

# The voting behaviour of youth in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

*In Sri Lanka today, representative democracy is being practised and the representatives are expected to abide by the mandate given by the people and the vision documents put forward by the respective parties at the election. Under the established democracy throughout the world voting plays a significant role. Voting behaviour among the different groups in society is dissimilar. There is no need to mention the vitality of the political behaviour of youth, as the problems of discontented youth of the main democratic system has already shown at two youth insurrections in 1971, and 1988-1989. The paper discusses some aspects of voting behaviour of the Sri Lankan youth based on a study conducted to identify "Attitudes of Youth towards Democratic Institutions in Sri Lanka", by the author. The Sri Lankan voting pattern has remained static for a long time. In spite of various difficulties with regard to voting, a considerable percentage of young people have kept a trust on the existing democratic system. The study proves that the young people of the country are not satisfied with the prevailing political status quo of the country. The political sociology is a very appropriate body of knowledge in understanding most of the Sri Lankan social phenomena. The youths tend to distrust the election process and tend to consider there is no value in the exercise of their voting. They tend to believe that the politicians have taken them for a ride. The paper aims to elaborate this view.*



## Introduction

The Sri Lankan society has undergone a very crucial time period in 1971 and 1988-1989 as a result of two insurrections led by the Peoples Liberation Front which is popularly known as Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the south. Furthermore currently the so-called "ethnic conflict" or the "terrorist movement" led by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) has also created havoc in the society. Whatever the causes for which they struggled, these movements have made known clearly the power and capacity of the young people of the country. And this has revealed their dissatisfaction towards the established political set up as well as the political process.

Under the practising *Representative Democracy* in Sri Lanka today, the representatives are expected to abide by the mandate given by the people referring to the policy and vision documents put forward by the respective parties at the elections. In this system the elections began to play a key role in facilitating people to cast their preferences. "Voting is the key mechanism of consensus in a democratic society" (Lipset 1966, p.30). The voting behaviour of the people can be studied with special reference to age distributions, gender, class, religion, ethnic, regions etc. The author is interested in studying the various aspects related to voting behaviour of youth. Voting is a unique decision. This decision is taken based on various grounds such as trust towards the political party or the politicians, the knowledge of the voter, the impact of the political campaigns, the nature of the election etc. This paper is based on a broader study conducted by the author to identify "*Attitudes of Youth towards Democratic Institutions in Sri Lanka*", using the financial assistance of the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, under the DYLP research fellowship.

## Research background

The Political Sociology is a very appropriate body of knowledge in understanding most of the Sri Lankan social phenomena. The essential concern of Political Sociology is an analysis of the conditions making for democracy (Lipset 1966, p.1). This aspect is considered from the very beginning of the study. There are no



adequate studies done here to understand the voting behaviour of people in general and youth in particular. In general, most of the developed countries conduct youth surveys annually whereas Sri Lanka finds it very difficult to complete its national census. The Shell Study in Germany is conducted annually. The author had a chance to read a copy of the thirteenth Shell Study and it really motivated him to do a study on youth and democratic institutions. The study has shown that the young people in Germany have lost their trust in the political hierarchy (Thomas 2000, p.7). There is a remarkable similarity between the political behaviour of youth in Germany and in Sri Lanka. According to observations most of the Sri Lankan youth rejected politics and they separated themselves from democratic institutions. According to the 1991 study, the interest of youth in politics was 57% and it had come down to 43% in the 1999 Shell Study. Studies have found out that "young people's distance from politics depended upon whether or not they believed they could cope with their future" (Thomas 2000, p. 7). The increasing negative attitude of youth was reflected in the decline of the election turnout of young Germans.

Zinnecker (1992) too has done a study on West German youth. There he has tried to compare youth of the 1950s with those of 1980s. His observations vary with those of the Shell Study. He found that the interests of youth in politics in the 1950s had increased by 1980s. Within this period the interest of women in politics had improved compared to those of males. According to him there was a certain development in the extent of opportunities to engage in politics available to the young people at that time period. There is a difference in the way the adults and young select parties which could be clearly seen in the 1980s (Zinnecker 1992).

