

Analysing The Politics Of Kerala

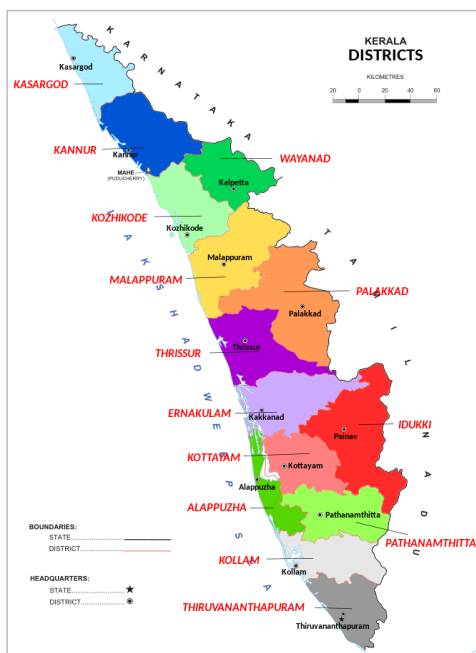
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Kerala Baseline

HISTORY OF KERALA

Kerala is originally mentioned as Keralaputra (land of Cheras) in a rock inscription related to the



Mauryan monarch Ashoka. Keralaputra is also often referred to the descendants of the ancient Chera Dynasty of ancient Kerala.

The region gained notoriety among the Greeks and Romans in the last century BCE for its spices (especially pepper). The area was under the control of the eastern Pandya and Chola empires, as well as the Cheras, throughout parts of the first five centuries CE when it was still a part of Tamilakam, the Tamils' home country.

Jewish immigrants began to migrate to Kerala in the first century, and St. Thomas the Apostle is said to have visited Kerala during that same century.

The history of Kerala from the sixth to the eighth centuries is mostly shrouded in mystery, however, it is known that Arab traders eventually brought Islam to the region. Malayalam established a unique language during the Kulashekhara dynasty (c. 800-1102), and Hinduism gained popularity.

Throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, Kerala was frequently under Chola dominion. The Venad kingdom's Ravi Varma Kulashekhara established a fleeting hegemony over southern India at the start of the 14th century. After his passing, Kerala descended into a tangle of rival chieftains, the most significant of which were Calicut (now Kozhikode) in the north and Venad in the south.

Vasco da Gama's landing close to Calicut in 1498 marked the beginning of the age of foreign Invasion. The Portuguese supplanted Arab traders in the 16th century and took control of the Malabar Coast's trade. The zamorin (hereditary ruler) of Calicut prevented them from establishing sovereignty. In the

17th century, the Dutch drove the Portuguese out. The Dutch expansionist plans were thwarted at the Battle of Colachel, 12 years after Marthanda Varma assumed the throne of Venad. After that, Marthanda Varma expanded the Venad dominion to include what would later become the southern state of Travancore and adapted a European style of martial arts. He helped the raja of Cochin (Kochi) to defeat the zamorin in 1757, ensuring Cochin's survival. But by 1806, Cochin and Travancore had joined the northwestern Malabar Coast as subject states under the British Madras Presidency.

Cochin and Travancore were combined to form the Travancore-Cochin state in 1949, two years after India gained its freedom. The present state of Kerala was constituted on a linguistic basis in 1956 when the Malabar Coast and the Kasargod taluka (administrative subdivision) of South Kanara were added to Travancore-Cochin. Aikya Kerala Movement (United Kerala Movement) also contributed to the formation of Kerala as a state on a linguistic basis. Tamil Nadu was given control of the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin state's southern half.

State Formation

Based on the historical development and socio-economic conditions, the state is divided into two distinct regions, namely Malabar, and Travancore-Cochin. The Malabar region consists of Kasargod, Wayanad, Cannanore, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad in the North, and the remaining eight districts - Trichur, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alleppey, Pathanamthitta, Quilon and Trivandrum constitute the Travancore-Cochin region.

