CHAPTER-V

DETERMINING FACTORS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC BASES, ROLE OF VIOLENCE, AND PROPORTIONATE VOTING
Introduction

Like in many developing countries, factors such as ethnicity, religion and economy have determined the outcome of elections in Sri Lanka for the past four decades. These factors played an important role in the 1988 presidential elections too. The most important factor that determined the outcome of the elections, however, was violence. Moreover, the election of a president by a majority vote (one-half of the total votes polled) changed the electoral equations of the past. This chapter aims to analyse three factors: socio-economic bases, role of violence and proportionate voting.

Socio-Economic Bases

The Sri Lankan people were known for their political awareness and effective participation in electoral politics. However, the absence of an institutional network between the government and the rural masses made it difficult for any party in power to develop a stable support base. Moreover, political parties in general failed to strengthen their organisations at the grass root level. Consequently, the electors frequently shifted their support between the two major political parties - the United National Party (UNP)
and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). ¹

The UNP, which came to power on the eve of Independence was dominated by the Western educated elite, who accounted for just seven per cent of the total population. Though they were small in numbers, political power was entirely enjoyed by them.² Further, in education as well as in employment, the English-educated elite continued to dominate the Sinhalese-educated elite. Moreover, the UNP also ignored the aspirations of the Buddhist clergy for greater patronage for Buddhism. These discontented segments, who formed the majority saw that their legitimate interests could be best served through the SLFP formed by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1951.³ Consequently, the SLFP-led coalition was voted to power in the 1956 general elections thus leading to the emergence of a two party system in Sri Lanka.

However, the failure of both UNP and SLFP to solve the socio-economic problems of the people brought about a shift in the electorate support between these two parties. The


shift in support can be attributed to a number of factors. The incumbent governments were confronted with persistent economic problems and severely limited financial and other resources. Hence, any party in power was unable to fulfill its promises made to the people on the eve of the elections.\textsuperscript{4} Further, population increased rapidly from 6,178,000 in 1941 to 13,940,000 in 1977.\textsuperscript{5} The sharp rise in population led to a demographic shift towards the younger generation who came to form two-thirds of the total population. The educational level rose markedly higher due to the broadening of educational opportunities in the post-independence period. Literacy rate had increased from 69 per cent in 1953 to 87.2 per cent in 1981.\textsuperscript{6} The increase in population and rise in literacy rate led to an acute unemployment problem. According to a Central Bank survey, the unemployment rate was 24 per cent in 1973 compared to 13.8 per cent a decade earlier.\textsuperscript{7} These factors led to discontentment among the common people especially the youth.


which led to their voting against the ruling party during elections. The support base of the political parties on the basis of socio-economic status is not clear. Apparently, the local elite and the wealthy class in Sinhalese rural areas tended to support the UNP, while the rural middle class and poorer sections of the society supported the SLFP or the Marxist parties. 8

In Sri Lanka, communal and socio-economic issues have always figured prominently in electoral politics. Communal issues like the 'Sinhala only' policy and special status to Buddhism became decisive factors in deciding the electoral outcomes of the 1956 and 1960 general elections. 9 The SLFP-led coalition came to power in 1956 by playing the language and religious cards. However, since 1965, though communal issues have continued to figure in elections, socio-economic issues have been more prominent. In the 1965 general elections, the UNP-led coalition secured the largest number of seats by making the cost of living as the primary issue. 10 In the 1970 general elections, the swing against


10. ibid.
the ruling UNP was mainly because of the high inflation, the lowering of the rice subsidy and unemployment.\footnote{ibid., p.466.} Again in the 1977 general elections, the scarcity in consumer goods and high cost of living led to the SLFP's defeat.\footnote{Harji Malik, "Sri Lanka: The Elections and After", \textit{India International Centre Quarterly}, (New Delhi), vol.4, no.3, (1977), p.246.} The only occasion where the ruling party regained power was in 1982. This could be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the unemployment problem was brought down from 24 per cent in 1973 to 12 per cent. Secondly, unlike the SLFP, the UNP made available consumer products in plenty.\footnote{Urmila Phadnis, "The Political Order in Sri Lanka Under the UNP Regime: Emerging Trends in the 1980's", \textit{Asian Survey}, (Berkeley), vol.24, no.3, (March 1984), pp.285-6.}

In the 1988 Presidential election, socio-economic issues once again played a crucial role in deciding the outcome. The UNP's campaign depended more on its economic policies. It not only highlighted its populist programmes such as \textit{Gam Udava} or 'Village Re-awakening' and one million housing programme but also presented a constructive programme to overcome problems such as poverty, housing, unemployment and cost of living. The SLFP and the SLMP, however, failed to present viable programmes to convince the
people of their competence to overcome the socio-economic problems. Hence, the UNP's past performance on the economic front and the programme it presented during the elections ensured Premadasa's victory. 14

Role of Violence

On the eve of the Presidential election, Sri Lanka was plagued by intense violence. On the one hand, the JVP in the South and the LTTE in the North-Eastern Province conducted campaigns of terror. Both these groups declared the election to be "illegal" and threatened people with dire consequences if they exercised their franchise. On the other hand, the government was alleged to have had a hand in the violence to ensure its candidate's victory.

