



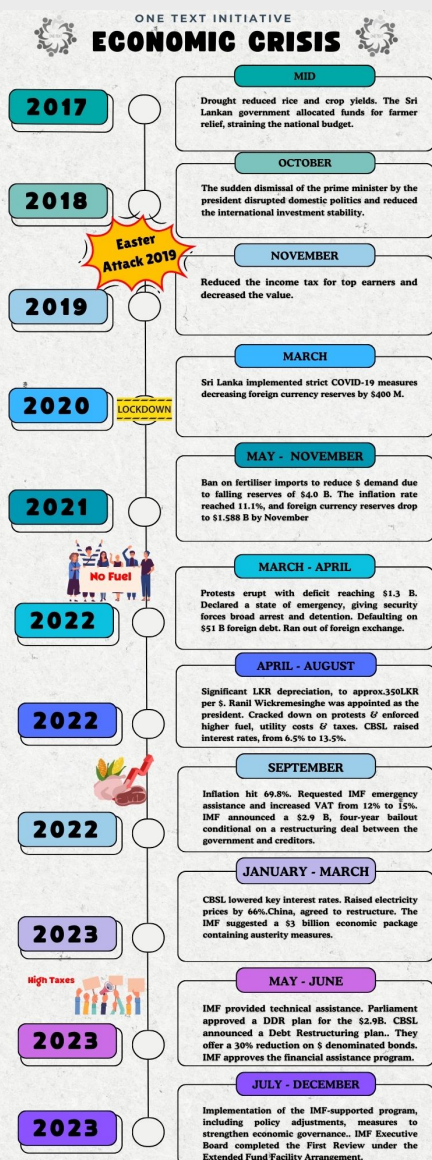
Politico-socio-economic snapshot

Key observations:

“Urban voters, particularly the younger demographics, show a stronger preference for technocratic leadership.”

“Millennials and Gen Z, show an inclination towards government models that prioritize individual rights”

Economic Crisis: A Timeline



1. The Election Year

The governance crisis in Sri Lanka has indeed set off a domino effect, beginning with a debt crisis that subsequently spiraled into a broader economic crisis. Now, with the proposal of elections, there is a looming concern that this could lead to a political crisis, adding another layer of complexity to the nation's already precarious situation.

This sequence of events underscores the intricate relationship between governance, economic stability, and political harmony. The governance crisis, characterized by issues such as corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency, directly impacted the country's financial management and economic policies, leading to unsustainable debt levels. This debt crisis, in turn, strained the economy, resulting in shortages, inflation, and social unrest, thereby deepening the economic crisis.

The forthcoming elections, therefore, represent a critical juncture for Sri Lanka. They offer an opportunity for the electorate to shape the country's future direction by choosing leaders who can address the underlying issues of governance that precipitated these crises. However, there is also the risk that, without a clear path to stability and reform, the elections could lead to further political fragmentation and uncertainty.

To navigate this precarious situation, it will be essential for all political actors in Sri Lanka to prioritize national interest over partisan gains. However, the competition among these parties seems to have increased. Yet, the focus must be on forming a stable, transparent, and accountable government that can implement necessary economic reforms, engage in effective debt management, and restore public trust. Only through such concerted efforts can Sri Lanka hope to emerge from its current cycle of crises and set a course toward recovery and sustainable development.

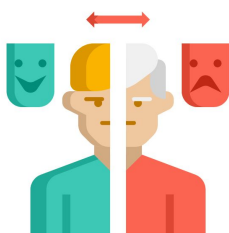
Current President Ranil Wickremesinghe might enter the presidential race to gain public support for his stringent economic policies as the nation works to bounce back from the deepest sudden economic downturn in recent history and Wickremesinghe, who took office after a parliamentary vote following his predecessor's departure, faces a lack of popularity due to his strict financial strategies. Key opponents like Sajith Premadasa and Anura Kumara Dissanayake appear to be contenders with stronger popular support behind them.

