



**Main Features of
Provincial Councils**

Provincial Councils (PCs) were established in 1987, through the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. This resulted mainly from minority Tamil community demands for decentralizing and devolving political power.

Term limit:
5 years

Voting System:
Based on a preferential voting system where electors first choose the party, and then select up to three candidates from the party.

Seat Assignment:
Based on a system of proportional representation. Each party gets seats in proportion to the votes received. The party with the highest number of votes gets 2 bonus seats in addition.

Merger and demerger:
The North and East consisted of a single merged PC July 1987 until January 2007 when the Councils were de-merged by court order. The first Eastern PC election was held in 2008. An election has not been held for the Northern PC

Sri Lanka Provincial Council Elections 2012

Event

The government prematurely dissolved the Provincial Councils (PCs) and call elections in the North Central, Sabaragamuwa and the Eastern Province on 8 September 2012 was controversial several reasons:

(1) A general view that piecemeal elections unduly favour the government, given the context that, though illegal, in practice public property and resources are extensively used to support the governing party.

(2) The elections were being called prematurely in the Eastern Province, while elections were NOT being called in the Northern Province – which has never had a PC election.

Significance

For the government the Sabaragamuwa and North Central Province elections were important as a bellwether of the political sentiment amongst the majority Sinhala population.

Separately, the Eastern Province elections were important to demonstrate significant support within a mixed-ethnic province. For the TNA and SLMC, (the main Tamil and Muslim parties) the elections were a test of their continued relevance and grassroots mobilisation capacity.

Analysis

The results suggest that the government's popularity is on the wane from its high in the early 2010-2011 period. However, it still dominated the North Central Province despite droughts and associated discontents and its decline in vote share was strongly significant only in the Eastern Province.

There is a definite uptick in the UNP vote shares in the North Central and Sabaragamuwa Province, but not enough to be a serious threat to the dominance of the UPFA. There are also signs that candidates closely associated with the UNP leader have lost popularity. In the Eastern Province, the UNP also declined in vote share, and the TNA posted record gains.

2012 Elections

Number of Parties:

In total, 24 registered parties submitted their nominations to different districts in the provinces for the 2012 elections

This included major parties such as the UPFA, United National Party (UNP), United People’s Freedom Alliance (UNFP), United National Party (UNP), Janatha Vimukthi Permauna (JVP).

In addition, Eksath Lanka Maha Saba and Sri Lanka Labour Party have also fielded their candidates in all seven districts in the three provinces.

Cost of Election:

According to the Elections Commissioner, the estimated cost to elect 108 public representatives to the three provincial councils was Rs. 600 million (the estimate has not been accepted by the government).

The Eastern Province elections were keenly contested, with some evidence of increased ethnic based voting patterns and no party gaining an absolute majority.

Sinhala votes in the Trincomalee district have shifted from the JVP to the more extreme Nationalist party, the NFF. Over all, the JVP shows a declining trend in its vote share across all provinces.

The UPFA’s coalition strategy shows a shift, with a preference for ex-post rather than ex-ante coalitions; with ex-ante election campaigns of the would be coalition partners being free to appeal to contradictory voting blocks by taking positions that are even strongly critical of the UPFA. The SLMC and the CWC (which formed an alliance with the opposition DPF) were prime examples of this strategy in the present election.

I. Eastern Province

Because of the ethnic mix and the strong minority vote bases, no single party was expected to get an absolute majority in the Eastern PC election – making it the most keenly contested of the three PC elections.

Ethnic Mix

The Eastern Province consists of three districts: Digamadulla (Ampara), Batticaloa, and Trincomalee.

The 2007 estimates of the ethnic mix in the demography shows the district as having almost an equal number of Tamil and Muslim voters at 39 and 38 percent respectively, and the Sinhala voters accounting for about 22 percent. (Table 1).