It is shown by some studies conducted in the past that the youth of this country were not happy with the existing democratic institutions. According to the National Youth Survey conducted by the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo to which the author also contributed as a national coordinator and trainer of research assistants, in the year 2000, it appeared that a considerable percentage of youth favour communist/ socialist ideologies. Nearly 63% of youth favoured communist/ socialist ideology. In a way it could be interpreted as their willingness



towards democratic institutions of those ideologies. They liked the politicians and administrative method of a leftist inclination. 63% of youth felt that the use of violence was not the best approach for problem solving, while 31% of youth indicated that it was a suitable way. Nearly 72% of young respondents believed that our society is not just. It is very essential for a country to understand why youth think so, and what can be done to help youth to solve their problems using democratic means. 30% of the youth believed that their votes do not affect decision making in society. The above mentioned figures have clearly shown their lower confidence in democratic institutions of our country. The level of confidence in political parties was very low. The study showed that 48% of youth did not trust the political parties while 48% trusted them somewhat, only 4% of youth have a great deal of trust. The same attitudes of youth could be seen on the elected representatives to the parliament. (National youth survey; overview report 2000). This relates to the political culture of the country. Political culture can be discussed as a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to the political process and which provides the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system. It shows that the positive attitudes or trust of youth in democratic institutions has deteriorated gradually.

Chari (1994) discusses about institutionalising democracy in India. He concentrated on five areas such as political leadership, political parties, parliament, bureaucracy and the electoral process. He discusses how democracy was deteriorating in India. The main intention of the political parties is to get power and retain it by some means or other. He discusses the development of a corrupt nexus between politicians, criminal elements (smugglers, drug traffickers, arms dealers), pliable bureaucrats (police, customs and criminal officers), and crooked businessmen. According to observations, this situation is very similar to that of Sri Lanka. He has mentioned that political leadership does not hesitate to get support from anyone as long as it maximises the winning chances. Political parties should be broad enough to accommodate major social and economic interests. But it was not really happening in India. He discusses at length the institution of parliament. Just electing members of parliament does not assure the healthy functioning of the institution. Politicians should actively participate in decision-making; they



have to participate in discussions and debates actively. Some of the members of the parliament have not spoken for more than a few minutes in their entire five-year tenure (Chari 1994, p. 43). When he discusses about the electoral process he highlights the use of monetary and muscular power in winning voters, capturing and preventing voters in exercising their franchise. He stressed the need to eliminate these malpractices of the democratic institutions, which increase the frustration of the genuine voters. This situation is similar in Sri Lanka, absenteeism is high, and members of parliament do not actively participate in parliamentary debates, do not behave decently in the parliament, and do not follow the code of ethics in behaving inside the house. Politicisation and emasculation of the public services have deteriorated all other institutions in India. He says that democracy is decaying in India.

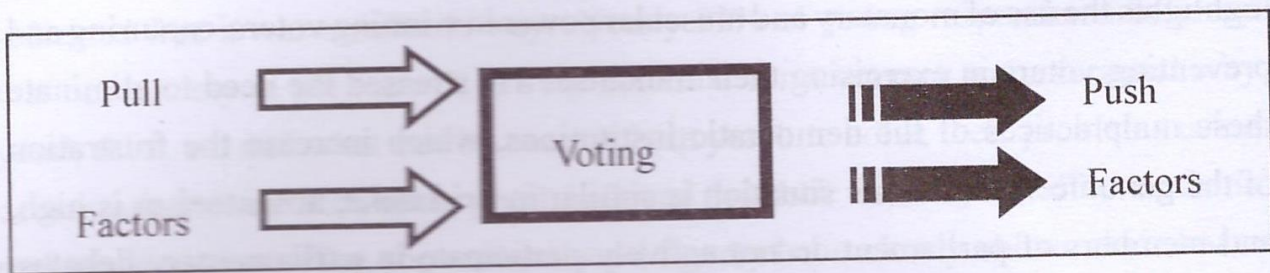
### **Conceptual explanation and theoretical milieu**

Voting behaviour is the decision-making process and the social factors influencing the patterns of voting. Studies on this subject has four main types. Among them focussing a particular category of voters such as youth is considered as one type of study. The analysis of voting patterns always focus on the determinants of why people vote as they do and how they arrive at the decision they make (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 1998).

