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Polarization of the Sri Lankan Polity: An Analysis of Presidential Elections (1982 – 2005)

ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious developing country that has enjoyed continuous universal adult franchise since 1931. Under a new constitution enacted in 1978, Sri Lanka moved to a presidential system of government. Since 1982 five presidential elections were conducted. This paper analyzes voter behavior by looking at all the five presidential elections. This study shows that all the winners of the presidential elections (except in 2005) won them by appealing across racial and religious boundaries with a popular mandate. In 2005, there was a shift; the winner was able to secure victory by promoting a hard-line pro-Sinhala nationalistic platform. This signals a departure from the previous elections, as in the past it was understood that minority support is crucial to win the Presidency. The 2005 election sends a dangerous signal to a country that is ravaged by ethnic violence for over 20 years. Further, this study looks at the voter behavior in urban vs. rural areas. Similar to the red vs. blue states divide in the US, in Sri Lanka, there is a strong urban-rural division in voter behavior. Logistic regression was used to analyze the results of the elections.

Keywords: *Sri Lanka, presidential elections, logistic regression, minority votes*

Introduction

Introduced in 1978, the second republican constitution of Sri Lanka changed the governmental structure to a Presidential system, replacing the “British style” parliamentary form of government. This new constitution was a stark departure from its predecessor and followed the French model, where the president holds executive powers and is directly elected by the people. Under this new model, the president is the chief executive of the country, supreme commander of the military, head of the government and the head of state. He or she also has authority to appoint the Prime Minister, the Supreme Court, and the Cabinet and also has the power to convene, suspend and dissolve the parliament.

Prior to 1978, Sri Lanka enjoyed a fairly stable form of government, where there was a ceremonial president as the head of state and the head of the military. The Prime Minister was the head of the government. In the past the members of the parliament were elected by the “first past the post” electoral system, the new constitution changed the method of election to Proportional Representation (PR) (Warnapala & Yehiya, 2005). Sri Lanka became the first democracy in the region to introduce a presidential form of government along with a PR system. Both were two alien concepts to the region and even after 25 years, no other country in the region has followed Sri Lanka’s lead and changed their form of government.

Many observers believe that this system was introduced purely because of personal ambitions of J. R. Jayawardena (Moore, 1990: 381). Even though there was no public clamor for constitutional or electoral reforms, in 1977, the United National Party (UNP) led by J. R. Jayawardena came to power promising that he will change the constitution and move the country towards a presidential system of government. Jayawardena received a landslide victory with 5/6 seats in the parliament (Commissioner of Elections). Along with

constitutional changes, Jayawardena also used his victory to steer the country away from the rigid state control economic model (Athulathmudali, 1984: 76-77). He also introduced much needed social and economic reforms and moved Sri Lanka's foreign policy away from the Soviet/Indian axis. On February 4, 1978, Jayawardena became the first executive president of the country.

Ethnicity is a vital aspect in Sri Lankan politics and it is impossible to separate ethnic politics from "regular" political discourse. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sri Lanka is the home for one of world's longest and bloodiest civil wars. This conflict began in 1950s and took a violent turn in the 1980s. The two protagonists are the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. This crisis that has taken over 70,000 lives is based on ethnicity and not on religion (Reuters, 2008). The minority Tamils are demanding for a separate state called "Eelam" in the north and east of the country based on some contested historical claims and alleged discrimination by successive Sinhala dominated governments (Gunasinghe, 1983; Manogaran, 1987; Wilson, 1988).

Ethnically the Sri Lankan population can be categorized into four distinct communities, Sinhalese (74%), Tamils (12.6%), Muslims (7.1%) and Indian Tamils (5.6%) (Statistical Pocketbook, 1989: 14)¹. Religious composition of the country is 69.3% Buddhists, 15.5% Hindus, 7.6% Muslims and 7.5% Christians (including Catholics) (Statistical Pocketbook, 1989: 12). Sinhalese are predominately Buddhists and the Tamils and Indian Tamils are predominantly Hindus and all three ethnic groups have a small, but highly influential Catholic/Christian minority (Warnapala & Yehiya, 2005: 440).

In this study we analyzed the voter behavior in Sri Lanka via two lenses. Firstly we analyzed each ethnic group's voter behavior in the five presidential elections. Did the winner

appeal to all ethnic groups? Do you need the minority support to win the presidency? To what extent the cultural terrain needs to be understood to craft the campaign message?

Secondly we examined the rural-urban divide. Since 1982, all presidents have had a strong urban bias, but in 2005 this stranglehold was broken and a rural candidate was able to defeat an urban candidate.

The Presidential Electoral System

Sri Lanka elects its president every 6 years. Up to date there have being 5 elections (1982, 1988, 1994, 1999 & 2005). In the Sri Lankan presidential elections one unique feature is that the both the first and the second rounds are conducted simultaneously (Reilly, 2001: 117-119). In most countries where there is a presidential system (ex: France, Liberia, Peru, Haiti), if the winner of the first round does not get more than 50% of the vote, there is a second round between the two top candidates.

In order to reduce cost and time, Sri Lankans vote for their candidates based on their preferences, by marking 1, 2 and 3 (Reilly, 2001: 118). If the top candidate fails to get over 50% of the votes, all the other candidates get eliminated, except the second place candidate. Then second preferences of the eliminated candidates will get counted. If their second choices are for one of the top two candidates, the votes will get re-distributed. It is worth noting that up to date no election has gone to this second round counting and all the winners have won in the first round itself.