Table 1: Ethnic ratios of population in Eastern Province, by District

District	Registered voters	Muslim	Tamil	Sinhala
Digamadulla (Ampara)	441,287	44%	18%	38%
Batticaloa	347,099	25%	74%	< 1%
Trincomalee	245,363	45%	29%	25%

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka

Table 2: Seats won and proportion of votes by political party

Party	Digamadulla		Batticaloa		Trincomalee		Province	
	Seats won	Vote %	Seats won	Vote %	Seats won	Vote %	Seats total	Vote %
UPFA	5	33.66	4	31.17	3	28.38	14*	31.58
ITAK (TNA)	2	16.28	6	50.83	3	29.08	11	30.59
SLMC	4	30.43	1	11.21	2	17.15	7	20.98
UNP	3	17.47	0	1.18	1	16.01	4	11.82
NFF					1	6.24	1	1.50

*UPFA won 12 seats, and also received 2 bonus seats for achieving the highest number of votes.

Trend Analysis

Figure 1 shows the popularity of each party at elections over the years in the Eastern PC

- *UPFA*

At the 2008 PC election the UPFA received more than 50% of the vote – with ex-LTTE cadres fielded as candidates that attracted the Tamil vote. The TNA did not contest and the UNP contested in alliance with the SLMC. Subsequent elections have seen the UPFA vote share decline. The present low of 31.6 percent suggests a steep erosion of popularity in the last two years.

- *ITAK (TNA)*

The TNA has shown a strong increase in its popularity since the general elections in 2010. (The low voteshare in the Local government election of 2011 results from the party not contesting in Muslim dominated areas). Its strongest showing (with just over 50 percent of voteshare) is in the Tamil dominated district of Batticaloa.

- *SLMC*

The SLMC contested in alliance with the UNP up to the 2010 general elections. Its voteshare has increased from 16 to 20 percent between the LG elections in 2011 and the present PC elections.

- *UNP*

Has lost voteshare since the LG elections by almost as much as the SLMC has gained. The SLMC and the UNP votes added up, however, is now much greater, at 33 percent, than the 26 percent received when contesting as an alliance at the general elections. Yet, the vote share is also much lower than the 42 in the 2008 Provincial Council Elections.

Increased ethnic based voting

The UNP and UPFA decline indicates a decrease in minority community votes (Muslim and Tamil respectively) to the two largest national political parties. The TNA's vote share in Trincomalee exceeds the ratio of the Tamil population: the likely explanation is an attraction of Muslim votes as well by the TNA in Trincomalee.

The importance of being 1% ahead

In the overall result UPFA received almost one third of the vote squeezing ahead of the TNA by just 6,217 votes (less than 1% of the total votes cast). According to the rules, this won the party two bonus seats. If the lead was reversed TNA would have had 13 seats as against a UPFA 12. (Table 2).

