

THE SHIFT TOWARDS THE UNP: A DISTRICT-WISE ANALYSIS

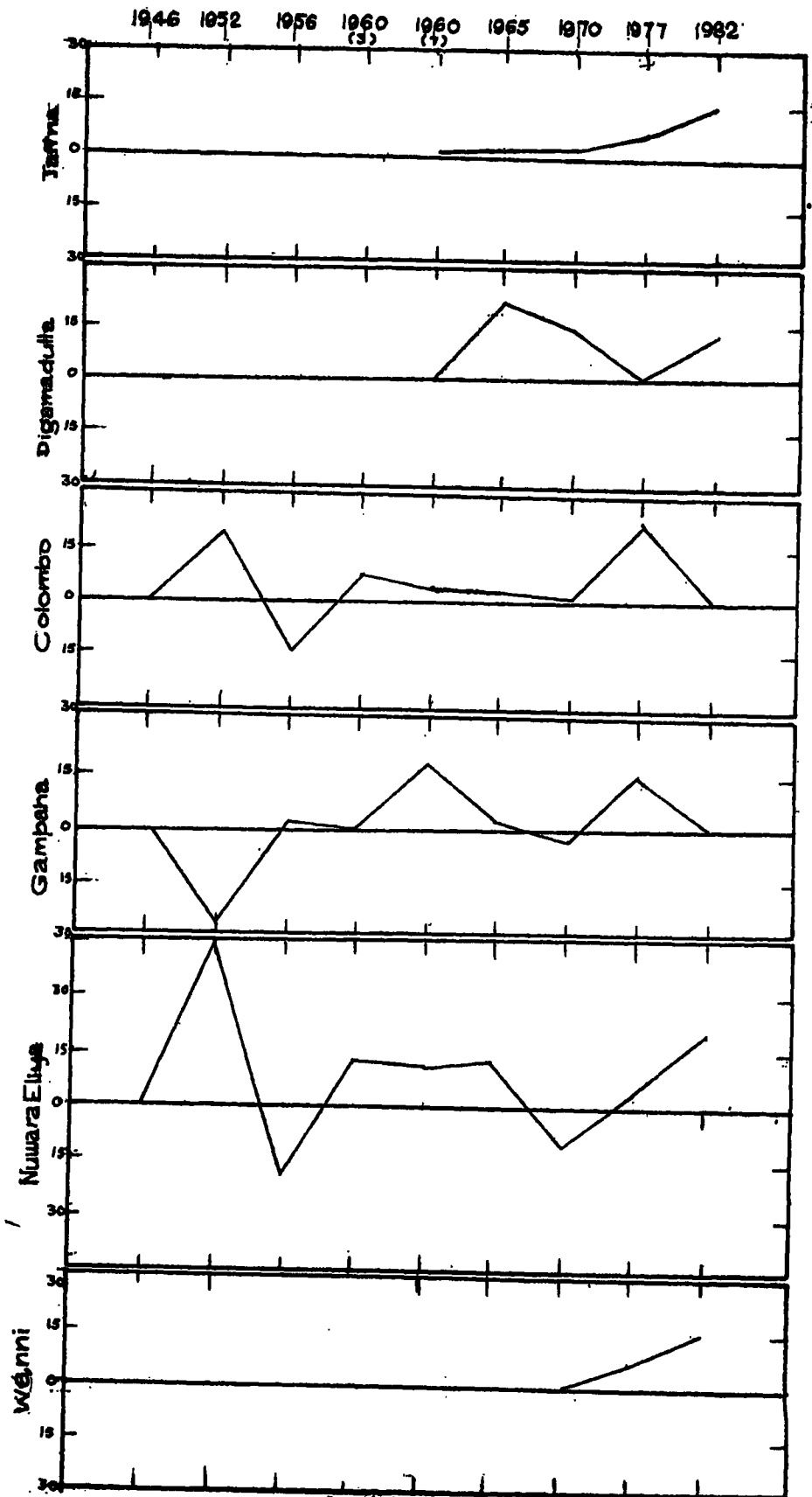
W. G. S. Waidyanatha

In the 1982 Presidential poll the United National Party gained majorities in 21 out of the 22 districts of the island. An attempt is made here to examine the percentage-wise change and pattern of votes polled by the UNP in each district in 1982 in relation to its performance in 1977. At times, however, in order to clarify the analysis, it is necessary to make reference to the number of votes of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party polled in this election. It should also be noted that at the Presidential Election the United National Party was supported by the Ceylon Workers Congress; while, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party was the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, a section of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and a few other left splinter groups.

