

# The Vote in the Northern and Eastern Provinces

H. L. Hemachandra

A number of significant features may be observed in the results of the Presidential Elections held in 1982 October, in respect of the Northern and Eastern provinces. The number of voters who turned out in these two provinces was considerably low at this election, while a substantial number of the votes polled had been rejected. The two prominent national parties, namely, the UNP and the SLFP have both obtained a greater number of votes in these Provinces than they did in the 1977 general elections.

Before attempting to discuss these special features, it is necessary to analyse the composition of population of these two provinces and the various political parties that contested this election. According to the Census of 1981, 86.4 per cent of the total population of the Northern Province comprises Sri Lanka Tamils and 5.7 per cent are Tamils of Indian origin, with the total Tamil population in this province being 92.1 per cent. In the Jaffna district, which comes within the Northern province, these percentages are 95.3 per cent for Sri Lanka Tamils and 2.4 per cent for Indian Tamils, with the total percentage of Tamils being 97.7 per cent. In the newly

formed Wannai electoral district (which comprises the former administrative districts of Mannar, Mullaitivu and Vavuniya) the population of Tamils is 75.3 per cent of the total population (59.8 per cent Sri Lanka Tamils and 15.5 per cent Indian Tamils).

The percentage of the Tamil population in the Eastern province which is 42.1 per cent, is considerably low compared to that of the entire Northern province. This comprises 40.9 per cent of Sri Lanka Tamils and 1.2 per cent of Indian Tamils. Of the three districts of the Eastern province, the Batticaloa district has the largest Tamil population, with 72.0 per cent of the total population being Tamils, (70.8 per cent Sri Lanka Tamils and 1.2 per cent Indian Tamils). The percentage of Tamils in the Trincomalee district is 36.4 per cent of the total population, which comprises 33.8 per cent Sri Lanka Tamils and 2.6 per cent Indian Tamils while in the Amparai district the respective percentages for Sri Lanka Tamils is 20.1 per cent and Indian Tamils 0.4 per cent bringing the total Tamil population in this district to 30.5 per cent. (See tables I and II).

It is therefore clear that the majority of the population inhabiting the Northern Province are Tamils. The distribution pattern of the various nationalities shows a difference in the Eastern province where, except for the Batticaloa District, the majority of the population does not constitute Tamils. It is also evident that the percentage of Tamils of Indian origin in these two provinces is comparatively low and that there is a greater weightage of Tamils of Sri Lankan origin. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that of the total Tamil population of Sri Lanka 37.9 per cent live in the Northern province whereas in the Eastern province this percentage is only 15.3 per cent. Considering only the Sri Lanka Tamil population it may be observed that 51.3 per cent inhabit the Northern province while 21.3 per cent of the Sri Lanka Tamil population is in the Eastern province. Considering the Indian Tamil population in Sri Lanka it is seen that 7.7 per cent live in the Northern province, whereas only 1.5 per cent live in the Eastern province. One evident feature from this population distribution is that the majority of Tamils of Sri Lankan origin (almost three-fourth) inhabit these two provinces, mainly the Northern, whereas the majority of the Indian Tamils live outside these two provinces; the majority of them, nearly 90.8 per cent living mainly in the plantation areas. It must be noted that while all Sri Lankan Tamils enjoy the right to vote, only a section of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka enjoy this privilege.

At the General Elections of 1977 the two major national parties, that is, the UNP and the SLFP, and also the TULF (which participated only on a regional basis), entered the contest. At the Presidential Election of 1982, however, the TULF withdrew completely from the contest though a representative of the Tamil Congress (which had allied with the TULF in the 1977 General Election) did contest.