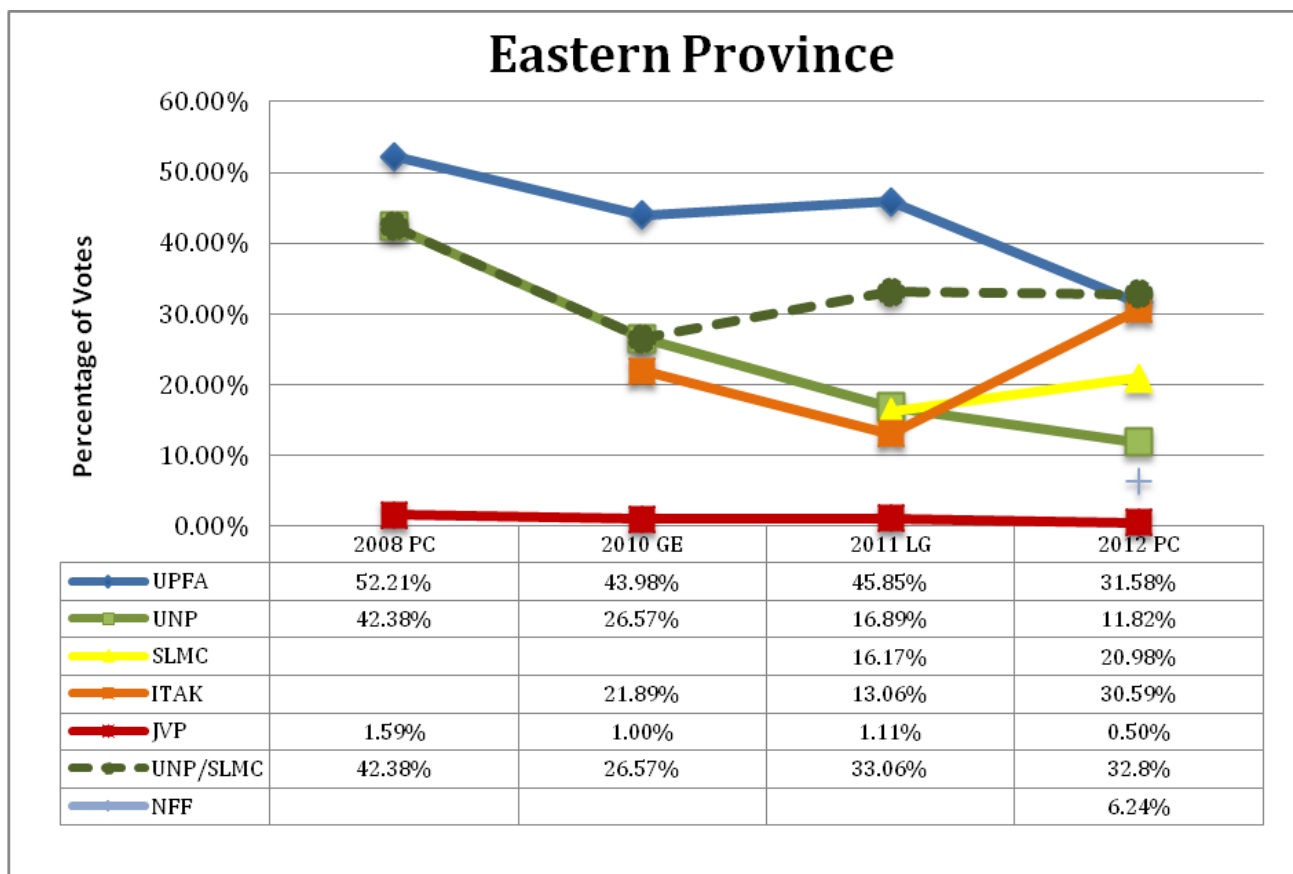


Figure 1: Eastern Province Electoral Trends 2008 to 2012

UPFA vote in Batticaloa

The UPFA received 64,190 votes (31 percent) in Batticaloa where the Sinhala population is less than 1 percent – demonstrating that it could still tally-up a large minority vote. The highest preference votes in Batticaloa for the UPFA were counted as 22,338, for Sivanesathurai Santhirakanthan (popularly known as Pillayan) – who was the incumbent Chief Minister, of Tamil Ethnicity. However the second, third, fourth and fifth highest preference votes were counted for Muslim candidates of the UPFA, receiving 21271, 20407, 17903, and 11517 votes respectively.

The numbers suggest that Tamil votes to the UPFA were incumbency related and that the UPFA enjoys more support from the Muslim population rather than the Tamil population in Batticaloa.

NFF Strikes out in Trincomalee

The NFF was a dark horse and the one seat it won was unexpected. It is powered by Minister Wimal Weerawansa, formally JVP, and now with the government. It takes a more extreme Nationalistic position than the JVP. The area in Trinco that voted for the NFF was formerly a JVP stronghold.

By this move, the NFF has sent a message to its coalition partner, SLFP, that it is ready to compete as an independent party and even challenge the governing party on an ultra-nationalist platform. (The UPFA refused to include the NFF candidate Mr. Wijesekara in its nomination list).

