

PREVALENCE OF HATE SPEECH AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN SRI LANKA

An expert opinion poll with selected religious and community
leaders from 12 districts



ශ්‍රී ලංකා ජාතික සාම මණ්ඩලය
இலங்கை தேசிய சமாதானப் பேரவை
The National Peace Council

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction to the Report.....	4
Introduction to Hate Speech.....	5
What is Hate Speech?	5
Hate Speech in Sri Lanka	6
Methodology.....	8
Findings	12
Hate speech when participating in community activities.....	12
Hate speech when accessing or participating in political or election related activities	13
Hate speech when engaging in trade.....	14
Hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment (public and private sectors)	15
Hate speech when purchasing or obtaining land or houses	17
Hate speech when obtaining health-care services	18
Hate speech in educational settings.....	19
Hate speech when seeking police or court services.....	20
Hate speech when seeking administrative services	21
Hate Speech turning into physical violence	22
Hate Speech in daily life, when making personal or collective choices.....	22
Overall experience of hate speech at the local level and national level	24
Prevalence of hate speech on social media and mass media	25
Groups responsible for hate speech.....	26
Recommendations	27
Annexure	28

Executive Summary

In recent times, the discussion surrounding hate speech has focused mostly on its prevalence online. The importance of online hate speech, especially social media as a leading platform for promoting hate speech is not understated in this study. However, this study attempts to look at other spheres and offline avenues through which hate speech may occur at the local level in our day-to-day lives. The following is a summary of some of the most notable findings from this study, as well as field observations by data collectors.

The study highlights that hate speech is widespread on both social media and mass media, with mass media appearing to have a slightly higher prevalence. It was observed that social media can be an effective tool for disseminating targeted mass media content that may incite hate speech among individuals and groups. Thus, more hate speech may be seen on social media as a result of the increased visibility and circulation of hate speech-promoting mass media content on this platform.

It is also suggested that one's religious identity has an impact on the amount of hate speech one encounters at the local level. When examining the prevalence of hate speech in Sri Lanka from the perspectives of the five major religious communities (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian (non-Roman Catholic), and Catholic) it is found that three religious minority communities in the country, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians (non-Roman Catholic), are found to be more vulnerable to hate speech. The study suggests that hate speech is experienced differently by these religious communities.

The findings indicate that the Muslim community is subject to hate speech mostly in trade-related activities. In the postwar period, there have been numerous anti-Muslim riots targeting Muslim shop owners and their businesses in various parts of the country, which have been carried out by both national and local extremist groups.¹ Hate speech directed at Muslims in the context of trade, as found in this study, could be interpreted as an indication of the persistence of this anti-Muslim sentiment in Sri Lanka. It has also been found that Muslims are subject to hate speech when purchasing land or homes. According to the study's findings, this is due to fears of members of other religious communities that by allowing Muslims into their neighborhoods, Islamization of the area would become inevitable. This finding about the Muslim community is significant because it confirms

¹ Sri Lanka's anti-Muslim riots signal deeper malaise. (2014, June 23). In *The New Humanitarian*. Available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2014/06/23/sri-lanka-s-anti-muslim-riots-signal-deeper-malaise>

national-level concerns about Muslims being viewed as a threat to the religious composition of the country.

Hindus from the North, East, and Central Provinces who took part in this study tend to be more concerned about discrimination and hate speech faced by members of their community while attempting to obtain state services and resources at the local level. Interestingly, previous studies have found that Hindus from the North and East perceive difficulties in accessing state services as a barrier to reconciliation.² Discrimination when accessing land and other state resources, as well as difficulty to engage with government officers due to language barriers, have been found to lead to experiences of hate speech among the Hindu community within this study.

Within this study, the Christian (non-Roman Catholic) group was found to be subject to hate speech when purchasing private land, houses and during the school admission process. According to the findings, hate speech directed at Christians in such instances is mostly motivated by the prevalent perception of them as a community attempting to expand their religion and causing uneasiness among other religious groups. This is connected to the widely held belief that the Christian (non-Roman Catholic) community engages in unethical conversions.

Thus, the findings imply that hate speech directed at the three aforementioned religious minority groups is usually for specific reasons.

The study found that Catholics and Buddhists are less affected by hate speech than the three religious groups discussed above. Regardless, it has been found that the Catholic community is more likely to encounter hate speech during the school admissions process. When it comes to Buddhists, field observations indicate that they are more vulnerable to hate speech in areas, settings, and contexts where they are a minority in terms of composition.

The findings of the study also suggest that minority religious groups consider politicians and religious leaders most accountable for exacerbating hate speech directed against them at the local level.

This study further indicates that hate speech is substantially less prevalent in the private sector, particularly in the private employment sector, private health care sector, and in private tuition classes. Hate speech incidents are also observed to be lower while seeking court services, Grama Niladhari

² This was a finding from the *Using Everyday Peace Indicators to Strengthen Reconciliation Programs* study conducted by the Social Scientists' Association for the United States Institute of Peace in 2018. The research project employs the "Everyday Peace Indicators" framework to understand and track changes in reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

services, and preventative health care services, such as those provided by the Public Health Inspectors and Midwives.

In addition, the findings and field observations suggest that some expressions that are commonly regarded as hate speech theoretically may not be always considered to be hate speech at the local level. Some of these expressions have been used at the local level for generations and have become normalized through time. For example, referring to someone by their religious or ethnic identity, such as *demala kella* (Tamil girl), may not always be an intentional expression of hate speech but merely a way to simply address someone. Thus, it is crucial to note that when assessing the extent to which certain terms and expressions are considered hate speech, both the local context and the intent with which they were used should be taken into account. This, however, does not undermine the significance of countering any form of hate speech that may be prevalent at the local level.

Introduction to the Report

In August 2021, the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka (NPC) contracted a consultant and a research team to conduct a study regarding the prevalence of hate speech in Sri Lanka at the local level. This study was carried out in 12 selected districts across the country. The data for this study was collected by NPC’s pool of “Master Trainers on Hate Speech”. The respondents of this study were community and religious leaders who are currently engaged with NPC on the ground level. The data for this study was collected between September and October 2021.

Through this study, NPC was interested in determining the prevalence of hate speech at the local level, determining the functions of hate speech in identified spheres at the local level, and learning about the ways in which various religious groups across communities are affected by hate speech. The consultant and research team were responsible for conceptualizing the study, implementing the survey, training the data collectors, processing the data, and writing the final report.

Introduction to Hate Speech

What is Hate Speech?

Hate Speech can be defined as, speech or expression that denigrates a person or persons on the basis of (alleged) membership in a social group identified by attributes such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical or mental disability, and others.³ Hate speech can be a powerful tool for spreading misinformation about a specific group to the rest of society. Hate speech can be directed towards a certain group over time in order to create an atmosphere or environment that justifies violent acts against that group. Hate speech has the ability to incite and encourage people to commit violent acts by convincing them to hold hostile views toward one another, resulting in widespread violence in society. The Anti-Defamation League's (2018) "Pyramid of Hate" (see Figure 1) explains how hate speech can escalate into violence within society, leading to mass atrocities against specific groups.⁴ According to this pyramid, severe hate crimes are built on the acceptance of lower-level behaviors such as biased attitudes, including stereotypes, misinformation, and micro-aggressions, which form the bedrock that allows for the escalation of hate and discrimination. It depicts a progression from Acts of Bias, including dehumanization and slurs, to Discrimination, Violence, and, finally, Genocide.