The Travancore and Cochin were the Princely States and Madras was one of the British Presidencies in India, Madras remained a neglected region for a long. The agitation of the movement for the linguistic formation of Kerala began at the beginning of the 20th century with the formation of the linguistic provinces of Assam, Bihar, Sind and Orissa. The State Peoples' Conference organized at Ernakulam in April 1928 passed a resolution for the formation of Aikya Kerala, a movement that aimed at forging a Malayalam speaking State, extending from Kasaragod to Cape Comorin.

In 1946, the Raja of Cochin expressed his willingness in the Cochin Legislature, to join hands with the United Kerala Movement Leaders, for Aikya Kerala State and consented to merge with the state of Travancore. The Travancore ruler at the time opposed the United Kerala Movement. The Tamil-speaking population of Travancore was alarmed by the Aikya Kerala Movement, which made them worry that they would be treated unfairly in the Malayalam State. As a result, they were against the idea of merging the State's Tamil-speaking taluks into a Malayalam-speaking State. Exploiting this sentiment, Diwan C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer declared that the idea of a Malayalam speaking State was unthinkable and there was no intention on the part of the Travancore Government to surrender its sovereignty to any union. The feeling of discontent and neglect among the Tamils against the authority led to the formation of the Tamil Merging Movement, which later turned into an Anti-United Kerala Movement in the Tamil taluks. They demanded merging with the Tamil-speaking Madras State.

When India became independent and an elected Legislature came to power at the Centre, the Government of India considered the issue of the formation of linguistic States. It had given hope for the Tamils too. As a result, they intensified their campaigns in support of the Tamil merger movement. The first election for the Travancore State was held in 1948 while there was a protest against Travancore's progress toward independence and the unification of Travancore and Cochin States. The Travancore State Congress appeared to support Malayalam nationalism throughout this election campaign, whereas the inhabitants of the Tamil taluks supported Tamil nationalism.. The election campaigns also recorded violence between Tamils and Malayalees in election campaigns.

The rulers of Travancore and Cochin gave assurances to national leaders like Sardar Patel and V. P. Menon that a Union of both States would be formed on July 1, 1949. As a result, they struck an agreement and, on July 1, 1949, ceded their sovereignty to the newly established Travancore-Cochin State. As a result, on July 1, 1949, the United State of Travancore-Cochin was established. Kerala's current linguistic region was preceded by the United State of Travancore-Cochin.

In 1952, Travancore-Cochin State held its first general election for the legislature. The Tamil Merging Movement of the Tamil-speaking taluks with Madras State was supported in this election by the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress. Malayalees and Tamils engaged in violent conflicts during the election campaign. But when the election results were announced, Tamils once again won in Tamil taluks. They considered the victory as the support for the Tamil Movement. As a result, they strengthened their struggle for merging the Tamil-speaking taluks with Madras State.

In the elections of 1952, no political party won a majority. The Congress assured the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress that, in exchange for their help in forming a Ministry, they would support their proposal to combine the Tamil-speaking regions of Travancore-Cochin with Tamil Nadu. Later, on March 12, 1953, the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress withdrew its support for the Congress Ministry. A. J. John created a short-lived ministry with the help of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress.

With the merger of Travancore and Cochin on 1 st July 1949, the movement for a united Kerala gained strength. The legitimacy of a united Kerala was brought home by a book *Onnekalkodi Malayalikal* by E.M.S.Namboodirippad. The self-sacrifice of Potti Sreeramulu in Andhra accelerated the process of state formation on a linguistic basis. When, finally, the state of Kerala came into existence by joining together the regions where Malayalam is spoken, the Thovala, Agastheesvaram, Kalkkulam and Vilavankodu taluk of Trivandrum district became part of Madras State. Similarly, the Kasargode and Hosdurg taluks, which were parts of the district of South Canara, were added to the State of Kerala. Thus came into existence a new state of Kerala comprising Malabar, Cochin and Travancore on November 1, 1956.