In 1977, the party succeeded in obtaining over 50 percent of the votes cast in 16 out of 22 districts. In 9 of these 16 districts namely Colombo, Kurunegala, Matara, Badulla, Puttalam, Hambantota, Matale and Polonnaruwa the UNP won over 55 percent of the total votes. This position was not reflected in the results of the 1982 Presidential Election when the number of districts in which the UNP obtained over 50 percent of the vote was reduced to 14. The districts where this majority was gained also changed somewhat from the 1977 position. Thus the Matara, Hambantota, Anuradhapura and Moneragala districts where the UNP received over 50 percent of the vote in 1977 registered majorities of below 50 percent in 1982. On the other hand, the UNP's share of the votes cast in Colombo, Kurunegala, Kandy, Badulla, Kegalle, Puttalam, Digamadulla, Nuwara-Eliya, Matale and Polonnaruwa districts even exceeded the 55 percent mark in 1982. Moreover, the share of the UNP votes cast in the Nuwara-Eliya District increased by 20.14 percent over its 1977 position.

Compared with the 1977 situation, in 1982 the UNP increased its vote in 10 districts, while it polled less than in 1977 in 12 districts (See table on page 9). However, with the exception of the Jaffna District the UNP had clear majorities in all other districts in 1982. The graphs on the following pages indicate the extent of change and behaviour patterns of the UNP vote over each preceding general election in each district. In order to gauge the tendencies in the UNP vote this year, it would be useful to examine the movement or change from the 1977 position to that of 1982.

This may be ascertained through a comparison of the votes cast in



favour of the UNP in each district in 1977 and in 1982. In the graphs reproduced on these pages the line indicating zero could be identified as the total of votes polled in the previous election year. The increase or decrease in the amount of votes received in a particular year was therefore measured with the zero line denoting the base year. Thus, the percentage change at any elec-

tion is the point away from this line. On this basis of all 22 electoral districts the highest rate of gains in 1982 is evident in the districts of Kandy, Nuwara-Eliya, Vanni, Batticaloa Jaffna and Digamadulla.

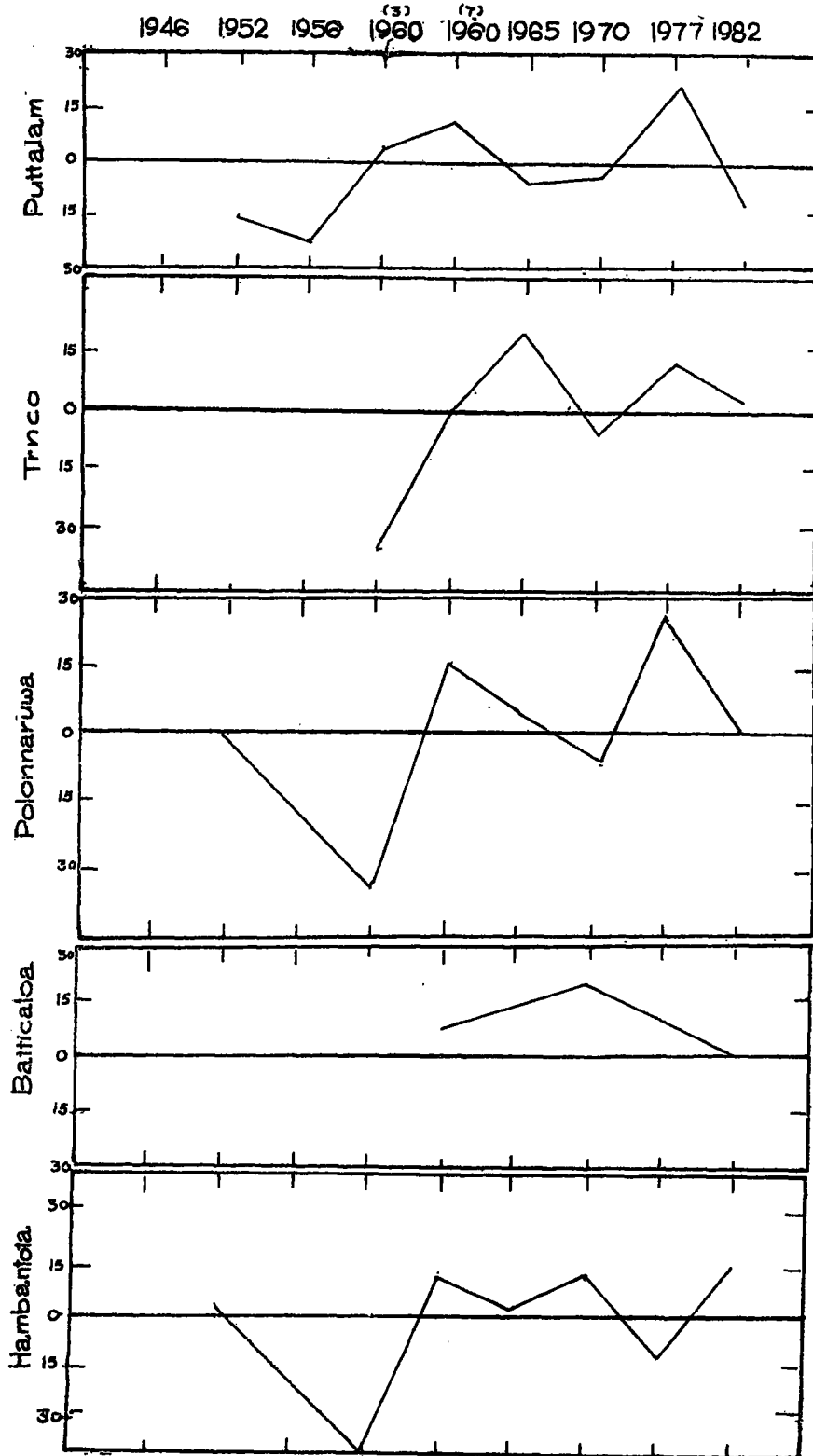
The increase in the UNP votes in the Kandy district is also probably related to a drop in the popularity of the Sri Lanka Freedom