The Study, Methodology and Data

To examine Sri Lankan voter behavior, we selected Logistic Regression technique. Logistic Regression allows one to predict a discrete outcome from a set of variables that may be discrete. Generally the dependent or response variable is dichotomous, such as win/loss.

When the dependent variable is dichotomous, then the dependent variable can take the value 1 with a probability of success p , and value 0 with the probability of $1-p$. This type of variable is called a Bernoulli variable. Logistic Regression makes no assumption about the distribution of the independent variables. They do not have to be normally distributed, linearly related or of equal variance within each group. The relationship between the predictor and the response variables is not a linear function; instead, the logistic regression function is the logit transformation of p .

$$P = p_i = e^{(\text{constant} + b_1 x_{1i} + b_2 x_{2i} + \dots + b_n x_{ni})} / (1 + e^{(\text{constant} + b_1 x_{1i} + b_2 x_{2i} + \dots + b_n x_{ni})})$$

Where b = the coefficient of predictor variables. An alternative form of the logistic equation is given by: $L = \text{Log}(p_i / (1-p_i)) = \text{constant} + b_1 x_{1i} + b_2 x_{2i} + \dots + b_n x_{ni}$

Furthermore, by multiplying the estimate, b_i , by the variance of the dependent dichotomy, which is $p_i*(1 - p_i)$, allows us to interpret the net effect of a dichotomous independent variable on the dependent variable's probability (Bohnstedt & Knoke, 1994: 343). The data for this study was taken from the Department of Elections' Web site. The web site had results of all the presidential and the parliamentary elections. The data on the distribution of ethnic groups in each polling division was directly obtained from the Department of Census and Statistics (un-published data). They are based on the 2001 census.

Prior to the introduction of the PR system, Sri Lanka had 160 electorates (polling divisions). Even after the PR system was abolished, political parties use these electorates as their organizing unit to appoint local party organizers and to set-up local political party branches. To this day unofficially this unit continues to function, and the Commissioner of Elections uses these units to announce election results. Therefore, for this study we decided to use these 160 polling divisions to observe the pattern of voter behavior². By using the

ethnic distribution data, we rank ordered the ethnic composition of each polling division according to the proportion of each ethnic group. Points were assigned in the following manner: 00.01% - 20.00% = 1; 20.01% - 40.00% = 2; 40.01% - 60.00% = 3; 60.01% - 80.00% = 4; and 80.01% - 100.00% = 5.

The logistic regression coefficient will show the change in the predicted log odds of win/loss for one unit change (20% increases in population) in the independent variable. We felt that a 20% interval is desirable, as it will keep provisions for population growth, migration and displacement of people due to the ethnic conflict and due to the devastating Tsunami of December 2004. Although the population distribution for each polling division would have changed between 1982 and 2005 (period of our study), the available data is reasonably sufficient to capture the ethnic composition of each polling division for the entire duration of our study. Validity of this assumption is consistent with the ethnic composition of the members of the parliament for each area during the period of our study (Goonerathne, W. G & Karunaratne, 1996; Commissioner of Elections, 2006). Therefore, utilizing the 2001 census data to analyze the ethnic composition does not distort the picture of the polling divisions.

We also categorized each of the 160 electorates according to the degree of urbanization³. In Sri Lanka, local government administration is divided according to the degree of urbanization and the size of the population it serves (Baxter et al, 2002: 350-351). In order to divide along the degree of urbanization, we categorized the 160 electorates into municipalities, urban councils or pradeshiya sabha (local councils). Out of 160 polling divisions, there were 24 municipalities and 34 urban councils and the remaining 102 were pradeshiya sabhas. We excluded the pradeshiya sabas from the urban model. We classified

the urban council and the municipal councils in the following manner: Urban Councils (medium size cities) = 1, Municipal Councils (large metropolitan areas) = 2.

In the cases where local government councils and parliamentary polling divisions were not properly overlapping with each other, we aligned them according to the population centers. The data for categorizing a polling division whether it belongs to a municipality, urban council or a pradeshiya sabha was taken from the Commissioner of Elections. In the next section, we will examine each presidential election using logistic regression techniques. The results of our study revealed some interesting patterns that are not regularly taken into consideration in Sri Lankan electioneering.

1982 Elections

Sri Lanka had its first presidential election in 1982. The election was between a hugely popular incumbent president (J. R. Jayawardena), supported by a strong government and against a very weak opposition. The main opposition leader and former Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranayake was prevented from contesting as she was found to be guilty of alleged corruption and abuse of power by a special presidential commission (De Silva & Wriggins, 1988). As a result she lost her civic rights for seven years, thus preventing her from running for the presidency.

No one was able to mount an effective challenge to Jayawardena and his well-run UNP's political machinery. For most political observers, the only opposition candidate worth observing was Rohana Wijeweera, the founder-leader of the People's Liberation Front (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) (JVP), a former Marxist terrorist group that had attempted to overthrow the government in 1971. Jayawardena released the JVP leadership from prison in 1977 under the condition that they would accept democratic principles. The JVP, as a

political party deriving support from the younger and less formally educated rural youth has shown its ability to display some originality on its propaganda designed primarily to attract the socially-oppressed and the disillusioned (Warnapala, 2001). It is in this 1982 election that the JVP tested its political strength at the ballot boxes.

