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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Aliff, S. M. (2016). Sri Lanka's general election 2015. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 68, 7-17.
<https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.68.7>

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Sri Lanka's General Election 2015

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Keywords: Parliamentary election of Sri Lanka 2015, Politics of Sri Lanka, Political party, Proportional Representation,

Abstract Sri Lanka emerges from this latest election with a hung Parliament in 2015. A coalition called the United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG) won 106 seats and secured ten out of 22 electoral districts, including Colombo to obtain the largest block of seats at the parliamentary polls, though it couldn't secure a simple majority in 225-member parliament. It also has the backing of smaller parties that support its agenda of electoral. In the August parliamentary election, the former president Rajapaksa forces upped the nationalist ante and campaigned to win a majority of parliamentary seats with the votes of the Sinhala Buddhists only, but extreme appeals to nationalism failed to get traction in the elections among the Sinhalese. It is fair to say that the double blow against nationalism in the south was occasioned by the politics of good governance promoted by the UNP and its alliance in the election. In Sri Lanka's eighth General elections, none of the two major political alliances- the (UNF), nor the (UPFA)- gained a clear majority in the election. More important, for the fourth time the fragmentation of seats among the major parties and regional level party has inaugurated a period of unstable coalition governments, creating an air of political and economic ambiguity in the nation as it enters a post- Mahinda Rajapakse era. This study is based on an interpretive approach. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study examines distinguishes the 2015 election from previous ones and what extent? What are the major factors leads to defeat the ruling party? However, this study argues that the election results are indicative not only of the decline of Mahinda Rajapakse era but also of a gradual transition toward good governance.

Introduction

The turning point of election of Maithripala Sirisena as president on 8 January 2015 was an historic victory for Sri Lanka's beleaguered democracy, backed by UNP and coalition of parties and civil society activists that poster "good governance" spanned the country's broad ethnic and ideological spectrum the peaceful transition from an oppressive regime that had miscalculated its popular support was rightly hailed as a triumph of democracy. But the victory was only a fragile beginning, particularly with regard to addressing of tension and violence over minorities all over the country. A massive turnout of minorities against Rajapaksa helped Sirisena gain the vital lead in the presidential election. The presidential elections made its initial transition away from authoritarian rule in which ethnic nationalism was utilized to deliver repeated electoral mandates and parliamentary election in August 2015.

Sirisena has brought a welcome consensus-building style to government decisions, but the emergence of multiple, competing power centers has led to uncertainty and confusion. Continued Rajapaksa support in the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) – despite major corruption allegations and investigations – have allowed him and his powerful family to mount a comeback and contributed to numerous decisions that have disappointed the new president's supporters, who had hoped for a sharper break with the past. . The new President, Maithripala Sirisena, who came as the head of a coalition, pledged to work towards restoring democracy and good governance through a 100-Day program.

The nineteenth amendment was a major political victory for new Sirisena's government and a significant step toward rebuilding good governance in Sri Lanka. It allowed Sirisena to fulfill in large part his promise to abolish the executive powers of the president and to overturn Rajapaksa's authoritarian constitutional changes of 2010.

Sirisena's chief obstacle was stronger-than-expected support for Mahinda Rajapaksa within the party. Within weeks of the election, supporters began campaigning for Mahinda to be the SLFP-led, United People Freedom Alliance (UPFA) candidate for prime minister in the parliamentary elections. This was led by the UPFA's smaller constituent parties, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP), the National Freedom Front (NFF) and the Democratic Left Front (DLF), along with a breakaway faction of the JHU (Pivithuru Hela Urumaya), led by Udaya Gammanpila, and some three dozen SLFP parliamentarians.(ICG:2015) This support for Rajapaksa was partly ideological – many share his strong Sinhala nationalist positions – but it was also self-interested: without his continued influence, few of his parliament loyalists were likely to win UPFA nominations for the general election and many would be at risk of criminal investigation. Meanwhile, the campaign to make Mahinda prime minister gathered momentum, as the pro-Rajapaksa wing of the UPFA organized large rallies in May and June.(ICG:2015) Mahinda continued visits to Buddhist temples across the country and regular visits to jailed ex-ministers and appeared daily on television and in newspapers.