The JVP that engaged in violence ever since the signing of Indo-Sri Lanka Accord 15 escalated its terror campaign further on the eve of Presidential elections. It also put forth a number of demands for its co-operation in holding a free and fair election. These were: the resignation of President Jayewardene and the appointment of a senior Judge of the Supreme Court as the Acting President; dissolution of Parliament and the formation of a caretaker government to

14. Socio-economic issues in the 1988 Presidential election were discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.

15. JVP's violent campaign since the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.
conduct free and fair elections; dissolution of Provincial Councils; disbandment of the Special Task Force, the National Auxiliary Force, the Home Guards and other para-military forces; creation of an environment that would enable the JVP to participate in the elections; and the immediate abrogation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the withdrawal of the IPKF. 16

When the government failed to accede to its demands, 17 the JVP banned the holding of Presidential election and stated in its leaflet issued on 23 November 1988 that:

The Presidential election to be held by Jayewardene is a false election. This is being held on the instructions of Rajiv Gandhi in order to confirm Sri Lanka as a colony of India. This election is being held without vacating the Presidential Office, without dissolving the Parliament and utilising the powers of the surreptitiously constituted Provincial Councils .... All the three candidates are representatives of Jayewardene's destructive policies .... None of the three can solve even one of the basic problems of the country. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna will categorically reject any result emanating from this election .... It is further requested from all patriotic people that they will reject the


17. President Jayewardene acceded to certain demands of the JVP especially the dissolution of Parliament and the formation of a caretaker government on the condition that the JVP should give up violence and participate in such a government. However, the JVP rejected it. This was discussed in the preceding chapter.
result of this false election and refrain from participating in it and continue to struggle for a genuine election.

At first, the JVP through its students wing, the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF), mobilised university students to spearhead its anti-government agitations. Subsequently, it also brought school students into its fold who came out in open to participate in JVP-sponsored demonstrations. Moreover, university and school teachers, who sympathised with the JVP, encouraged the students to come out in support of it. At the same time, the JVP also killed those teachers who prevented the students from participating in its demonstrations. The universities and schools, as a result, became centres of violence which forced the government to close down all

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20. For example, in Ratnapura district, JVP members went to a school and asked the students to come out and demonstrate. The Principal of that School refused to send the students out. The very next day the JVP ruthlessly killed that Principal in his own house. Interview with Lalith Alakoon, Assistant Editor of Sunday Times in Colombo, on 30 September 1988.
major universities and schools to contain violence. 21

Secondly, the JVP had the support of unemployed youth and the poorer sections of the society. 22 Thirdly, although the JVP initially lacked support among the workers, it penetrated several trade unions and within a short time brought them under its control. 23 To secure the support of workers, the JVP also deliberately put forward some non-political demands to gain their support. 24 Above all, the JVP attacked army and police camps and took away large amounts of arms and ammunition. It also seized arms provided to commercial establishments and to people by the government for their protection. 25

The JVP, apart from calling the people to boycott the election, also adopted unconventional methods to mobilise


24. The demands were: the doubling of wages, making the casual workers permanent, a monthly wage for plantation workers, re-instatment of dismissed workers, a festival advance of Rs.1000 in December, release of all workers and trade unionists from custody and restoration of powers to civil administrators with a suspension of action by security forces against those participating in the strikes. "JVP's two seven-point demands", Lanka Guardian, vol.11, no.15, (1 December 1988), p.5.

support for its agitations. On the day of the JVP's proposed hartal, the Deshapremi Janatha Viyaparaya (DJV), imposed an unofficial curfew and ordered people not to venture out of their homes. They were asked to remain in the dark without watching TV or radio. It also ordered the closure of all shops, state and private institutions, industries and public services like banks and transport. More importantly, the JVP ordered the people, especially in the South, to send a fixed number of members from each family to participate in its demonstrations. It was these people who were used as front runners by the JVP in its demonstrations. Moreover, workers were threatened at gun-point to abstain from work and join the JVP-led processions. Since the people were scared of facing the wrath of the DJV, they generally complied with these orders.

