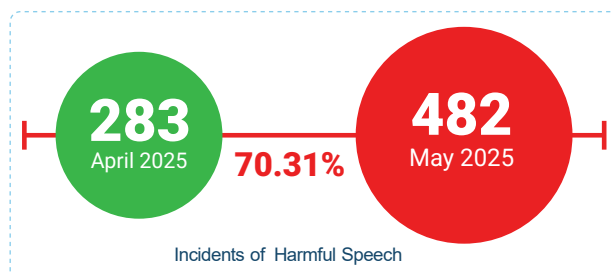


Harmful Speech in Sri Lanka

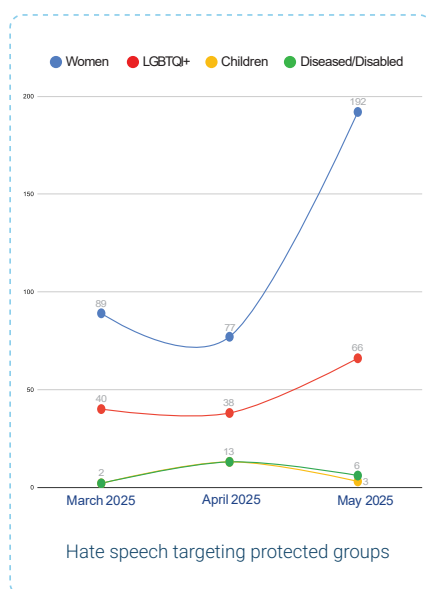
MONTHLY BULLETIN
M A Y 2 0 2 5

Key Trends

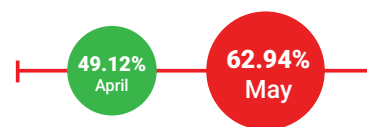


Compared to April, there was a 73.68% increase in the number of anti-LGBTQI+ content pieces and a two-fold increase in content targeting women this month, particularly targeting the Prime Minister over her participation in veteran actress Malini Fonseka's funeral and discussions surrounding alleged ragging incidents in universities, which were attributed to female students. However, there was a 76.92% decrease in content targeting children and a 53.84% decrease in content targeting diseased or disabled groups, respectively.

Key events in May that led to harmful speech



HATE SPEECH INCIDENTS IN MAY 304



Tensions surrounding the Tissa Vihara in Thayiddi, Jaffna

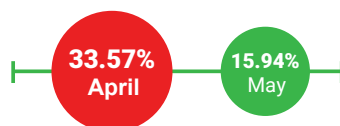
Tissa Vihara in Thayiddi has been a longstanding flashpoint for ethnic tensions with protests taking place each month for at least two years. Recent online discourse has included content that could be interpreted as inciting hostility or violence if the site was harmed, highlighting ongoing intercommunal tensions. Such rhetoric risks fuelling unrest and poses threats to public safety and social cohesion.

Tension triggered by 18 May (Mullivaikkal Remembrance Day/Victory Day) Commemorations

Memorial events for those who lost their lives during the conflict were held on 18 May around the country with solidarity events in locations such as Wellawatte and Negombo also being observed. Participants of these events were the targets of online hate speech, including threats of violence, while the presence of clergy at an event in Negombo triggered anti-Christian rhetoric online including a wave of disinformation linking religious institutions to past conflict actors.