In attempting to analyse the significant features of the October

Table 1 PERCENTAGE OF TAMILS IN THE NORTHERN AND THE EASTERN PROVINCES IN 1981, NUMBER OF VOTES POLLED AND REJECTED AT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF OCTOBER 1982 ON A DISTRICT BASIS

Province/District	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Total Tamil	Votes Polled	Votes Rejected
	%	%	%	%	%
Northern Province	86.4	5.7	92.1	49.3	4.3
Jaffna District	95.3	2.4	97.7	46.3	4.6
Vanni District	59.8	15.5	75.7	61.5	3.3
Eastern Province	40.9	1.2	42.1	74.7	1.8
Batticaloa Dist.	70.8	1.2	72.0	71.3	2.3
Trincomalee Dist.	33.8	2.6	36.4	71.4	1.9
Digamadulla Dist. (Amparai)	20.1	0.4	20.5	79.8	1.3

Table 2 PERCENTAGE OF TAMILS IN SRI LANKA IN 1981, THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS AT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF OCTOBER 1982, NO. OF VOTES POLLED, PERCENTAGE REJECTED, AND PERCENTAGE GAINED BY THE UNP AND SLFP-ACCORDING TO PROVINCES

Province	Sri Lankan Tamil	Indian Tamil	Total Tamil	No. of Votes Registered	Votes Polled	Votes Rejected	Votes Polled by UNP	Votes Polled by SLFP
	%	%	%		%	%	%	%
Northern	86.4	5.7	92.1	612,798	49.3	4.3	26.9	54.8
Eastern	40.9	1.2	42.1	510,394	74.7	1.8	49.2	28.4
Western	5.6	1.6	7.2	2,306,676	82.1	1.0	54.1	40.8
Central	7.3	18.8	26.1	953,921	86.7	1.0	60.2	36.0
Southern	0.6	1.3	1.9	1,154,342	83.4	1.1	49.0	42.2
North Western	2.7	0.5	3.2	985,180	85.8	0.9	56.6	39.1
North Central	1.5	0.1	1.6	406,218	85.1	1.0	51.8	41.2
Uva	4.5	15.7	20.2	406,745	85.8	1.3	55.9	38.5
Sabaragamuwa	2.2	8.9	11.1	808,750	86.1	1.1	54.0	40.5
Total	12.6	5.6	18.2	8,145,024	81.1	1.2	52.9	39.1

Presidential Election, in respect of the Northern and Eastern provinces only, it is necessary to consider specially the pattern of population distribution and the participation of particular political parties at this election.

#### Decline in Number of Votes Polled

The turnout of voters at the Presidential Election particularly in the Northern province was very low, while in the Eastern province too it was considerably low, the respective percentage turnout being 49.3 per cent and 74.7 per cent compared to 81.1 per cent for the whole island. This situation contrasts strongly with the percentage of votes polled in the other seven provinces of the Island where the turnout varied between 92.1 per cent and 86.7 per cent (See table 2). The average percentage of votes polled for these 7 provinces is a high 84.3 per cent. (This is further interpreted from table 3). It is apparent that the low percentage of votes polled in these two particular provinces, namely the Northern and the Eastern, resulted in a general decline in the average national percentage as well.

Considered district-wise, it appears that (with the exception of the Colombo District) in all other Districts in the Island the percentages of the votes polled have exceeded those of all districts in the Northern and the Eastern province. Another evident feature is that a strong correlation appears to exist between the percentage of votes polled in the five electoral districts in the Northern and Eastern provinces and the strength of the Tamil population in these respective districts. (See Table 1). Considered percentage wise, it is observed that the lowest percentage of the votes polled (46.3%) was in the district where the highest percentage of Tamil population exist, namely the Jaffna district; and the highest percentage of votes polled (79.8%) was in the Amparal district which is inhabited by the lowest percentage of the Tamil population among these five districts.

According to this pattern the non-participation of the TULF in the Presidential Election of 1982, appears to have been the major reason for the decline in the number of votes polled in the Northern and Eastern provinces at this election; it has been an important factor in Election as much as 69.0 per cent of the valid votes in the Northern province and 32.9 per cent of votes of the Eastern province were won by the TULF adds support to this contention.