Table 1: 1982 election results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
J.R. Jayawardene	United National Party	3,450,811	52.91%
H.S.R.B. Kobbekaduwa	Sri Lanka Freedom Party	2,548,438	39.07%
Rohana Wijeweera	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna	273,428	4.19%
Kumar Ponnambalam	Akila Illankai Tamil Congress	173,934	2.67%
Colvin R. De Silva	Lanka Samasamaja Party	58,531	0.88%
Vasudeva Nanayakakra	Nawa Sama Samaja Party	17,005	0.26%
Total Registered Voters		8,145,015	
Total Polled		6,602,617	81.06%
Total Valid Votes		6,441,667	
Total Rejected Votes		80,470	
No. needed for outright victory		3,261,073	
No. of votes above the 50% mark		189,738	
Date of Poll: Sept 20, 1982			
No. of Polling Stations: 6985			

Source: Election Commissioner

Ethnic Model -1982

When we carefully examined the 1982 election results, we made a few interesting observations. In 1982, Jayawardena won 133 polling divisions (83%, $p = 0.863$), including all 7 Muslim divisions and the only Indian Tamil majority polling division. The logistic regression model that was used to depict the results of the winner was: $L = -0.952 * \text{Sinhala} - 2.095 * \text{Tamil} + 2.459 * \text{Muslim} + 1.027 * \text{Indian-Tamil} + 6.356$. Thus the Sinhala and Tamil polling division coefficients were negative and the Muslim and Indian Tamil polling division coefficients were positive. Therefore Sinhala and Tamil polling divisions had decreased log odds of voting for Jayawardena, while Muslim or Indian Tamil polling divisions had increased log odds of voting for Jayawardena. The effect of the Sinhala polling division coefficient was -11%. Similarly the effect of the Tamil polling division coefficient was -25%,

the effect of the Muslim polling division coefficient was 29% and the effect of the Indian Tamil polling division coefficient was 12%. Thus Muslim and Indian Tamil polling divisions had increased probability of voting for Jayawardena by 29% and 12% relative to non Muslim and non Indian Tamil polling divisions.

This indicated that even though Jayawardena was able to secure votes from all segments of the country, he had more support from Muslims and Indian Tamils. This is consistent with UNP's philosophy and Jayawardena's voter base. Muslims community has traditionally supported the UNP and they directly benefited from UNP's economic policies. In the case of the Indian Tamils, the UNP managed to get the support of the main political party/trade union, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). Its leader S. Thondaman was a member of the Jayawardena's cabinet (De Silva & Wriggins, 1988).

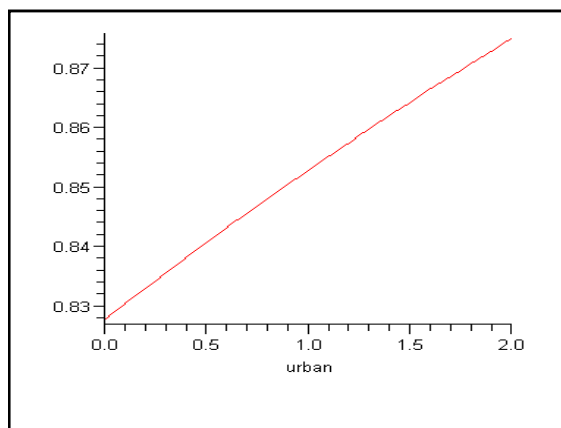
In the 1982 ethnic model the Sinhala and the Tamil polling division coefficients were negative. We argue that this is because the Tamil community's vote went to the Tamil candidate (Kumar Ponnambalam), who won 8 out of 25 Tamil majority electorates (Election Commissioner). The majority Sinhala vote was fragmented among the Sinhala or Marxist political parties and the main opposition SLFP, which always had a strong Sinhala voter base. Therefore, Jayawardena having an 11% negative coefficient effect in the Sinhala electorates relative to non-Sinhala electorates is understandable.

Urban Model -1988

When we looked at the corresponding urban model, the logistic regression equation was as follows: $L = 0.188 * \text{urban} + 1.57$. In this model the urban polling division coefficient was positive. Jayawardena won 86.2% ($p = 0.862$) of the urban polling divisions and the effect of the urban coefficient was 2%. According to this model an urban polling division had

increased chance of voting for Jayawardena by 2% relative to a non-urban (rural) polling division. From this model we interpolated that a *least urban* polling division had an 85% chance of voting for Jayawardena.

Figure 1: More urban a polling division becomes Jayawardena's probability of winning increases.



1988 Elections

Sri Lanka conducted its 2nd presidential election in 1988. UNP nominated Jayawardena's Prime Minister R. Premadasa. It was one of the most violent elections in Sri Lankan history (Baxter, et al, 2002: 345). SLFP nominated its leader Sirima Bandaranayake, who had re-gained her civic rights after a presidential pardon in January 1986. In Sinhala heartland the JVP control was strong and the JVP's boycott might have robbed in 1988 a Bandaranayake victory. Premadasa, with the help of the state machinery, cheating and his urban appeal scraped a narrow victory.