DISINFORMATION INCIDENTS IN MAY

77

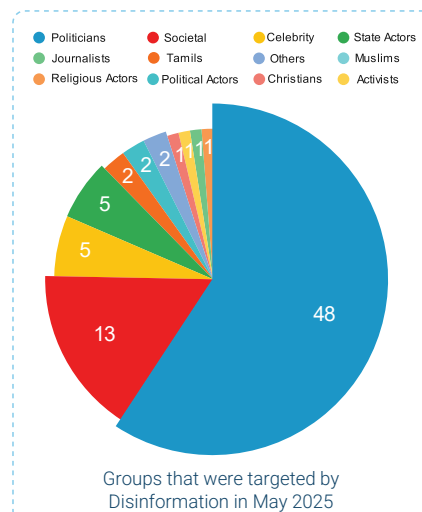


Disinformation Following a Student Death at the University of Sabaragamuwa

In the aftermath of a tragic student death reportedly linked to ragging at the University of Sabaragamuwa, a wave of disinformation emerged across social media platforms. Monitors observed content that appeared to normalize or glorify ragging practices, potentially contributing to a climate of impunity around harmful practices, and undermining public discourse on student safety and institutional accountability.

Misinformation Regarding Swimwear Regulations in Arugam Bay

Social media monitoring identified the circulation of misinformation claiming that swimwear, specifically bikinis, has been officially banned in Arugam Bay. These claims have been inaccurately attributed to government authorities and have contributed to confusion among the public and visitors. At present, there is no official directive or regulation prohibiting the use of swimwear at beach locations in Arugam Bay. The area continues to be a popular destination for both domestic and international tourists, with no such restrictions in place.



01. Harmful speech includes hate speech, dis/misinformation, harassment and incitement to or glorification of violence.
02. The [UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech](#) defines hate speech as, "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."
03. While there is no universally accepted definition of disinformation, the Report of the [UN Secretary-General on Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) defines disinformation as, "information that is inaccurate, intended to deceive and shared in order to do serious harm".

RESPONSIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

May 2025

Key Observations

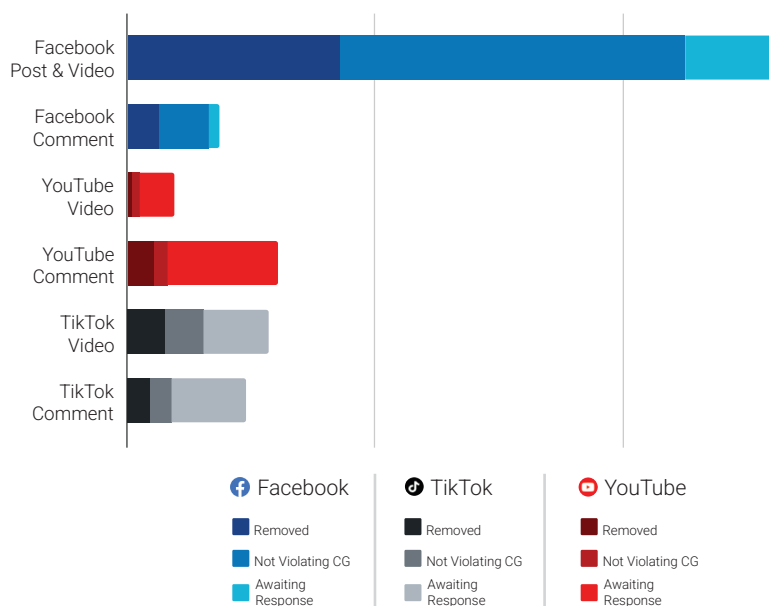
In May, 482 incidents of harmful speech were reported to social media platforms. Of these, 297 were reported to Facebook, 105 to TikTok, and 80 to YouTube. Unlike other platforms, where both posts and comments can be reported, only videos can be reported on YouTube. This month, Facebook had the highest removal rate, at 33.33%, followed by TikTok at 22.86%. YouTube's removal rate amounted to 16.25%.

53.53% of content reported to Facebook was found not to violate its community guidelines.