The push and pull theory borrowed from the migration theory of demography has been used to identify the political behaviour of the youth. There are two factors that can be discussed principally, in the study. First, there are some factors that attract youth towards voting and politics while some factors that push sensitive youth away from voting and democratic institutions.



**Figure 1.1** Push factors and pull factors



The concept of political culture is also important in this context. Gabriel A. Almond says, "every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientation to political action" (Pye 1969, p. 7). According to him this gives a meaning to the polity, discipline to institutions, and social relevance to individual acts in an operating political system. The concept of political culture suggests that the traditions of a society, the spirit of its public institutions, the passion and the collective reasoning of a citizenry, and the style and operating codes of its leaders are not just random products of historical experience but fit together as a part of a meaningful whole and constitute an intelligible web of relations (Pye 1969, p.7). On the other hand, the political culture provides controlling guidelines for effective political behaviour, and for the collectively, it gives a systematic structure of values and rational consideration, which ensure coherence in the performance of instructions and organizations. Sidney Verba indicates the political culture in the last chapter of the book *Political Culture and Political Development* as, "consists of the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action take place" (Pye 1969, p.8). The political culture could be divided into two. They are the mass and elite political culture. In the light of the above, theoretical explanation of the political culture to the Sri Lankan situation can be understood. The existing political culture can create negative or positive concepts among the people about democratic institutions or democratic principles. This common opinion created by the existing political culture will act as either push or pull factor for voting.

The well-known Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto discussed the process of elite



circulation which really allows the qualified people to replace with those who occupy key positions in the society currently. This would really assure the socio-political stability of a country (Hettige 2005). We hardly see that this theory is valid to Sri Lanka as there are a lot of reported violence of post, pre and on the day of elections. When the ruling party estimates that they have no signs of winning in some electorates they tend to use their terror machine in order to assure that the candidate of the party is winning. On the one hand the business community predominantly considers the election as a way of showing their gratitude to the party or politicians on the one hand, and also it is an investment for them to get much benefit if the candidate or the party comes into power after the elections. This has improved the capacity of the politicians to mobilise the thugs and guarantee more votes for them using pressure on the voters.

### **Research problem**

This article is based on a part of a main study conducted to identify attitudes of young people towards democratic institutions. Identifying young people's attitudes towards electoral process, voting, party politics were also a part of the main study. This paper describes the various aspects concerning voting behaviour of young people in detail.

### **Research methodology**

Random sampling technique was used to select the youth for the study. The Assistant Divisional Secretariat (ADS) divisions for the study too were selected on a random basis in each district. After selecting ADS divisions, the villages and estates were chosen as a convenient sample. Twenty-five young people were included in the study from each location and five of them were interviewed in detail in order to get qualitative answers. The total sample of the survey was 692. The cluster method was used to select young people in each village. Twenty-two districts excluding Mannar, Killinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna were taken for the study. This study was conducted from September 2004 to October 2005. The



research consisted of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A questionnaire which included (both open-ended and close-ended) 123 questions was used. In this study, unmarried males and females within the age group of 18-32 years have been considered as youth.

### **Socio-economic background of the youth**

Youth from all the ethnic and religious groups participated for the study. There were 437 (63.2%) Sinhalese 142 (20.5%) Tamils, and 113 (16.3%) Muslims, in the sample. Both Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils were included to the sample. Tamils from Vavuniya, Batticaloa, Colombo, Kandy, Badulla, Nuwara Eliya represented the Tamil community. Muslims from the districts of Puttlam, Ampara, Kandy, Colombo, were taken for the study. Religious representation in the sample is also important for one to understand the ideas of the young people. There are 423 (61.1%) Buddhists, 124 (17.9%) Hindus, 114 (16.5%) Muslims, and 31 (4.5%) of Catholic young persons in the sample. Gender representation of ethnic groups was also interesting. There were 258 (37.3%) males and 179 (25.9%) females from Sinhalese, 79 (11.4%) males and 63 (9.1%) females from Tamils and 62 (9.0%) males and 51 (7.4%) females from Muslims.

