

# Rajapaksas win super majority in Sri Lanka parliamentary poll

Monday 10 August 2020, by [SRINIVASAN Meera](#) (Date first published: 7 August 2020).

## **SLPP secures nearly 60% of the vote; critics worry about consequences**

Sri Lanka's ruling party secured a two-thirds majority in the recent parliamentary election, Friday's results showed, giving the Rajapaksa brothers the power they sought to amend the Constitution.

The Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) obtained nearly 60% of the total votes polled, almost equalling the Rajapaksa-led front's biggest mandate yet in 2010, when it peaked in popularity on the heels of ending the civil war.

Coming less than a year after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's ascent to power, the huge victory heralds the brothers' likely power consolidation, as they helm the country's two most powerful offices.

The President's elder brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, 74, polled over five lakh votes in his constituency — Kurunegala district in North Western Province — and will be sworn in as Prime Minister on Sunday at the Kelaniya Raja Maha Vihara, a famed Buddhist temple near Colombo.

The SLPP, one of Sri Lanka's newest parties founded by the Rajapaksas, won 145 seats in the 225-member legislature. With the assured support of at least five allies, the party can easily reach the 150-seat mark needed for two-thirds support, which is a political feat in Sri Lanka's proportional representation system of election.

## **Super majority**

However, the prospect of such a super majority has already sparked concern among sceptics and Opposition forces.

"2/3 majority! Expecting the worst — hoping for the best. Prove us wrong, Mr. President," tweeted Mangala Samaraweera, a prominent Minister in the former government, who opted out of the political race, after his party suffered a split ahead of this election.

The "root causes" of the evils facing Sri Lanka, he said, could be traced to periods when governments held a two-thirds majority in the House, citing precedents in 1956, 1977 and 2010, while urging the President to learn from "past mistakes".

## **Likely casualties**

Even before the poll, the Rajapaksas vowed to change the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, a 2015 legislation — introduced when the former government was in power — that sought to trim the President's executive powers and strengthen independent institutions.

The amendment is the likely “first casualty” of the Rajapaksa government’s two-thirds majority, according to Harshana Rambukwella, a senior academic at the Open University of Sri Lanka.

“Despite its many flaws, it strengthened democratic institutions and acted as a moderating force on executive overreach,” he told The Hindu. “We might be in a paradoxical situation where democratic space shrinks, while the political stability generated by the two-thirds may translate into political dividends at least for certain segments.”

It is not just the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment that is at stake. Politicians linked to the regime have also questioned the need for the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, that followed the Indo-Lanka Accord and remains the only legislative assurance on devolving substantive powers to provinces including those inhabited by minority Tamils.

In a recent interview to the local Daily FT newspaper ahead of election, Basil Rajapaksa, another Rajapaksa sibling and the architect of their camp’s poll campaigns and victories, referred to the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment as “the first biggest blow” to the Sri Lankan Constitution. “A Constitution needs pillars and frameworks. Unfortunately in the current situation these have been changed from time to time... we are definitely dedicated to a new Constitution,” he said, tying it to the mandate their party might get.

Speaking of the SLPP’s future role, he said he would like to model it on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, the “best two” examples, and “how they act”.

While Sri Lankans wait to see how the ambitious party fares while in power, rights and democratic freedoms have already come under greater focus after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa assumed office. Recently, 10 international human rights organisations — including Amnesty International, Forum Asia and South Asians for Human Rights — issued a joint statement urging the Sri Lankan government to end “targeted arrests, intimidation and threats” of lawyers, activists, human rights defenders and journalists.

Following his big win, PM Mahinda Rajapaksa on Friday thanked supporters for “placing their trust” on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and himself. “We will ensure #lka will not stand disappointed during our tenure,” he said in a tweet.

---

## **Meera Srinivasan**

*[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.*

---

## **P.S.**

The Hindu

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/sri-lanka-polls-rajapaksas-slpp-secures-big-win/article32290424.ece>