³ Definition of "Hate Speech" from Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hate-speech>

⁴ Anti-Defamation League. *Pyramid of Hate*. 2018. available at: <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/pyramid-of-hate.pdf>

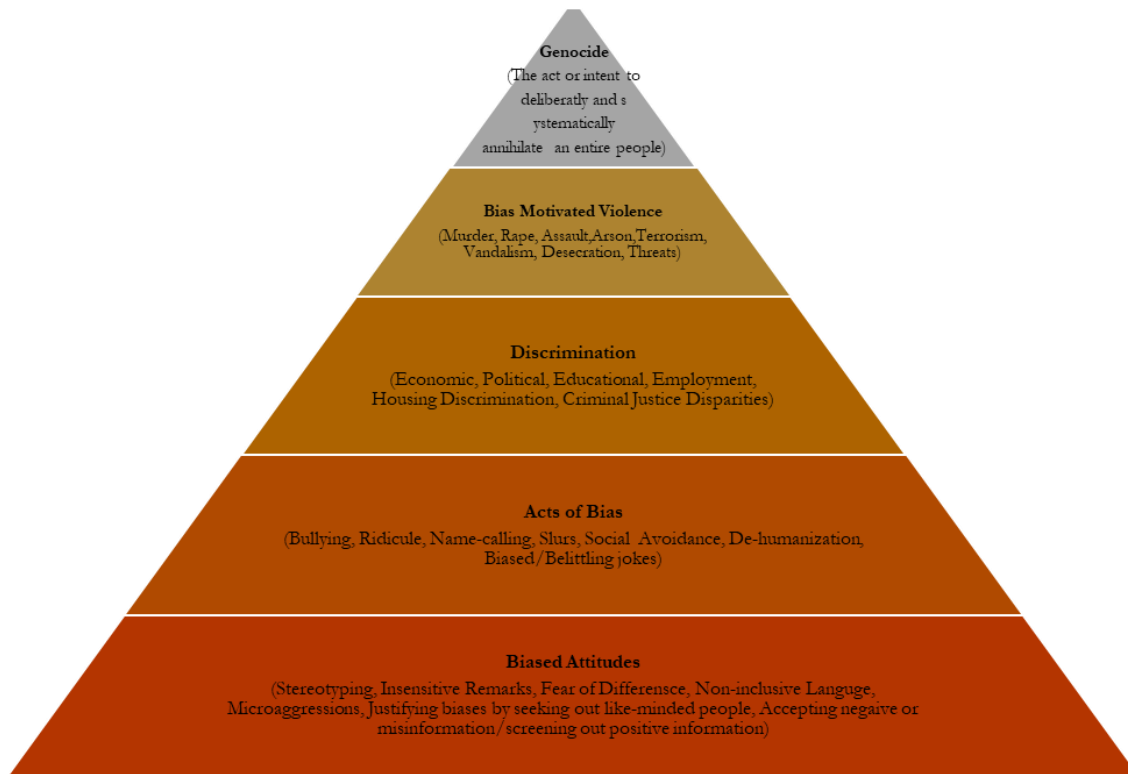


Figure 1: Pyramid of Hate (Anti-Defamation League, 2018)

Hate Speech in Sri Lanka

Hate speech directed at religious groups has recently become a more serious issue in Sri Lanka. Since 2014, there has been more overt discrimination against minority communities, including violent attacks, demonstrations, and hate speech, with many believing that these are not isolated incidents but are part of a larger campaign to incite large-scale violence or conflict in the country.⁵ Following the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, there was a greater spread of disinformation and hate speech on social media, leading to riots in areas such as Kandy and Negombo.^{6,7} Since then, incidents of hate speech have increased, as have concerns about the rise in incidents. According to a study conducted by the Asia Foundation, the influence of local television, combined with increased internet usage, has resulted

⁵ Aliff, S. (2015). Post-War Conflict in Sri Lanka: Violence against Sri Lankan Muslims and Buddhist Hegemony. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 59, 109–125. available at:

<https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.59.109>

⁶ Al Jazeera. (2019, August 26). *Sri Lanka urged to tackle 'hate propaganda' against Muslims*. available at:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/8/26/sri-lanka-urged-to-tackle-hate-propaganda-against-muslims>

⁷ International Political Science Association. *Hate Speech and Social Media in Sri Lanka*. available at:

<https://www.ipsa.org/wc/paper/hate-speech-and-social-media-sri-lanka>

in an increase in online hate speech in 2020 compared to 2018.⁸ Clothing, customs, food and drink preferences, livelihood, behaviours, beliefs and language, and cultural symbols are some of the features, aspects of religious groups or collective choices that are commonly targeted or subject to hate speech in Sri Lanka.

Hate speech directed at a person's religious identity can occur in a variety of contexts. For example, when engaging in daily community activities, trade, seeking employment and education opportunities, acquiring land or housing, or accessing various state services such as administrative services, health services, police services, or court services. Furthermore, certain groups may be subject to hate speech directly by politicians or while participating in election-related activities in their local areas. This report will describe the trends in hate speech identified by a National Peace Council survey of religious groups when they access, engage, and participate in the aforementioned spheres and sectors of society.

⁸ The Asia Foundation. *A Road to Reconciliation in Sri Lanka*. available at: <https://asiafoundation.org/2021/03/17/a-road-to-reconciliation-in-sri-lanka/>

Methodology

This study was conducted as an expert opinion poll using a structured survey questionnaire. The prevalence of hate speech in a specific geographical area was determined through the opinions of local religious leaders and community leaders from all major religious groups – Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Christian (non-Roman Catholic). Each survey respondent expressed their personal views on the prevalence of hate speech in the religious community that they represent. These responses were used to gain a better understanding of the general climate of hate speech in the selected areas.

A **questionnaire** instrument was developed based on a conceptual framework (see Figure 2) to capture the opinions and experiences of local level religious leaders regarding hate speech in their community. This instrument was designed specifically to assess the prevalence of hate speech in the following aspects:

- Hate speech when participating in community activities
- Hate speech when accessing or participating in political or election related activities
- Hate speech when engaging in trade
- Hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment (public and private sectors)
- Hate speech when purchasing or obtaining land or houses
- Hate speech when obtaining health-care services
- Hate speech in educational settings
- Hate speech when seeking police or court services
- Hate speech when seeking administrative services
- Hate speech on social media
- Hate Speech in daily life, when making personal or collective choices

When answering to the questions about hate speech in the above aspects, the participants in this study were asked to consider their own religious community's experiences during the past three years. The questionnaire was translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages before being administered in the field. The survey was pilot tested with a small sample drawn from the field to ensure its validity.

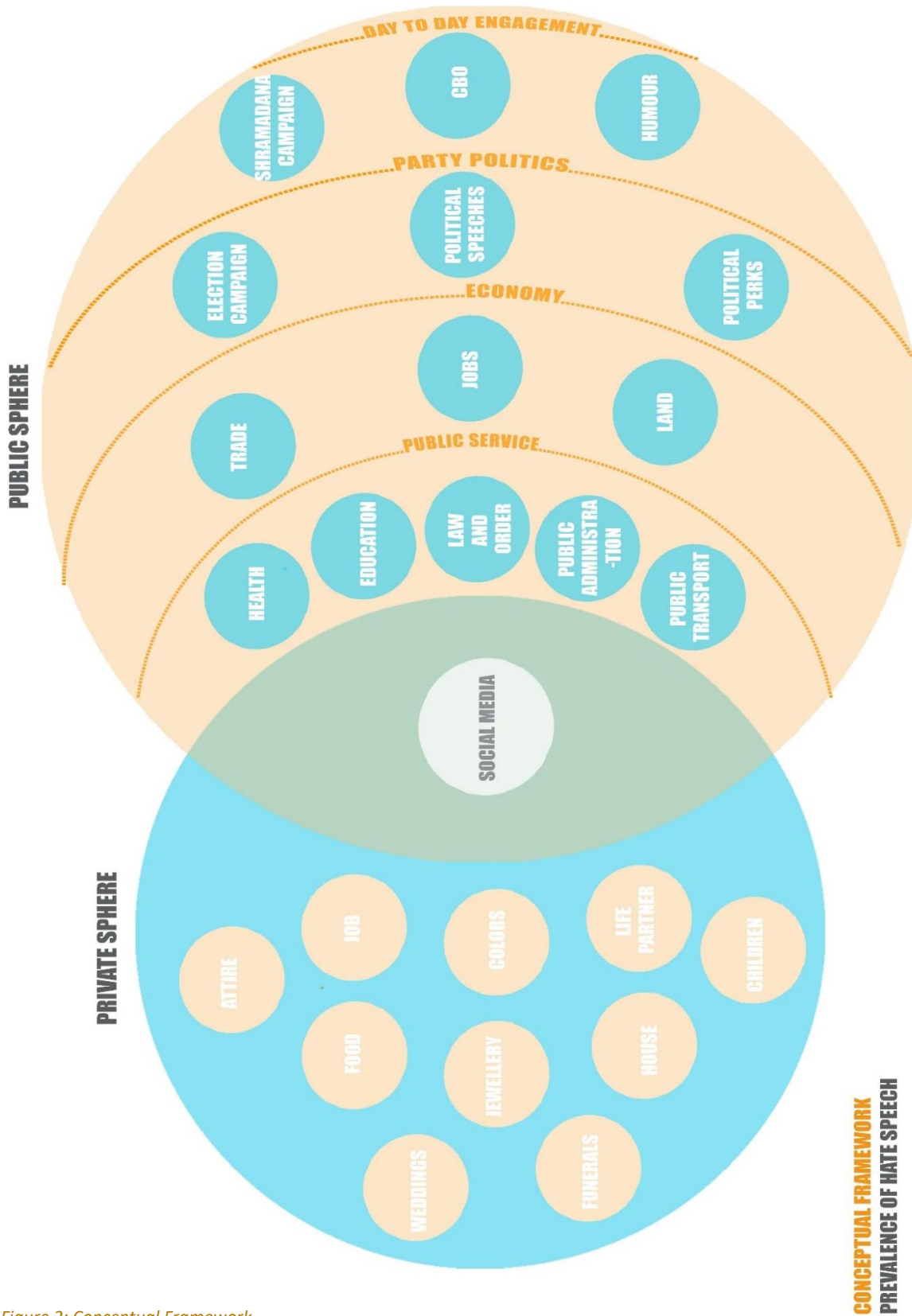


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Sample for the survey was drawn from 12 districts (see Figure 3). Religious and community leaders who work with NPC at the grassroots level were selected as respondents for this study. Thirty respondents were chosen at random from each district. The five main religious groups were equally represented in the proposed district sample. However, due to a lack of adequate respondents in some areas to represent certain religious communities, the poll was unable to include the views of religious leaders and local community leaders from all five religions in some districts. Tables 1 and 2 show the overall number of respondents by district and religion.