The studied youth group has a fairly good educational background. 18.5% of them have studied up to the year 11 while 40.3% of youth have passed the G.C.E. O/L examination. 26.7% of young girls and boys have G.C.E. A/L qualifications and 10% of the sample has Degrees. Young people of the sample were found to be engaged in a lot of activities to earn their living. They were engaged in nearly 35 activities to find their income. There are 61 (8.8%) Teachers, 29 (4.2%) Farmers, 49 (6.9%) Computer operators/ Clerical staffs/Receptionists, 17 (2.5%) Garment factory machine operators, 50 (7.2%) Businessmen /Business women, 13 (1.9%) Technicians/ Motor mechanics, 10 (1.4%) Self-Employed people, 89 (12.9%) Students, 15 (2.2%) Watchers/ Labourers, 13 (1.9%) Drivers, 184 (26.65%) Unemployed persons in the youth group. The average income of a young person is 4576.98 rupees per month



## General feelings of the young people regarding politics

The level of political knowledge of young people is very significant in understanding the nature of political behaviour and the political culture of young people. A high percentage (94.7%) of young persons of the sample has an adequate understanding about politics and the democratic practices of the country. The study findings show that young people read newspapers, and respond to electronic media as well; more males have better political knowledge than females.

According to the research findings, only 40.7% of young people appear to have some kind of satisfaction in the political practices of the country while nearly 59% of young people are not satisfied. It appeared that more males are dissatisfied with the politics than the female respondents. There is no significant co-relationship between political satisfaction and the ethnic background of the respondents. A young person describes his idea about politics of the country as follows:

*It is a way of cheating people. When they are in power they ignore the people and once they loose power come back to people and say we are struggling on behalf of you. We fight to give a better future for you etc. Both main parties have cheated the people time and time again they will continue it (26 year old woman, undergraduate, Matara) .*

A significant number of respondents (74.9%) have an interest in politics when the others have shown no interest in politics. Gender cross tabulation of the political interest has shown that females do not have much interest in politics compared to young males. A good number of Tamils and Muslims (15% “highly interested” and Sinhalese 30.1% “interested”) young people are included in the “highly interested” and “interested” categories whereas Sinhalese (6.2% “highly interested” and 22.7% “interested”) have not that much interest. Sinhalese (21.3% “not interested” and 7.6% “not interested at all”) do not show much interest in politics compared to Tamils (9.9% “not interested” and 4.9% “not interested at



all”) and Muslims (17.7% “not interested” and 5.3% “not interested at all”). This can be a result of minority-majority identification. A young person describes his political interest as follows:

*I really take an interest in politics but the problem is we cannot actively involve ourselves. If I get involved actively there will be a lot of problems for me. Perhaps I will not be able to live after that.*  
(30 year old man, Carpenter, Matale)

The role of organized opposition or political parties is to bring pressure on the government on important issues of the people. 78% of responded youth were of the view that the political parties take some sort of interest in bringing into the attention of government about the burning issues of the people while 19.7% of youth did not agree with this opinion. Young persons do not say firmly that political parties are sensitive to crucial issues of the masses. A young businessman says:

*We cannot say all the political parties try to draw the attention of the government to our problems. Mostly the UNP and the JVP do it. The government never attends to issues of the people. They do this job to some extent. Only at election time they talk about issues affecting people.* (29 year old, businessman from Kegalle)

When they tend to believe that the political parties do not represent their views and do not address their concerns, the possibility of practising non-democratic means is high.

Trusting someone to some extent shows that they still have some suspicions. The survey data shows that 16.7% of youth “fully respect” and 35.3% of them have “somewhat” respect towards the politicians. 47% of the youth in the sample “do not respect” any politician at all. Cross tabulation of the attitudes of young persons towards the politicians based on ethnicity shows that youth of all three ethnic



groups do not respect political leaders that we have today. 42.1% of Sinhalese, 59.2% of Tamil and 50.4% of Muslim youth have clearly said that they do not respect any political leader.