Table 2: 1988 election results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Ranasinghe Premadasa	United National Party	2,569,199	50.43%
Sirimavo Bandaranaike	Sri Lanka Freedom Party	2,289,960	44.95%
Osvin Abeygunasekara	Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya	235,719	4.63%
Total Registered Voters		9,375,742	
Total Polled		5,186,223	55.32%
Total Valid Votes		5,094,778	
Total Rejected Votes		91,445	
No. needed for outright victory		2,547,389	
No. of votes above the 50% mark		21,810	

Date of Poll: Dec. 19, 1988			
No. of Polling Stations: 8060			

Source: Election Commissioner

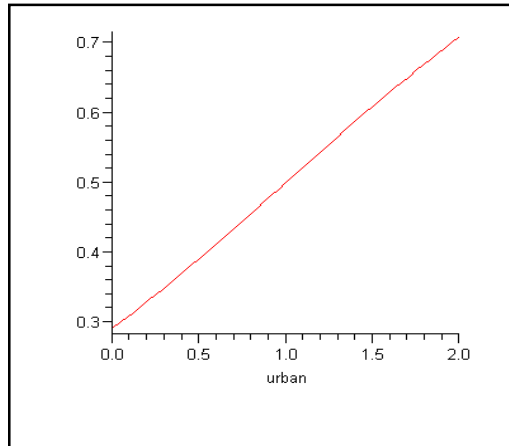
Ethnic Model - 1988

In 1988, Premadasa won 61.3% of the polling divisions ($p = 0.613$) and the logistic regression model for Premadasa was as follows: $L = -0.856*\text{Sinhala} - 1.104*\text{Tamil} + 0.847*\text{Indian-Tamil} + 4.934$. Thus the Sinhala and Tamil polling division coefficients were negative and the Indian Tamil polling division coefficient was positive. Therefore Sinhala and Tamil polling divisions had decreased log odds of voting for Premadasa, while Indian Tamil polling divisions had increased log odds of voting for Premadasa. In this case the effect of the Sinhala polling division coefficient was -20%. Similarly the effect of the Tamil polling division coefficient was -26% and the effect of the Indian Tamil polling division coefficient was 20%. Thus Indian Tamil polling divisions had increased chance of voting for Premadasa by 20% relative to non-Indian Tamil polling divisions. Also, Sinhala and Tamil polling divisions had decreased probability of voting for Premadasa by 20% and 26% relative to non Sinhala and non Tamil polling divisions. For the 1988 elections, the Muslim polling division's coefficient was dropped from the model because of its high significance.

Urban Model - 1988

In the 1988 urban model and the logistic regression equation was as follows : $L = 0.887*\text{urban} - 0.887$. Premadasa won 58.6% ($p = 0.586$) of the urban polling divisions and the urban coefficient was positive. Therefore effect of the urban coefficient was 21%. Thus in 1988 an urban polling division had increased chance of voting for Premadasa by 21% relative to a non urban (rural) polling division. From the above model we interpolated that *a least urban* polling division (rural) had a 50% chance of voting for Premadasa.

Figure 2: More urban a polling division becomes Premadasa's chance of winning increases.



It is apparent from our urban model that Premadasa got elected to the presidency due to his urban appeal. Premadasa was a “cross-over” politician who represented the only Muslim majority Colombo electorate in the parliament. Born to a poor working class family, this self made populist was a street politician with a “common man” appeal. On the May Day of 1992, Premadasa was murdered by a LTTE suicide bomber. Premadasa was succeeded by his Prime Minister D. B. Wijetunge. Wijetunge was able to control the lawlessness in the country.

1994 Elections

By 1994, after 17 years of UNP rule, the country was fatigued with the UNP and the people were yearning for a change. Bandaranayake was replaced by her charismatic daughter Chandrika Bandaranayake Kumarathunga. She was able to shelf the old socialist philosophy and moved SLFP away from Sinhala nationalism. She had solid liberal credentials and promoted cultural pluralism. Kumaratunga was one of the few Sinhala politicians that took personal and political risks in meeting with the LTTE leadership in the 1980s. She spoke of national reconciliation and was very popular in the Tamil heartland. This was a mark departure for SLFP, as a party it had always portrayed itself as a Sinhala nationalist party.

In 1994, first the parliamentary elections were held. SLFP and its grand coalition the People's Alliance (PA) led by Kumaratunga, won with a narrow victory (113 vs. 112). With this razor thin majority Kumaratunga formed a coalition government with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and became the Prime Minister. Few months later the Presidential elections were conducted and the UNP nominated Gamini Dissanayake, a charismatic popular leader previously marginalized by Premadasa, who in turn had co-founded another political party. During the election campaign Dissanayake was killed by a LTTE suicide bomber. Dissanayake's candidacy was replaced by his widow, a political novice⁴.

Table 3: 1994 election results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Chandrika Kumarathunga	People's Alliance	4,709,205	62.28%
Nihal Galappaththi	Sri Lanka Progressive Front	22,749	0.30%
Srimathi Dissanayake	United National Party	2,715,285	35.91%
A.J. Ranasinghe	Independent	22,752	0.30%
Harischandra Wijethunga	Sinhalye Mahasammatha Bhoomiputhra Pakshaya	32,651	0.43%
Hudson Samarasinghe	Independent	58,886	0.78%
Total Registered Voters		10,945,065	
Total Polled		7,713,232	81.06%
Total Valid Votes		7,561,526	
Total Rejected Votes		151,706	
No. needed for outright victory		3,780,763	
No. of votes above the 50% mark		1,928,442	
Date of Poll: Sept 11, 1994			
No. of Polling Stations: 9580			

Source: Election Commissioner

Dissanayake's widow was no match for Kumarathunga. Kumarathunga as the incumbent Prime Minister has already consolidated her power. In this environment Kumaratunga's victory was a certainty. Kumaratunga as predicted got a landslide victory. She won all but 1 polling division in the country. Therefore we could not use the logistic regression models to analyze the 1994 election, as the independent variable (win/loss) was not dichotomous in this case.

