

# Politics in Tamil Nadu after 2024 Loksabha Elections: Issues Unravelled

Rahul Reghu

## Abstract

This paper will examine the major shifts in state politics that occurred in Tamil Nadu during the past five years, outline the landscape of the balance of power in politics as it stands today, and raise and answer critical questions about the political ecosystem in the aftermath of a landslide victory of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) led alliances in the Lok Sabha elections concluded in June 2024. In the aftermath of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Tamil Nadu's political landscape has reaffirmed its commitment to regional autonomy. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK)-led alliance, under Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, secured a decisive victory. The BJP's efforts to penetrate the southern political sphere, including high-profile campaigns and symbolic gestures by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, failed to resonate with Tamil Nadu's populace. The state's distinct cultural identity and emphasis on social welfare have historically been at odds with the BJP's centralizing narratives. Looking ahead, the DMK's strong performance in the 2024 elections is expected to bolster its influence in national politics, advocating for state rights and social justice. The party's leadership is anticipated to leverage this mandate to push for policies that align with Tamil Nadu's developmental priorities and uphold its secular ethos.

**Key Words:** DMK-led alliance, Tamil Nadu politics, 2024 Lok Sabha elections

## Introduction

The politics of the southernmost state of Tamil Nadu in the last five years paved way for the emergence of new political convergence redefining the very heart of the Dravidian project, since its heyday in 1967 itself. The initial theorists of Tamil populism can be anchored as assertive populism propagated by the Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam (DMK), and paternalist populism promulgated by the All-India Anna

Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam (AIADMK) (Subramanian 1999). There is a shift in this duo-populism in the recent years due to emergence of Hindu nationalist politics and its attempt to override the Dravidianism.

### **Decisive victory: Reasons and Issues**

The alliance led by Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam (DMK) was able to make a sweeping victory in all the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu. This victory was against the backdrop of attempts made by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance attempt to increase its footprints in the Southern States politically. But DMK led alliance was able to get sideline its attempt through a politically overt operation. There are many underlying reasons for this thumbing victory, first DMK alliance under steward leadership of Chief Minister M K Stalin outperformed other political factions in molding a cohesive robust alliance. DMK as a part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) took special care in ensuring that the seats allocation was done in a smooth manner. On the same hand, the INDIA alliance had many teething issues in the seat sharing in other states. In various states, the unity within the INDIA alliance was seriously affected due to tussle between major regional party and Indian National Congress (INC). This went on to the extent that many regional political parties levelled criticism against INC accusing for playing the 'Big Brother' role. But in the same context DMK supremo M K Stalin took steps which strengthened INDIA alliance by giving adequate representation to the regional parties within the alliance in Tamil Nadu. Earlier in 2019, DMK contested in 24 seats but in 2024 DMK reduced the number of seats that the party contesting from 24 to 21 by providing the space for other political parties. On the same line, as the alliance head, DMK also allowed regional parties within its alliances to even use their own party symbols for contesting in the election which cemented the alliance.

Similarly, DMK used its election manifesto for setting up and propagating 'New Delhi vs Madras' agenda which seemed to be adequately accepted by people of Tamil Nadu. This include the promise that DMK government will not implement Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019, Uniform Civil Code and even abolition of 'Governor' post in the backdrop of the recent gubernatorial politics. The manifesto even made the promise that the petrol price will be reduced to Rs 75 per liter. In addition to all these, the DMK also levelled the argument that the Tamil Nadu is denied from receiving its allocated GST money from the Union Government. This discourse was placed and played along with another argument that the southern states especially Tamil Nadu is contributing

more towards the revenue whereas the northern states are contributing less.

Certain development programmes implemented by the DMK led Government also played a pivotal role as a third key factor which actually helped DMK alliance to make such a huge victory. The implementation of 'Free bus service for women, providing one thousand rupees for the women homemakers, Chief Minister breakfast scheme, created a momentum for the DMK. This momentum was not so strong enough to withstand the anti-incumbency against the DMK government in the state. But this anti-incumbency factor in the state was skewed because of the existence of the four cornered alliances leading into a massive split in the opposition itself. Presence of DMK led alliances, AIADMK led alliance, BJP led NDA alliance, Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) and other parties as the fourth alliance led to the division in the opposition and making anti-incumbency factor feeble and naive.