In Sri Lanka's eighth General elections held in August 2015, none of the two major political alliances- the (UNF), nor the (UPFA)- gained a clear majority in the election. More important, for the fourth time the fragmentation of seats among the major parties and minor or regional level party has inaugurated a period of unstable coalition governments, creating an air of political and economic ambiguity in the nation as it enters a post- Mahinda Rajapakse era. However, this study argues that the election results are indicative not only of the decline of Mahinda Rajapakse era but also of a gradual transition toward good governance.

Decline of Mahinda Rajapakse era

The transition toward good governance is not a sudden development but the cumulative end product of changes taking place over time and shifts in the political history of Sri Lanka. More specially, it arises out of several factors interlinked process; the decline of Mahinda Rajapakse in the Presidential election on January 8, 2015, and a parallel process of Buddhist hegemony and consequently of the totalitarianism rule has operated since 2010.

Much debate traces the decline of the Mahinda Rajapakse regime, which began in 2005. However, it was 2015 that witnessed the decline of the Mahinda Rajapakse regime both at the presidential level and parliament. In January 2015, Rajapaksa—who, as president, won Sri Lanka's 26-year civil war in 2009—was defeated in his quest for an unprecedented third term. His failure surprised many in the country and around the world, particularly because it came at the defection of Sirisena, who a longtime member of the SLFP and had even held a cabinet position in Rajapaksa's administration. Although the UPFA achieved massive victories in the presidential and parliamentary election in 2010, the people punished the Rajapakse and UPFA at the 2015 elections. The party's vote share plummeted by 10% from 2010 to 2015 in the presidential election. Many analysts blamed the 2015 UPFA debacle on Rajapaksa's undemocratic style of government and restore his structure of dominance every spare of government institutions. As a result, the corruption malpractice, family dominance, erosion of freedom and centralization of power emerges in the period.

The Rajapaksa's regime machinery had experienced decay due to the twin forces of family rule and totalitarianism that operated during the 2005s. Under the Mahinda Rajapakse, there had been a gradual erosion of democracy, social harmony, increasing use of centralizing institutional devices, and interference in the working of judicial, leading to lose of autonomy and even corruption in every government sectors. In fact, by 2010s institutional decay was so advanced that one could hardly talk about a “family regime” at all. Numerous studies of the Mahinda Rajapakse clearly show decay of the institutional machinery that had been instrumental in maintaining Mahinda Rajapakse' family dominance at all level, thus providing space for the rise of grievances among the

peoples and Jehan Perera rightly pointed out that “The past decade of rule by President Rajapaksa has seen the main institutions of governance lose much of their integrity due to the centralisation of power in the hands of the President which have been justified by national security considerations. The enormous concentration of power in the President’s hands has seen big erosion in the system of checks and balances which is a threat to any well-functioning democratic system of governance. In the event, his impact was to halt the rapid erosion in the party’s support without attracting back the voters particularly minorities in large numbers. He did boost party morale and draw large crowds to his rallies and made so- call winning candidate image in the public. The Rajapaksa campaign once again raised racism to gain votes of the Sinhala Buddhists. Although there was a reduction of the voters who favored Rajapaksa, it was a considerable number amidst the revelations of various corrupt activities taken place under his regime.

Further, the greatest setback that Sri Lanka’s democracy has suffered, particularly during President Rajapaksa’s second term, is his inclination to erase the distinction between himself as the President, his UPFA regime, and the Sri Lanka State. Indeed, the identification of the individual ruler sitting at the top with the regime and the State under his tight control is the most decisive blow, which Sri Lanka’s democracy received under the post-18th Amendment Constitutional order of Sri Lanka.(Uyangoda,2014).

The UNP, which emerged after its defeated in the 2010 elections, adopted good governance policy as its guiding philosophy; however, poor electoral performance in national and regional elections in 1990s and 2000s- led to a fundamental rethinking within the party and the gradual creation of good governance policy which, in the hands of new generation of leaders with close links to the minorities parties, it was hoped would provide the basis for a new national government. The UNP attempted by means of mass mobilization to create a single, massive national vote bank in the North and Eastern and central provinces using the contentious issue of a minority at risk in Sri Lanka. These changes were also meant to counter the so-called nationalism strategy created by Mahinda Rajapakse and were described as an attempt to divide the Buddhist Sinhalese along ethnic line. With the weakening of the UPFA, the post-2010 UNP leadership felt it could use its new platform of good governance to capture power. Hence, a movement for good governance came into force during the presidential election which eventually brought Rajapaksa down. The movement dissipated with the defeat of Rajapaksa in the presidential election.(Keethaponkalan, S.I.,2015)