The DJV was ruthless against those who disobeyed its orders. There were a number of incidents where public servants, bus drivers, truckers and dock workers who dared

27. C.A. Chandraprema, n.18, p. 235.
30. Comment: Ballot and Bullet, n.19, p.9

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to ignore the hartal call of the JVP were ruthlessly eliminated.\textsuperscript{31} Further, it threatened families with severe punishment if the coffins of its victims were carried more than a few inches from the ground.\textsuperscript{32} It also banned people from participating in the funerals of victims whom the JVP dubbed as traitors.\textsuperscript{33} Fear was the key factor which the JVP and its militant wing DJV used very well to succeed in its goal. Hence, Sri Lanka was in a pathetic situation where the functioning of government offices, banks, factories, business houses, hotels and shops came to a halt.\textsuperscript{34} While employees of the transport department either refused to work or abstained from it due to the JVP's threat,\textsuperscript{35} shop-keepers

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{31} After killing those who disobeyed its orders, the DJV severed their heads and publicly displayed them. In Anuradhapura district, a family which had buried a victim on the previous day woke up in the morning to see his severed head stuck in a flower pot in front of their door with a JVP warning. \textit{Forward}, 5 December 1988.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{32} ibid.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{ibid.}, 5 November 1988.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{34} Arun Weerasuriya, "Sri Lanka: Backdrop to Presidential Election", \textit{Mainstream}, (New Delhi), 24 December 1988, p. 34.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{35} According to a Sri Lanka Transport Bus (SLTB) service spokesman, around Rs.1 million was lost daily by the SLTB because of the disruptions and death threats by the JVP. \textit{The Journal}, 2 December 1988. Railway employees refused to work because of inadequate security. \textit{Weekend}, (Colombo), 30 October 1988.
\end{quote}
could not open their shops fearing violent reprisals.\textsuperscript{36} Due to the disruption of transport services and the closure of shops, food shortages were reported from various districts, especially in the southern province. This further resulted in the escalation of prices of consumer goods.\textsuperscript{37} The JVP also resorted to disrupting the power supply and plunged a number of districts like Anuradhapura, Kandy, Kurunegala, Matara, Galle and Hambantota into darkness.\textsuperscript{38} The disruption of power supply, coupled with a series of strikes, paralysed the functioning of hospitals. As a result, a number of patients underwent untold sufferings.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the JVP through its violent campaign, made life miserable for both the government and the general public.

Unlike in the South, the LTTE was a force to reckon with in the North-East. However, the situation in the North-East was largely handled by the IPKF which engaged in

\textsuperscript{36} On the day of hartal the JVP personally handed over a letter to shop-keepers ordering them to close their shops. ibid., (6 November 1988). Those shop-keepers who disobeyed these orders were either killed or publicly humiliated. Forward, 5 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{37} Daily News, (Colombo), 5 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{38} The Journal, (Colombo), 9 December 1988.

\textsuperscript{39} Due to lack of power supply to the hospitals, premature babies died and those patients suffering from major diseases like heart problems were put to a lot of difficulties. Sun, (Colombo), 26 November 1988.
an armed conflict to disarm the LTTE. In late 1988, the
LTTE banned the holding of the presidential election to deny
legitimacy to the system that led to the misery of Tamils.40
In the process it threatened people from participating in
the election. It also disrupted the election work to a
large extent especially in Jaffna and Vanni.41

Impact of Violence on the Electoral Process

Both the JVP and the LTTE were engaged in obstructing
the election campaign of political parties and the
preparatory work of the election commission. The election
campaign was hampered by the unprecedented violence, threats
and the consequent collapse of law and order.42 Election
work was seriously disrupted due to the breakdown of
essential services like transport, posts and
telecommunications.43 More importantly due to intimidation
and threats, a number of kachcheries in districts like
Matale, Matara, Hambantota, Jaffna, Vanni, Trincomalee,

40. S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, "Sri Lanka's Presidential
   Election", Lanka Guardian, vol.11, no.19, (February

41. The LTTE's role in disrupting the electoral process was
discussed in the following pages.

42. The problems faced by political parties during the
election campaign were discussed in detail in the
preceding chapter.

43. The Island, (Colombo), 29 November 1988.
Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa, Badulla and Monergala were closed down or were non-functional. 44 Around eleven districts suffered from a lack of staff due to absenteeism, drop in work output, transport paralysis and intimidation of electoral officers. 45 Election work in Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Vanni came to a standstill. 46 In Kegalle and Kurunegala, election work almost collapsed when an election office was burnt and Government Agents were attacked. 47 In some of the districts unidentified youth visited the offices and residences of the Returning Officers and other electoral officers and threatened them to stop the election work. This resulted in Army officers taking control of those districts. 48 Moreover, due to disruption of transport, and insecurity that


45. ibid.

46. In Hambantota family members of the election staff were threatened in order to keep them away from the election work. ibid., p.68 and 103.

47. In Kegalle an election office was burnt resulting in the death of two persons and a number of people being injured. In Kurunegala, residences of Government Agents were attacked. As a result, seven hundred employees from Kurunegala refused to do any election work. ibid., pp.68-9.

48. ibid., p.104.
prevailed in some of the districts like Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Muneragale, Jaffna, Vanni, Batticaloa, Digamadulla and Trincomalee, the ballot papers could not be transported in time. As a result, some of these districts received ballot papers only a few days before the date of election. Further, classification of ballot papers according to the needs of each district ran into difficulties because of the lack of a safe place and the non-availability of staff. As a result, in some districts the Returning Officers and their assistants did all the work including those of their lower subordinates to complete the work.