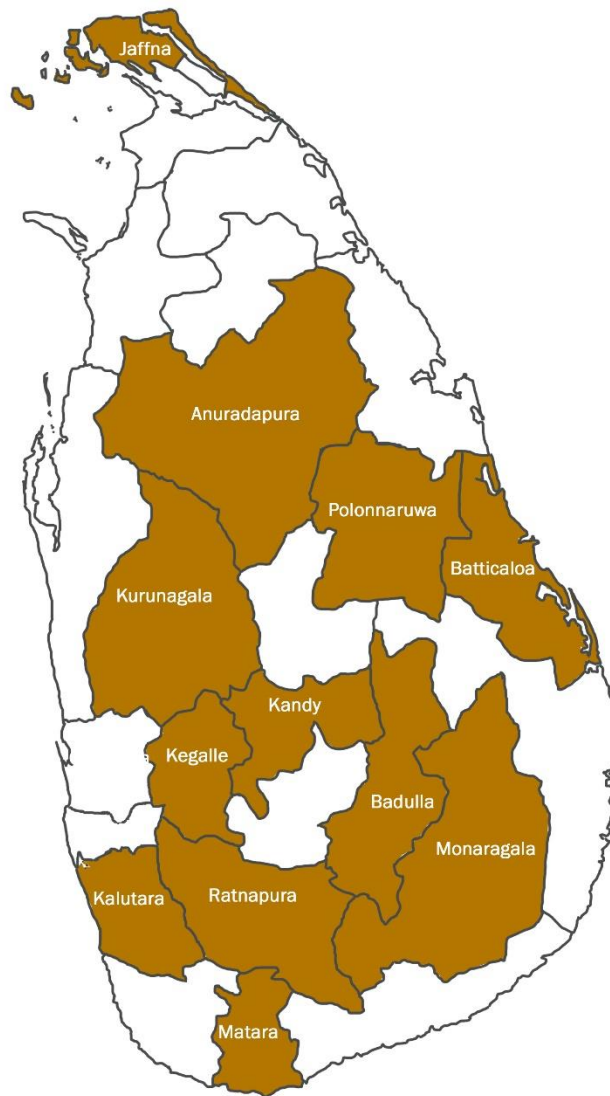


Figure 3: Geographical distribution of the sample

Data Collection for this study was done by a group of people known as "Master Trainers on Hate Speech", who are connected with NPC. This group received training from the consultant and his team prior to conducting fieldwork. To assure the quality of the fieldwork, the consultant and his team actively monitored the data collection process.

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents by district

	Buddhist	Christian (non-Roman Catholic)	Catholic	Hindu	Muslim	Total
Anuradhapura	6	6	7	6	6	31
Batticaloa	1	5	4	12	10	32
Jaffna	0	4	10	8	7	29
Matara	8	6	4	6	6	30
Monaragala	6	4	9	6	6	31
Polonnaruwa	12	1	3	6	8	30
Rathnapura	24	1	0	4	1	30
Kurunagala	10	8	2	4	6	30
Kandy	6	9	3	6	6	30
Kegalle	6	6	6	6	6	30
Kaluthara	10	1	7	3	9	30
Badulla	6	4	7	6	6	29
Total	95	55	62	73	77	362

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by religion

Buddhist	95
Christian (non-Roman Catholic)	55
Catholic	62
Hindu	73
Muslim	77

Findings

This section describes the results of the survey with religious and community leaders. The research team used the total percentage of - *At all times, In most instances and In some instances* responses to determine the overall prevalence of hate speech at the local level.

Hate speech when participating in community activities

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would encounter hate speech while participating in community activities such as shramadanas, community organizations and to jokes when participating in community activities in their day to day lives.

Majority of respondents report that members of their own religious group were either rarely or never subject to hate speech while participating in community activities such as shramadanas, community organizations and to jokes when participating in community activities in their day to day lives. However, over 30.0% of respondents report that members of their community encounter hate speech in the aforementioned aspects. The most common form of hate speech, according to 34.8% of respondents, is in the form of jokes when participating in community activities, while 34.5% report encountering hate speech while participating in community organizations. (Refer to Table 1 of Annexure 1)

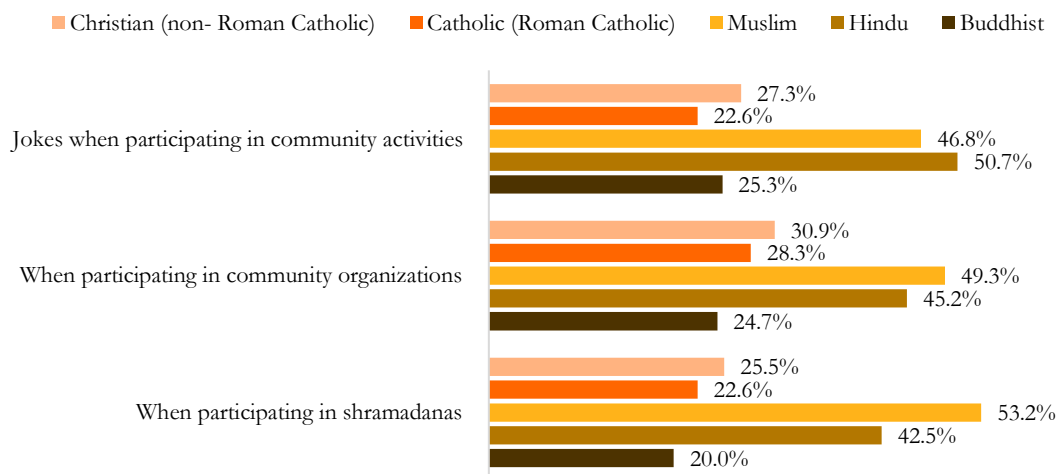


Figure 4: Hate speech when participating in community activities (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 4), it can be seen that overall more than 40.0% of Muslims and Hindus are frequently affected by hate speech while participating in community activities such as shramadanas, community organizations and to jokes when participating in community activities in their day to day lives. These two religious groups are followed by Christians (non-Roman Catholic), of whom at least 25.0% report experiencing hate speech in these aspects.

Muslims were most frequently targeted with hate speech when participating in shramadanas (53.2%) and community organizations (49.3%), while Hindus were found to be the most commonly targeted with jokes which are based on their religious identity when participating in community activities (50.7%).

Hate speech when accessing or participating in political or election related activities

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity while accessing or participating in political and election-related activities.

It was found that nearly 50.0% of respondents report that members of their own religious community were either rarely or never encounter hate speech when accessing or participating in political and election-related activities.