JVP retreat

The particular candidate who won in the NFF, Mr. Jayantha Wijesekara, is a well-known Sinhalese political figure. He has been hailed by supporters as one who once pulled down the LTTE flag in Trincomalee District. He has

played a prominent role in JVP politics and lately broke away and joined the NFF. This is a case in point of JVP's drawback as a populist third force in Sinhala politics

Local Votes – Central Bargaining

The SLMC's final choice to enter an alliance with the government in the Eastern Province was curious. Given that it campaigned on platform strongly critical of government and received from the TNA a more beneficial offer in term of a Chief Ministerial position. This might be a case in which votes of the Province were used to bargain for Ministerial powers and privileges at the center rather than in the Province – a curious inversion of the democratic intent of devolved power.

II. Sabaragamuwa Province

The Sabaragamuwa Province consists of the districts of Ratnapura and Kegalle. The Sinhala population is about 86.5 percent. The Tamil population is mainly classified as “Indian Tamil” mostly functioning as plantation labour (7 percent) and those classified as “Sri Lankan Tamil” is about 2.5 percent. The Muslim population accounts for about 4 percent.

Two mainstream parties dominated the Sabaragamuwa Provincial elections: UPFA, UNP. The province also featured the lowest voter turnout rates, with Ratnapura District recording turnout of less than 40%. The average turnout rates in the other provinces were between 55% and 60%.

Trend Analysis:

Figure 2 shows the vote shares at elections since 2008 in the Sabaragamuwa PC:

- *UPFA:*

The UPFA coalition in the province has always included the SLMC, except in the local government elections of 2011 – where the SLMC votes were negligible in any case. At the 2010 general election the UPFA peaked with a vote share of 67%. Despite the declining trend since, even at present, the vote share is higher than the 55% in 2008.

- *UNP:*

The UNP vote share in this province mirrors the UPFA. It bottoms out in 2010 and shows an increasing trend (now exceeding one third of the vote) and yet behind its high of forty percent in 2008.

- *CWC/DPF:*

the CWC has been in alliance with the government in the last two elections. But it broke ranks ex-ante this time to contest with the Democratic Peoples Front (DPF) and the Up Country Peoples Front (UPF). The strategy proved successful exclusively for the CWC with both the candidates elected on the combined ticket being from the party (by getting the highest number of preferential votes).

- *JVP:*

The JVP which has only been a minor party in the province – with the highest vote share of 3 percent in 2010, shows the same trend as the UPFA, with an important difference. Its present vote share at less than 1.5 percent is even less than that of 2008, and has caused the party to lose significance as a political opposition.