Apart from this, the disruption of postal services had its impact on the election work with regard to the distribution of postal ballots and poll cards. The postal services were affected to such an extent that except for Colombo and its suburbs all other districts were cut off from the mainstream. As a result, out of about 1,62,000 postal voters, only 20,000 sent their application. This led the Election Commission to extend the last date from 21 October 1988 to 21 November 1988. Even then, only 95,631

49. ibid., p.25.
50. ibid.
51. Sun, 6 December 1988.
applications were received which was 41 per cent less than the expected total number of postal voters.\textsuperscript{52} The number of postal voting applications received, allowed and rejected in terms of districts are represented in Table-5.1. In districts like Matara, Hambantota, Batticaloa, Digamadulla, Trincomalee, Kununegala, Pollonnaruwa and Moneragala very less number of applications were received. Significantly in Jaffna only 15 applications were received and none in Vanni. Out of 95,631 postal voting applications received, there were around 82,646 voters who were allowed to exercise their vote by post.

Also, the disruption of postal services affected the distribution of poll cards to the electorate which was normally sent through post.\textsuperscript{53} On a number of occasions the subversives forcibly took away the poll cards from the post

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{52} Report of the Commissioner of Elections on the Second Presidential Election, n.54, p.31.
\textsuperscript{53} Under Section 24 of the Presidential Elections Act, every voter was entitled to receive a poll card containing the name and number of the electoral district, the name, address and the registered number of the voter, the polling division and the polling station allotted to the voter and, the dates and hours of the poll. Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Presidential Elections Act, No.15 of 1981, (Colombo, 1981), pp.14-5.
\end{verbatim}
TABLE-5.1.

Number of Postal Voting Applications Received, Allowed, Rejected and Received Late in each Electoral District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Electoral District</th>
<th>No. of Applications Received</th>
<th>Allowed</th>
<th>Rejected</th>
<th>Recd. late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.</td>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>19,530</td>
<td>18,606</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.</td>
<td>Gampaha</td>
<td>17,420</td>
<td>16,751</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.</td>
<td>Kalutara</td>
<td>7,148</td>
<td>5,627</td>
<td>1,521</td>
<td>875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.</td>
<td>Mahanuwara</td>
<td>9,501</td>
<td>5,947</td>
<td>3,554</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.</td>
<td>Matale</td>
<td>2,039</td>
<td>1,738</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.</td>
<td>Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>1,990</td>
<td>1,883</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.</td>
<td>Galle</td>
<td>6,986</td>
<td>6,382</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.</td>
<td>Mataara</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>909</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.</td>
<td>Hambantota</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Jaffna</td>
<td>015</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Vanni</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Digamadulla</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Kurunegala</td>
<td>8,342</td>
<td>6,713</td>
<td>1,629</td>
<td>1,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Puttalam</td>
<td>3,085</td>
<td>2,686</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Anuradhapura</td>
<td>2,669</td>
<td>2,616</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Polonnaruwa</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Badulla</td>
<td>2,579</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>1,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Monergala</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Ratnapura</td>
<td>4,430</td>
<td>3,914</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Kegalle</td>
<td>5,119</td>
<td>4,935</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total | 95,631 | 82,646 | 12,967 | 9,168

offices, and from postmen, who were to deliver them.\textsuperscript{54} This led the Election Commission to caution the postal authorities that unless it was certain that the poll cards could be delivered to the electorate they were to retain them at the kachcheris.

Table-5.2 represents the details of the delivery and non-delivery of poll cards. About 43,368 poll cards were either burnt or seized from the post offices by the subversives in about 45 incidents. In Matale, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Polonnaruwa and Kegalle districts, the poll cards were not handed over to the postal authorities owing to the prevailing insecurity in those districts. In Jaffna, Vanni and Moneragala the Commission could not even prepare the poll cards. Further, around 800,000 undelivered poll cards were returned to the kachcheris by the postal authorities. As a result, only 45 per cent of poll cards were distributed to the electorate.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} The subversives forcibly took away the poll cards from the post offices in Pasyala in Gampaha, Namal Oya, Paragahakele, Veyanketapola sub-post office of Ampona and 27 sub-post offices of Matara district. Moreover in Wadduwa and Kalutara in Kalutana district, Ratgama, Galle, Ambalamgoda, Ahangama and Balapitiya in Galle district and Athurugiriya in Colombo district, the poll cards were snatched from the postmen who were on their way to deliver it. Report of the Commissioner of Elections on Second Presidential Election, n.28, p.35.