However, over 35.0% of respondents report that members of their community are frequently subject to hate speech by politicians during election campaigns, public meetings, or when they distribute political benefits such as goods. It was found that people are most likely to face hate speech based on their religious identity, when politicians distribute political benefits such as goods during the election season in local areas (44.2%) or during election campaigns (39.8%). (Refer to Table 2 of Annexure 1)

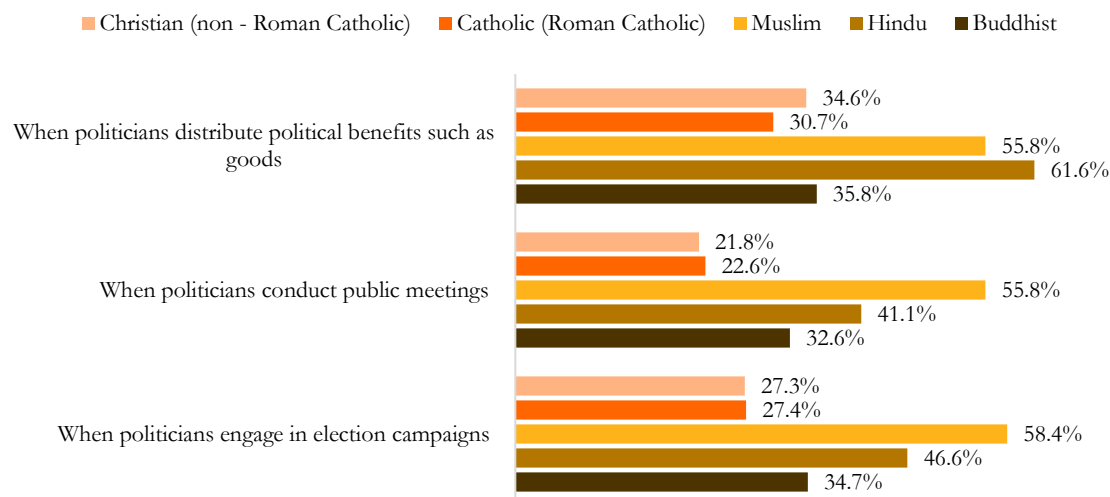


Figure 5: Hate speech when accessing or participating in political or election related activities (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 5), it can be seen that overall more than 55.0% of Muslims are significantly affected by hate speech during election campaigns (58.4%) and when politicians conduct public meetings (55.8%).

Further, it can be observed 61.6% of Hindus are found to be disproportionately targeted with hate speech when receiving political benefits such as goods during election season. More than 40.0% of Hindus report being subject to hate speech during election campaigns (46.6%) and public meetings held by politicians (41.1%).

Hate speech when engaging in trade

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity while engaging in trade-related activities in their local area.

More than 50.0% of the respondents report that members of their own religious community encounter incidents of hate speech only rarely or never in trade-related activities in their local area.

However, more than 35% believe that members of their own religious community are frequently subjected to hate speech in trade-related activities in their local area. 35.9% report that traders of their own religious community encounter incidents of hate speech from consumer community in their local area. 35.8% report that members of their own religious community are subjected to hate speech by traders of other religious groups and by the manner in which they conduct their businesses. (Refer to Table 3 of Annexure 1)

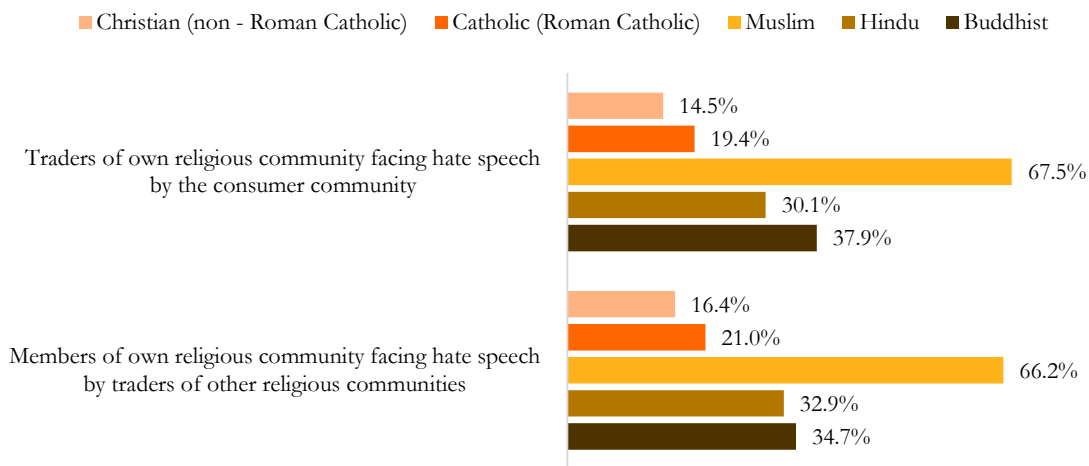


Figure 6: Hate speech when engaging in trade (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 6), it is clear that more Muslim traders are disproportionately subjected to hate speech by the consumer community (67.5%) or by the manner in which traders of other religious groups in the locality conduct their businesses (66.2%). Further, more than 30.0% of Buddhists and Hindus are also affected by hate speech when engaging in trade-related activities in their local area. Interestingly, 37.9% of Buddhists report that traders of their own religious community encounter hate speech by the consumer community in their local area.

Hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment (public and private sectors)

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity when seeking or engaging in employment in both the public and private sectors.

More than 50.0% respondents report that members of their own religious group were either rarely or never subjected to hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment in both the public and private sectors.

However, more than 30.0% respondents report that members of their religious community face hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment in the public sector. While only about 25.0 % report that members of their religious community encounter hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment in the private sector. (Refer to Table 4 of Annexure 1)

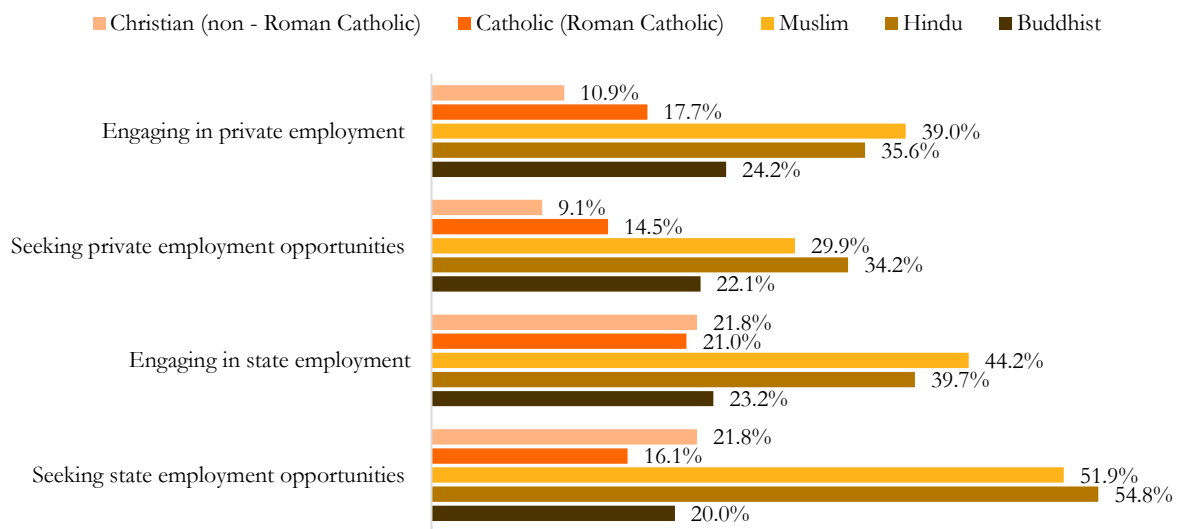


Figure 7: Hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 7), it was found that overall Muslims and Hindus are disproportionately subjected to hate speech when engaging in or seeking employment in both the public and private sectors in their local areas, when compared to other religious groups.

Hindus are the most affected when seeking both state employment opportunities (54.8%) as well as private employment opportunities (34.2%). Muslims are the most affected when engaging in both state employment (44.2%) and private employment (39.0%).

However, it can also be observed that the likelihood of Muslims and Hindus encountering hate speech in the private sector when both seeking employment opportunities and engaging in employment is much lower than in the public sector

Hate speech when purchasing or obtaining land or houses

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity when purchasing or obtaining land or houses in their local area.

Nearly 50.0% of the respondents state that members of their own religious community either rarely or never encounter any type of hate speech based on their religious identity when purchasing or obtaining land or houses in their local area. However, 30.0% or more respondents report members of their religious community are subject to hate speech most often when purchasing private land (44.1%) or obtaining a house (35.9%) in their local area. (Refer to Table 5 of Annexure 1)