General Election and Realignments among the Parties

For the eighth parliament election, a total of 6151 candidates representing from 537 political parties and independence groups fielded nomination. Of candidates who are vying for a seat in the legislature, 3653 represent political parties while 2498 are from independent groups.(Sunday Times,2015). The electoral battle lines for general election drawn between two main axes, the UNP-led United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG), and the SLFP-led UPFA. The eighth general elections hastened alignment and polarization around the major parties for power. A central feature of the process was the attempt by UNP to form alliances with minority parties which of some were a coalition partner of UPFA between 2010-2014 in order to strengthen the regional bases and thereby gain a majority at the center. The UNP tried to ally with the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress,(SLMC) All Ceylon Makkal Congress, (ACMC), and Upcountry Tamil parties which were recently formed Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPF).(ICG,2015,) . It also formed an alliance with Jathika Hela Urmaya(JHU) and a breakaway faction of Sri Lanka Freedom Party(SLFP). Incidentally, the ACMC contested the 2010 general election on the UPFA ticket. The UNP has to a large extent completed its nomination lists though discussions and accommodated a few more SLFP dissidents on its ticket. The threat of Mahinda’s return also helped reunite and re-energies his opponents. By 13 July, when nominations had to be finalized, the UNP had reversed the fragmentation of the broad coalition that defeated Rajapaksa in January. The newly formed UNFGG brings together a wide range of parties from across the political and ethnic spectrum. Thus, a central characteristic of the 2015 election was that a number of strong minorities’ parties align with UNP of the major contenders, leading to the strong electorate win.

The UNFGG is a new coalition formation, put together for the parliamentary election to confront Rajapaksa at the parliamentary polls. The UNFGG has the advantage of securing most of the Tamil and Muslim votes as well, except in the North and some parts of the East where the Tamil National Alliance is contesting.

The UPFA is a grouping of several political parties comprising the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party, the Desavimukthi Janatha Party, the National Unity Alliance and the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

In addition, the National Freedom Party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party have over the years been allies of the UPFA. The Pivithuru Hela Urumaya, a breakaway group of the Jathika Hela Urumaya has also expressed its desire to contest the general election on the UPFA ticket. For this election, the LSSP and the CP have handed over a combined list to the UPFA nomination board seeking to contest from 15 districts while the MEP led by former Dinesh Gunawardane is seeking 10 slots for its members.(Timeslanka,2015). The UPFA, in contrast, will primarily depend on the Sinhalese-Buddhist votes. Ethnic and religious minorities view the SLFP and UPFA under Rajapaksa's leadership as aggressively majoritarian.(Uyangoda,2015)

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), a grouping of four political parties representing the Northern and Eastern Tamils, has completed its nomination lists for the general election. The Ilankai Tamil Arachu Katchchi (ITAK) has the highest number of slots from the Northern and Eastern districts; The Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) are the other parties contesting under the TNA banner.

Some developments supported the process of realignment and polarization during the electoral nomination around the two major contenders: defections and vertical alliances formed by UNP and UPFA with minority and small parties- in both cases the UNP benefited to a greater extent. There were an exodus to the UNP- described as "anti- Mahinda"- by minorities' parties and groups that were interested in the formation of good governance and saw the UNP as the stronger of the two main contestants. With these realignments, the traditional SLFP and UNP rivalry has transformed into UPFA and UNGGF.(Anushree Ghisad,2015)

Election campaign

UNP has announced the formation of the United National Front for Good Governance (UNFGG) to contest on the same plank of corruption free governance it had used successfully in the presidential election in January 2015. The UNFGG brings together disparate political parties and elements like the rightwing (JHU), along with, dissidents from the UPFA front, some important leaders and close confidants of Sirisena from the SLFP and Field Marshal Sarath Fonseka and his Democratic party and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) are likely to extend support to the UNFGG even if they do not join it.(R Hariharan,2015). Their primary purpose was to end the Rajapaksa juggernaut of corruption and abuse of power, to restore democracy, and to end Sri Lanka's isolation at the government level in the western world. These were the common slogans that united the UNP, sections of the SLFP, the TNA, and the JVP, the JHU and the Muslim and Upcountry Tamil political organizations. These organizations subordinated their own 'nationalist agendas' to the common slogans of good governance. The January 'victory' of the common platform has been endorsed again in August albeit under a different electoral format.(Rajan Philips,2015). While the election campaign is progressing, some of the central themes of the opposition campaign are also getting greater political legitimacy and public attention. 'A regime change for political change' is the key thematic slogan of Maithripala Sirisena-UNP-JHU campaign.(Uyangoda,2014). Despite many shortcomings of UNP lead alliance campaign and the policy manifesto, its basic merit is that it has re-introduced to Sri Lanka's political debate an approach to politics, political power, and the qualities of the ruler, which is an alternative to the one practiced by the current UPFA regime. (Uyangoda,2014).