A majority (92%) out of 692 respondents believe that the present politicians enjoy more facilities and privileges in the name of democracy. They compared today's politicians with the politicians we had immediately after independence. Males (92%) and females (91.8%), all the educated categories and ethnic groups of the sample have agreed with the assessment. Today people tend to think of a political position as an "easy livelihood". Whenever there are problems the citizens of the country should be able to communicate with their leaders. If these were not happening the frustration would increase and the trust in the democratic process would be eroded. A considerable number (326) of young persons has told that they have no way of contacting politicians. Young women explained how politicians are excessively privileged:

*Each and every politician irrespective of his or her political party is excessively privileged. They steal facilities, donations allocated for us, the ordinary poor, without giving it to the people who deserve. (24 year old woman, unemployed, Ampara)*

The politicians themselves try to maintain a distance with people for their benefit. Therefore most of the people in general and youth interviewed in particular believe that they cannot communicate their needs to the present day politicians in the country. 52% of the youth said they can while 47% of youth said they cannot communicate their needs to the politicians. Gender cross tabulation of the question demonstrates that more females (56%) than males (49.1%) tend to believe that they can communicate with politicians better. More Sinhala young people (55.6%) have told that they can communicate their needs to politicians while Tamils (42.3%) and Muslims (50.4%) have not said so.

The general tendency of the Sri Lankan politician is to forget all the promises once they come into power and this is well proved even by the study. Once a



politician gets power, he tends to treat his party people known as “*mage minissu*” (my people), “*mage pakshe aya*” (my party members), “*mata udawu karapu aya*” (my supporters). All the other party supporters are considered as “*anit pette ayo*” (opposition party supporters), “*wiruddha wadeen*”, “*Anit pakshe aayo*”. In addition to that there are some people well known to the politicians and they are considered as “*known faces*”, “*danna aya*”, or “*andunana aya*”.

### Attitudes of young people to the holding of elections

With this background we tried to understand the political behaviour of the young people. Young people were asked whether they would vote if there is an election tomorrow. Out of 692 young persons, 65.2% (451) said “yes”, 11.1% (77) said “no”, 22.8% said, “not decided”, and 0.9% (6) had not answered the above question. We as a country are still fortunate because the majority of young people opt to vote in the elections. They still believe in communicating their needs through voting behaviour. A young person from Sewanagala explains his stance about elections:

*After completing A/L, I actively supported the UNP party and the candidate here on three separate elections. My aim was to get a job through it. But finally I could not get an appointment to meet the politician whom I supported. My friends and I gave up active politics with great frustration. But I would vote even if there is an election tomorrow because if we too do not vote others would still label us as UNPers. (27 year old man, Three Wheel Driver, Monaragala)*

Young people do not think Sri Lankan elections are free and fair. They have witnessed many occasions where political rights of neighbours are violated. Only 22 young persons believe that Sri Lankan elections are free and fair while 259 say “no” and 137 say “not at all”. 57.2% who said “somewhat” also may be included here if we do further interview with them. It is very crucial for the country’s future and the commissioner of elections and the government to pay more attention to this. Voting at elections is a fundamental right of communicating the needs of people to politicians. If this system is not free and fair, the views of the people



will not be communicated properly to the politicians. According to the research findings more women see that elections are free and fair. Election violence should be understood from the women's point of view when the policy planners or the government try to organise free and fair elections. For example a non-violent situation for a man may be a violent situation for a woman. More Tamil youth indicated that elections are "not fair" (42.3%) and "not fair at all" (23.9%) within the ethnic group representation. Tamil youth feel social insecurity today because of the war and war based tensions.

### **Attitudes of young people to voting at elections**

It is very important to know the basis of voting behaviour of young people since it has direct links with the representative democratic institutions. Young people are asked whether they vote for the same political party that their parents have been voting for. A significant number of young people (82.1%) do not vote to the same party that their parents vote. If they want to vote to the party the parents support for, after taking into consideration the merits and demerits of the political parties or a candidate it is perfectly alright. No significant difference can be seen between male and female voters in support of a political party that their parents supported. More Sinhalese (13.7%) youth were supporting the same party with parents and this could not be seen among Tamils (11.3%) and Muslims (10.6%). When the level of education is increasing young people were not inclined to support the party that their parents supported. Among the respondents who said that they support (12.7%), and not support for the party to which their parents supported pointed out many reasons for as to why they hold such a position. Each respondent was allowed to give three reasons. Those who supported the parents party due to; "that party really concerned about the development of the country" (4.9%), "we have good contacts/ help us" (2.8%), "parents have better political understanding" (4.7%), "parents also hold my political view" (1.0%). Majority of youth did not support the political party their parents belongs to due to reasons such as; "vote for any party which works hard for the country's development" (9.6%), "since it is my choice, my discretion" (35.7%), "policies, and the work are important" (28.1%), "politics should change along with time" (13.2%).