#### Rejected Votes

At the 1982 Presidential Election 4.3 percent and 1.8 percent of the total votes polled were rejected in Northern and Eastern Provinces res-

pectively. The percentages of rejected votes in other provinces ranged from 0.9 per cent to 1.3 per cent, the average percentage of total votes rejected in these other 7 provinces being 1.0 per cent. (The average percentage of rejected votes of all 9 provinces was 1.2 per cent). It shows that the number of votes rejected in the Northern and Eastern provinces had gone up. (A district-wise breakdown of the figures shows that the five districts in Northern and Eastern provinces have registered a higher percentage of rejected votes than all other districts except for two, namely Monaragala and Kegalle). It is evident therefore, that there has been a close link between the percentage of the Tamil population and the percentage of votes rejected as well as the percentage of votes not polled. (See Table 1).

It is difficult to trace any factor, other than a political one, which has brought about this unprecedented increase of rejected votes. There is no evidence to suggest that the standard of education of the people of these two districts had any influence in this unprecedented increase in rejected votes. According to the 1981 Census the rate of literacy among the people of the Jaffna district recorded a very high percentage, being second only to that of the Colombo and Gampaha districts. But the Jaffna district registered the highest percentage of rejected votes. The conclusion that a large number of these votes were spoilt deliberately is thus strongly upheld. It is possible that such voters may have by this action intended to express either their dislike towards the Presidential poll or a feeling of dismay towards the existing political system of the country.

#### Performance of Two Major National Parties

At the end of the 1982 Presidential Election the UNP was able to obtain 26.9 per cent and 49.2 per cent of the total valid votes polled in the Northern and the Eastern provinces, respectively. On the other hand, the SLFP obtained 34.8 per cent and 28.4 per cent respectively, in these two provinces. But it would not be realistic to base our analysis on these percentages alone, obtained by these two major national parties. It is also necessary to consider two other factors: that the TULF, which is the leading regional political party, did not contest at this election; and the high rate of voter abstention at this election.

To assess the level of success at this poll by the UNP and the SLFP, factors such as the number of voters who abstained from voting under special circumstances, what political parties these voters supported, and also if the TULF actually contested the attitude they

would have adopted at this election must also be considered. However, we attempt to analyse this situation on the assumption that these voters, who abstained from voting under special circumstances, were mainly TULF supporters and if the TULF contested these votes would have gone to this party, the picture would be as follows: the UNP obtained 15.5 per cent and 43.6 per cent of the valid votes polled in the Northern and the Eastern provinces, respectively; while, the SLFP obtained 20.1 per cent and 25.2 per cent of the valid votes in these two provinces. At the 1977 General Election when all three parties contested the UNP gained only 7.7 per cent in the Northern province and 38.0 per cent in the Eastern province. The apparent trend is that this party has registered a clear percentage increase in votes in both these provinces compared to 1977. In the case of the SLFP it obtained 1.4 per cent and 26.8 per cent respectively from these two provinces in 1977. In 1982 this party showed a marked improvement in its performance in respect of the Northern province at the Presidential Election; but in the Eastern province although the votes gained by the SLFP were 12,000 more than in 1977 General Election, it seems that they have shown a slight decrease percentage wise. The number of votes obtained by the two major national parties could well have been lower if one were to consider a situation where the TULF actually contested the Presidential election. In such a situation some of the votes gained by these two parties could possibly have been received by the TULF.

One assumption that may be made is a situation where the TULF contested the Presidential elections of 1982, instead of the TC and the voters who abstained from voting in these two provinces as well as the votes polled by the TC were obtained by TULF. In such a situation the TULF could have registered 62.1 per cent and 26.9 per cent of the valid votes polled, in the Northern and the Eastern provinces, respectively. At the 1977 General Election the corresponding percentages registered by this party was 69.0 per cent from the Northern and 32.9 per cent from the Eastern provinces. Therefore on the above assumption the performance of the TULF on a percentage basis, would have been comparatively lower than in 1977, if this party in fact contested the 1982 Presidential Election. (This would have been the situation only if the TULF did not receive any of the votes obtained by the UNP and the SLFP).

On the other hand, if the TULF did contest the Presidential Election of 1982, and if this induced the voters (who abstained under

special circumstances) in the Northern and the Eastern provinces to vote for the TULF, the number of total valid votes polled at the Presidential election would have increased by another 261,000 votes. Thus the total valid votes polled could have increased from 6,522,000 to 6,783,000. In these circumstances the percentage of the total valid votes polled by the two major national parties could have declined and the 52.9 per cent registered by the UNP at this election may have been reduced to 50.9 per cent; while the SLFP's percentage may have been 37.6 per cent instead of the 39.1 per cent that was registered by this party in October 1982.