Mahinda, to win the general elections of 2015, he formed an electoral alliance with the pro-Sinhala nationalist parties with the total support of Sinhala-Buddhists, strongly campaigned in the South

and West of the island, with strong propaganda anti-LTTE, anti-terrorism with pro-Buddhism. The communal campaign harped on the war victory, propagated hate, and instilled fears of the LTTE re-emerging with a UNP government. With the UPFA campaign focusing on the alleged threat of renewed militant separatism, the election looks to be a test of Rajapaksa's hardline brand of Sinhala nationalism.(Daily Mirror,2015)

Rajapaksa's personal campaign paid scant regard to major socio-economic dimensions, such as health, education, agriculture, plantations and instead, concentrated on the alleged threats to "National Security" through a revival of the LTTE, combined with the renewed articulation of minority aspirations. He failed to see or refused to concede, that the aggression in the minority approach was a direct response to his hard line and uncompromising attitude.

President Rajapaksa's propaganda campaign seems to have suffered a setback because of its lack of new ideas that can appeal to the political imagination of the masses. His key campaign theme of regime continuity for further economic and infrastructure development, political stability, consolidating a strong State and personal gratitude for winning the war against the LTTE does not seem to have led to the much public excitement.

The old and cerebral slogans so far deployed in the UPFA campaign show that Rajapaksa and his camp are running short of new political ideas that can move the electorate, or even simply help retain its voter base.(Uyangoda,2014) Meanwhile, what largely remains as the greatest electoral strength of Rajapaksa is his personal appeal to the largely Sinhalese electorate. (Uyangoda,2014). The old and cerebral slogans so far deployed in the UPFA campaign show that Rajapaksa and his camp are running short of new political ideas that can move the electorate, or even simply help retain its voter base.

The people have taken part in the election campaign overwhelmingly and enthusiastically though it was entirely free and fair, and peaceful or democratic. Participation in the election was very high at 70 percent. There was a significant turnout by voters in the north and east province of Sri Lanka where minorities are predominant.

However, some leading small parties and figures seem to have already positioned themselves against Rajapakse. The hardcore Buddhist Party, Jathika Hela Urumaya, and the Peoples' Liberation Front (erstwhile Janatha Vimukti Peramuna) are already lined up against Rajapakse. A more active involvement of former president Chandrika Kumaratunga in the campaign may be a game changer.

The contest in the Sinhala south was mainly between Rajapaksa's (UPFA) and the (UNFGG), led by Rani Wickremesinghe. While both the UNFGG and UPFA had many differences, they categorically rejected the TNA demands for both a federal constitution and international accountability for Tamil minority grievances. During the election campaign, the UNF targeted Rajapaksa's personality, his style of governance and the abuses that took place under his administration. The UNF also effectively used the fear of the possibility of returning to the era of darkness to its advantage (Keethaponkalan, S.I., 2015)

Voting Patten

Out of declared, the election produced hung parliament; the UNP and its allies with 106 seats, the UPFA, and allies with 95 TNA 16, JVP 06 and others 02 seats. The results in terms of votes cast for the main parties by electoral districts shown below indicate a hung parliament. It is generally acknowledged that the proportional representation electoral system reduces UNP lead coalition majorities and often leads to minority governments. The 2015 election results gave the UNP alliance overall victory with 106 seats with the national list but fell short of a clear majority to form a government in the 225 member Parliament. This was certainly a substantial increase in terms of the number of seats 106 obtained by the UNP when compared with its previous performance as the UNP (i.e., UNP and Allies) gaining 60 seats in 2010 (Table:1). The improved performance in 2010 of the UNP and Allies is also shown in figure 1 which compares the performance of the two main party coalitions over two elections between 2010 and 2015. This was a scenario predicted by many analysts. Under the existing system of proportional representation and in the present balance of

political forces in the country, no party or coalition could get a working majority unless there was a massive wave of support, as in 2010 when the Mahinda Rajapaksa-led United Peoples' Freedom Alliance (UPFA) coalition won the election with just a few seats short of the two-thirds majority. That was under unusual circumstances of the Rajapaksa government having won the war against the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE). (The Hindu, 2015)