Decades of Unstable Governance

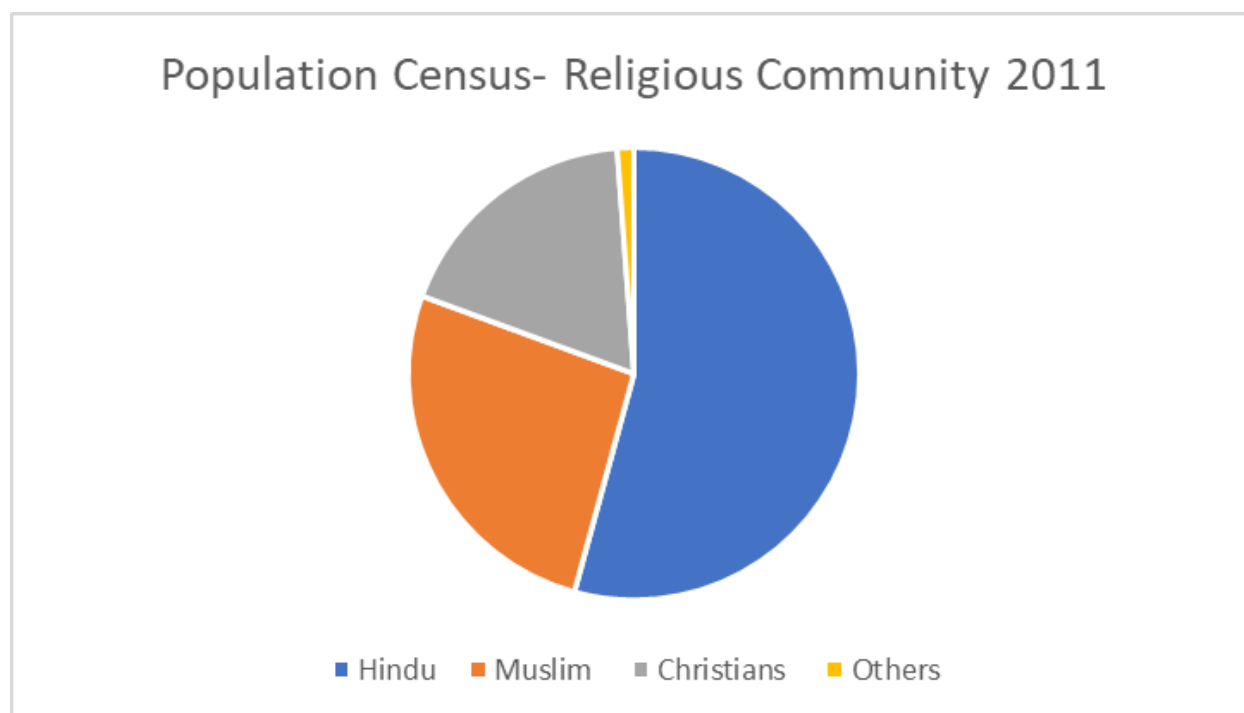
Kerala was the first state ever to elect a communist party to power and bring down the same through political turmoil. The political system of system has been subject to continuous instability as more

than one political party exercised political control over the state for shorter periods than what was stipulated in the constitution. Between 1948 and 1956, there were as many as 10 governments. Post-1956, there have been 23 Ministries and seven terms of President's Rule. In 1957, it was the challenge from pressure groups like the Nair Service society and the church which led to the dismissal of the government in 1959. Other times, the instability was brought by political parties switching fronts and the inability of the electorate to determine a particular front as the winner. The major two fronts (the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Indian National Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF)) have had similar ideologies which don't make the demarcation between the two easy for voters, thus the two keep forming government in alteration. This is also one of the reasons for the constant change of loyalty of the parties towards the two Fronts.