1999 Elections

The main contenders for the 1999 elections were the incumbent President Kumarathunga and UNP's Ranil Wickramasinghe. Between 1994 and 1999, Kumarathunga continued UNP's neo-liberal economic policies, and bridged the gap between the UNP and the SLFP in economic policies and progress. As a result, the 1999 election was not a battle on bread and butter issues, but on how to handle the ethnic crisis (Jayasuriya, 2005). On the eve of the elections there was a Tamil Tiger suicide bomb attack. The target was Kumarathunga's last election rally. She survived the attack, but permanently lost sight in one eye. The public sympathy after the attack, the power of the incumbency, Wickramasinghe's lack of charisma, ensured a second term victory for Kumarathunga. The election was marred with violence and the international election observers found several election violations on both sides (Law and Society Trust, 2000; PAFREL, 1999).

Table 4: 1999 election results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Abdul Rasool	Sri Lanka Muslim Katchi	17,359	0.21%
Alwis Weerakkody Premawardhana	People's Freedom Front	3,983	0.05%
Ariyawansa Dissanayaka	Democratic United National Front	4,039	0.05%
M. D. Nandana Gunathilaka	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna	344,173	4.08%
Kamal Karunadasa	People's Liberation Solidarity Front	11,333	0.13%
Chandrika Kumaratunga	People's Alliance	4,312,157	51.12%
Tennyson Edirisuriya	Independent	21,119	0.25%
W. V. M. Ranjith	Independent	27,052	0.32%
Ranil Wickramasinghe	United National Party	3,602,748	42.71%
Rajiva Wijesinha	Liberal Party	25,085	0.30%
Vasudeva Nanayakkara	Left and Democratic Alliance	23,668	0.28%
Hudson Samarasinghe	Independent	7,184	0.09%
Harishchandra Wijayatunga	Sinhala Mahasammatha Bhoomiputhra Pakshaya	35,854	0.43%
Total Registered Voters		11,779,200	
Total Polled		8,635,290	
Total Valid Votes		8,435,754	
Total Rejected Votes		199,536	
No. needed for outright victory		4,217,877	
No. of votes above the 50% mark		94,280	
Date of Poll: Dec 21, 1999			
No. of Polling Stations:		9912	

Source: Election Commissioner

Ethnic Model - 1999

The SLFP led People's Alliance (PA) candidate Kumaratunga won 81.3% of the polling divisions ($p = 0.813$). The logistic regression model was $L = 1.196 * \text{Sinhala} + 0.465 * \text{Tamil} + 0.581 * \text{Muslim} - 0.729 * \text{Indian Tamil} - 3.655$. Thus in this election the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim polling division coefficients were positive and the Indian Tamil polling division coefficient was negative. Therefore Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil polling divisions had increased log odds of voting for Kumaratunga, while Indian Tamil polling divisions had decreased log odds of voting for Kumaratunga. An Indian Tamil polling division had decreased chance of voting for Kumaratunga by 11% relative to a non-Indian Tamil polling division.

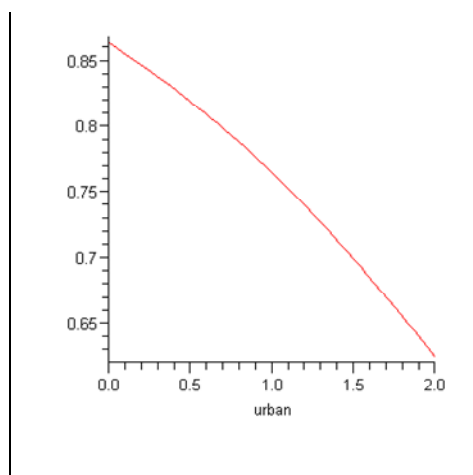
When we carefully examine Kumaratunga's victory, unlike Jayawardena or Premadasa, it is clear that she was able to get the support of the majority Sinhalese. While Jayawardena and Premadasa in the ethnic models had negative coefficients for the Sinhala and the Tamil polling divisions, Kumaratunga was had a positive coefficient in both elections in which she won the presidency. This goes to show SLFP's strong Sinhala voter base. It is apparent that Kumaratunga's attempt to "secularize" the party had no significant impact at the ballot boxes. Extreme Sinhala voters had not alienated the party and had continued to support the SLFP, inspite the JVP putting forward a candidate with an ultra-Sinhala nationalistic platform. It seems Kumaratunga's popular appeal assisted the party from any backlash from the hard-line elements within the Sinhala voter base. To her credit, she moved the party away from communal politics. In the ethnic model, Kumaratunga also had a positive effect in the Muslim polling divisions. Even though traditionally Muslims have supported the UNP,

Kumaratunga was able to get their votes in both elections. This is because she was able to get the support of the SLMC and its splinter groups. The only group that Kumaratunga was unable to get a positive coefficient in the ethnic model was in the case of the Indian Tamils. Indian Tamils are considered a “bloc vote” led by their trade union the CWC. CWC aligned itself with the UNP in all the presidential elections.