Table: 1 Parliamentary Election Results in 2015 and 2010

2015

2010

Party	Votes	Votes%	Seats	Votes	Votes%	Seats
UNP	5,098,927	45.66	106	2,357,057	29.34	60
UPFA	4,732,669	42.38	95	4,846,388	60.33	144
TNA	515,963	04.62	16	233,190	02.90	14
JVP	543,944	04.87	06			
SLMC	44,193	0.40	01			
EPDP	33,481	0.30	01			

Source: Virakasari Weekly (Tamil News Paper), 2015.08.23

Official results showed that although the ruling United National Party (UNP) fell just short of an outright parliamentary majority, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will still command enough support to form a stable government. The UNP won 45.66 percent of the vote, or about 106 seats - just shy of an 113-seat majority. The main opposition garnered 42.38 percent or 95 seats. Whilst the latest win for the UNP over the UPFA is comparatively slight, the reality is that between 2010 and 2015, the UNP has increased the number of seats from 60 to 106 and the total vote from 29.34% to 46% of the total polled, whilst the UPFA has been reduced to 95 seats from 144, and the total vote from 60.33% to 42.38%.

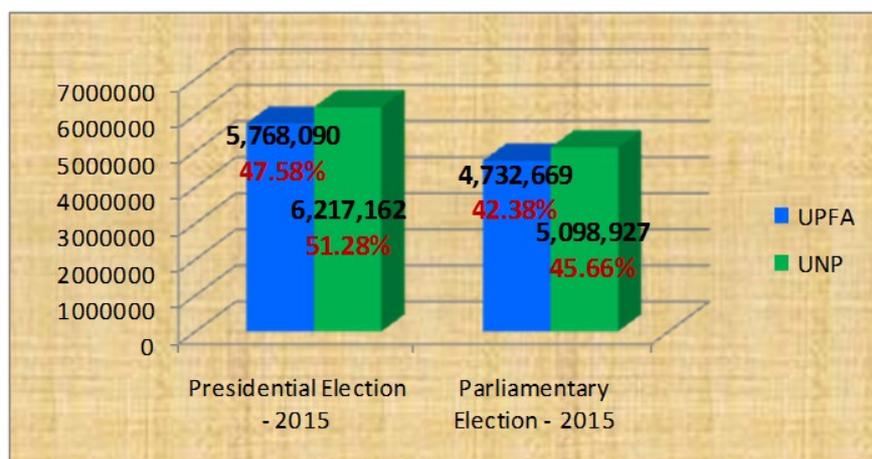


Figure: 1 Performance of UPFA and UNP in the Presidential and Parliamentary Election in 2015

At the presidential election of January 8th, the UPFA got 5.8 million votes. At the August 17th parliamentary election, the UPFA could score only 4.7 million votes. At the presidential election, the UPFA obtained 47.58% of the national vote; at the parliamentary election its national average went down to 42.38%. That's a rate of decrease as high as 10.9% in just seven months. It will be seen from Figure 1 that the difference between the main two parties in terms of the total votes cast was small (45.66% for UNP as against 42.38% for UPFA). In terms of elected seats (Table 1) the UNP obtained 106 seats as against 95 by the UPFA including national seats also.

The most significant aspect of the election results was the increased vote for the TNA of 04.62% (Table 1) as compared with their performance at the 2010 parliament election gained 02.90% votes (see Table 1). This strong showing gave the TNA a total of 16 seats. Its main stronghold was in the Northern Province, where it was gained 9 out of 13 seats. The TNA was becoming major as a 'third force' with the potential to form a government to either of the main parties their choice.

There was a reduction of voter turnout of the general election 2015 which was 77.6%, compared to the voter turnout of the presidential election 2015 which was 81.52%. It was stated by many that this election was the freest and fairest election held under the second republican Constitution. The credit should go to the new government policy of good governance.