2. As Test on IMF-led Restructuring Program

The upcoming election marks the first since Sri Lanka experienced a devastating economic crisis in 2022, leading to its declaration of bankruptcy. Importantly, this election occurs in the context of an IMF-initiated recovery plan launched last year, a program that has faced criticism from the opposition for its emphasis on heavy taxation and privatization efforts aimed at achieving fiscal goals. Consequently, the election is anticipated to primarily serve as a judgment on President Wickremesinghe, an established political figure who has positioned himself as the emblem of Sri Lanka's path to recovery. International stakeholders, including countries like India and China that have extended financial support and loans, as well as Sri Lanka's various bilateral and commercial creditors, will be keeping a keen eye on the election outcomes.

3. Economic Contraction affecting electoral decisions

As elections approach, the country is at crossroads, as the political landscape is deeply influenced by the increasing economic hardships of the people. This period is marked by significant challenges, primarily stemming from the country's economic and social turmoil. After declaring bankruptcy, Sri Lanka has faced an economic contraction that has exacerbated the plight of its people. This economic downturn has not only stifled growth but also heightened social vulnerabilities, leading to a desperate societal state as outlined in a recent UN report. This report highlights the multiple vulnerabilities faced by the population, reflecting a society grappling with economic hardship and social disenchantment.



Amid these struggles, political anxiety has become a palpable undercurrent within the society, manifesting in various distressing forms. Notable among these are the increased violence against women, a surge in homicide rates, and a rise in petty crimes. These signs of societal distress, as reported by police department statistics, paint a bleak picture of the current state of affairs. Violence against women, in particular, points to deep-seated gender inequalities and systemic failures in protecting vulnerable populations. Similarly, the spike in homicides and petty crimes can be seen as a direct outcome of the prevailing economic despair and social instability, where individuals, pushed to the brink, resort to desperate measures.

As Sri Lanka inches closer to the Presidential elections, the interplay between the economic contraction, social vulnerabilities, and the resultant political anxiety casts a long shadow over the electoral process. The societal desperation, underscored by alarming trends in violence and crime, serves as a stark reminder of the critical need for comprehensive reforms. The upcoming elections thus emerge not just as a political contest, but as a crucial opportunity for addressing the underlying issues plaguing the nation and steering Sri Lanka towards a path of recovery and sustainable development.

4. What's the model of the state/ government that people are likely to support?

The political developments and elections within states that adopt distinct governance models reflect their foundational principles, goals, and societal expectations. These models shape the political landscape, electoral priorities, and governance outcomes, each offering a unique approach to achieving national objectives. These models emphasize different aspects of governance, societal goals, and political ideologies, illustrating the diversity in how states prioritize their objectives and the means by which they seek to achieve them. While there are lot of duplications among them, these have been identified based on various aspirations and expectations from the government. Below, we offer a brief overview of each model based on the expectations set by citizens:

1. **National Security-based State:** This model prioritizes the preservation of national sovereignty, cultural heritage, and religious values. It focuses on strengthening national defense, safeguarding the contributions of the nation's founders, and conserving natural resources. Political success in such states is often achieved by candidates and parties that advocate for enhancing national pride and security, resonating with voters who value tradition and national sovereignty.
2. **State Ensuring Good Governance:** In this model, the emphasis is on protecting individual rights, upholding democratic values, and ensuring the rule of law. It involves debates on the appropriate level of government intervention, the protection of private property, and the promotion of a free-market economy. Elections in such states engage citizens deeply, evaluating candidates on their commitment to democratic governance, transparency, and accountability.

3. ***Economy-first State:*** These states aim to balance the principles of a market economy with a strong welfare system, focusing on regulating the economy to ensure fairness and protect workers' rights. Political discussions center around tackling social inequalities, advocating for workers' rights, and preserving cultural values. Elections often explore the best methods to achieve an equitable market economy that supports all citizens.

4. ***'Socialist State:*** This model is characterized by efforts to address historical injustices and promote social equality. It emphasizes public ownership, industry regulation, and the equitable distribution of wealth. Political discourse in such states is geared towards transforming the socio-economic structure to prevent wealth concentration and ensure equal opportunities for all.