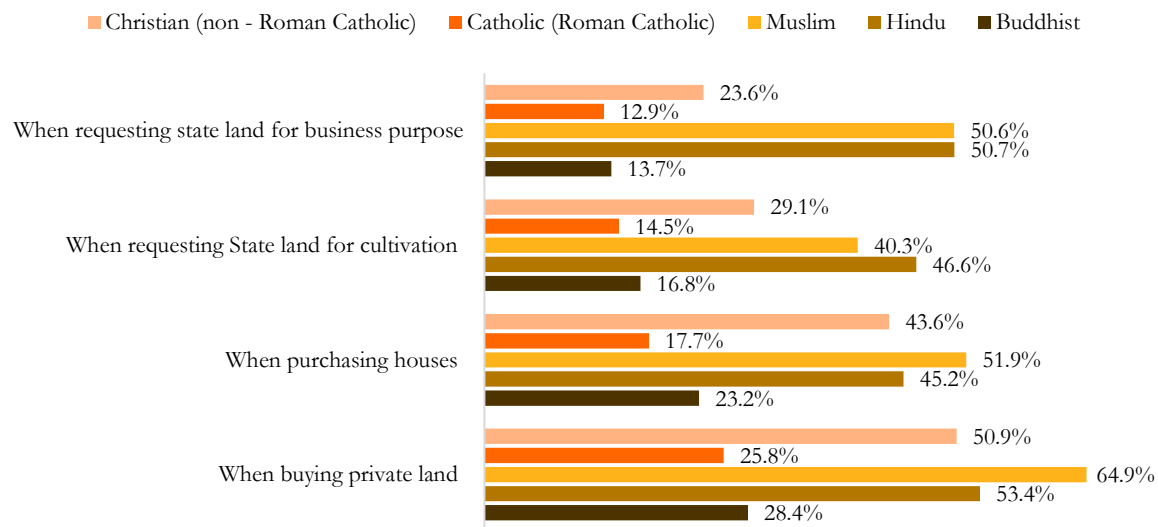


Figure 8: Hate speech when purchasing or obtaining land or houses (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 8), it is clear that more than 50.0% of Muslims are disproportionately affected by hate speech when purchasing private lands (64.9%) and when purchasing houses (51.9%). While Hindus are found to be more affected by hate speech when requesting land from the state for business purposes (50.7%) or for cultivation (46.6%). A considerable number of Christians (non-Roman Catholic) also report being affected by hate speech when buying private land (50.9%) and purchasing houses (43.6%).

Hate speech when obtaining health-care services

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity when obtaining health-care services in their local area.

Nearly 70% or more respondents report that members of their own religious community either rarely or never encounter any type of hate speech based on their religious identity when obtaining health-care services in their local area. According to the findings, hate speech is significantly less in private hospitals (7.0 %) and in preventative health care services such as those offered by Midwives (12.8 %), and Public Health Inspectors (12.4 %). However, 25.0 % claim that hate speech events are prevalent in state hospitals. (Refer to Table 6 of Annexure 1)

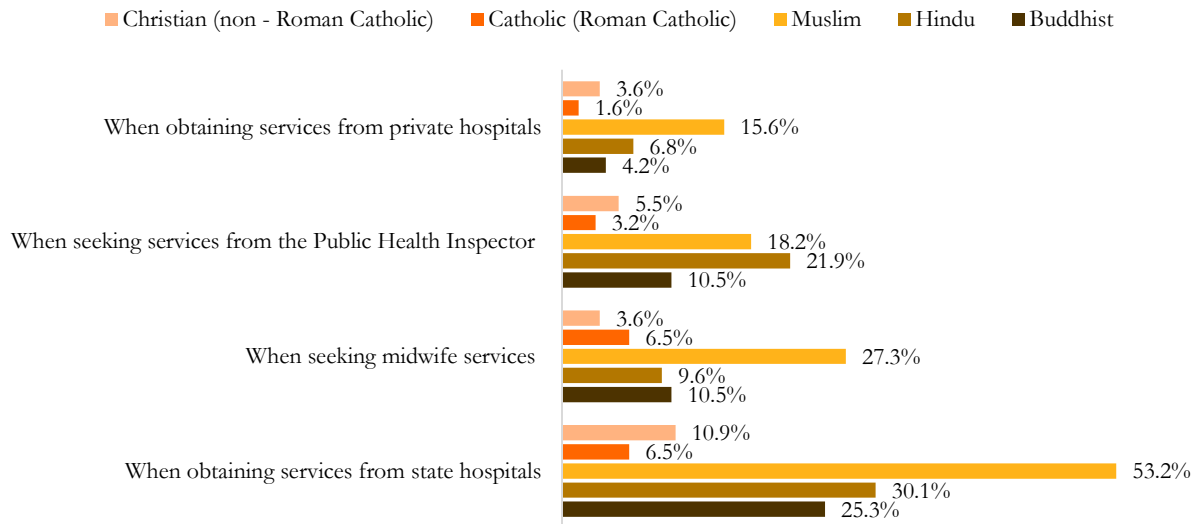


Figure 9: Hate speech when obtaining health-care services (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 9), Muslims are found to be the most affected by hate speech, followed by Hindus. More specifically, Muslims report to be significantly impacted by hate speech when seeking services from state hospitals (53.2%).

Hate speech in educational settings

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech in educational settings based on their religious identity.

More than 60.0% respondents report that members of their own religious community either rarely or never encounter hate speech in educational settings. Regardless, nearly 30.0% of respondents report that members of their own religious community are more likely to face incidents of hate speech in state schools from children of other religious groups (30.1%) or from teachers or principals in state schools (29.6%). In general, hate speech incidents are less common in private tuition classes (18.5%) and in vocational training institutes (16.3%) than in state schools. (Refer to Table 7 of Annexure 1)

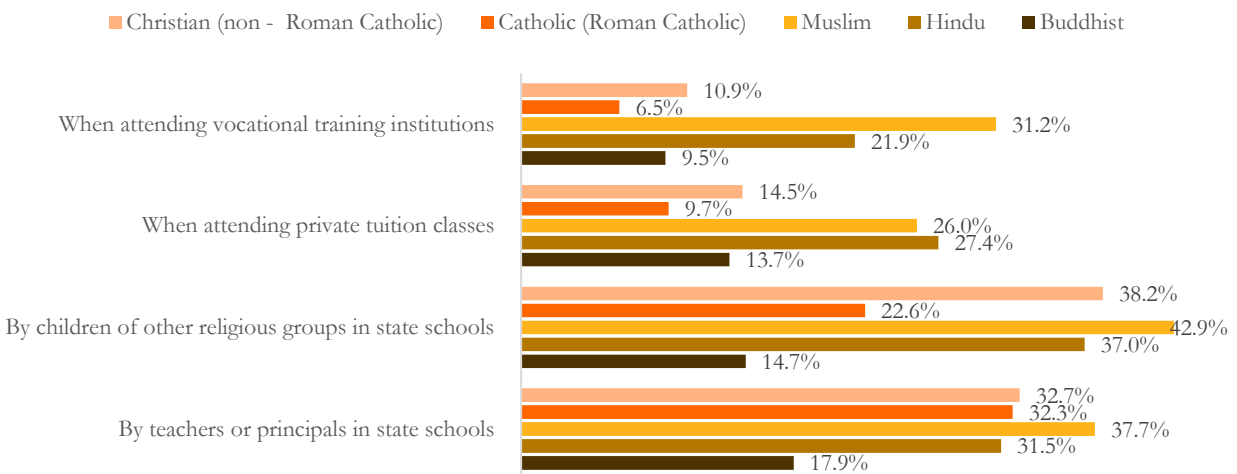


Figure 10: Hate speech in educational settings (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 10), it was found that Muslims are the most affected by hate speech incidents in state schools - either by children of other religious groups (42.9%) or by teachers or principals (37.7 %). Interestingly, both Christian (non-Roman Catholic) (32.7%) and Catholic (32.3%) respondents report a prevalence of hate speech targeting their religious community by teachers or principals in state schools. Further, 38.2% of Christian (non-Roman Catholic) report that members of their own religious community encounter hate speech from children of other religious groups.

Hate speech when seeking police or court services

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity when seeking Police or Court services.

More than 60.0% of respondents state that members of their own religious community either rarely or never encounter any type of hate speech based on their religious identity when seeking police or court services. However, 30.9% of respondents report being subject to hate speech when seeking police services, while 11.9% report being subject to hate speech when seeking court services. (Refer to Table 8 of Annexure 1)

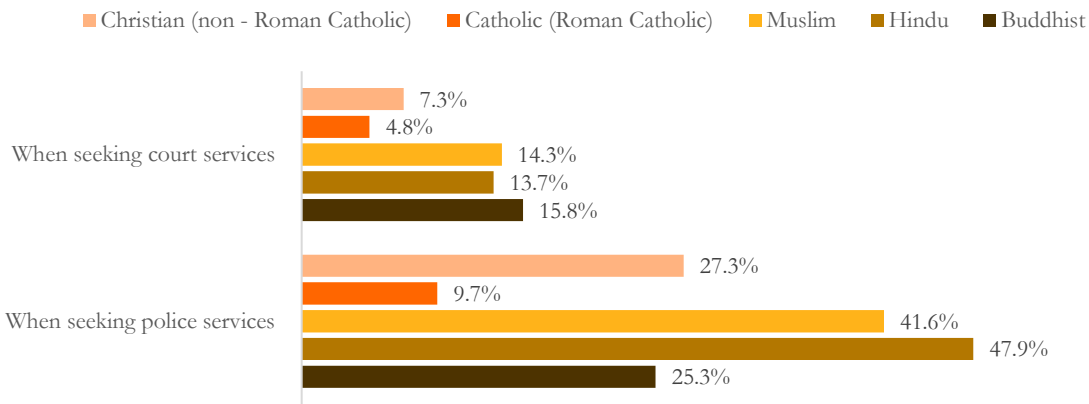


Figure 11: Hate speech when seeking police or court services (by religious group)

Looking at data by religious group (see Figure 11), it is found that more than 40% of Muslims and Hindus are affected by hate speech when seeking police services, with Hindus (47.9%) slightly more affected than Muslims (41.6 %). It can also be observed that all religious communities report that hate speech is less prevalent while seeking court services than when seeking police services.