In the 2015 general election, the UNP was able to carry decisively won 11 electoral districts, mainly substantial minorities living in the district such as Colombo, Gampaha, Puttalam, Kekalla, Kandy, Matala, Nuwaralia, Badulla, Ampara and Trincomalee, all of which heavily reflect the minorities such as Muslim, Christian, and Indian Tamil. The regional pattern of voting for the 2015 general election is depicted in Figure 2. The green color shows except Polanaruwa District, that UNP and its alliance won the electoral district where substantial minorities are living in the constituency while blue color shows that the distinct predominantly Buddhist Sinhalese and won by UPFA.

At the district level, the voting pattern of overwhelmingly Buddhist Sinhalese was different. In the district of Galle, Matara, Hambantota, Ratnapura, Kaluthura, Kurunagala, Monaragala, and Anuradhapura went decisively favor of the UPFA; gained 42 out of the 74 seats. The southern voters a most nationalist pro-Rajapakshe voter- also provided substantial evidence of the influence of his personality.

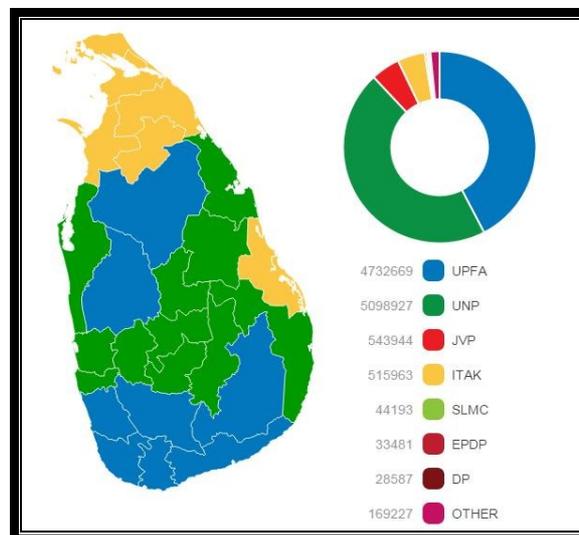


Figure: 2 Party Performances in the Electoral District of Sri Lanka

The charismatic and pro-nationalist skill displayed by Mahinda to inspire voter confidence and respect him as so-called “war hero”, including he concluded protracted war against LTTE. And also he was not just leader of the SLFP but the unchallengeable leader of the UPFA alliance. Mahinda Rajapakshe potency is a derivative of his war victory over the LTTE, a political achievement that he could certainly claim uniqueness to win the election. But equally certainly that singular achievement did not give him the license to turn postwar Sri Lanka. Hence failing to build on postwar promises and for trying to indefinitely entrench himself in power.

Using the results of the General election, the present analysis examines a few key aspects of the electoral landscape for the parliamentary elections. These include shifts in voter turnout, the shifts in vote share between the UPFA and UNP, the significance of minority voters, voted for UNP and the declining electoral draw of the Rajapaksa name and development rhetoric. According to Dr. Keethaponkalan a political analysis “.It was increasingly becoming clear for example in 2014 that Rajapaksa and his government were growing unpopular especially among minority communities. Tamils, of course, disliked Rajapaksa. The Muslims were also becoming wary of his attitude. With limited support within the Sinhala-Buddhist constituency and almost no support within the two major minority communities”. (Keethaponkalan,2015). This failure has now become clear even in districts where the UPFA won comfortably. In almost all those districts, the UPFA’s share of votes has been reduced and some have shifted to the UNP. In the final count, the total number of votes that the UPFA could get is a little over 4.73 million, a significant drop from 5.79 million votes which Mr. Rajapaksa polled as the presidential candidate, just seven months ago.

The Sri Lankan parliamentary poll results have shown that the voters have rejected divisive politics and authoritarianism by electing Ranil Wickremesinghe. Sri Lankan voters have dealt a decisive blow to the comeback ambitions of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who ran the island nation people in authoritarian style for a decade. (srilankabrief,2015) The message is the defeat of former President Mahinda Rajapakse rather than the victory of the UNP-led coalition. Rajapakse's bid for a return despite his humiliating defeat in the Presidential elections has been foiled. The majority of Sri Lankan voters reaffirmed the choice they had made in January when they voted in President Maithripala Sirisena and rejected the siren call of narrow ethnic-based nationalism. (Jehan Perera, 2015) Their rejection of his bid for the premiership almost certainly ends his chances of leading the country again; however voters have not given a decisive mandate to the UNP-led coalition.