5. ***Techno-Enterprise State:*** States that fall under this model prioritize strategic resource management and the incorporation of technology, particularly artificial intelligence, in decision-making. They focus on innovation, governance enhancement, and promoting a meritocracy. Political developments involve discussions on how to leverage technology for economic growth and integrate technological advancements into public policy, appealing to voters who value foresight and innovation.

These models reflect the varying priorities and expectations citizens have from their state, from focusing on security and governance to promoting economic fairness and technological advancement.

Each governance model presents a distinct political and electoral landscape, shaped by its core values and societal goals. Understanding these nuances is crucial for analyzing the political developments and election dynamics within different states.

5. Demographics of Electoral Trends

In 2023, Sri Lanka saw a decrease in the addition of new voters to the electoral roll, with only 207,000 new registrants compared to the usual 300,000, indicating a declining interest among young people in the electoral process. The Registration of Electors (Amendment) Act, No. 22 of 2021, facilitates online registration for those turning 18, allowing the voter register to be updated quarterly. Despite efforts to make registration easier and more frequent, the challenge remains in engaging young voters and managing the increased workload for local officials due to the growing number of families.

Emerging electoral trends, especially when viewed through the lens of demographics, provide a nuanced understanding of the evolving political landscape. These trends are shaped by factors such as generational changes, economic conditions, and shifts in social values. Key insights into how different demographics are influencing electoral preferences and governance models in Sri Lanka reveals a complex interplay between leadership preferences, desired government structures, and critical societal issues, differentiated by age, employment status, and urban versus rural divides.

6. Leadership Preferences by Demographics

Across generations, from the Lost Generation (aged 79-86) to Gen Z (aged 16-18), there's a discernible divergence in leadership preferences. The studies indicate a generational shift in the political sentiment, with younger voters—Millennials and Gen Z—showing a marked preference for leaders currently leading opposition politics such as SJB leader Sajith Premadasa, and NPP leader, Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

This shift suggests a growing disillusionment with traditional political figures and a desire for new leadership that promises reform and addresses the current socio-economic challenges. Notably, the NPP's appeal among younger voters, including Gen X, underscores a broader appeal for a "try something different" approach amidst a backdrop of political dissatisfaction.

7. Desired Government Structures

The preferences for government structures also vary significantly across demographics, reflecting distinct priorities and visions for the country's future. While older generations (Lost Generation and Baby Boomers) may lean towards models emphasizing sovereignty, cultural identity, and protection of natural resources, younger demographics, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, show an inclination towards government models that prioritize individual rights, democracy, and a market economy balanced with a robust welfare state. This suggests a generational pivot towards more open, democratic, and equitable governance frameworks.

8. Critical Societal Issues

The study illuminates critical societal issues that resonate differently across demographics. Concerns range from corruption, nepotism, and the influence of oligarchs, to challenges in fostering entrepreneurship, addressing historical injustices, and managing state-controlled assets efficiently. Interestingly, the younger demographics—Millennials and Gen Z—are more vocal about these issues, indicating a heightened awareness and demand for transparency, accountability, and equitable economic policies.

9. Urban vs. Rural Dynamics

Urban and rural divides further color these trends, with urban voters exhibiting slightly different preferences in leadership and governance models compared to their rural counterparts. This divide underscores the impact of socio-economic conditions and access to information on political preferences. Urban voters, particularly the younger demographics, show a stronger preference for technocratic leadership and governance models that leverage technology for efficient decision-making and economic development.

10. Implications for Future Elections

The data suggests that the upcoming election could be a watershed moment for Sri Lanka, with the potential for significant shifts in political power as younger demographics seek alternatives to traditional political figures. The demand for new leadership and governance models that address current challenges while ensuring fairness, transparency, and equitable development could reshape the political landscape.

In conclusion, emerging electoral trends in Sri Lanka, viewed through demographic lenses, highlight a transformative period in the nation's political discourse. The generational demand for change, coupled with distinct preferences for leadership and governance, underscores a broader call for reform. As Sri Lanka navigates these trends, the forthcoming elections will not only reflect the current political sentiment but also shape the country's future.

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