



WEAPONISING GENDER: GENDERED DISINFORMATION AND POLITICAL MANIPULATION IN SRI LANKAN SOCIAL MEDIA

Sri Lanka's online political discourse has increasingly become shaped by gendered hate speech, misogyny, homophobia, and disinformation campaigns designed to manipulate public opinion and polarize audiences. During politically sensitive periods, including elections and major policy debates, social media platforms have become spaces where political actors, supporters, influencers, and anonymous networks weaponize gender and sexuality to undermine political legitimacy, discredit opponents, and provoke emotional reactions among users.

These narratives often move beyond conventional political criticism and instead target the morality, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, family life, and personal relationships of politicians, journalists, activists, and public officials. Such narratives exploit existing social prejudices, conservative cultural anxieties, and misinformation surrounding gender and LGBTQ+ identities to influence political perceptions and electoral decision-making.

The spread of gendered narratives contributes to democratic harm by discouraging women's participation in politics, normalizing online abuse, deepening social polarization, and shifting public discourse away from policy issues toward identity-based attacks and moral panic.

This study analysis key gendered disinformation and political manipulation that took place on Sri Lanka social media from January to April 2026.

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