The irony of this is that Mahinda Rajapaksa actually got the majority of Sinhala votes in the south notwithstanding the fact that Sinhala voters were also disappointed in the regime for different reasons.

Several experts explained that the voting pattern at district level suggest that the prejudiced, pro-Sinhala Nationalist campaign of the UPFA failed to draw any substantial response from voters in the overwhelmingly Sinhalese-dominated districts. The prejudiced campaign by UPFA failed to enthuse the average Sinhalese voters, who were very enthused with Mahinda who won the protracted war against LTTE, and did not wish to be continually reminded of family rules, repression, and corruption.

In this context, Jehan Perera, Executive Director of Colombo-based National Peace Council (NPC), added that the election results closely resembled those of the presidential vote. "They reflected the anxieties of the ethnic and religious minorities about the conduct of the previous Rajapaksa government. While his coalition won in the predominantly Sinhalese rural and suburban areas, it lost heavily wherever there was an ethnically mixed population," (www.dw.com,2015)

Jayadeva Uyangoda, a Sri Lanka-based political scientist, and constitutional expert explained that the UPFA campaign relied exclusively on the support of majority Sinhalese-Buddhist voters and offered no new ideas "except for the necessity to bring Rajapaksa back - the 'strong' and 'macho' ruler," (www.dw.com,2015)

The political analyst also stressed that the results simply reflected the desire of a majority of Sri Lankans to be "in a country governed by the rule of law, and not 'the rule of one man,' which it became under Rajapaksa."

A disturbing feature of the UPFA performance has been an erosion of the support base enjoyed by the UPFA among the minorities. The UPFA lost support in electorates where substantial minorities mix with majority Sinhalese, and there was also a dispersion of Muslim vote. The election has brought changes that present a complex political landscape; the post-poll electoral map showed that Rajapaksa had lost support from the minorities, who mainly voted for the UNP, which led over through Rajapaksa regime while the majority Sinhalese electorate was divided between the two mainstream parties which have traditional constituencies.

However, his vacillation in handling some sensitive issues in respect of minority religions in the previous three years cost him around half a million Muslim votes. With that alone, he would have won the 2015 presidential election. It was clear that not only Muslims but Tamils as well as Christians voted almost en masse for Maithripala Sirisena at the January 8 presidential election, leading to the collapse of the Rajapaksa regime considered by many as invincible. (Ayub.M.S,2015). The Muslims, who suffered the most relentless attacks in recent years, backed the UNP to ensure the UPFA's defeat. The up-country Tamils, in turn, for the first time voted out the CWC to open the space for a new politics in their region.

This defeat of UPFA leads by Mahinda will be the end of a decade that steered the country towards increasing militarization and polarization for the singular goal of consolidating one regime's political and economic power. The minority vote played a decisive role in UPFA defeat. That was the truth, but not the whole truth. UPFA and the Mahinda Rajapaksa lost not just because he failed to gain the support of minority communities, but also because they failed to retain the support of the majority community.

According to a political analyst Laksiri Fernando..... former president Mahinda Rajapaksa failed to raise the Sinhala (racial) card sufficiently at the presidential elections in January, for some reason, it was abundantly marketed during the parliamentary elections in August... Yet he failed. The whole 'bring back Mahinda' movement was based on such a parochial nationalist sentiment. It is true that the UPFA gathered around 4.7 million votes and 95 seats in Parliament. However, it was nearly a million drop from 5.8 at the presidential elections. The results clearly indicated that within the last 9 years, Rajapakse's popularity had rapidly eroded and his much talked about 5.8 million voter base had reduced by one million.(Rasika Jayakody,2015)

Moreover, the whole of UPFA votes or seats were not for Mahinda or 'ethnonationalism.' There were other issues and factions involved. What is important at this stage is the general trend/s which needs to be properly cultivated further in the future.(Laksiri Fernando,2015). And also General Election, the UPFA, fighting under the MR pennant, polled a total of 4.7 m votes. That deficit, surely, was entirely from the Sinhala-Buddhist vote bank which, for more than a decade, Rajapaksa had manipulated so successfully.(Anura Gunasekera,2015)

According to Rajan Philips, in the August parliamentary election, the Rajapaksa forces upped the nationalist ante and campaigned to win a majority of parliamentary seats with the votes of the Sinhala Buddhists only. They lost again, polling a million votes less than in January. But there has not been any blame game after the August election unlike in January. The ultra-nationalists in the south who were once sponsored by the Rajapaksa regime were decimated. Extreme appeals to nationalism failed to get traction in the elections not only among the Sinhalese in the south but also in the North and East among the Tamils and Muslims. It is fair to say that the double blow against nationalism in the south and in the north was occasioned by the politics of good governance.(Rajan Philips,2015).