**FOOT NOTE**

At the December Referendum once again the lowest number of

votes polled in the Island was recorded in the Northern Province particularly in the two districts of Jaffna and Wannl. Also, the trend of a lower poll than in other provinces, seen in previous elections, was maintained here. For instance at the 1977 General Elections when the total registered votes polled for the entire Island average 86.1 per cent the figure for the Northern province was 82.2 per cent. Again, when the national average polled at the October Referendum 70.8 per cent the figure for the Northern province was 60.1 per cent. On the contrary at the December Referendum the poll for the Eastern province was comparatively high, with the three districts of Batticaloa, Digamadulla and Trincomalee re-

gistering an average poll of 70.3 per cent, 75.7 per cent and 68.7 per cent, respectively. Considered beside the national average poll at the December Referendum of 70.8 per cent, the level of voting in this province has not shown a significant decline at the Referendum. It must be noted that in December the national average poll dropped significantly from the October figure of 81.1 per cent to 70.8 per cent.

A significant factor was that a large number of voters in the Jaffna district who abstained from voting at the Presidential Election exercised their franchise at the Referendum with the percentage of turnout going up to 60.1 per cent in December from only 49.3 per cent in October.

**Table 3 NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS, VOTES POLLED, ABSTENTIONS AND REJECTIONS IN NORTHERN AND EASTERN PROVINCES AT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF OCTOBER 1982. VALID VOTES RECEIVED BY MAJOR PARTIES, AND ASSUMPTIONS ON ABSTENTIONS AND LIKELY VOTE ON OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES**

(1) Provinces/Districts	(2) No. of Registered Votes	(3) No. of Votes Polled	(4) *Percent- age of Voters assumed to have abstained under special circumstances	(5) No. of Votes abstained (assumed) under special circumstances	(6) After reduc- ing 1% (as rejec- ted votes of the to- tal No. of voters ass- umed to have abstained under special circum- stances	(7) No. of Valid votes received UNP	(8) No. of Valid Votes received SLFP	(9) No. of Valid Votes received TC	(10) 6+9	(11) No. of Votes received by the other parties	(12) *The Total no. of votes that all parties would have obtain- ed (7+8+ 10+11)
Nothern Province	612,798	49.25	35.05	214,780	212,590	77,614 (15.48)	100,521 (20.05)	98,784 (19.70)	311,374 (62.11)	11,817 (2.36)	501,226 (100.00)
Jaffna Dist.	493,705	46.31	37.99	187,569	185,650	44,780 (11.09)	77,300 (19.15)	87,263 (21.62)	272,913 (67.61)	8,654 (2.14)	403,647 (100.00)
Wanni Dist.	119,093	61.45	22.85	27,220	26,940	32,834 (33.61)	23,221 (23.77)	11,521 (11.79)	38,461 (39.37)	3,163 (3.24)	97,679 (100.00)
Eastern Province	510,394	74.73	9.57	48,840	48,340	184,388 (43.59)	106,484 (25.18)	65,242 (15.42)	113,582 (26.85)	18,529 (4.38)	422,983 (100.00)
Batticaloa Dist.	172,480	71.29	13.01	22,440	22,210	48,094 (33.80)	21,688 (14.24)	47,095 (33.10)	69,305 (48.71)	3,200 (2.25)	142,287 (100.00)
Trincomalee Dist.	133,646	71.38	12.92	17,270	27,090	45,522 (41.13)	31,700 (28.64)	10,068 (10.00)	27,158 (24.54)	6,306 (5.70)	110,686 (100.00)
Digamadulla Dist. (Amparai)	204,268	79.83	4.47	9,130	9,040	90,772 (53.39)	53,096 (31.23)	8,079 (4.75)	17,119 (10.07)	9,023 (5.31)	170,010 (100.00)
All Island Position	8,145,024	81.06	3.24*	263,620*	260,930*	3,450,811 (50.87)	2,548,438 (37.57)	173,934 (2.56)	434,864 (6.41)	348,965 (5.14)	6,783,078 (100.00)

\*\* The assumptions for abstentions; (4) under special circumstances, and (12) total valid votes all parties could have received in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, are based on the national average poll at the Presidential Election of 84.3 per cent for the seven other provinces. It must be noted, however, that generally in the Northern province the poll has been slightly lower than the national average.