An attempt was made to make the young people understand that acquiring membership of political parties by them was important. 17.1% (118) have got political party membership, 78.5% (543) have no membership, 3.5% (24) have no idea, and 1% (7) have not responded to the question. This situation lays a strong foundation for better democratic practice in the country. They have not become members of political parties as a matter of course, just because it is available as a political organization. Majority (71%) of the respondents have said that there are political organisations in their area. Young people have not become members of any political party since they want to be open. In Sri Lanka today, once you get a membership of a party, changing it is not accepted by society. People would start accusing the members who change the party. He or she is considered as a person without a proper vision. Because of this nature of political behaviour of the young people political analysts tend to say the winning of any party depends on the young peoples' political behaviour. Politics is often a male dominated activity in most of the Asian countries including Sri Lanka.

The young people have different views about the effectiveness of their votes. 26.3% (182) young persons indicated that their vote is a useful one. And also 23.1% of youth believe it has effected to "some extent". 21.8% (160) of young persons clearly say there is no result of their voting. 23.8% (165) of young people have no clear understanding to say whether their voting is useful or not. When the answers are cross tabulated with gender, more males (29.8%) accept, than females (21.5%), that their vote can change society. Females (27%) believe their vote is not as useful as those of males (20.3%). Even though Sinhala (32.7%) youth say their vote is useful Tamil (13.4%) and Muslim (17.7%) youth do not trust it that much. It can be due to a minority mentality and on the other hand to the awareness that they are not going to get key cabinet portfolios or key posts under the representative democratic system although there are a few minority ministries. The uncertainty as to whether their vote is effective or not is high among the Tamil (27.5%) and Muslim (41.6%) young people, compared to Sinhala youth (18.1%). This situation cannot be considered as a very healthy one because the majority of young people from other minor communities are uncertain. With the development of education,



young people tend to believe that their vote is effective and can change society through the vote. It was 20.3% among young people with year 7 to 11 education, 21.9% among the young people with G.C.E. O/Ls, 30.3% among the young people with G.C.E. A/Ls, and 49.3% among the degree holding young persons.

The Sri Lankan voting pattern has remained static for a long time. Children tend to learn about the political parties and the good and the bad of those from the parents and the process of political socialisation. They learn about the parties and politicians whom their parents and family members support. It has become a cult of the new age cohort. Yet there are occasions when young people deviate from this pattern of political behaviour by voting for different parties at different polls. Nearly half of the young persons of the sample have not (49.9%) continued to vote for the same party that they voted in their first elections. But still a considerable percentage (35%) has become lifelong members of a party. It is not constructive behaviour of a responsible citizen. No one can expect that the same party would do better all along. Therefore voters should be flexible and they must be able to see both pros and cons of a party. Tamil (36.6%) and Muslim (40.7%) young people have continuously voted for the same party compared with the Sinhala youth (33%). Sinhala (56.1%) youth find it more possible to change the political party than the Tamil (43.7%) and Muslim (33.6%) youth. This dissimilarity of voting among ethnic groups may be a result of little social exposure, low education and exposure to media of minority groups. Since there are a larger number of political parties among the Sinhalese, the political education and thinking of the Sinhala youth would change but a similar tendency could not be observed among minorities.

The chances are very rare for a person coming from grassroot levels to shine politically in the Asian political arena. Generally political thinking of people in Asia expects their candidate to be a person coming from an established prestigious family of high class or caste. Even though there are people with very strong views with regard to national issues they are unable to get a significant percentage of votes at elections. According to the research nearly 75% of young people reject the myth of electing a leader from a prominent family. There is a long way to establish



a mechanism in which a person from grass roots level can become a leader of the country though young people in the sample reject it. To reach this stage a drastic attitudinal change should take place. Against the above trend a youth presented his idea as follows:

*Contesting of thugs those who have money to spend in the election can be avoided if we get contesters from prominent families. Prominent family members do not engage in mean work, they behave decently since they are high-born. When they come into politics we can have more a stable government unlike today. We have few elections within a very shorter period. It really disturbs our normal lifestyle. No development activities take place. All these thugs come from ordinary families. Members coming from prominent families behave decently and responsibly. They do not release terror. I would say the more we get politicians from the prominent families the less our troubles will be. (30 year old, miner, studied up to G.C.E O/L, Sinhalese Buddhist, Ratnapura)*