### **Fight for 'Silver'**

Urge to secure first place is always primarily in a political race, but in case of Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu there was a tussle between Edappadi K. Palaniswami led AIADMK and K. Annamalai led BJP to secure the second position and wanted to prove that they are the second powerful alliance after the DMK led alliance or 'real' opposition

The series of events and processes that were set in motion with the passing of former chief minister J Jayalalitha led to massive changes in the structure and functioning of AIADMK itself. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu AIADMK fought the election with BJP as its ally, this was after the end of larger series of political upheaval that emerged in AIADMK after its supremos death in 2016. AIADMK functioned under the duo leadership of Edappadi K. Palaniswami and O Paneerselvam from 2017 onwards after expelling V K Sasikala and her powerful Mannargudi group from the party. In August 2023, Edappadi K. Palaniswami expelled O Paneerselvam from AIADMK and became single leader of the party. Followed by this in September 2023, AIADMK which as in alliance with BJP led NDA came out of the alliance and made the proclamation that they ended up all the ties with NDA and BJP. Thus AIADMK under the sole leadership of Edappadi K. Palaniswami made it to the public that they are bagging with the saffron party and they adhere to the Dravidian ideology. But at the same time expelled leaders O Paneerselvam and V K Sasikala were continuing leading their own factions of party which is by large concentrated in

the southern Tamil Nadu. Traditionally Thevar and Gounder community are the vote bank of AIADMK, Edappadi K. Palaniswami belongs to the Gounder community with the expulsion of leaders O Paneerselvam and V K Sasikala both leaders belongs to Thevar community from the erstwhile AIADMK, the caste equation and its corresponding votes for the party was at stake. Thus through securing second position in Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu Edappadi K. Palaniswami wanted to have a more stronger grip in AIADMK and keep O Paneerselvam and V K Sasikala away. This prompted him to end ties with BJP led NDA and stood as separate entity while contesting the elections in 2024.

Edappadi K. Palaniswami after expelling other leaders made it clear that his objective is to create an arch alliance with various other political parties in Tamil Nadu against the DMK government in power. But in reality he failed in capitalizing the anti-incumbency factor that existed in Tamil Nadu, this is primarily because of the inability to form alliance with any larger political party other than Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK). Thus through the election Edappadi K. Palaniswami proved it again that AIADMK is the principal opposition party by securing the 21.7 % of the total vote share, but he failed in guarding party's bastion areas in Kongu Region of the state. DMK has barged into these areas and swept all these areas which is major blow to the leadership of Edappadi K. Palaniswami. The signs of declining voter support were evident during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, but the situation has worsened in 2024. In places like Villupuram, Karur, Salem, and Tiruppur, the party managed to retain a significant portion of its original strength, although it still experienced a decrease in its vote share. In Erode, the party nearly dropped below the 30 percent mark. The vote shares in Tiruvalur, Chennai South, Tiruchi and Theni areas where the party once held a strong presence—have now been cut down to half or even a third of what they were a decade ago. Despite winning all the Assembly seats in the Coimbatore constituency in 2021, the AIADMK-led front finished third in the current general election in Coimbatore. A critical analysis of the AIADMK's performance would also underscore the point that the party has a lot to go before it recapture its earlier vote share which they had a decade ago.

BJP which fought elections along with AIADMK as an alliance from 2018 stood alone in the 2024 Lok Sabha election in Tamil Nadu under leadership of K. Annamalai ex IPS officer to secure the position of the major opposition party or to finish the race as second in all the constituencies. By doing so, the saffron party thought of increasing its vote share in state and become a major opposition party. By and larger

BJP central leadership was in favour of this strategy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's active participation in rallies and road shows proved this fact. By participating in 23 Lok Sabha constituencies, BJP obtained about 11.1 percent of the votes in the State. Through optics and sound byte BJP state president was able to create a feeling that the real contest is happening between DMK and BJP and AIADMK doesn't have a role to play in it. Despite not winning any of their candidates, the party performed a bit better than the Congress' outcome, which was able to contest nine constituencies in Tamil Nadu as a component of the INDIA alliance bloc and managed to achieve 10.78% vote. In the five constituencies that Congress contested, the party received around 3.6% votes in the general election in 2019.