Urban Model - 1999

For the 1999 elections, the logistic regression equation for the urban model was as follows: $L = -0.668 * \text{urban} + 1.846$. Even though Kumaratunga won 70.7% ($p = 0.707$) of the urban polling divisions, as the urban polling division’s coefficient was negative, the effect of the urban coefficient was -14%. Thus an urban polling division had a decreased chance of voting for Kumaratunga by 14% relative to a non urban (rural) polling division. From this model we interpolated that *a least urban* polling division (ex: Deniyaya in the Matara district) had a 76% chance of voting for Kumaratunga.

Figure 3: More urban a polling division becomes, Kumaratunga’s probability of winning slowly diminishes.



But more urban a polling division got the percentage of votes Kumaratunga received decreased. Therefore in comparison, in the urban model, Kumaratunga was not very

successful. This showed that the SLFP is still very much a rural political party with a strong rural voter base, while the UNP is a strong urban party with a strong urban voter base.

Elections 2005

Next election was held in 2005. The run-up for this election was marred with controversies and legal battles. An ultra Sinhala-Buddhist party called Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) (National Heritage Party) went to court⁵. UNP again nominated Wickramasingha, who had led the UNP for over 10 electoral defeats (at national and local levels) (Jeyaraj, 2005). The SLFP led coalition UFPA (United Freedom People's Alliance) nominated Kumaratunga's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. Although Rajapaksa came from a rural political dynasty, his image and approach was very much akin to Premadasa's image. During the campaign he portrayed himself as a down to earth, small town lawyer, with a Sinhala-Buddhist and a socialist political orientation. Rajapakshe was also considered as a non-intellectual and he even refused to debate Wickramasingha. On the other hand UNP's Wickramasingha was seen as non-charismatic, intellectual, aloof and elite. The contrasts were similar to what occurred in the US during the 2004 presidential elections, between George Bush and John Kerry: Kerry was the aloof, intellectual, aristocrat, while Bush was perceived as down to earth friendly, non-intellectual, evangelical Christian. During the campaign, most observers would agree that Kumaratunga was undercutting Rajapaksa's campaign to ensure a Wickramasingha victory (The Sunday Leader, 2005a; 2005b).

Table 5: 2005 election results

Candidate	Party	Votes	%
Mahinda Rajapaksa	United Freedom People's Alliance	4,887,152	50.29%
Ranil Wickramasinghe	United National Party	4,706,366	48.43%
Siritunga Jayasuriya	United Socialist Party	35,425	0.36%
Ashoka Suraweera	Jathika Sangwardhena Peramuna	31,238	0.32%
Victor Hettigoda	Eksath Lanka Podujana Pakshaya	14,458	0.15%
Chamil Jayaneththi	New Left Front	9,296	0.10%
Aruna De Zoysa	Ruhunu Janatha Party	7,685	0.08%

Wimal Geeganage	Sri Lanka National Front	6,639	0.07%
Anura De Silva	United Socialist Party	6,357	0.07%
J.A. Ajith Kumara	Democratic Unity Alliance	5,082	0.05%
Wije Dias	Socialist Equality Party	3,500	0.04%
P. Nelson Perera	Sri Lanka Progressive Front	2,525	0.03%
Shantha Dharmadwaja	United National Alternative Front	1,316	0.01%
Total Registered Voters		13,327,160	
Total Polled		9,826,908	73.74%
Total Valid Votes		9,717,039	
Total Rejected Votes		109,869	
No. needed for outright victory		4,858,520	
No. of votes above the 50% mark		28,632	
Date of Poll: Nov. 17, 2005			
No. of Polling Stations: 10,486			

Source: Election Commissioner

Ethnic Model - 2005

In a hard fought battle, SLFP's Mahinda Rajapaksa was the winner. In 2005, Rajapakse won 58.1% of the polling divisions ($p = 0.581$). The logistic regression model was: $L = 2.754 * \text{Sinhala} + 1.911 * \text{Tamil} - 1.352 * \text{Muslim} - 1.464 * \text{Indian Tamil} - 11.461$. Thus the Sinhala and Tamil polling division coefficients were positive and the Muslim and the Indian Tamil polling division coefficients were negative. Therefore a Sinhala or a Tamil polling division had increased log odds of voting for Rajapaksa, while an Indian Tamil or Muslim polling division had decreased log odds of voting for Rajapaksa. The effect of the Sinhala polling division coefficient was 67%. Similarly the effect of the Tamil polling division coefficient was 46%, the effect of the Muslim polling division coefficient was -33% and the effect of the Indian Tamil polling division coefficient was -36%. Obtaining a positive coefficient from the Tamil polling divisions warrants an explanation and it will be discussed later. Thus an Indian Tamil and Muslim polling divisions had decreased chance of voting for Rajapaksa by 36% and 33% respectively relative to non-Indian Tamil and non-Muslim polling divisions. While a Sinhala or a Tamil polling division had increased probability of voting for Rajapaksa by 67% and 46% relative to a non Sinhala and non Tamil polling

division. Rajapaksha's election victory has created long term implications to Sri Lankan politics. He was able to break a cardinal rule in Sri Lankan presidential politics, i. e. that a serious candidate cannot win without minority support.