### **Willingness to participate in elections**

In the discussion of political involvement of the people, it is very vital to know whether they like to actively involve themselves in politics by contesting elections at different levels. While a small percentage (12%) of youth like to contest in elections, a majority of the young people (76.7%) do not want to actively involve themselves in politics. It is because of the corrupt political culture. They know that they get a considerable number of votes they have to spend money on canvassing, public work, and hiring teams of thugs. There are a lot of young people with a vision but who cannot come to active politics since they do not have the economic and social power. Women have not shown much interest in contesting elections. This has become more and more a mens' job. Out of 293 young women only 8.5% wanted to contest elections while out of 399 young males 14.5% wanted to join as politicians. 12% of males have said that there is no mechanism for them to step into politics while 6.5% females also said so. Within ethnic groups Tamils (11.3%)



and Muslims (20.4%) represent more than Sinhalese (10.1%) in expressing their wish to contest in elections. When the level of education goes up the willingness to actively involve in politics also increases.

Respondents were asked whether they canvassed for any politician. It is very important to understand active political participation of the young people. To canvass for any politician or party, the young people have to think, decide, critically look at it and compare with the records of other politicians or parties. If this was happening in a very rational manner the choice would be easy. 498 young people have never canvassed for any politician while 186 young people have canvassed for a politician. According to gender cross tabulation more men (78.5%) have canvassed for politicians than young women (21.5%) as usual. It is clear that many young people did not wish to canvass for any politician. Is it because of that they did not get a request from politicians? To get an answer for the question, young people were asked whether they would support, or canvass for any politician if they were requested. According to the findings most of the young people (544) do not want to canvass or support any politician even if they are asked. Only 123 young people said they liked to support politicians if they were requested.

The factors that young people consider when they select a political party are explained by the young people. Among them, "policy of the party on education, unemployment, poverty etc." (29.5%), "history/ track records of the party" (21.5%), "qualities of the party leaders" (13.3%), "sensitivity of the party towards problems of the people" (12.1%), "views of the majority voters/ trend" (1.1%), "should protect and love the country" (1.8%), "ability to develop the country" (12.1%), "approach to the ethnic conflict" 3.6%, "protecting human rights" (4.0%), "attitude about religion, ethnicity, culture" (1.0%) are very important.

Respondents mentioned qualities that they expect from a good politician too. Each respondent was asked to give three qualities that he/she liked most. Among the answers; "responsibility and commitment" (11.4%), "level of education" (8.7%), "should not be a thug" (1.3%), "keeping promises" (7.5%), "honesty, genuineness, trustworthiness" (27.7%), "ability to take proper decisions boldly" (19.8%),



“policies of the candidates’ party” (2.7%), “his own vision/ plan/ capabilities” (6.6%), “approachableness” (6.1%), “love for the country, religion, ethnic group” (1.4%), “economic capabilities/ wealth” (0.3%), “caring of all the groups (ethnic & other)” (2.5%), “the service he or she has rendered so far” (4.0%) are very significant. Today the politicians try to cheat people as a habit. Politicians do not take decisions frankly and they always think about the number of votes that they loose or gain before making decisions. Young people expect politicians to be leaders not to be followers. Lot of politicians are not given much responsibility and are not committed to the development or solving the problems of the country.

## Conclusion

The above discussion has given a detailed note on the attitudes of the youth regarding various aspects of their voting behaviour based on a research study conducted by the researcher. According to the above discussion it appears that there are problems and dynamics concerning the voting behaviour of the people. Even in the mid of various structural and manmade difficulties concerning voting a considerable percentage of young people have kept a trust on the existing democratic system. There are stronger pushing factors than pulling factors, facilitating youth to move away from the existing democratic structure in general and the voting system in particular. And also when the voting system is blocked or the people lose their trust on it naturally this has a tendency to disturb normal pattern of elite circulation as explained by Pareto. And there is room for youth to think of alternative means of getting rid of the existing “corrupt” practices and establishing a “people friendly” system. History has provided much more strong evidence to prove that these alternative means end up in disaster.

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