Hate speech when seeking administrative services

In this section, respondents were asked how likely it was that members of their own religious community would face hate speech based on their religious identity when seeking services from the Divisional Secretariat Office or Grama Niladhari, receiving state subsidies or allowances (Samurdhi), or when using public transportation.

More than 60.0% of respondents report that members of their own religious community are rarely or never affected by hate speech based on their religious identity when seeking different administrative. However, nearly 25.0% of respondents report that hate speech is more common when using public transportation (25.4%), or when obtaining state subsidies or allowances (Samurdhi) (25.4%) and when obtaining services from the Divisional Secretariat Office (24.0%). (Refer to Table 9 of Annexure 1)

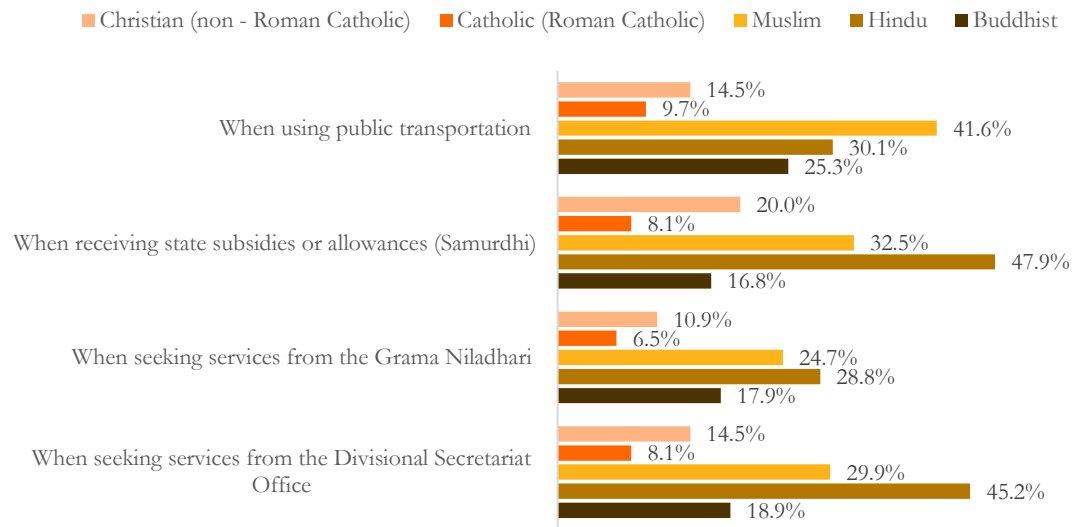


Figure 12: Hate speech when seeking administrative services (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 12), more Hindus are subject to hate speech when when obtaining state subsidies or allowances (Samurdhi) (47.9%) or when obtaining services from the Divisional Secretariat office (45.2%). Muslims are found to be more vulnerable to hate speech when using public transportation (41.6%).

Hate Speech turning into physical violence

In this section, respondents were asked how often hate speech in their area turns into physical violence. 63.3% state that hate speech in their area does not result in physical violence. However, 30.9 % report that hate speech in their localities leads to violence. (Refer to Table 10 of Annexure 1)



Figure 13: Hate Speech turning into physical violence (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 13), Muslims (40.3%) were the most likely to agree that hate speech can lead to physical violence, followed by Hindus (32.9%) and Buddhists (30.5%).

Hate Speech in daily life, when making personal or collective choices

In this section, respondents were asked if members of their religious community face hate speech based on their choice of food and drink, clothes, jewellery, colours, houses, number of children in their families, employment and how they grow their hair and beard. Furthermore, in this section respondents were asked if they face hate speech based on how they seek life partners, conduct weddings, and conduct funerals.

More than 60.0% of the respondents state that members of their religious group encounter hate speech only rarely or never with regard to the personal or collective choices of their religious group. . Regardless, hate speech appears to be more prevalent when it comes to clothing choices (30.9 %), how members of their religious groups seek life partners (27.6 %), and how religious communities conduct weddings (25.1%). (Refer to Table 11 of Annexure 1)

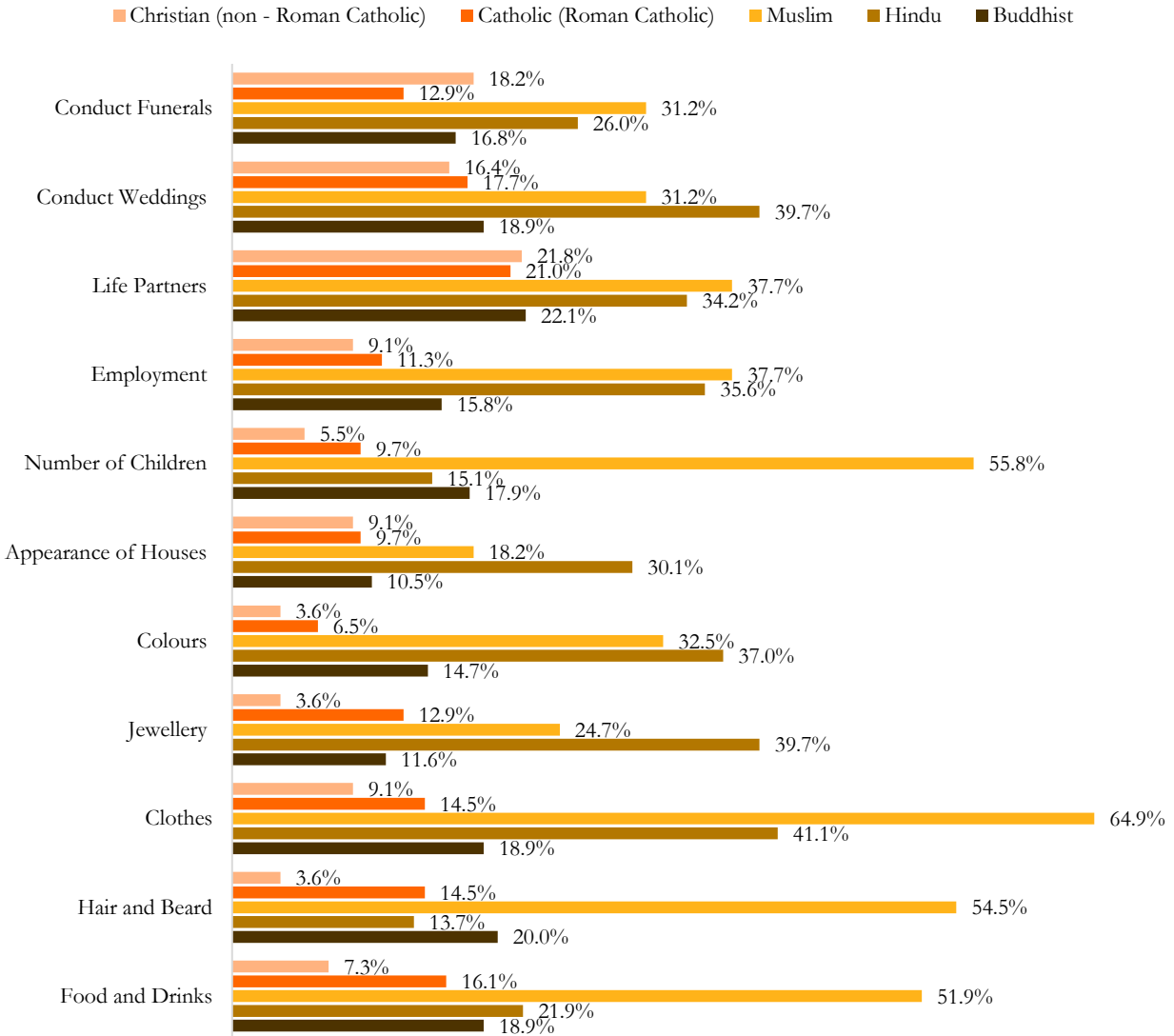


Figure 14: Hate Speech in daily life, when making personal or collective choices (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 14), it was found that overall Muslims and Hindus are the most vulnerable to hate speech as a result of their personal and collective choices.