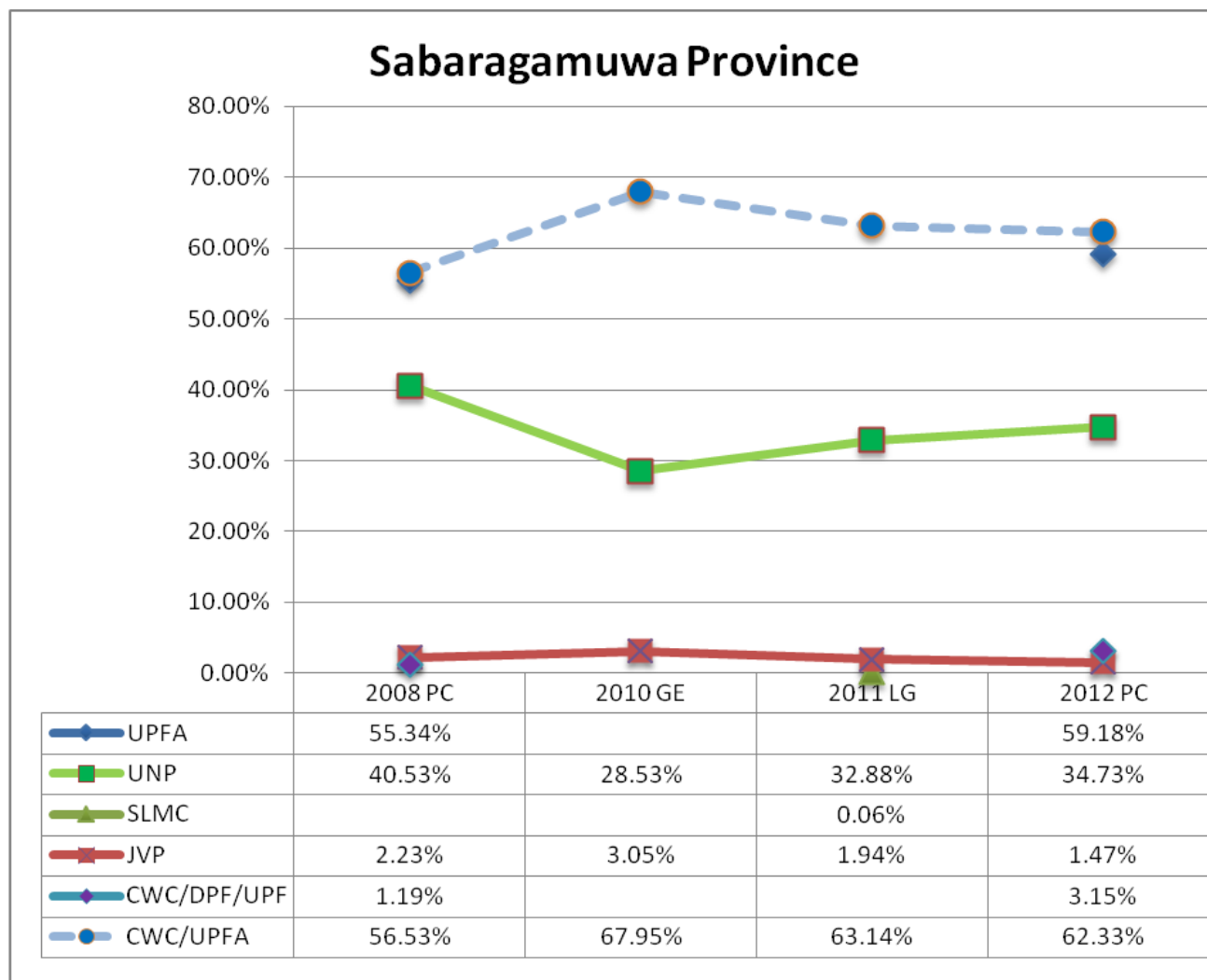


Figure 2: Sabaragamuwa Province Electoral Trends 2008 to 2012

New Coalition Strategy of the UPFA

It was a notable feature the PC elections that coalition partners of the UPFA such as the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), Communist Party, Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) perceived their chances to be stronger if they contested as independent parties; rather than coming on the UPFA ticket.

The CWC formed a new alliance with Democratic People's Alliance (DPF), led by Mano Ganesan, which is very critical of the government on issues of human rights and a political solution for the minorities. The SLMC contesting on its own made it a campaign strategy to strongly criticize the government and attract the anti-government Muslim vote.

It would seem that voters are susceptible to being somewhat misled by being attracted to the minor parties on the basis of ex-ante differences with and opposition to the government, and then having their votes used to create an ex-poste alliance with the government.

III. The North Central Province

The North Central Province consists of the districts of Anuradhapura and Pollonaruwa. The demographic of the province is about 90 percent Sinhala and about 8 percent Muslim. The province recorded average voter turnout rates between 55%-60%.

Trend Analysis

Figure 3 shows the vote shares at elections since 2008 in the Sabaragamuwa PC:

- **UPFA:**
 Apart from the local government elections in 2011, the UPFA alliance has included the SLMC in every election. In 2011 local government election the UPFA peaked with a vote share of 68% (contesting even without the SLMC). Despite the declining since the vote share remains higher than the 55% in 2008.
- **UNP:**
 The UNP with 35 percent has recorded a sharp increase of its vote share since the elections of 2010-2011 and approaching the high of 37 percent in 2008.
- **JVP:**
 The JVP which peaked at 4.9 percent of vote share at the 2008 PC elections has been in decline since to 2.9 percent at present.

