

Between Tradition and Transition: Kerala's Electoral Story in the 2024 Lok Sabha Elections

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Abstract

With more than 900 million registered voters, India went to the polls from April to June 2024. This general elections led to a political reconfiguration of unprecedented magnitude. Modi's ruling BJP also managed to secure a majority of 293 seats in the Lok Sabha, the 543-seat lower house of India's Parliament. Although Modi has secured a third term, the BJP failed to achieve a parliamentary majority, falling short of its 370 seats target. This reconfiguration also worked in many states where new alliances and coalitions formed and unexpected outcomes put predictions in question mark. This scenario is also very significant to the southern state of Kerala where BJP won one seat out of the 20 parliamentary seats. This is highly commendable in the electoral study as this is the maiden victory of NDA in Lokh Sabha and may pose many questions for the two conventional political alliances in the state. In this context the present study looks into the voting pattern and tries to unravel the political complexities in the voter behaviour in the state of Kerala.

Key Words:Electoral Behaviour, Lok Sabha Elections 2024, Kerala,

Introduction

The 2024 general elections in India was significant in many counts. Primarily it asserted the capability of Indian democracy and upheld the decision making capacities of common man against many odds. It has highlighted the strength and resilience of India's institutions of democratic representation¹. During the election campaigns BJP and its partners tried to leverage India's rising global status and its Hindu nationalist credentials substantiated by many new mantras and terminologies. There was also the jubilant claims of unprecedented infrastructure development that extended from Kanyakumari to Kashmir². Further there was serious attempts to go beyond the

ideological lines and to reach all sections of electorate. PM Modi had asked the BJP members to reach out to every section of society, without electoral considerations. "The BJP is no longer merely a political movement but a social movement as well that is working to transform socio-economic conditions"³. However local livelihood issues within the framework of the new Indian welfarism and the issues of minorities ultimately proved decisive for voters. BJP's 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp' action plan, which aims to transform India into a developed country by 2047 also failed to reach the targeted audience and gain profits. It is true that Prime Minister Narendra got a rare mandate to continue in power for the third consecutive term making him only the second Indian prime minister to do so after Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962. But this mandate was not so concrete as predicted by many political pundits and pre poll surveys⁴. The electorate loaded BJP and the Prime minister with the coalition liabilities making room for mor consensus politics, which is the true essence of any democracy. This was also reflected in the federal level whereas the verdicts varied from state to state paving way for a revival of competitive federalism. It is also to be noted that 2024 General Elections was characterized by the resurgence of the Congress party around the leadership Rahul Gandhi, who defied predictions by preventing the BJP party from securing an absolute majority⁵.

The state of Kerala is well known for its fervent political landscape, characterised by the nature of coalitions and exchange of power between coalitions in alternative terms. Kerala's major political parties are aligned under two coalitions, namely the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) since the late 1970s. Kerala was the first Indian state to have coalition government as early as 1961. The Kerala society consists of five major communities viz Nairs, Christian, Muslims, Ezahava and scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes. They have great role in the formulation of coalition politics in Kerala. Each communities created their own political affiliations and they seems to shift political stands according to their conveniences. Thus it can be rightly observed that a 'Convenience Politics' is the under current of Kerala Politics. This also reflected in the electoral outcomes . The electorate has exhibited different stands in state and national politics. In the case of state legislature they try both coalitions whereas in the general elections majority seats are won by Congress.

Kerala: Political landscape and tradition

The History of governments in Kerala is also a history of coalitions. Since the formation of the state there were only two one party

governments- First in 1957 and second in 1962. There after party splits and reunions became the order of the day. A clear-cut coalition experiment in Kerala politics began when the EMS ministry with seven coalition parties assumed power in 1967. Another interesting factor about Kerala politics is the agitational politics. This agitational politics makes a vibrant civil society which is a mature field of political discourses. On the other side many of the serious discussions were engulfed in the flood of agitations.

Agitational politics has become the credo of Kerala Politics today. Not a single day passes without demonstrations of some sort of other at some place in Kerala. These agitations are sponsored by political parties or their front organisations. By organising mammoth rallies, staging dharnas and Satyagrahas in variegated forms they pressurise the government and get at least some of their demands fulfilled. One can witness the tidal wave of demonstrations while the State legislature is in session (Pillai, 1987)

The coalition politics in the state was the result of many factors. The long history of communal pressures starting from the colonial period made politics in the state more complicated and factionalist. With the extension of basic education to all sectors of society, the demands for spoils strengthened and ignited various political movements⁶. With the land reform acts the visible presence of feudalism vanished and social reforms created a curtain over the discriminatory practices in the name of caste and religion. But unfortunately all these practices resurfaced under the veil of pressure groups and well operated in a fertile atmosphere of coalitions. According to the 2011 census, minorities make up 44.9 percent of Kerala's population, with Muslims constituting 26.56 percent and Christians 18.38 percent. This minority presence is also a factor in promoting coalitions.