This sends out a dangerous message to the minorities. It says that Sri Lanka is no longer a pluralistic multi-cultural, multi-racial country, but a Sinhala-Buddhist country, and that minority votes do not count, thereby giving ammunition to the groups such as the LTTE to demand for a separate state. It is in this backdrop Rajapaksa was able to get a positive coefficient for Sinhala and the Tamil polling divisions. Obtaining a positive coefficient from the Tamil polling divisions warrants an explanation. Between 2002 and 2008 Sri Lankan government had a cease-fire agreement (CFA) with the LTTE. The Norwegians negotiated this ceasefire and until the end of the ceasefire, they served as the monitors and the intermediaries for the peace talks. It was assumed that the Tamils who live in the North and East would vote for Wickramasingha, as he was the architect of the CFA. Further, prior to the presidential elections, LTTE pledged that they will not interfere with the elections and would give the Tamil population a free hand in voting (The Sunday Leader, 2005c; The Global Information Gateway, 2005). But days before the elections, LTTE issued a decree, banning the Tamils living in the north and east from voting (Hindustan Times, 2005; Jayasinghe and Gunasekera, 2005; Rhode, 2005). As a result of this forced boycott, only .36% of the people voted in the Tamil heartland (Jaffna District), thus preventing over 700,000 from voting (Commissioner of Elections, 2006; European Union Report, 2006). Most of the polling divisions in the Northeast (Trincomalee District) and the East (Batticaloa & Digamadulla Districts), where the boycott could not be enforced were won by Wickramasingha. In the Vanni district where the boycott was semi successful, where only 26% voted,

Wickramasingha won 2 out of 3 polling divisions. In the final tally, Rajapaksa got only 1.86% more than Wickramasingha and if not for the boycott, the outcome would have been vastly different. For most observers, the Rajapaksa victory was engineered by the LTTE, by casting the most important vote (the boycott). Wickramasingha, as the Prime Minister between 2002 and 2004, was able to turn the world opinion against the LTTE and push them towards a negotiated settlement.

Urban Model - 2005

In the analogous urban model, the logistic regression model was: $L = -1.005 \cdot \text{urban} + 1.123$. Rajapaksa won 60.3% ($p = 0.603$) of the urban polling divisions and as the urban polling coefficient was negative, the effect of the urban coefficient was -24%. Therefore an urban polling division had a decreased chance of voting for Rajapaksa by 24% relative to a non urban (rural) polling division. When we changed the logistic model into the analogous exponential model, the new model was: $P = e^{-1.005\text{urban}+1.123} / (1 + e^{-1.005\text{urban}+1.123})$.

From this model we calculated that *a least urban* polling division had a 53% chance of voting for Rajapaksa.

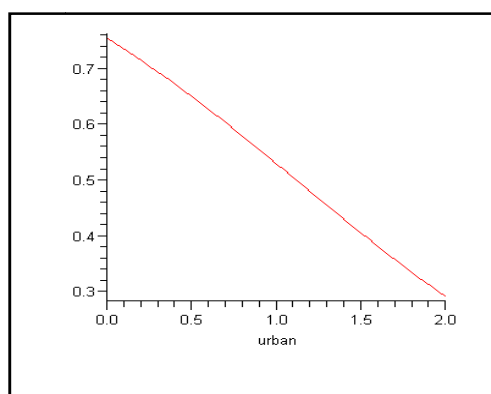


Figure 4: More urban a polling division becomes, Rajapaksa's chance of winning steadily decreases.

It is clear from the figure that more urban a polling division become Rajapakse's percentage of votes decreased. It is not surprising that Rajapaksa's performance was weak in the urban areas. Urban polling divisions are UNP's traditional strong holds. In the 2005

election the tradition of urban/rural divide has continued. When we carefully dissected the five presidential elections, the results of this study exposed some facts that were clearly interesting. What is evident is that the Sri Lankan polity is gradually getting “Balkanized” along ethnic, religious and regional lines. Today there are political parties that cater to all these groups. Jayawardena & Kumaratunga were able to appeal across ethnic and racial lines and also along the rural/urban divide. Even Premadasa, who campaigned during one of the most violent times was able to get more rural votes and had popular appeal across the spectrum. This characteristic faded in the 2005 elections. No major candidate could appeal to all groups.

The Sri Lankan urban/rural divide is similar to the red states/blue states divide in the US. UNP dominates the urban areas, while the SLFP dominates the rural Sinhala polling divisions. This urban/rural divide was breached in the 1982 (Jayawardena) and 1994 (Kumaratunga) elections. Both winners were able to encroach into each others territory. It can be argued that this breach happened not because of the winning candidate, but because of the weakness of the losing candidate. In 1982 SLFP (Hector Kobbekaduwa) and in 1994 UNP (Srima Dissanayake) were weak opposition candidates, who did not appeal to their party or to their base; therefore, because of lack of choice, the public voted by default.