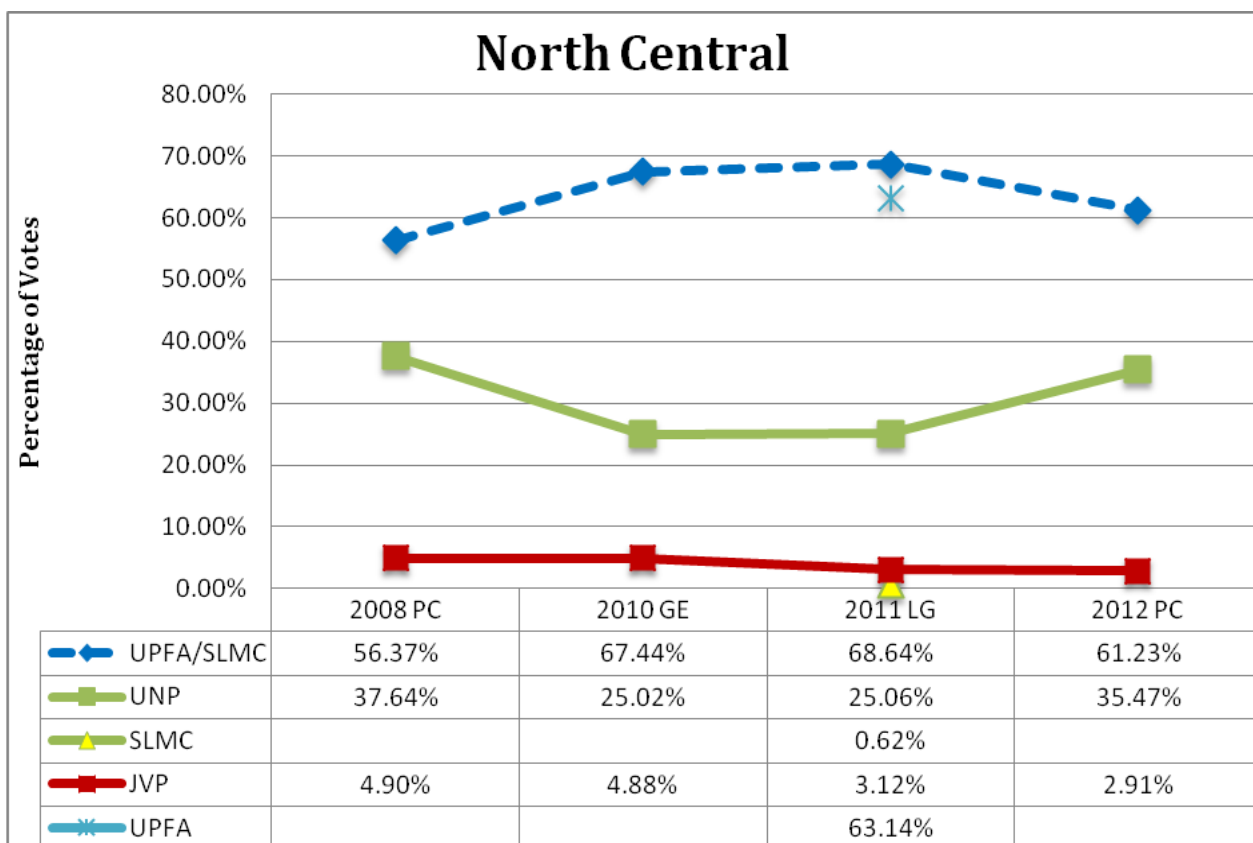


Figure 3: North Central Province Electoral Trends 2008 to 2012

Recent History of Provincial Elections in Sri Lanka

The first Provincial council elections were held in 1988 in seven provinces.