Party that prevailed in 1977; (in 1981 38.9%, in 1977 32.7%) a heavier vote from the Estate Tamil Labour in the district in its favour; (Percentage of estate Indian Tamil Votes in Kandy was 1981) and the pro-government vote of the business minded Muslim community who have benefited from the liberalized economic policy of the government in such areas as Akurana, Uduunuwara and Gampola.

A noteworthy feature of the poll in the Jaffna District is that the UNP vote at the Presidential election had gone up by 17.05 percent over 1977 figure, whilst SLFP gained 33.94% and Tamil Congress received 44% of the votes. The element of distortion due to the non-participation of the TULF is also to be noted. One interpretation of the heavy non TULF vote may be interpreted as a vote against violence. In spite of the TULF boycott part of this vote was cast and could possibly have switched to the UNP though most of it went in favour of the Tamil Congress candidate. However, this UNP vote was much less than the votes received by the other rival party candidates from the All Ceylon Tamil Congress and Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

Comparing the number of votes polled in 1977 and 1982 it is observed that the number of votes polled by the UNP's Presidential candidate in the Nuwara-Eliya district was the highest polled by this party in the entire island. It amounted to 63.10 percent of the total votes polled in the district. Even though the UNP was generally strong in this district at the last Parliamentary elections, the UNP vote in 1977 was less than that of 1970. 1977 3.2% less than 1970) There are several reasons why the UNP was able to increase its share of the poll by so large a margin in 1982 over the 1977 figure.

A fair percentage of the population and of the voters in this district (the Indian Tamil population in the Nuwara-Eliya district was 47.5% of its population in 1981, though all do not enjoy the franchise) are mainly estate workers of Indian origin. In the 1977 General Elections, they registered their vote in favour of the Ceylon Workers Congress and succeeded in electing an MP from one among them. Since 1946 this M.P., who opted to support the UNP which came to power in 1977, was also elevated to Cabinet rank and estate workers were probably able to obtain facilities earlier denied to them. Further, the process of enfranchisement of the estate population of Indian origin on the basis of the Sirima-Shastri Pact was accelerated. This M.P. who represented them canvassed their vote in support of the UNP's candidate in 1982, which was very probably the principal factor that influenced the