\textsuperscript{55} ibid., p.36.
### TABLE-5.2

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION - 1988**

Details of Delivery of Poll Cards and Connected Incidents in each Electoral District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dist. Electoral No.</th>
<th>No. of Poll Cards Not Register- handed over to and re- handed delivered Poll Incidents</th>
<th>Total No. of poll Cards not issued to Offices Kachcheri</th>
<th>(3+4+5)</th>
<th>(6+8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01. Colombo</td>
<td>1,088,780</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>141,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. Gampaha</td>
<td>969,735</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>100,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Kalutara</td>
<td>570,118</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>297,885</td>
<td>12,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. Mahanuwara</td>
<td>628,240</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>588,822</td>
<td>1,963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Matale</td>
<td>214,938</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>214,938</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>229,769</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Galle</td>
<td>571,303</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>157,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Matara</td>
<td>451,934</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>173,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jaffna</td>
<td>591,782</td>
<td>591,782</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Vanni</td>
<td>142,723</td>
<td>142,723</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Digamadulla</td>
<td>265,768</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>18,364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Trincomalee</td>
<td>152,289</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>26,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kurunegala</td>
<td>784,989</td>
<td>784,989</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>784,989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Puttalam</td>
<td>319,003</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>46,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Anuradhapura</td>
<td>334,074</td>
<td>334,074</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>334,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Polonnaruwa</td>
<td>163,741</td>
<td>163,741</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>163,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ratnapura</td>
<td>457,224</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>74,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9,375,742</td>
<td>896,432</td>
<td>3,446,239</td>
<td>805,861</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the reluctance of the election staff to involve themselves in election work due to threats and the disruption of the postal and transport services seriously disrupted the preparations for the Presidential election.

**Government and Violence**

President J.R. Jayewardene seemed to have delayed any major offensive against the JVP before the nomination day of for the Presidential election.56 Once the Presidential candidates filed their nominations on 10 November, he set out a task before the Security forces to shoot at sight on demonstrators and curfew violators, especially in trouble-torn places like Southern and Uva provinces.57 Further, the government also provided arms to a large number of people for security reasons to protect the members of Parliament and of political parties.58 The Government also appealed to the people to counter the violence and protect themselves from those who engaged in acts of sabotage.59 Moreover, it asked the security forces to arrest those students who participated in the demonstrations and release them only on a signed guarantee from their parents or

56. Arun Weerasuriya, n. 34, p. 6.

57. ibid.


The President promulgated emergency regulations to counter the JVP-supported violence. According to these regulations, threatening of others with death or inflicting physical injury or printing or distributing threatening letters and leaflets or participating in or organising illegal demonstrations would invite the death sentence. Moreover, military tribunals were appointed to try those arrested of the above crimes. The government also empowered the security forces to dispose off the bodies of those killed without any investigation. The President also warned that if the situation became worse, he would seek the assistance of India.

The President also came out with further regulations that grocery stores, hotels and pharmacies should be kept open and that transport and supply of electricity should be maintained. The government also treated the ministries of Health, Home Affairs, Public Administration, Local government, Housing and Construction, and Highways as

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60. Weekend, 4 September 1988.
62. Arun Weerasuriya, n.34, p. 6.
63. Comment: Ballot and Bullet, n.19, p.10.a
64. The Island, 6 November 1988.
essential services. While the government ordered the officers and other employees of these Ministries to report to work by cancelling the leave sanctioned to them. It also warned that those who failed to report to work would be considered as having resigned their jobs. Reacting to this, around nineteen trade unions representing the employees from the public service, state corporations and statutory boards called on the President to dissolve the Parliament to enable the holding of free and fair elections. In their letter to the President they pointed out that while on the one hand they had been threatened to stay away from work by different groups, on the other hand, the Government was imposing hard measures on the employees in order to make them attend to their normal work. Further, they proclaimed that those regulations could never in any way help bring back normalcy to the country.

Further, to overcome the food shortage that arose due to closure of shops and disruption in the transport services, the government made every effort to send food stuff to those areas affected by scarcity. While the government was able to transport consumer goods to cities and towns, it found it hard to reach those remote villages.

67. ibid.
68. Sun, 1 December 1988.
affected by subversive violence. However, to those areas, it made arrangements to transport food items with the help of the security forces.\textsuperscript{69}

More importantly, the government also tried to complete the election work by resorting to force. Returning Officers and other lower grade workers who did not report for work were forcibly escorted to work by the security forces.\textsuperscript{70} It ordered the Army Co-ordinating Officers to temporarily take charge of civil administration work at kachcheris, which was seriously affected due to the large-scale absence of employees.\textsuperscript{71} Further, the government transported ballot papers by air to districts like Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Polonnaruwa, Badulla, Moneragala and to the districts of North-Eastern Province. This was necessitated because of the apprehensions raised by Returning Officers on the safety of ballot papers transported to kachcheris too early.\textsuperscript{72}

Meanwhile, the President also announced that Parliament would be dissolved on December 20 with a view to restore normalcy.\textsuperscript{73} While the President conceded the opposition's demand for a monitoring committee by inviting members from

\textsuperscript{69}. Daily News, 5 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{70}. Forward, 5 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{71}. Sun, 7 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{73}. Sunday Observer, 4 December 1988.
SAARC countries to observe the election,\textsuperscript{74} he also appealed to the opposition parties to help the government in overcoming the prevalent violent situation.\textsuperscript{75} Thus, the government undertook these measures to counter the subversive violence and to hold the Presidential election as scheduled.