..... various communities and interest groups backed special parties and factions. A lot of horse-trading was thus necessary to survive simple majority elections in single member- constituencies and to keep a coalition government together. The result was to sustain communalism and political factionalism. Complicated agreements, lobbying, and such like nourished centralised forms of rule. The division of spoils bred still more factionalism, and the compartmentalisation of politics and administration. All this together produced problems of governance – which undermined democracy. And things grew worse when the Communists split in 1964. The minority stayed with the CPI (Communist Party of India). After that, the decimated CPI joined forces with the Congress-party for about a decade – in order to survive the fierce

competition with the majority of the who had formed the CPI-M (Communist Party of India- Marxist). (Törnquist & Tharakan, 1995)

Reorganisation of states on linguistic lines took place on the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission. Thus United Kerala became a reality on November 1, 1956. The entire Malabar District of Madras and the Kasargod Taluk of South Canara District were added to Kerala and the Tamil-speaking region of old Travancore State was annexed to the Madras State. The first elections to the Kerala Assembly were held from February 28 to March 11, 1957. Out of the total 126 seats, the Communist Party of India emerged as the largest single party in the Assembly with 60 seats. It was for the first time in the history of the world that the Communist party came to power through ballot⁷. The first popular ministry of Kerala headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, was sworn in on 5th April 1957. This Government did not last long. An agitation known as liberation struggle was launched by the Congress-led opposition and the president issued on 31st July 1959 a proclamation under article 356 of the Constitution dissolving the Assembly and introducing President's rule in the State. This is the beginning of the politics of the new state of Kerala. As of now the state of Kerala has 140 assembly seats and 20 Lokh Sabha seats.

Table 1: Electorate for general elections 2024 Kerala (Lokh Sabha)

Category	Total voters	Voters Exercised Franchise	Percentage Voted
Male	13415293	9467612	70.57%
Female	14333499	10281005	71.71%
Transgender	367	147	40.05%
Total	27749159	19748764	71.18%

Source: Election Commission of India

Out of a total electorate of 2,77,49,159 as many as 1,97,48,764 voters exercised their franchise on April 26, 2024. The electorate includes 1,02,81,005 women, 94,67,612 men and 147 transgender voters. 71.72% of women voters, 70.57% of male voters and 40.05% of transgender voted in the election.

In India's political arena, Kerala stands out as a bastion for the Congress party during Lok Sabha Elections. Even in the 2019 polls, Kerala remained one of the states where the Indian National Congress (INC) clinched a majority of seats, while the Bharatiya Janata Party-led

National Democratic Alliance (NDA) encountered victory in other parts of the state.

The transition

It is seen that the state politics revolves around two political coalitions and there is an almost fixed pattern of voting across communities, regions and also in state and national legislature⁸. But there were attempts to break down this pattern way back since 1980's. The emergence of Hindu Front in the elections of 1984, comprising the R.S.S., Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Temple Protection Samithi, Ayyappa Seva Sangham and Ramdass Mission, was an indicator of a new trend in Kerala Politics. Although the B.J.P, - Hindu Front fielded 119 candidates in the elections of 1987 they drew a blank in it but three of their candidates got second positions in three constituencies. They also polled 6.48% of the total votes polled as against 2.75% in 1982 (Pillai, 1987). However the BJP, which has emerged as a genuine new force in many states in India, had never won a seat in Kerala until the 2016 assembly elections when it won a single seat in legislative assembly elections.

Table 2: Vote share of Political parties in Lokh Sabha Elections since 1991

Year	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
INC	38.77	38.01	38.67	39.35	32.13	40.13	31.47	37.44	35.0
CPI (M)	20.71	21.16	21	27.9	31.52	30.48	21.84	25.97	25.8
BJP	4.61	5.61	8.32	6.56	10.38	6.31	10.45	12.99	16.68
CPI	8.12	8.22	8.32	7.57	7.89	7.44	7.68	6.08	6.17

Source: Compiled from various reports

The above table indicates the pattern of voting in Lok Sabha elections since 1991. It can be seen that the Indian National Congress under the banner UDF always maintained a steady vote share. The data also vindicates a transition in the voting pattern since 2004 elections where BJP led alliance captured a double figure vote share except in the year 2009. But this growth was not transformed into real victory till 2024 when BJP won the first Lok Sabha seat from the state of Kerala.