Muslims encounter hate speech mostly when it comes to their choice of clothes (64.9%), number of children in their families (55.8%), way they grow their hair and beards (54.5%), choice of food and drink (51.9%).

Hindus are subject to hate speech mostly when it comes to their choice of clothes (41.1%) jewellery (39.7%), how they conduct weddings (39.7%) and choice of colours (37.0%).

Overall experience of hate speech at the local level and national level

In this section, respondents were asked about the overall extent to which individuals belonging to their religious group were subject to hate speech based on their religious identity at the local level and at the national level. 64.1% of respondents report that individuals from their religious group face hate speech based on their religious identity at the national level, while 45.6% of respondents state that individuals of their religious group encounter hate speech based on their religious identity at the local level. (Refer to Tables 12 and 13 of Annexure 1) Therefore, the total prevalence of hate speech is found to be higher at the national level than at the local level.

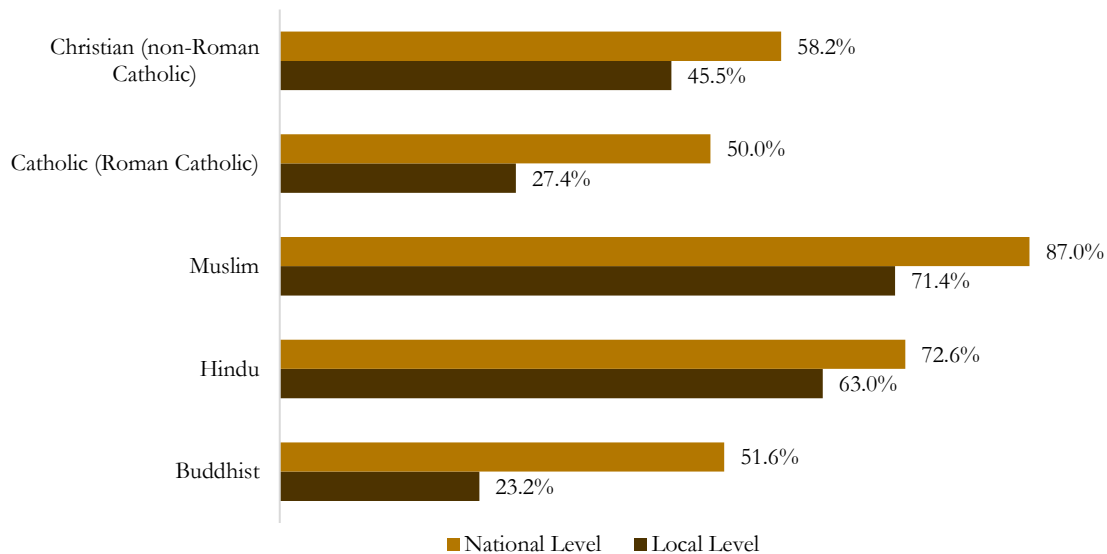


Figure 15: Overall experience of hate speech at the local level and national level (by religious group)

According to Figure 15, a comparison of hate speech across all religious groups also indicates that hate speech at the national level is higher than at the local level. Figure 15 also suggests that a significant number of Muslims encounter hate speech more at the national level (87.0%) than at the local level (71.4%). Similarly, a considerable percentage of Hindus also report encountering more hate speech at the national level (72.6%) than at the local level (63.0%). Further, a notable number of Christians (non-Roman Catholic) are also vulnerable to hate speech at the national level (58.2%) than at the local level (45.5%).

Prevalence of hate speech on social media and mass media

In this section, respondents were asked if members of their own religious community face hate speech based on their religious identity on social media and mass media. 63.3% of respondents report that their religious community is subjected to hate speech on mass media, while 48.4% of the respondents believe that their religious community is subject to hate speech on social media. (Refer to Tables 14 and 15 of Annexure 1). Thus, the prevalence of hate speech on mass media is found to be higher than on social media.

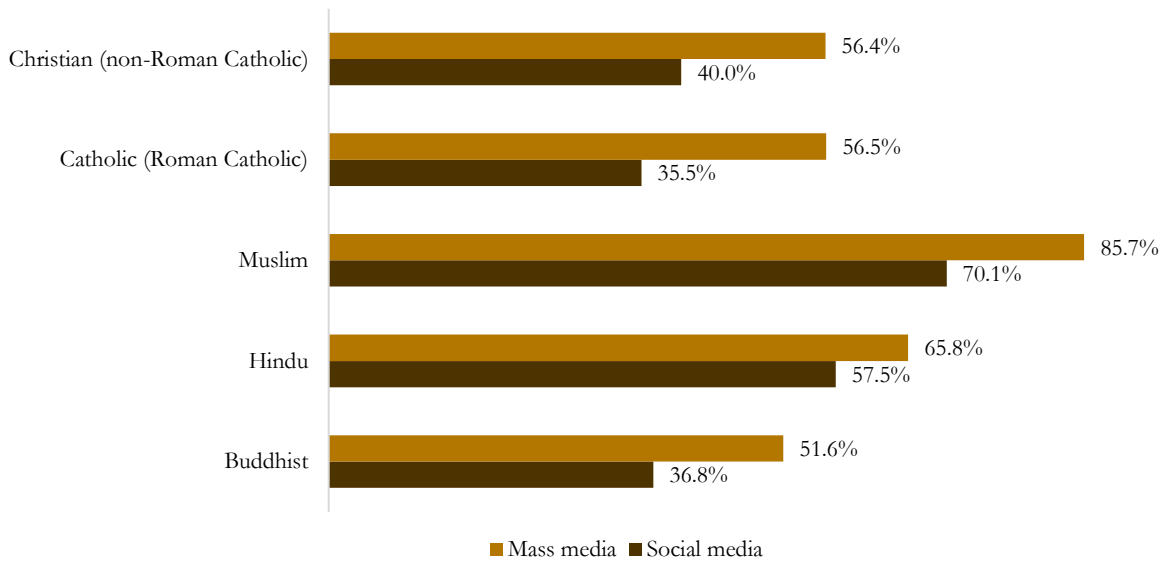


Figure 16: Prevalence of hate speech on social media and mass media (by religious group)

According to Figure 16, a comparison of hate speech across all religious groups also indicates that hate speech on mass media is higher than on social media. Figure 16, further shows that 85.7% of Muslims are found to be significantly affected by hate speech on mass media, while 70.1% of Muslims report prevalence of hate speech social media. Further, a notable amount of Hindus also report being affected by hate speech on mass media (65.8%) and on social media (57.5%). Interestingly, more than 50% of Catholic and Buddhist community members believe that members of their religious community are subject to hate speech on mass media, while just around 35.0% believe that hate speech is directed towards their religious communities on social media.

Groups responsible for hate speech

In this section, respondents were asked who, in their opinion, should be held accountable for hate speech targeting their religious communities in their local areas.

Rank	Buddhist	Hindu	Muslim	Catholic	Christian (non-Roman Catholic)
1	Politicians in your religious groups	Politicians in the other religious groups	Politicians in the other religious groups	Politicians in the other religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in the other religious groups
2	Politicians in the other religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in the other religious groups	Politicians in your religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in the other religious groups	Politicians in the other religious groups
3	Priests/religious leaders in your religious groups	Ordinary people in the other religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in the other religious groups	Politicians in your religious groups	Ordinary people in the other religious groups
4	Ordinary people in your religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in your religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in your religious groups	Ordinary people in the other religious groups	Politicians in your religious groups
5	Priests/religious leaders in the other religious groups	Politicians in your religious groups	Ordinary people in your religious groups	Priests/religious leaders in your religious groups	Ordinary people in your religious groups

Figure 17: Groups responsible for hate speech (by religious group)

Looking at the data by religious group (see Figure 17), it can be seen that Roman Catholic (25.1%), Muslims (22.2%) and Hindus (19.2%) believe politicians from other religious groups are the most responsible for hate speech. Most Christians (non-Roman Catholic) (27.0%) believe that priests/religious leaders of other religious groups are the most responsible for hate speech. Interestingly, 32.3% of Buddhists believe that politicians from their own religious group are the most responsible for hate speech. (Refer to Table 16 of Annexure 1 for complete list)

Overall, political and religious leaders have been identified to be responsible for hate speech incidents at the local level by all religious communities.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlights the prevalence of hate speech at state institutions. Thus, it is critical to ensure there is continuous engagement, regarding effective and non-discriminatory public service delivery and providing equal access to state resources.

The study also reveals that language plays a significant role in exacerbating the situation of hate speech at the local level. Existing language barriers between communities can have an impact on how or what is regarded as hate speech. Thus, more efforts also must be made to improve communication and ensure bilingual service delivery.