Although the government took these measures its credibility was questioned because of its alleged role in the violence. The government provided arms to different political organisations in a strategy of countering violence with violence. In the process it came up with the shadowy parliamentary groups like the Green Tigers. These were apart from the Special Task Force (STF) and the Army.\textsuperscript{76} These forces allegedly worked under the guidance of the UNP's local leaders.\textsuperscript{77} While they were sent out to terrorise the supporters and sympathisers of the opposition, especially of the SLFP, their services were also utilised for providing security to UNP rallies and public meetings.\textsuperscript{78} They were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} The Journal, 9 December 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Sun, 25 November 1988.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Vasantha Amerasinghe, "Polls and Political Violence", \textit{Lanka Guardian}, vol.11, no.20, (February 15, 1989), p.20.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Vasantha Amerasinghe, n.58, p.348.
\end{itemize}
also engaged in sabotaging SLFP rallies and public meetings. According to Sirimavo Bandaranaike, these shadowy forces ordered shop-keepers to close their shops on the eve of SLFP rallies under the disguise of the JVP.\textsuperscript{79} It was also alleged that at the insistence of UNP members the security forces arrested a number of SLFP supporters by using the emergency powers entrusted with them to counter the JVP.\textsuperscript{80}

Apart from this in the middle of the election campaign, a mysterious group calling themselves the People's Revolutionary Red Army (PRRA) came up. The PRRA was primarily engaged in killing the members of the JVP. It displayed posters all over with slogans like "Death to Wijeweera" and warned that "All supporters of the JVP would be crushed like flies and mosquitoes".\textsuperscript{81} Although it was believed that the PRRA was also a part of the government's goon squads, their identity is not exactly clear.\textsuperscript{82} Thus all these factors show that the government took advantage of the violent situation that prevailed to gain electoral advantage.

**Violence on the day of Election**

As a result of unprecedented violence, there was

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., p.350.
\textsuperscript{80} The Island, 5 December 1988.
\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in C.A. Chandraprema, n.18, p.238.
\textsuperscript{82} For more details see ibid.
\end{flushleft}
speculation that the Presidential election would be postponed. The Commissioner of Elections hinted that the election could be postponed if all the candidates in the contest demanded so. While the opposition candidates, Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Ossie Abeygunasekara, hoped for postponement, the UNP candidate R. Premadasa was for holding the election as per schedule.83 Hence, the Election Commission went on to hold the Presidential election amidst large scale violence, intimidation and threats. The Election Commissioner had to face numerous difficulties in despatching polling staff to the polling stations. Because of the insecurity prevailing in a number of polling stations, the Commission had to make alternative arrangements for the overnight stay of polling staff on 18 December 1988.84 However, when the polling staff were transported to the polling stations in the early hours of the election day, their way was obstructed by felling of trees, placing of boulders in the middle of the road and also in some places confronted with heavy gunfire.85 Further, the violent situation also affected the attendance of the candidates' polling agents with a very few turning up.86 Table-5.3

85. ibid., p. 57.
86. ibid., p. 107.
presents the attendance of polling agents in each district. While not even a single agent reported to the polling stations in Jaffna and Vanni, in Matara, Hambantota and Anuradhapura, it was as low as 10 per cent or below. The UNP sent a total of 59.10 per cent of Polling Agents and the SLFP had as high as 66.55 per cent attendance. The SLMP sent hardly 7.79 per cent of Polling Agents all over the country.

Above all, polling itself was disrupted by unprecedented violence, threatening of voters and stuffing of ballot papers. On the day of polling the situation was such that the election staff were prevented from performing their duties in a large number of polling stations by the militants either by attacking the polling stations or by obstructing the roads that led to the polling booths. As a result polling was delayed in about 800 polling stations because of the late arrival of the election staff. Further about 207 polling stations returned empty ballot boxes. Table-5.4 shows the impact of violence on polling stations in each electoral district. While about 243 polling stations were shifted from their original location, 49 polling stations in Moneragala district could not be established due to the violent situation prevailing in these

87. ibid., pp.110-117.
88. ibid., p.106.
89. ibid., p.108.
regions. Further, about 95 polling stations were affected by bomb explosions and gunfire. Also, incidents of ballot paper stuffing were reported from four polling stations in Matara.

### TABLE-5.3
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION-1988

Attendance of Polling Agents in each Electoral District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dist. Electoral No.</th>
<th>Total P.SS in Analysis of Data according to Recognised Political Parties</th>
<th>District Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. District</td>
<td>No. of which of which P.SS data in available</td>
<td>UNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01. Colombo</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. Gampaha</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Kalutara</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. Mahanuwara</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Matale</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Galle</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Mata</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Hambantota</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jaffna</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Vanni</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Batticaloa</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Digamadulla</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Trincomalee</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kurunegala</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Puttalam</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Anuradhapura</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Polonnaruwa</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Badulla</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Moneragala</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ratnapura</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Kegalle</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8,060</td>
<td>6,671</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the Ganhela polling station in the Akurrenta polling division of Matara district, some unknown persons forcibly took away twenty-five ballot books containing 1250 ballot papers from the Senior Polling Officer and marked ballot papers.

