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### **Coping with the election violence: The case of a Sri Lankan Village**

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Electoral Sociology is a sociological study of elections and voting (Unwinhyman Dictionary of Sociology 1995). This approach is employed to interpret Sri Lankan election violence. Asian politics in general and Sri Lankan elections in particular display a lot of violence when compared with western politics. With the introduction of party based political system in Sri Lanka, the antagonism among the parties has increased. Sri Lankan villagers have been divided on the lines of the political parties that they support. For whatever reason, Sri Lankan voters have been divided by the party system initially, and later people of the same party divided according to the candidate to whom they support under the preferential voting system. Gradually the politician too began to use various methods to win elections. Among them money, power, threats, intimidation, assault, etc. are very common.

The well-known Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto discussed the process of elite circulation which allows ambitious people to replace those who occupy elite positions currently. This would assure the socio-political stability of a country. However, we hardly see this theory validated in Sri Lanka as there is a lot of reported violence: post, pre and on the day of elections. When the ruling party estimates that it has no chance of winning it tends to use its terror machine in order to assure that its candidate wins.

On the one hand, the business community considers the election as a way of showing its gratitude to a party or politicians. On the other, it is an investment to get much benefit if the favoured candidate or party comes into power. Business community patronage has enhanced the capacity of the politician to mobilise thugs and put pressure on the voters.

Against this backdrop, a research was conducted by a team, including the author, in the District of Kandy between November and December 2007. The study has shown the various strategies of coping up with the election violence. The involvement of powerful politicians from outside areas plays a significant role in initiating electoral violence in villages. Moreover, it explains how the insiders justify it. The study shows that the villagers of both UNP and PA coped up with them. Factors such as caste, class, gender, relationship, matter very much in coping with election violence. People who belong to high caste, class were able to minimise the physical damage, while the others of the lower strata encountered both psychological and physical damage.

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