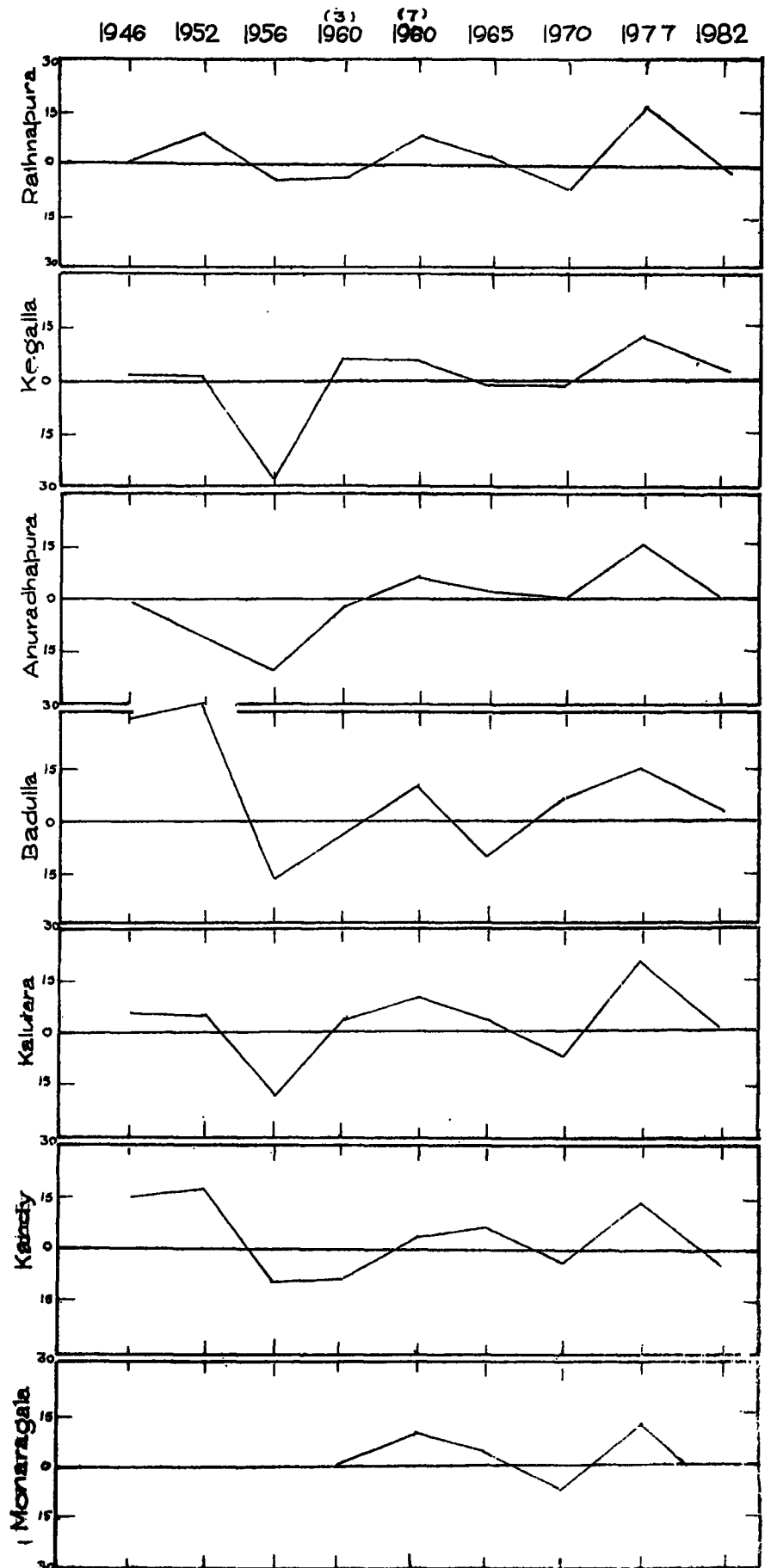


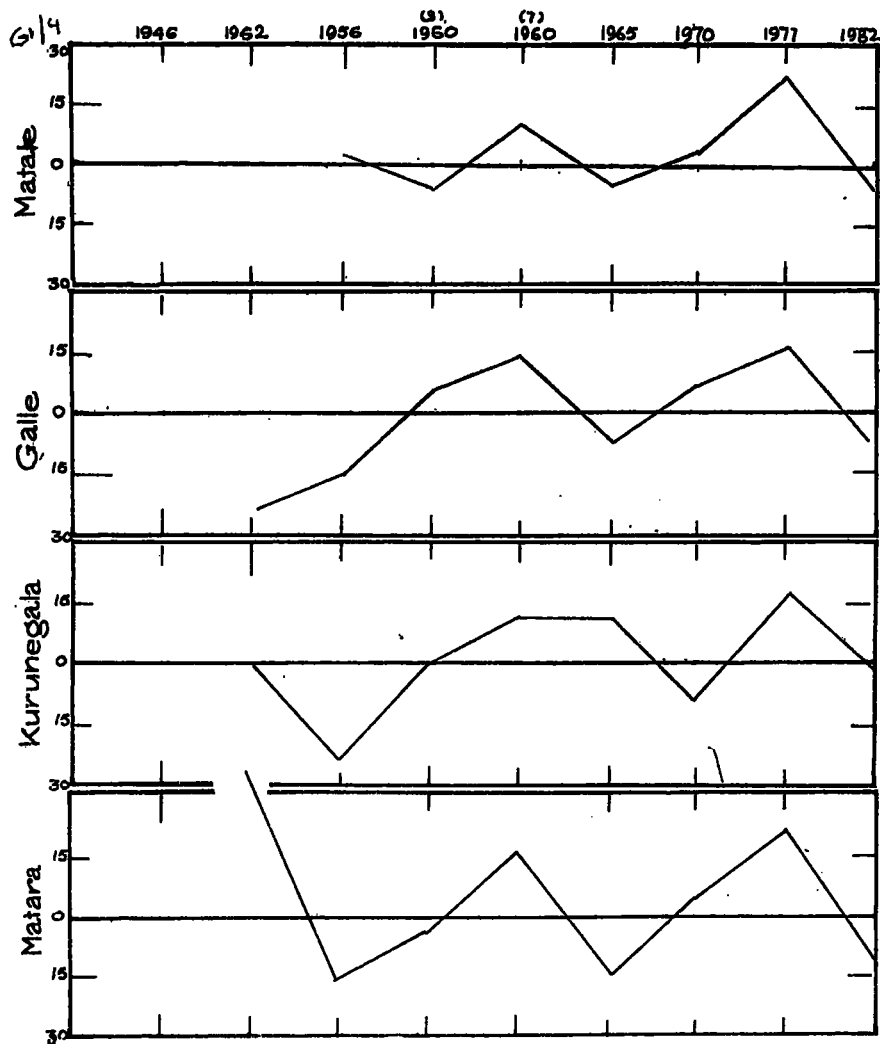
vote so heavily in favour of the UNP in the Nuwara-Eliya district.

In the case of the Batticaloa district, the UNP polled 14.59 percent more votes than in 1977. In this district, the number of votes polled by the UNP since 1960 July election had increased steadily till 1970; but in 1977 it dropped by 10.9 percent. The principal reason for the drop in 1977, was the presence of the TULF. Thus, the increase in the UNP vote in 1982 by 14.59 percent over the figure for 1977 surpassed even the majority it held in 1970. Here the TULF boycott was not as effective and the turnout was 71 percent as against a turnout of 46 percent in the Jaffna district. Besides, it also possibly shows that a section of the Tamil population had apparently rejected the terrorist activities resorted to in the Jaffna district. Also in this district, it appears that the Muslim community (where wealthier elements have always been traders) which had benefited from the liberalised trade policy of the present government had largely supported the UNP.

On the basis of an all-island percentage of votes polled by the UNP, it appears that the party was more popular in the central region than in the maritime provinces. Thus in the districts of the Southern province in particular the UNP's popularity appeared to drop somewhat from the position it held in 1977. For example, the UNP vote dropped by 4.26 percent in the Galle district, by 5.97 percent in the Matara district and by 9.72 percent in the Hambantota district. The presence of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (a new political party in the contest) which depended for the support on the young voter, could be one of the causes for this drop in the UNP vote. In 1977 a large part of the anti-SLFP youth vote, was cast in favour of the UNP. Part of this vote may have been diverted to the JVP in 1982. On the other hand, in Galle and Matara districts the other traditional left party in the contest polled considerably less votes in 1982 than in 1977; while the SLFP with Communist Party support polled more votes in 1982 than in 1977; one interpretation being that the left vote had significantly shifted to the SLFP in 1982. Also, though it appears that the drop in popularity of the UNP in the Southern Province may have been the result of was mainly in Matara and Galle districts that the SLFP increased an increase in the SLFP vote; it its vote in the South. The Communist Party received 16 percent of the votes in the Matara district and 6 percent in the Galle district in 1977 and a large part of this vote could have gone to boost the SLFP vote.