Anyhow the results of the elections failed to prove that BJP is the opposition party in the state politics. BJP was able to establish alliance with Pattali Makkal Katchi, the political party founded for Vanniyar caste led by Anbumani Ramadoss, Tamil Maanila Congress (Moopanar) led by G. K. Vasan, Amma Makkal Munnettra Kazagam led by T. T. V. Dhinakaran. But even after making the alliance the entire NDA could get 16.6% of vote share in elections, at the same time AIADMK alliance was able to 26.9% of vote share. The DMK alliance which won all the 39 Lok Sabha seats in the state was able secure 47.4 % vote share of the total votes polled.

Having been said this, the individual party wise data given below shows that how anti-incumbency was overridden by DMK led alliance.

**Table 1:** Voting share of Political parties in 2024 Lokh Sabha Elections in Tamil Nadu

SI No	Party	Vote Share ( Percentage)
1	DMK	27.2 %
2	Indian National Congress	10.8%.
3	Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam	2.6%
4	Communist Party Of India (Marxist)	2.5 %
5	Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi	2.3 %
6	Communist Party Of India	2.2%
7	Indian Union Muslim League	1.2%
8	AIADMK	21.7 %
9	BJP	11.4 %
10	Naam Tamilar Katchi(NTK)	8.2 %

*Source:* Combiled from Election Commission of India data

## Performance of Principal Opposition

Comparing the history of AIADMK's Lok Sabha elections for the last 25 years, the performance in the 2024 elections is undoubtedly the worst performance. The reasons behind this poor performance differ from each other and are many. Primarily the expulsion and division in the AIADMK created a huge vacuum which was effectively used by the DMK. The party suffered a setback in southern Tamil Nadu with Mukulathors<sup>1</sup> clearly moving away from AIADMK and section of Gounders, the cast to which Edappadi K. Palaniswami belongs, also shifting towards the BJP. The AIADMK and BJP forging an alliance would have been much more useful. If the current trend continues, then the AIADMK-BJP partnership would have won more than a dozen Lok Sabha seats and this would have dealt a big blow to the DMK before the assembly elections. Palaniswami misjudged the benefits of aligning with the BJP, believing that minorities who distanced themselves from the party would return. This is a misguided political choice, and the decline of the vote share in AIADMK's vote bank reflects a failure in leadership. This is primarily because of the ruling DMK's consistent anti-BJP stand and their enthusiasm in setting up secular alliance against BJP led NDA at the centre. The party needs to reflect on why its support among women and various castes is decreasing. The situation can only be improved if appropriate corrective actions are implemented. DMK's consistent stand. AIADMK under Edappadi K. Palaniswami in the Lok Sabha elections was trying to switch its position from an ally and become sheer critic of BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi akin that of DMK's anti –BJP stand. But AIADMK failed in marketing this strategy, finally leading into the BJP intruding into the votes of AIADMK. Thus it can be argued that both DMK and AIADMK is redefining their political strategies into an anti-BJP anti-hindu nationalist politics, this might pave way for the emergence of new political convergence in the state. The appropriate illustration of this caricature will happen probably in the 2026 Tamil Nadu State Assembly elections.

The continuous legal conflict between Edappadi K. Palaniswami and O Paneerselvam further undermines the party's structural integrity and organizational strength. Although the party has attempted to distance itself from the BJP, voter skepticism persists regarding its future direction, particularly as it appears to shift further to the right on the political spectrum. There was also a major criticism that Edappadi K. Palaniswami often restrict himself in the Salem region, popular media pundits also ascertain the same. In fact Edappadi K. Palaniswami should have campaigned across the state to boost its party cadres and machinery

S Rajasekhara Reddy in 2004 organised a 66-day-long padayatra which changed the locus of the election itself. AIADMK leaders were also not much focused in creating an optics and sound byte in favour of them.

## **Opportunities for Opposition in Tamil Nadu**

The ruling party is not facing any significant anti-incumbency sentiment, as it continues to enjoy widespread popularity and is strongly supported by its well-organized state-level infrastructure. Furthermore, the DMK's position is further reinforced by the unwavering support it receives from its allies, including the Congress and Left parties. This alliance is a symbiotic one, where all partners derive mutual benefits, rather than a parasitic relationship.

But when coming into the ground realities many dents are visible in the government's face which is not adequately capitalized by AIADMK, BJP or any other political parties. The succession of MK Stalin after M Karunanidhi in DMK strengthens the charge of 'family rule' and 'dynasty' politics often made by the main rivals AIADMK, Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) BJP. Soon after Lok Sabha election victory in September 2024 itself M K Stalin elevated his son Udhayanidhi Stalin DMK's youth wing chief as the Deputy Chief Minister. This dynasty succession and politics around the same was not harvested by the opposition leading into the creation of a public opinion against it.