In Kerala, the United Democratic Front (UDF), led by the Indian National Congress (INC), and the Left Democratic Front (LDF), led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), competed independently despite

both alliances being part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) at the national level. The UDF secured a landslide victory, winning 18 out of 20 seats, one fewer than in the 2019 elections with a decrease of 2.27%. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made history by winning its first-ever Lok Sabha seat in Kerala, representing Thrissur with a notable 3.59% increase in vote share compared to 2019, while the LDF claimed the remaining seat with a 2.93% drop in vote share .

Table : 3 Electoral Results 2024

S.No.	Alliance	Seat won 2024	Vote Share (%)
1	United Democratic Front (UDF)	18	45.21 (-2.27)
2	Left Democratic Front (LDF)	01	33.36(-2.93)
3	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	01	19.23 (+ 3.59)

Source: Election Commission of India data

A summary of the electoral results shows that both coalitions has suffered casualties in the elections with UDF loosing 2.27 of their traditional votes and LDF loosing 2.93 % votes. The National Democratic Alliance maintained a stable vote share of 15.64% between 2014 and 2019. In 2024, they achieved a notable increase of 3.59 percentage points, reaching a 19.23% vote share and securing their first Lok Sabha seat in Kerala. This gain is at the cost of both coalitions. It shows that the political transition in Kerala is happening in a new pace and momentum. But turning it into real outcomes in terms of parliamentary seats is a big task ahead for NDA in Kerala.

Table 4: General Election Parliament Constituency Wise Vote Percentage 2024

Constituency	UDF	LDF	NDA
Kasaragod	44.1%	35.06%	19.73%
Kannur	48.74%	38.5%	11.27%
Vadakara	49.65%	39.45	9.97%
Wayanad	59.69%	26.09%	13%
Kozhikode	47.74%	34.33%	16.57%
Malappuram	59.35%	31.69%	7.87%
Ponnani	54.81%	31.84%	12.16%
Palakkad	40.66%	33.39%	24.31%

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Alathur	38.63%	40.66%	18.97%
Thrissur	30.08%	30.95%	37.8%
Chalakyad	41.44%	34.73%	11.18%
Ernakulam	52.97%	25.47%	15.87%
Idukki	51.43%	35.53%	10.86%
Kottayam	43.6%	33.17%	19.74%
Alappuzha	38.21%	32.21%	28.3%
Mavelikkara	41.29%	40.07%	15.98%
Pathanamthitta	39.98%	32.79%	25.49%
Kollam	48.45%	32.03%	17.82%
Attingal	33.29%	33.22%	31.64%
Thiruvananthapuram	37.19%	25.72%	35.52%

Source: Election Commission of India data

The NDA score in Thrissur constituency is significant in many counts . One important factor is the selection of the candidate by the party. A celebrity was selected by the party for the candidature and he was working consistently in the field, developing deep rooted net works and creating own circles apart from the party structures. So the candidate was not new to the people and with the party in power at the centre he was capable of showering offers. This was added with the discontent of the Christian community with the existing coalitions. Many inside issues in the church prompted the leaders to align with NDA and this resulted in a victory by thumping majority. But there are several other factors that influenced the voters. Local level corruptions and scams were in plenty and NDA was in forefront to expose these issues.

Table 5: Voting share in Thrissur Lok Sabha Constituency 2014-2024

Party	Vote 2014	Vote 2019	Vote 2024
UDF	42.5%	39.8%	19.24%
BJP	38.8%	36.3%	37.8%
LDF	14.2%	16.7%	30.95%

Source: Election commission of India data

The above table explains the pattern of voting shift over the three elections. The National Democratic Alliance maintained a stable vote share of 15.64% between 2014 and 2019. In 2024, they achieved a

notable increase of 3.60 percentage points, reaching a 19.24% vote share and securing their first Lok Sabha seat in Kerala. Eventhough the LDF was successful in acquiring more votes this was not transformed into a victory. Actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi, the BJP candidate in Thrissur, secured a comfortable margin of 74,686 votes, against his rivals.