While UNP popularity in the Hambantota district too has dropped





by 9.72 per cent, the increase in the SLFP's popularity in that District had been marginal. On the whole, the other candidates together have increased their total vote here from 7.58 percent in 1977 to 15.37 percent in 1982. The comparatively high

percentage of the poll for the JVP in this district makes one believe that the dissident voter could have moved over to the JVP.

Matale is another district in which the UNP has polled a lower percentage of votes in 1982 (ie

CHANGES IN THE UNP'S VOTE FROM 1977 TO 1982

District	% of votes polled		Change in 1982
	1977	1982	
1. Nuwara-Eliya	42.96	63.10	+ 20.14
2. Jaffna	2.59	19.64	+ 17.05
3. Wannai	30.82	46.42	+ 15.60
4. Batticaloa	25.46	40.02	+ 14.59
5. Digamadulla	44.48	56.39	+ 11.91
6. Kandy	53.72	59.80	+ 6.08
7. Puttalam	55.63	59.12	+ 3.49
8. Kegalle	55.19	57.02	+ 1.83
9. Trincomalee	47.10	48.64	+ 1.54
10. Colombo	57.15	57.71	+ 0.56
11. Gampaha	54.56	53.90	- 0.66
12. Kurunegala	56.81	55.77	- 1.04
13. Badulla	59.89	58.67	- 1.22
14. Polonnaruwa	57.80	56.26	- 1.54
15. Ratnapura	52.88	50.98	- 1.98
16. Kalutara	53.53	50.15	- 3.38
17. Anuradhapura	53.29	49.84	- 3.45
18. Moneragala	53.36	49.38	- 3.98
19. Galle	54.09	49.83	- 4.26
20. Matale	62.84	58.11	- 4.73
21. Matara	55.29	49.32	- 5.97
22. Hambantota	55.62	45.90	- 9.72

4.73%) than in 1977. The UNP has continuously increased its popularity in this district from 1965, showing an improvement of 5.4 percent in 1970 over 1965, and an improvement of 19.6 percent in 1977 over that of 1970 though at the 1982 poll it recorded a drop

In the Moneragala district too the UNP's popularity dipped by about 4 percentage points compared to its 1977 position. Once again it appears that the dissent vote moved more to the JVP whose candidate obtained 6.9 percent of the votes in this district. The SLFP had a marginal increase of 1.5 percent over that of its 1977 position.

In the Anuradhapura district too the UNP's popularity showed a drop of 3.45 percent over its 1977 position in this district and it was almost the same percentage (3.48%) that the SLFP gained here. However, the JVP too obtained a significant 5.9 percent of the votes in this district, which was polled by the two Traditional left parties (CP and LSSP) in 1977.

Polonnaruwa was another district where the UNP recorded a drop from its 1977 position, in this case, however, the drop was a marginal 1.5 percent. Here too the JVP had gained comparatively much ground obtaining 7.7 percent of the votes in the district; though it probably gained more at the expense of the SLFP (whose vote dropped 3.8 percent) than the UNP. The other five districts in which the UNP vote showed a drop were Gampaha, Kalutara, Kurunegala, Badulla and Ratnapura and in all these districts there were gains by the SLFP and also the JVP. (Gampaha SLFP 5%, JVP 3.4%, Kalutara SLFP 20%, JVP 4%, Badulla SLFP 7%, JVP 3.2%, Kurunegala SLFP 5.9%, JVP 3.5%, and Ratnapura SLFP 14.5%, JVP 3.2%).

However, if the island is taken as a whole (despite possible distortions due to the lower poll in the northern and eastern provinces) popularity of the UNP in October 1982 shows an overall gain over its 1977 position; statistically, an improvement from 50.6 percent in 1977 to 52.9 percent in 1982. The second largest political party the SLFP also improved its popularity from 29.7 percent in 1977 to 38.6 percent in 1982. The most significant trend in the entire process, considering all previous elections, is that in 1982 for the first time an electorate did not move away from a party which it had voted in overwhelmingly in a previous (1977) election.

Moreover, the number of votes cast in favour of this party has increased continuously since 1956 with each one of the last six general elections, whilst its main contender has shown ups and downs with the latter increasing its share at this poll. (See graph on page 3).

VOTING PATTERNS AT THE REFERENDUM

(This pattern can be compared with the voting pattern at the Presidential Election. See maps on front covers.)