The United National Party won control of all seven provinces.

The fifth round of Provincial Council elections was held in 2008/2009 in 8 provinces. The UPFA won control of all eight provinces.

In June 2012, the Sabaragamuwa, North Central and Eastern provincial councils were prematurely dissolved and fresh elections were called.

Sabaragamuwa and North Central provincial council terms were to end in September 2013; the Eastern provincial council term was to end in April 2013.

Dynamics of UNP improvement

While the party increased its voteshare, its primary candidate, former opposition leader of the Province Mr. Kasthuri Anuradhanayake, lost his seat.

Mr. Anuradhanayake has been known as a close ally of the opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe during the leadership struggles of the party, and been publicly criticised for that by his fellow provincial councilors. His defeat therefore is a step back for the party leader, even while the UNP itself has forged ahead.

Dynamics of UPFA decline

The political climate of the two Districts in the North-Central Province – Polonnaruwa and Anuradhapura has recently been charged by a series of protest campaigns of farmers whose cultivations were affected by the drought.

The Government initiated various programmes of compensations, and provided water pumps to farmers to offset the displeasure. The governments decline therefore must be read within these special circumstances, which were on the whole not favourable in terms of elections.

Authors:

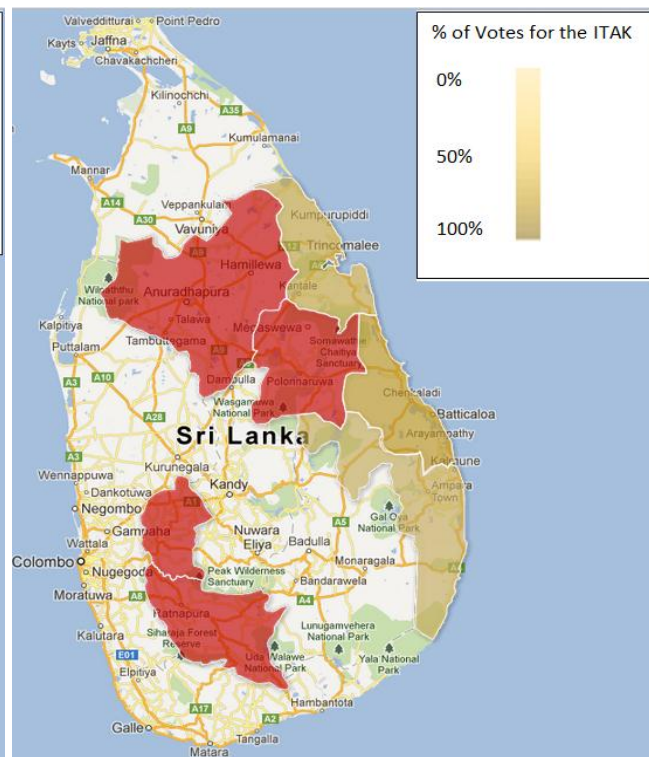
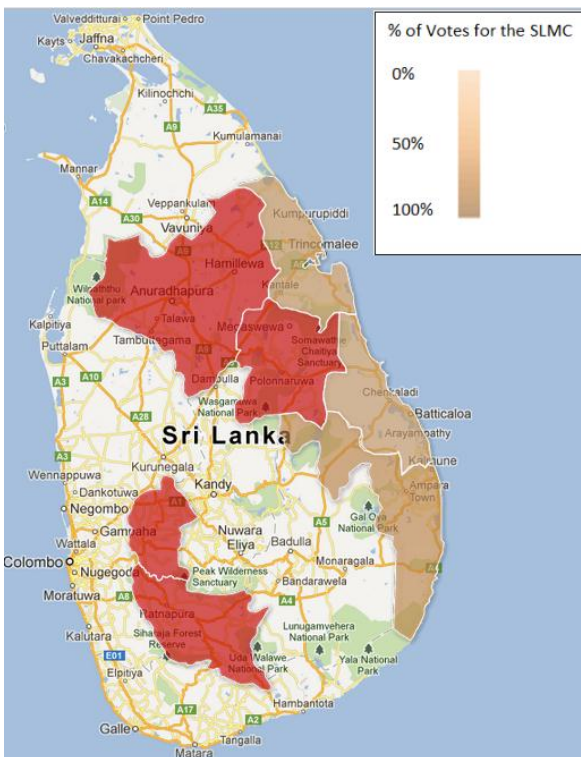
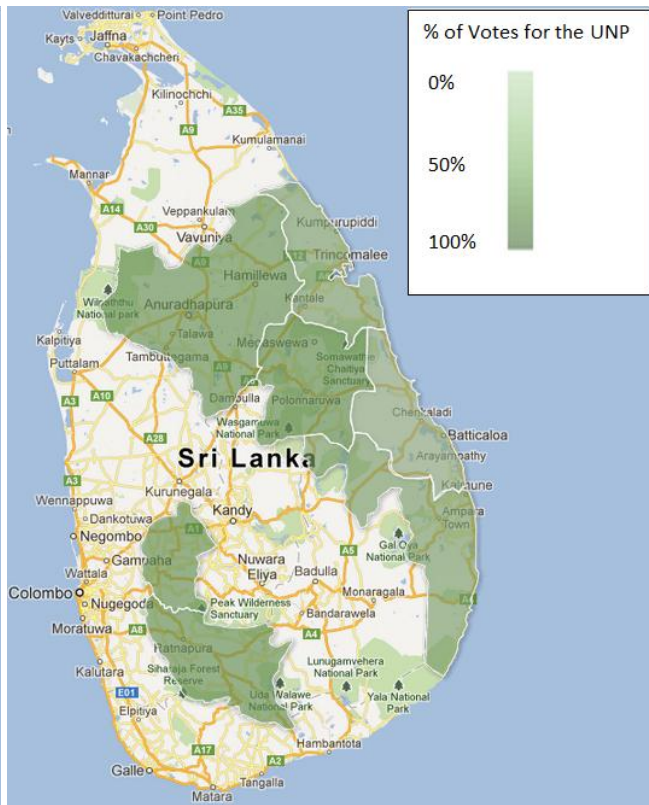
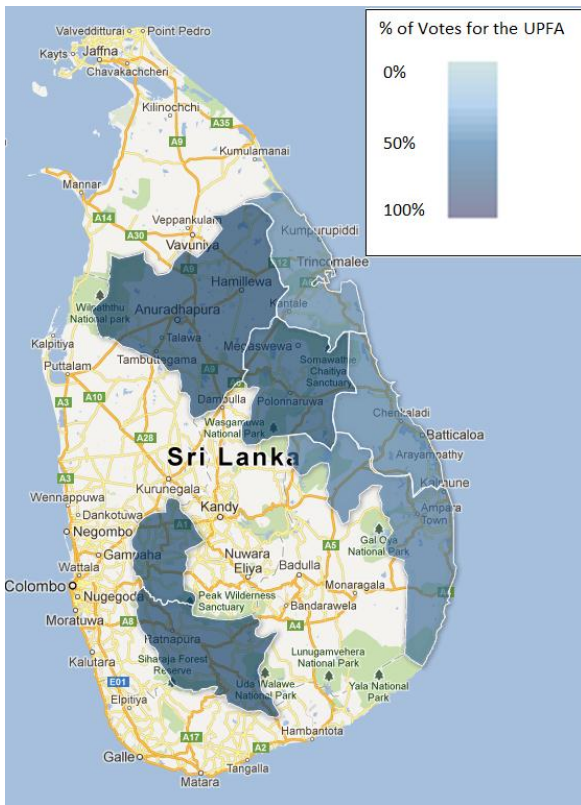
*Nishan de Mel
Sumith Chaaminda*

Contributors:

*Vidya Nathaniel
Navam Niles*

Layout:

Rumal Siriwardena



*the areas in red was not contested by the respective parties