**Table 4 COMPARATIVE POSITION OF VOTES POLLED AND REJECTED AT THE OCTOBER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE DECEMBER REFERENDUM**

Province	No. of Votes Registered	% Votes Polled Presidential Election (Oct.)	% Votes Polled Referendum (Dec)	% of Votes Rejected Presidential Election (Oct.)	% of Votes Rejected Referendum (Dec)	% Votes Polled UNP P. Elec. (Oct.)	% of Votes Polled Lamp Ref. (Dec.)	% of Votes Polled Other Parties P. Elec. (Oct.)	% of Votes Polled for Pot Ref. (Dec.)
Northern	612,798	49.3	60.1	4.3	0.6	26.9	14.0	73.1	86.0
Eastern	510,398	74.7	72.1	1.8	0.5	49.2	48.7	50.8	51.3
Western	2,306,676	82.1	67.4	1.0	0.3	54.1	53.9	45.4	46.1
Central	953,921	86.7	77.6	1.0	0.4	60.2	60.3	38.8	33.0
Southern	1,154,342	83.4	69.2	1.1	0.3	49.0	48.1	51.0	52.0
South Western	985,180	85.8	74.4	0.9	0.3	56.6	61.7	43.4	38.3
North Central	406,218	85.1	72.5	1.0	0.4	51.8	65.5	48.2	34.5
Uva	406,745	85.8	75.9	1.3	0.6	55.9	68.6	44.1	31.4
Sabaragamuwa	808,750	86.1	74.6	1.1	0.3	54.0	57.4	46.0	42.6
Total	8,145,024	81.1	70.8	1.2	0.4	52.9	54.7	47.1	45.3

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In the Eastern province when comparing the overall average turnout for all districts in this province with the October situation, the number of votes polled at the December Referendum appears to have registered a decline; although when compared with the percentage of other provinces this decline seems negligible. There was a 2.6 per cent drop in the Eastern province, from 71.7 per cent in October to 72.1 per cent in December.

At the Referendum, however it is apparent that there was a strong vote against the proposal in both the Northern and Eastern Provinces; particularly in the Northern province which averaged only 14 per cent in favour of the proposal (Jaffna 8.7 per cent and Wannai 34.5 per cent). This low percentage for the proposal at the Referendum in the Jaffna district no doubt contributed to a substantial decline in the overall average percentage in respect of the whole island.

The percentage of votes received in favour of the proposal for the whole Island was 54.7 per cent. This figure when worked out for the other 21 districts (with the exception of the Jaffna district) would have amounted to 57.1 per cent. It was in the Batticaloa district where the lowest percentage of votes for the proposal recorded in the Eastern province. In this district the percentage of votes received for the Referendum was only 39.1 per cent. However, in the other two districts which comprise of the Eastern province, namely Trincomalee and Digamadulla, the percentage of votes received for the Referendum does not show a similar decline where the respective percentages recorded were 43.0 per cent and 58.9 per cent. As shown in the analysis of the Presidential election results the vote against the government was strongest in the districts of these two provinces where the concentration of the Tamil population was heaviest.

#### **Spoilt Votes**

A notable feature in the results at both the Presidential Election and the Referendum is that the number of spoilt or rejected votes in the Northern province was the highest for any province. In October it was as high as 4.3 per cent against a national average of 1.2 per cent; while at the Referendum it was 0.6 per cent against a national average of 0.4 per cent. At the 1977 General Elections, however, the number of spoilt votes was far below that of the national average, which has therefore given rise to the view that the high proportion of spoilt votes in the Northern province at the two 1982 polls was not due to negligence (or ignorance as appeared to be the case in the Uva province in December 1982) but a deliberate course of action.