Allegations of corruption involving DMK ministers, along with the ongoing investigation concerning Senthil Balaji, K. Ponmudy, KKSSR Ramachandran, Thangam Thennarasu, and Periyasamy, significantly undermine the party's assertion of maintaining a pristine reputation. Along with the elevation of Udhayanidhi Stalin's as Deputy Chief Minister, Senthil Balaji who got bail from the Supreme Court was again reinstated as the minister. Other than mere statements levelled against this, there was no major political movement from the opposition to capitalize this. DMK has terminated Jaffer Sadiq, a party official, due to allegations regarding his connections with an international drug cartel. However, this matter is frequently brought to attention by Leader of Opposition Edappadi K Palaniswami as a means to criticize the DMK. But this issue was not taken up further by political opposition to the extent of targeting the government. The brutal murder of Tamil Nadu's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president K. Armstrong in July 2024 pointed finger towards the law and order issue in the state, but main accused was killed in the police encounter, this issue should have been effectively used by the opposition.

Amidst the tumult of the ongoing rivalry between the major regional parties in Tamil Nadu—DMK and AIADMK—and their competitor, the BJP, a noteworthy and understated development has emerged in the State—the ascendance of Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK). With its vote share surpassing the 8 percent threshold, the party has qualified, according to the guidelines set by the Election Commission, for the designation of ‘State-recognised party.’ Established in 2010 by film director-turned-politician Seeman, the party contested its inaugural assembly elections in 2016, securing a mere 1.76 percent of the vote. This figure increased to 3.87 percent during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Seeman’s compelling oratory and passionate speeches attracted large audiences, where he articulated the principles of Tamil nationalism and extolled the virtues of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the founder of the LTTE, frequently referring to himself and his party members as “sons of Prabhakaran” in his addresses.

The performance of the Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) in the electoral landscape highlights a significant shift in political sentiment among the youth. While Seeman’s speeches may have failed to resonate with some, they found a strong connection with younger voters, largely due to his unwavering stance against forming alliances with larger parties. NTK has effectively positioned itself as a refuge for those disenchanted by the traditional dominance of DMK and AIADMK. This growing appeal is evident in the party’s electoral results, with its vote percentage rising from 6.58% in the 2021 assembly elections to an impressive 8.19% in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This upward trajectory suggests that NTK is cementing its role as a significant player in Tamil Nadu’s political arena, capturing the hopes and frustrations of a generation seeking an alternative.

## **Conclusion**

After the conclusion of the Lok Sabha elections 2024 political parties are sharpening their weapons and redefining their strategies for facing the upcoming the State Legislative Assembly elections. Both DMK and AIADMK is redefining their political strategies into an anti-BJP anti-hindu nationalist politics, this might pave way for the emergence of new political convergence in the state slightly moving away from populism.

## End Notes

- [1] The Mukkulathor people, who are also collectively known as Thevar, are a community or group of communities native to the central and southern districts of Tamil Nadu, India.

## References

- [1] Sunilraj, B., & N, R. (2024). Critical analysis of debates on Tamil populism: perspectives from the field. *Contemporary South Asia*, 32(3), 418–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2024.2371810>
- [2] Narayan Lakshman, "The last anchor: the legacy of M. Karunanidhi", *The Hindu*, 9 August 2018, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-last-anchor-the-legacy-of-m-karunanidhi/article24636368.ece>.
- [3] Narayan Lakshman, "Two leaves, one leader, and a party reborn", *The Hindu*, 15 July 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/two-leaves-one-leader-and-a-party-reborn/article65640228.ece>.
- [4] Sudha Ramachandran, "Will the BJP Gain a Toehold in Southern Indian States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala?", *The Diplomat*, 19 April 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/will-bjp-gain-a-toehold-in-southern-indian-states-of-tamil-nadu-and-kerala/>.
- [5] Raghav Aggarwal, "In Tamil Nadu, BJP hopes to blunt criticism, break '2-party' poll system", *Business Standard*, 19 April 2024, [https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/in-tamil-nadu-bjp-hopes-to-blunt-criticism-break-2-party-poll-system-124041801185\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/in-tamil-nadu-bjp-hopes-to-blunt-criticism-break-2-party-poll-system-124041801185_1.html).