Ezhavas, Nairs, Muslims and Christians form roughly 80 percent of the population of the state. Several governments have survived or fallen due to shifting alliances of these communities. These communities have looked at each other with suspicion and apprehension. Each one of the mentioned communities has its own organizations which run important hospitals, orphanages, hostels, educational institutions, reading rooms, and publish newspapers and magazines. Given the socialist approach of lifestyle and politics, these organizations and institutions mark major political presence and function as pressure groups. Even minor shifts in voting patterns of these organizations can cost political parties their government.

Another reason for political instability was the proliferation of political parties. In 1957, only 5 parties participated in the elections. The number increased to 21 in 1982, out of which 17 were represented in the assembly. In 1987, 18 political parties were represented in the assembly.

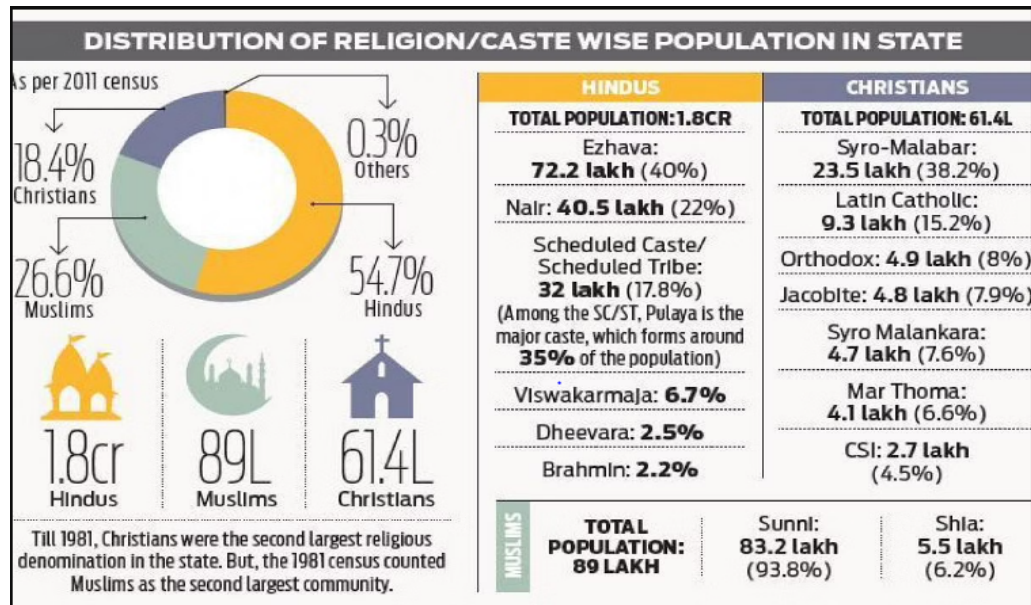
STATE & DISTRICT LEVEL DETAILS (Caste & Religion)



Distribution of population in KERALA on the basis of religion (2011 census)

RELIGION	TOTAL POPULATION	PERCENT POPULATION
Hindu	18,282,492	54.73%
Muslim	8,873,472	26.56%
Christian	6,141,269	18.38%
Sikh	3,814	0.01%
Buddhist	4,752	0.01%
Jain	4,489	0.01%
Other religions/ persuasions	7,618	0.02
Religion not stated	88,155	0.26%

- Caste wise division of Population- OBC consists of the majority population of 60%, Dalits (SCs) of 9.1%, Tribals of 1.45% and General consist of 29% of the population.



- **Major Caste Division (of Hindus)-**

1. Ezhavas form the majority population of Hindus. Ezhava belong to the Backward community and currently form around 27 % of the Total population of Kerala, which means around 40% of Hindus are from Ezhava community. Ezhavas mainly reside in Wayanad, Palakkad, Idukki, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram.
2. Nairs constitute around 22 percent of the Hindu population and belong to the high caste equivalent of kshatriyas. Nairs mainly reside in Kannur, Kozhikode, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram.
3. Vishwakarma community is the Third Largest Hindu caste in Kerala, it also belongs to the OBC group of castes.