**TABLE-5.4**

**IMPACT OF THE VIOLENT SITUATION AND INCIDENTS ON INDIVIDUAL POLLING STATIONS IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 1988**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dist. Electoral No. District</th>
<th>Shifted from original location</th>
<th>Failure to establish</th>
<th>Bomb explosions and gun fire</th>
<th>Stuffing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01. Colombo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. Gampaha</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Kalutara</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. Mahanuwara</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Matale</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Galle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Matara</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Hambantota</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jaffna</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Vanni</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Batticoloa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Digamadulla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Trincomalee</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Kurunegala</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Puttalam</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Anuradhapura</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Polonnaruwa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Badulla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Moneragala</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ratnapura</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Kegalle</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** 243 49 95 4

papers were put into the ballot box. However, there is no evidence to prove that these votes were polled in favour of any particular candidate. In another incident, about ten unauthorised persons entered the polling booth at the Dickwella polling station in Matara district and forcibly obtained 12 ballot books containing 600 ballot papers each of which was marked in favour of the UNP candidate and put into ballot boxes. Apart from this there were reports that prominent members of the UNP engaged in malpractices. The SLFP alleged that UNP members freely entered polling stations and intimidated the polling staff. It also said that a number of its counting agents were arrested on their way to the counting centres. This is evident from the Non-Governmental Observers' report that highlighted an incident in Mahanuwara district, where a member of Parliament with two guards freely moved inside a polling station and conversed with the voters and the polling staff.

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91. Ibid.

Hence, the large scale violence, intimidation and threats had its impact on the election and resulted in poor voter turn-out. This enabled Premadasa to win the election by a narrow margin. At the same time, it also to a large extent affected the chances of Sirimavo Bandaranaike. This is evident from the voting pattern. Premadasa obtained a majority of the votes polled in areas where ethnic and religious minorities traditionally supported the UNP and were able to poll heavily in conditions unaffected by violence. In contrast, districts like Matara, Galle, Hambantota, Moneragala, Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, Matale, Polonnaruwa and Badulla, which formed the SLFP's support base, were affected by unprecedented violence. This leads one to believe that the government deliberately avoided maintaining law and order in these districts.

Another significant incident highlights the fact that the UNP expected to gain advantage from the violence. A rumour was floated during the final week of the election campaign that the JVP has lifted its ban on the SLFP. Responding to this, the UNP Chairman Ranjan Wijeratne, in a

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95. ibid., p. 349.
hurriedly called press conference branded the posters that came up to this effect as mischievous and also termed it as an election stunt of the SLFP to mislead the voters.96 This clearly reflects the UNP's belief that the violence would lead SLFP supporters to keep away from voting for Sirimavo Bandaranaike, which would in turn ensure Premadasa's victory.

**Role of Proportionate Voting**

The second Republican Constitution which came into force in 1978 paved the way for important changes in the electoral system. As discussed earlier, one of the significant features of this change was the direct election of the President under a preferential system of voting.97 In the past, when elections were held under the parliamentary system between 1947 and 1977, political parties were able to come to power by securing a plurality of votes. From Table-5.5 it is evident that both the UNP and the SLFP could come to power by securing 33 to 44 per cent of votes. The only exception was in 1977 when the UNP secured victory by obtaining 50 per cent of votes. This was a first in the electoral history of Sri Lanka. Further,

96. ibid., p. 350.

97. The preferential system of voting was discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.
both these parties had won the elections solely with the support of the Sinhala population by espousing communal issues like language and religion. Because of this communal attitude, the UNP and SLFP could not even secure a respectable percentage of votes or seats in the Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern Provinces during this period. 98

TABLE-5.5

Percentage of Votes Polled by both UNP and SLFP (1956-1977)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Year of Election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNP</td>
<td>27.3 29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLFP</td>
<td>40.7 21.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In contrast, under the new system, a candidate contesting for the post of President had to secure one-half of the total votes (50 per cent of total votes polled plus one vote) polled. 99 While this factor changed the entire voting pattern of the electorate, it also made every single

98. R.N. Kearney, n.8, pp. 99-100.


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vote polled a valuable one. As a result, the UNP and the SLFP, which had won elections in the past by securing 30 to 40 per cent of votes, now had to depend on the minorities to secure the remaining 10 to 20 per cent of votes to win the Presidency. This led these parties to dispense with their communal outlook since they could not afford to alienate the minorities if they needed to secure victory in the Presidential election. This also forced the minorities especially the Sri Lankan Tamils, who hitherto voted for parties that were supposed to have represented them, to vote for candidates belonging to the majority Sinhala community. Thus, the support of the minorities became crucial in deciding the outcome of the Presidential election.