The INDIA Story

The 2024 Lokh Sabha elections witnessed the emergence of a new political coalition in India namely INDIA which stands for Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance. It comprises a diverse range of 37 political parties from across India⁹. Political alliances are known to change over time. But the Congress and the CPI(M) also find that their friendship changes across space. They have built up extraordinary bonhomie in States such as West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh as partners in the INDIA grouping while putting on public display their manic hostility in Kerala¹⁰. The CPI(M)'s Kerala unit, which retains its organisational and political strength, has always had reservations about any understanding with the Congress anywhere in India. Thus the INDIA alliance was not operated in the state of Kerala. Consequently there was a straight fight between the INDIA designated PM candidate Rahul Gandhi and the CPM candidate. This fight also high lights the peculiar nature of Kerala politics which operate independent of national politics. In the case of the much debated election of Rahul Gandhi congress emerged with an envious majority.

It is again to be noted that in the byelection due to the resignation of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the next power centre in congress was fielded in the election and the LDF brought a national leader Annie Raja. Here again Congress won a thumping majority. It can be assumed that the commitment of both Congress/Left to INDIA alliance was well exposed in Wayanad.

In 2014, M.I. Shanavas (UDF) won Wayanad with 3,77,035 votes (41.21%), defeating Sathyan Mokeri (LDF) with a margin of 20,870 votes, while BJP's P.R. Rasmilnath secured 80,752 votes (8.83%). In 2019, Rahul Gandhi (UDF) secured a landslide victory with 7,06,367 votes (64.67%), defeating P.P. Suneer (LDF) by 4,31,770 votes, with BJP's Thushar Vellappally getting 78,816 votes (7.22%). In 2024, Rahul Gandhi retained the seat with 6,47,445 votes (59.69%), defeating Annie Raja (LDF) by 3,64,422 votes, while BJP's K. Surendran received 1,41,045 votes (13%). In the 2024 by-poll, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

(UDF) won with 6,22,338 votes (64.9%), defeating Sathyam Mokeri (LDF) by 4,10,931 votes, with BJP's Navya Haridas securing 1,09,939 votes (11.4%).

Table: 6 Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency general elections 2014, 2019, 2024 and 2024 by-election

Year	Party	Votes Secured	Vote Share (%)
2014	UDF	3,77,035	41.21%
	LDF	3,56,165	38.92%
	BJP	80,752	8.83%
2019	UDF (Rahul Gandhi)	7,06,367	64.67%
	LDF	2,74,597	25.14%
	BJP	78,816	7.22%
2024	UDF (Rahul Gandhi)	6,47,445	59.69%
	LDF	2,83,023	26.09%
	BJP	1,41,045	13.00%
2024 By-Poll			
2024 By-Poll	UDF (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra)	6,22,338	64.9%
	LDF	2,11,407	22.0%
	BJP	1,09,939	11.4%

Source: Election commission of India

Conclusion

The state of Kerala is facing serious political and economic crises. Political violence in the state attracted national attention. In 2016, Kerala ranked 20th in total murders, yet it had the third-highest number of political murders in the country, behind Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Between 1970 and 2016, Kerala recorded 969 political murders. This politics of violence reduces the quality engagement in politics. Ideological paradigms are set aside by most of the parties for the benefit of 'convenience politics' and the major government business is conceived as distribution of spoils. This has made serious dents in the proclaimed development model of the state¹¹.

While such a growth process also resulted in a structural transformation of Kerala's economy, much earlier than the national economy, it has

resulted in heightening the inter-sectoral inequality. However, despite the impressive increase in per capita income along with a high human development record, Kerala continues to face the problem of unemployment with a significant underutilisation of labour of both educated and less educated working age population. The main burden of the educated unemployment has fallen on women adding to the problem of gender unfreedom. The state's ability to tackle this basic problem of unemployment and enhance capital expenditure has been thwarted by a declining tax collection efficiency leading to borrowing to meet both revenue and capital account deficits. Besides the state has also failed to generate any surplus from its public sector enterprises and thus having to carry the burden of its losses. In addition, the state's record in project implementation has been a deeply disappointing one leading to waste of scarce public resources as well time (Kannan, 2023).