The study also suggests that some hate speech may result from prejudices held by communities against one another. Thus, it is critical to engage in and have active dialogues about these preconceptions with local communities in order to counter hate speech in the long run.

Politicians and religious leaders are recognized as responsible parties for the rise in hate speech at the local level, according to the study. Thus, in order to reduce hate speech, it is necessary to maintain ongoing dialogue with these parties.

The findings of this study indicate that social media and mass media are two critical platforms where hate speech is prevalent. According to the study, mass media has a larger role in the spread of hate speech. Thus, working on media ethics and engagement with mass media outlets to ensure unbiased and ethical reporting is critical to prevent hate speech.

When working on and addressing the issue of hate speech at the local level, it is also critical to consider the context and intent of the expressions or terms used by individuals.

According to the findings of the study, minority religious communities are found to be encountering more hate speech than the religious majority in the country. While Buddhists are the majority in the country, their majority status changes based on the geographical area, context, and scenario, hence it is important to keep in mind that there may be instances where Buddhists are also targeted with hate speech at the local level.

Annexure

Table 1: Hate speech when participating in community activities (overall)

	When participating in a shramadana	When participating in community organizations	Jokes when participating in community activities
At all times	1.1%	0.8%	0.3%
In many instances	6.4%	5.2%	8.8%
In some instances	25.4%	28.5%	25.7%
Rarely	24%	21.8%	26.2%
Never	42%	38.1%	37.8%

Table 2: Hate speech when accessing or participating in political or election related activities (overall)

	When politicians engage in election campaigns	When politicians conduct public meetings	When politicians distribute political benefits (such as distributing goods)
At all times	2.5%	0.8%	3%
In many instances	13.5%	9.4%	13%
In some instances	23.8%	25.7%	28.2%
Rarely	15.2%	16.6%	15.5%
Never	35.1%	39.2%	34%

Table 3: Hate speech when engaging in trade (overall)

	Members of own religious community facing hate speech by traders of other religious communities	Traders of own religious community facing hate speech by the consumer community
At all times	0.8%	0.3%
In many instances	9.9%	9.1%
In some instances	25.1%	26.5%
Rarely	20.4%	20.7%
Never	40.6%	39.8%

Table 4: Hate speech when seeking or engaging in employment (public and private sectors) (overall)

	Seeking state employment opportunities	When engaging in state employment	Seeking private employment opportunities	When engaging in private employment
At all times	1.1%	0.3%	-	-
In many instances	8.6%	5.2%	2.5%	4.4%
In some instances	23.8%	24.9%	20.4%	22.1%
Rarely	19.9%	20.7%	24%	24%
Never	37.6%	40.3%	43.6%	40.1%

Table 5: Hate speech when purchasing or obtaining land or houses (overall)

	When buying private lands	When purchasing a house	When requesting state land for cultivation	When requesting state land for business purposes
At all times	3%	1.1%	3.9%	3.3%
In many instances	14.6%	10.2%	8.3%	8.8%
In some instances	26.5%	24.6%	17.1%	18.2%
Rarely	18.8%	17.4%	14.6%	15.5%
Never	31.8%	40.3%	39.5%	35.1%

Table 6: Hate speech when obtaining health-care services (overall)

	When obtaining services from a state hospital	When obtaining services from a midwife	When obtaining services from the public health inspector	When obtaining services from a private hospital
At all times	1.1%	-	-	-
In many instances	5.8%	1.9%	2.2%	0.9%
In some instances	19.9%	10.2%	10.2%	6.1%
Rarely	17.1%	19.6%	21.3%	17%
Never	52.5%	60.8%	60.2%	64.6%

Table 7: Hate speech in educational settings (overall)

	By teachers or principals in state schools	By children of other religious groups in state schools	When attending tuition classes	At vocational training institutions
At all times	1.4%	1.1%	-	-
In many instances	7.5%	8.8%	2.8%	2.2%
In some instances	20.7%	20.2%	15.7%	14.1%
Rarely	19.6%	22.1%	23.8%	20.4%
Never	45%	40.6%	45.3%	43.1%

Table 8: Hate speech when seeking police or court services (overall)

	When obtaining police services	When obtaining court services
At all times	2.2%	0.3%
In many instances	9.4%	2.5%
In some instances	19.3%	9.1%
Rarely	17.7%	15.7%
Never	47%	53.6%

Table 9: Hate speech when seeking administrative services (overall)

	When obtaining services from the Divisional Secretariat office	When obtaining services through the Grama Niladhari	When obtaining state subsidies or allowances (Samurdhi)	When using public transport
At all times	0%	-	0.8%	0.6%
In many instances	3.6%	3.9%	8.6%	5.2%
In some instances	20.4%	14.6%	16%	19.6%
Rarely	18.2%	19.3%	18.2%	19.3%
Never	53.9%	58.6%	46.4%	47.8%

Table 10: Hate Speech turning into physical violence

Yes	30.90%
No	63.30%

Table 11: Hate Speech in daily life, when making personal or collective choices (overall)

	Food And Drinks	Hair and Beard	Clothes	Jewellery	Colours	Appearance Of The Houses	Number Of Children	Employment	Life Partners	Weddings	Funerals
At all times	0.3%	-	2.8%	0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	1.7%	-	1.1%	1.1%	0.8%
In many instances	3%	7.7%	7.7%	5%	6.9%	2.5%	6.1%	2.8%	6.6%	5.5%	3.3%
In some instances	21%	14.9%	20.4%	13.8%	12.4%	13%	14.4%	19.9%	19.9%	18.5%	17.1%
Rarely	19.1%	16.6%	17.1%	14.9%	15.2%	19.9%	17.1%	17.1%	18.8%	19.1%	16%
Never	48.1%	51.1%	44.5%	55.8%	55.8%	53.3%	50.3%	50%	41.7%	46.4%	51.1%

Table 12: Hate speech at the local level (overall)

At all times	0.80%
In many instances	11.90%
In some instances	32.90%
Rarely	29.60%
Never	21.80%
Do not know	3.00%

Table 13: Hate speech at the national level (overall)

At all times	2.80%
In many instances	26.00%
In some instances	35.40%
Rarely	22.40%
Never	9.40%

Table 14: Hate speech on social media (overall)

At all times	2.50%
In many instances	16.60%
In some instances	29.30%
Rarely	19.30%
Never	24.90%

Table 15: Hate speech on mass media (overall)

At all times	4.70%
In many instances	26.50%
In some instances	32.00%
Rarely	21.00%
Never	11.90%

Table 16: Groups responsible for hate speech (by religious group)

Buddhist	
Politicians in your religious group	32.3%
Politicians in the other religious group	17.8%
Priests/religious leaders in your religious group	16.3%
Ordinary people in your religious group	8.6%
Priests/religious leaders in the other religious group	7.3%
Ordinary people in the other religious group	6.2%
Traders in your religious group	3.8%
Traders in the other religious group	3.6%
Government officials in your religious group	3.3%
Government officials in the other religious group	0.6%

Hindu	
Politicians in the other religious group	19.2%
Priests/religious leaders in the other religious group	15.4%
Ordinary people in the other religious group	15.0%
Priests/religious leaders in your religious group	14.1%
Politicians in your religious group	13.7%
Ordinary people in your religious group	10.5%
Traders in the other religious group	4.2%
Government officials in the other religious group	3.6%
Government officials in your religious group	2.8%
Traders in your religious group	1.6%

Islam	
Politicians in the other religious group	22.2%
Politicians in your religious group	19.1%
Priests/religious leaders in the other religious group	15.2%
Priests/religious leaders in your religious group	13.5%
Ordinary people in your religious group	8.6%
Ordinary people in the other religious group	7.8%
Government officials in the other religious group	6.0%
Traders in the other religious group	5.3%

Traders in your religious group	2.1%
Government officials in your religious group	0.2%

Catholic	
Politicians in the other religious group	25.1%
Priests/religious leaders in the other religious group	18.1%
Politicians in your religious group	16.1%
Ordinary people in the other religious group	11.9%
Priests/religious leaders in your religious group	8.9%
Ordinary people in your religious group	7.8%
Government officials in the other religious group	4.7%
Traders in the other religious group	3.4%
Government officials in your religious group	3.1%
Traders in your religious group	0.9%

Christian (non-Roman Catholic)	
Priests/religious leaders in the other religious group	27.0%
Politicians in the other religious group	24.7%
Ordinary people in the other religious group	18.6%
Politicians in your religious group	7.0%
Ordinary people in your religious group	6.0%
Priests/religious leaders in your religious group	5.8%
Traders in the other religious group	4.9%
Traders in your religious group	2.5%
Government officials in your religious group	2.0%
Government officials in the other religious group	1.5%