Now let’s re-examine the 2005 elections and its future implications. Because Rajapaksa was able to win the presidency with a hard-line agenda, this will be seen in the future as the recipe for winning elections. Long-term implications of the Rajapaksa victory are profound, especially for the ethnic crisis that is engulfing the northeast region. During the campaign he pledged to change SLFP’s stated policy of supporting a Federal solution for the ethnic problem and revert back to a unitary state (Mahinda Chintana, 2005: 32). He also said

that he would cancel the post-tsunami aid-sharing program (P-TOM) with the LTTE (Daily Mirror, 2005); amend the CFA (Mahinda Chintana, 2005: 35) and replace Norway as the mediator⁶.

Rajapaksa ran his campaign similar to a United States presidential candidate in the primary elections. In the US, during the primaries, “playing to the base” is a standard practice, so the base will get motivated to vote. But during the presidential elections both major party candidates try to “appeal to the middle.” In Sri Lanka, the opposite happened; “playing to the base” was Rajapaksa’s winning strategy, while Wickramasingha’s “appealing to the middle” back fired as he was seen as a “dove” that would cave in to the LTTE. It is clear that Sri Lanka is a highly polarized country and the politicians are clearly exploiting these cleavages for their advantage. Until there is a national consensus on how to resolve the ethnic question, the crisis will continue with a military stalemate.

History is full of examples, where hard-line hawkish leaders made concessions to their opposing parties and their fellow citizens trusted the deals made by these leaders. Richard Nixon with China, Ronald Reagan with Soviet Union, Arieal Sharon on Gaza and Menachim Begin with Egypt are just few examples. Perhaps Rajapaksa with his “hawkish” agenda can come out of this deadlock. However, there has to be a partner to negotiate. All the indications are that the Tamils have not produced one.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the presidential system of government has further polarized an already fragmented country. This system of government also introduced the possibility of co-habitation between an all-powerful president from one party and a legislature from a different party. Sri Lankan political culture does not allow for this kind of political co-habitation.

From 2002 and 2004, there was a period of cohabitation, and the public did not see a level of “check and balance” but saw constant “check mate” between the president and the parliament.

The Presidential system has also created an “imperial” presidency. It was President Jayawardena, who famously said that he had the power to do everything "other than making a man a woman, or vice versa" (Asian Human Rights Report, 2006). With this kind of an attitude towards the presidency by the architect of the presidential system, one might view suspiciously the reasons behind moving the country towards an all-powerful presidential system, while undermining the authority of the legislature. Further, Sri Lanka enjoyed a stable governmental structure for over 70 years and there was no real justification to consolidate power under one person.

The cease-fire which was in existence since 2002 was cancelled in early 2008. After the 2005 elections, the cease-fire was blatantly violated by both parties. Since November 2005 violence has steadily increased and within 6 months the death toll has exceeded 5000 (Reuters, 2008). Most of the blame for the escalation of violence lies directly at the feet of the LTTE. After conspiring to elect a hard-line Sinhala president (via an election boycott), LTTE has steadily increased their terror campaign. LTTE is currently banned in the European Union, the US, Canada, India and host of other countries. Within the UNP the failure at the elections have prompted calls for reforms. UNP wants to project that they too can cater to the needs of the majority Sinhalese and that they too prefer to distance themselves from the minorities. This phenomenon is similar to the debates within the Democratic Party in the US. The moderate Democrats are demanding that the party should appeal to the middle, while the left wing Democrats are pushing the interest of the minorities, such as Blacks, Hispanics,

Unions & Women's groups. It is clear that the UNP is in danger of imploding, not because it went "soft" on the ethnic issue, but because of lack of leadership.

As indicated at the beginning, the presidential system has contributed to further polarization in Sri Lankan politics. Once this system was seen as a system that can unify the nation, but today it has increasingly become a tool for divisive electoral politics. Because the 2005 election was won only with the Sinhala votes, Rajapaksa will not feel he represents the entire polity, and will not have any obligation to take in to consideration of minority interests in policy issues. Further, in the future presidential elections the candidates will not see a reason to cater to the needs of the minority and advocating a hard-line anti minority posture will be seen as the recipe for victory. This will send out a dangerous signal to the minorities, which in return will fuel further political alienation and resentment. Further research is needed on the efficacy of the presidential system in Sri Lankan politics and its long-term implications. There are several proposed constitutional amendments, among them are: revert back to the old "British style" parliamentary system, reduce the power of the executive president, create multiple vice-presidents representing all the ethnic groups, etc. No clear alternative is in sight.

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¹Since 1989, the Tamil terrorists have not allowed the government to conduct census in their areas so we used 1989 census data.

² It is important to note that Sri Lanka does not have an Electoral College system that is similar to that of the US. Presidents are elected directly by the people; therefore it is technically possible for a candidate to win the presidency even by losing the majority of the 160 polling divisions.

³ A. J. Wilson (1975) in Electoral Politics in an Emergent State: The Ceylon General Election of May 1970 categorizes the 145 electorates in to urban, rural and quasi-urban areas, based on multiple definitions such as local governmental classifications.

⁴ Replacing the dead politician with the bereaving widow or a member of the family is a very common South Asian phenomenon.

⁵ Kumaratunga alleges that it was her own Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa who encouraged JHU to go to courts, as he was waiting for an opportunity to run for presidency and believed that he had a better chance of winning in 2005 and did not want to wait till 2006 to see Kumaratunga, plotting to give party's nomination to a candidate of her liking, such as her brother. JHU is an ultra Sinhala-Buddhist party; all its members in the parliament are Buddhist clergy.