Table: 2 General Election 2015, District wise Result

District	UNP	UPFA	TNA	JVP	SLMC	EPDP
Colombo	11	7		1		
Gampaha	9	8		1		
Kalutara	4	5		1		
Mahanuwara	7	5				
Matale	3	2				
Nuwara Eliya	5	3				
Galle	4	6				
Matara	3	5				
Hambantota	2	4		1		
Jaffna	1		5			1
Vanni	1	1	4			
Batticaloa	1		3		1	
Digamadulla	4	2	1			
Trincomalee	2	1	1			
Kurunegala	7	8				
Puttalam	5	3				
Anuradhapura	4	5				
Polonnaruwa	3	2				
Badulla	5	3				
Monaragala	2	3				
Ratnapura	5	6				
Kegalle	5	4				
TOTAL	93	83	14	4	1	1

Conclusion

The past two elections raise the question of whether the era of Mahinda dominance at the center is over. Besides this election result is a victory for the good governance and democracy in Sri Lanka and victory against totalitarianism and muscular Sinhalese nationalism was defeated at the polls in Sri Lanka. This victory proved the power of the people in democratic states and would mark the dawn of new era of good governance and democracy in Sri Lanka. The peoples of this country have clearly articulated – at not one; but two elections – that they no longer want any part of the racist and totalitarianism and hoping to bring regime change through votes to achieve the good governance.

Parliamentary elections allowed voters to renew January's "good governance" mandate, but there are no guarantees of a decisive outcome and broad-based government. Mahinda Rajapaksa's re-entry to parliament as a member could give him the significant power to complicate a UNP-led government's ability to handle the deep problems Sri Lanka faces: on corruption and rule of law, on demilitarization, reconciliation and a negotiated settlement of the ethnic conflict, on accountability and the economy. However, corruption, impunity, and good governance are very high on the public agenda. , the new government needs to begin providing clear indications of plans for addressing issues. The minority Ranil government is technically not a coalition, but to survive it must work our quasi-coalitional arrangement with the major opposition.

Further, the UNP's parliamentary victory reflects the people's demand for more change and the continuation of a reform program that began in January 2015. It thus opens the door to greater stability and the implementation of more meaningful reforms, although the road ahead is far from certain.

Moreover, the election and the parliament it produces hung will be crucial, but equally important is the character of the campaign and strength of nationalist voices. While the UNP led coalition has defended itself strongly against Rajapaksa's and the UPFA's charges of supporting separatism and terrorism, and got unclear a popular mandate a UNP government would have to pursue the reforms necessary to reconciliation.

While the UNP still remained vulnerable in the areas dominated by Buddhist Sinhalese especially southern and northwestern part of Sri Lanka, where they are still supporting to the so-called war hero Rajapaksa. By contrast, the UPFA suddenly appeared to be a rudderless party which had lost its confident sense of being the party for a dominant party for the rule. For a party which, its inception follows good policy to integrate people of Sri Lanka, and its campaign performance on minorities' issues and handle of minorities problems in the 2010s received a savage indictment from a mature and discriminating political electorate.

Moreover, the muscular nationalism Rajapaksa cultivated among majority Sinhalese still poses a potentially serious challenge to reforming ambitions. It will be hard, to achieve political reforms to address the legacy of conflict with minority without securing majority – Sinhalese – support for them.

In the general election, ordinary voters of Sri Lanka had done their responsibility. They resisted the deadly appeal of ethnoreligious racism, rejected to succumb to tedious terror and voted with accountability and maturity. In the North and in the South they voted for good governance as Sri Lankan. And also the Lankan electorate, in a reflection of its long democratic tradition voted prudently to reject polarization and narrow nationalism and reinforce the process of democratization that began with the presidential elections in January 2015.

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