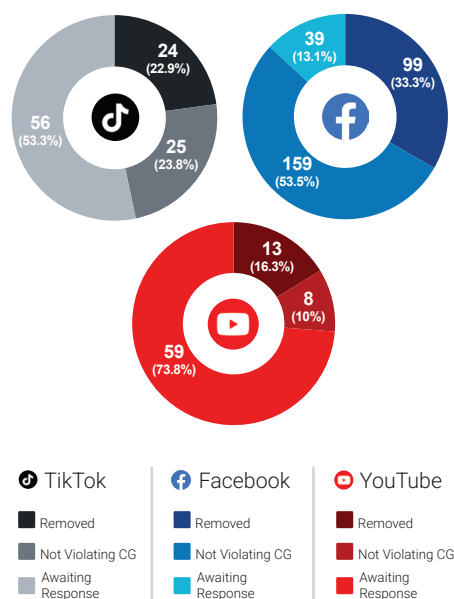
37.14% of content reported to TikTok awaits a response.

All platforms responded to 61.62% of the content within a week of escalation.

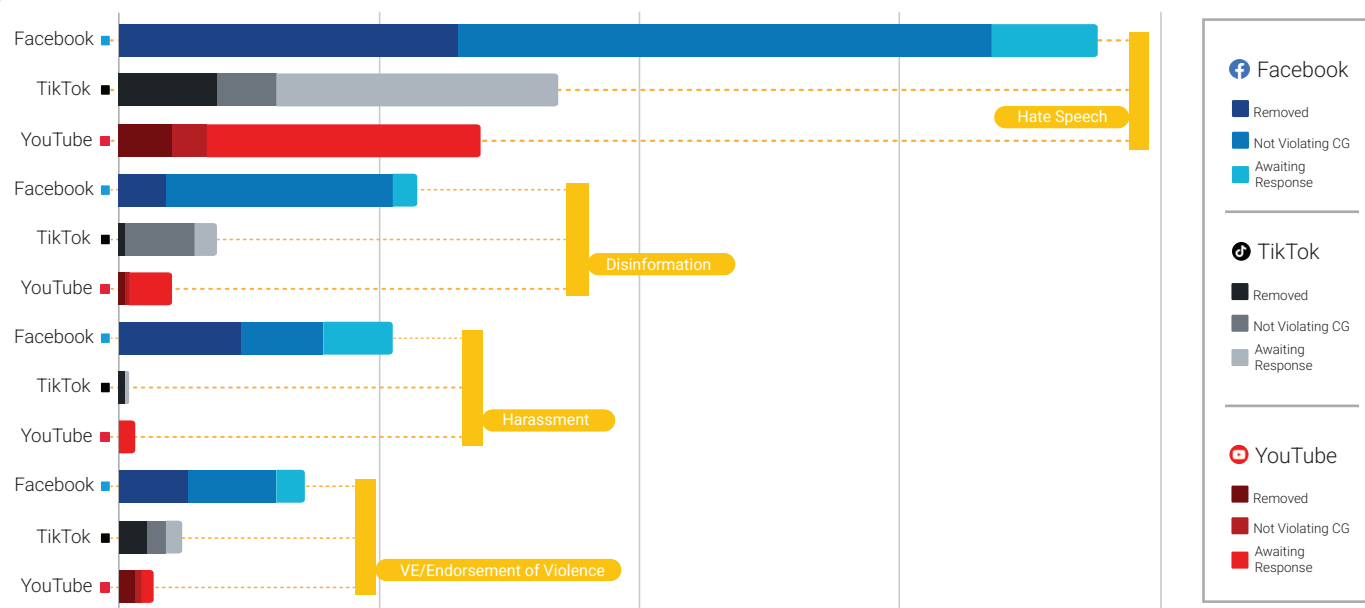
RESPONSE BY THE PLATFORM FOR EACH TYPE OF CONTENT



OVERALL RESPONSE BY PLATFORMS



RESPONSE BY CATEGORY



04. The ability to monitor Facebook was negatively impacted by the retirement of Meta's CrowdTangle tool on 14 August 2024.

05. The UN in Sri Lanka relies on trusted external fact-checkers to independently monitor dis- and misinformation. Actual levels of dis- and misinformation may be higher than reported due to monitoring capacity constraints.