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Sri Lanka: Rekonfiguration des Singhalesischen Nationalismus?

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Summary

Sinhala nationalism is the constitutive political ideology for the majority of Sri Lanka's Buddhist, Sinhalese-speaking majority. This article argues that since the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War (2009), this political ideology has undergone a reconfiguration — now oscillating between competing interpretations. Current president Maithripala Sirisena, elected in 2015 and governing in a unity coalition that includes social-democratic and liberal Sinhalese parties, has initiated a rapprochement toward the West. His predecessor and rival, Mahinda Rajapaksa, was strongly associated with the victory over the insurgent Tamil Tigers (LTTE) that had been heavily criticized by Western powers from a human rights perspective. Rajapaksa's rule up to the presidential election in 2015 had been characterized by increasing authoritarianism, anti-minority sentiment, and corruption. As of early 2018, Rajapaksa has reemerged as the leader of a new populist front and seems to cater to the fears of Sinhalese nationalists — which secured his party a decisive victory in the local government elections. This nationalist populism with an agrarian base displays similarities to current populist strategies being witnessed in other world regions too.

Keywords: Sinhala Nationalism, Sri Lanka, post-conflict situation, political ideology, authoritarian populism, Asian geopolitics

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