In view of these factors, on the eve of the Presidential elections of 1988, political parties relentlessly tried to win over the support of the minorities. The SLFP went all out to woo the minorities by proposing programmes that would attract them. Although the SLFP pledged to abrogate the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement, it came out with the solution that their party would create 'Regional Units' for the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Muslims in the North-Eastern Province.100 By presenting these

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proposals, the SLFP attempted to secure the support of even the LTTE which was waging a war against the IPKF and the State.\(^{101}\) It also promised to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act\(^ {102}\) which the UNP government had allegedly misused against the Sri Lankan Tamils.\(^ {103}\) Further, the SLFP aspired to secure the support of Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims through the Tamil Congress and the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress respectively, who also participated in an effort to form an anti-UNP platform. While the SLFP succeeded in bringing the Tamil Congress into the proposed Democratic People's Alliance (DPA), it failed in its bid to secure the support of the SLMC. The SLMC withdrew from the DPA due to disagreement over electoral arrangements with regard to the ensuing parliamentary elections.\(^ {104}\) Nevertheless, the SLFP made every effort to woo the Muslims. This was evident from its proposal to close down the Israeli interest section in Sri Lanka which the Muslims had demanded ever since its

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101. The SLFP's attempts to secure the support of the LTTE was discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.  
104. The differences that occurred between the SLFP and SLMC was discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.
inception.\textsuperscript{105} Above all the SLFP promised that it would include section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution which had safeguarded the rights of the minorities in the proposed new constitution.\textsuperscript{106}

The UNP sought the support of the minorities in every possible way. While it continued to enjoy the unequivocal support of the plantation Tamils through the Ceylon Workers Congress, the UNP also exploited the differences that arose between the SLFP and the SLMC to its advantage. By fulfilling some of the basic demands of the SLMC, the UNP secured its indirect support.\textsuperscript{107} Further, with a view to securing the support of the Muslims, the UNP promised in its manifesto that it would send back those agencies from Sri Lanka which work against the interest of the Muslims.\textsuperscript{108} In the case of Sri Lankan Tamils, though the UNP did not come up with any favourable proposal, it averted a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Programme of the Democratic People's Alliance, n.100, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{106} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{107} The UNP government reduced the cut-off point from 12.5 per cent to 5 per cent and abolished the zonal electoral system which was demanded by the SLMC. Interview with A.R.M. Hakeem, General Secretary SLMC on 15 October, 1988.
\end{itemize}
confrontationist attitude. It was cautious in its approach towards the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement and stated that it would replace the accord by signing a friendship treaty. It also proposed to solve the ethnic crisis through consultation, compromise and consensus. 109

The SLMP, on its part, to secure the support of the Sri Lankan Tamils, proposed that it would provide more than the provisions of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement to solve the ethnic problem. 110 While the SLMP proposed to repeal the PTA, it also promised the closure of the Israeli interest section in Sri Lanka to obtain the support of the Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims respectively. 111 Thus, all the three parties made consistent efforts to obtain the support of the minorities. While the UNP succeeded in its attempt, the SLMP found some support from the Sri Lankan Tamils. But the SLFP, notwithstanding its attractive promises, failed to secure the support of the minorities which contributed to its defeat to a large extent. 112

109. ibid.

110. SLMP Manifesto - Our Programme to Construct the Nation, (Colombo, 30 November 1988) p.12

111. Ibid.

112. The performance of all the three candidates among the minorities is discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter.
Conclusion

In the 1988 Presidential election three factors - the socio-economic base, role of violence and proportionate voting played a crucial role in deciding the outcome. While the UNP impressed upon the poor masses its socio-economic programme such as poverty alleviation and housing, the SLFP failed to provide an alternative economic programme to overcome the problems of the people. The election was held under an unusual atmosphere of violence. People had to face a lot of difficulties in their day-to-day life. While the people were threatened with their lives, if they did not heed the orders of the JVP, they had to suffer due to breakdown of law and order, transport, electricity and the non-availability of consumer goods due to frequent closure of shops.

The election itself was at stake because of the violent campaign organised against it by both the JVP and the LTTE. The lives of officials involved in the electoral process were threatened. People were ordered not to exercise their franchise. All these resulted in a poor voter turn-out. While in a number of polling divisions the polling was either delayed or shifted from its original place, some of the polling divisions were not opened for polling at all. Moreover, the election also witnessed malpractices such as ballot paper stuffing and intimidation of the polling staff.
and of voters. The ruling UNP members took advantage of their party being in power and reportedly engaged in electoral abuses. Minority votes became crucial in the Presidential election since the Presidential candidates had to obtain absolute majority to secure victory. While the UNP succeeded in securing the support of the minorities, the SLFP failed in its bid notwithstanding its impressive proposals. Thus, all these three factors determined the results of the 1988 Presidential election.