One immediate impact of the developmental crisis is the heavy student/youth migration to West. Student migration from Kerala has nearly doubled in five years, from 1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.50 lakh in 2023¹². The number of student migrants rose from 1,29,763 in 2018 to about 2,50,000 in 2023. Underlining a significant shift in emigration demographics. These are serious issues of concern for the state and the political parties.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) emerged on top in the State of Kerala by winning 18 of the 20 seats in the Lok Sabha Elections 2024. Ending its electoral drought the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) opened its account by bagging the Thrissur seat. Incidentally the NDA alliance increased its vote share across the state and had established in many state assembly constituencies. It shows a transition position in the traditional political affiliation of the people in the state of Kerala. There are many reasons for the gain in NDA vote bank. One may be the shifting political alliance of the Christian community in the state as show cased in the case of Thrissur constituency where the Christian community votes form a decisive factor. Another factor is the distrust in the traditional coalitions. On one side the ruling coalition has become dictatorial after securing a second term. The opposition is handicapped by deep factionalism. There is also many serious social and economic crises that the state which questions the existing governance model. In the case of BJP the long term presence is of not much supportive for occupying the grounds. The social reform movements led by the communist party have also played a significant role in keeping the BJP at bay. As a result, despite the RSS's deep roots, it has not translated into support for the BJP. Furthermore, there are often visible conflicts

between the BJP and the RSS in Kerala¹³. All these factors demands a transition from traditional political affiliations and the electorate is looking for viable alternatives. But can NDA with its present organisational structure can offer an alternative is a serious question that is being attested by the by election results in Wayanad constituency. The alternatives should be qualified for sustainability and viability. It can be summarised that the 2024 election results is to be a an eye opener for the three coalitions. The days of campaign gimmicks are over and people need concrete solutions in the long run.

End Notes

- [1] Atul Kohli, Verdict 2024: Real winner is India's democracy, June 28, 2024. <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/verdict-2024-real-winner-is-indias-democracy-9379549/>
- [2] The National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) was launched by government of India , targeting a projected infrastructure investment of around 1 111 lakh crore from FY20 to FY25. The NIP serves as a centralised platform for hosting projects of states, union territories and central ministries to facilitate their monitoring and review. Currently, it encompasses over 9,766 projects and schemes across 37 sub-sectors. See <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/economicsurvey/doc/eschapter/echap06.pdf>
- [3] <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/prime-minister-narendra-modis-mantra-to-win-2024-lok-sabha-elections-at-bjp-parliamentary-meet-3760004>
- [4] Towards the end of the electoral campaign and at the beginning of the voting operations, the BJP was widely predicted to be the clear winner, even aiming for 400 seats out of the 543 in the Lok Sabha.
- [5] In 2019 the Indian National Congress won 52 seats, failing to get 10% of the seats needed to claim the post of Leader of the Opposition.
- [6] One best example is the 'Malayali Memorial' which was a petition submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore on January 1, 1891, demanding that Malayalis be given priority in high government positions within the state, essentially protesting the dominance of Tamil Brahmins in administrative roles, and advocating for equal opportunity based on merit, not caste or religion; it was a significant movement in the fight for social justice in Kerala, India. This was promoted by educated Malayalis of the time.
- [7] <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-32-communist-movement-in-india/>
- [8] Unlike most other Indian states, there has been a remarkable level of party continuity. Even when new political parties have emerged, they have tended to be the result of splits within existing parties, rather than

from the formation of genuinely new parties. For example in 1964 the CPI split into the CPI and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)); and in 1965 the Kerala Congress was formed out of a split from the INC. By contrast, the BJP, which has emerged as a genuine new force in many states in India, had never won a seat in Kerala until the 2016 assembly elections (when it won a single seat). Currently, the political competition in the state revolves around the Communist led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress led United Democratic Front (UDF).

- [9] According to the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the alliance's ideology revolves around the principles of developmentalism, inclusivity, and social justice. By combining their efforts, the member parties aim to protect democratic values, promote welfare and progress, and counter what they perceive as an ideology that threatens the idea of India. It was formed with the objective of defeating the incumbent BJP led NDA in the 2024 Indian general election.
- [10] <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/limited-company-on-the-congress-left-spat-in-kerala/article68091097.ece>
- [11] The Kerala model of development is a combined effort and set of practices adopted by the government and the people of Kerala to achieve better productivity, low infant mortality rates, significantly lower population growth rates, increased life expectancy, better healthcare facilities.
- [12] Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2023. The survey found that , there was an increase in the number of people leaving at a very young age, as early as 17 years. Students constituted 11.3% of total emigrants, indicating that a growing number of younger individuals are choosing to migrate, particularly for educational opportunities.
- [13] <https://thesouthfirst.com/opinion/tracing-rss-silent-march-in-kerala-its-impact-on-bjps-2026-poll-prospects/>

References

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- [5] Times of India. (2024). *Priyanka Gandhi achieves historic victory in Wayanad by over 410,000 votes*. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/115608923.cms>
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- [8] Törnquist, O., & TRharakan, M. (1995). *The Next Left: Democratisation and Attempts to Renew the Radical Political Development Project in Kerala*. NIAS Publications.