District-wise Distribution Of Religions (2011 census)

DISTRICT	HINDUS	MUSLIMS	CHRISTIANS	SIKHS	BUDDHISTS	JAINS
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM	68.51%	13.77%	16.79%	0.02%	0.02%	-
KASARGOD	55.84%	37.24%	6.69%	0.01%	0.03%	0.01%
MALAPPURAM	27.60%	70.24%	1.98%	-	-	-
ERNAKULAM	45.99%	15.67%	38.07%	0.03%	0.02%	0.04%
THRISSUR	58.42%	17.07%	24.27%	0.01%	0.01%	-
KOZHIKODE	56.21%	39.24%	4.26%	0.01%	0.01%	0.02%
PALAKKAD	66.76%	28.93%	4.07%	0.01%	0.01%	-
KOLLAM	64.42%	19.30%	16%	0.01%	0.01%	-
KANNUR	59.83%	29.43%	10.41%	0.02%	0.04%	0.01%
ALAPPUZHA	68.64%	10.55%	20.45%	0.01%	0.01%	0.01%
KOTTAYAM	49.81%	6.41%	43.48%	0.01%	0.02%	-
PATHANAMTHITTA	56.93%	4.60%	38.12%	0.01%	0.01%	-
IDUKKI	48.86%	7.41%	43.42%	0.01%	0.02%	-
WAYANAD	49.48%	28.65%	21.34%	0.01%	0.04%	0.22%

- Malappuram District is the only Muslim majority district. Edappal, Thenhippalam, Ariyallur, Vazhayur are the only Hindu majority towns in Malappuram district. Malappuram consists of several 'safe' constituencies for IUML. This particular district was created as a reward for IUML, for extending support to the United Front Ministry in 1967.
- In Pathanamthitta district, there are total 4 towns, wherein 2 are hindu majority towns - Pathanamthitta, adoor and other 2 - Kozhencherry, thiruvalla are christian majority towns
- 80-85 percent of Hindus in Kerala consider themselves as atheist and communist.
- Malabar region records higher density of Muslim population.

MAJOR COHORTS

Just like any other State, political circumstances in Kerala are influenced by factors like religion and caste. Political commentators have stated this fact quite often that caste is crucial in Kerala in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. This is evident in voting patterns and even while selecting candidates. It is very common for political party leaders to hold scheduled appointments to meet religious and community heads during election days and influence the outcome in their favor.

The Hindu community forms 54.73 percent of the total populace in the state. The Ezhavas and the Nairs are the two main sub-sections of the Hindu community. Muslims on the other hand comprise 26.56 percent. Among the Muslims, 93.8 percent of the population belongs to Sunni sect. Christians comprise 18.38 percent of the total populace.

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)

Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) is a community organization representing Ezhavas, the major Hindu group since 1903. The organization aims to work for the educational and economic prosperity of the group and to lead the Ezhava community in a religious reform movement. The group is led by General Secretary Vellappally Nadeshan. The organization is headquartered in Cherthala, in the Alappuzha district of Kerala. The SNDP has influenced over 50 constituencies in Kerala in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Thrissur, Palakkad, and Kannur. Thus gaining the support of the organization is significant for all major political parties. SNDP has supported CPM in the recent past for important issues like allowing women entry into the Sabarimala temple. SNDP has supported the LDF government in the by-elections held. Despite SNDP's support to LDF in the Lok Sabha elections in 2019, UDF won 19 out of 20 seats in Kerala.

Nair Service Society (NSS)

Nair community forming 17% of Kerala's populace is represented by the Nair Service Society (NSS) headquartered in Changanassery, Kottayam District. The organization is considered to be highly influential in the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam Thrissur, and Palakkad. At present, G Sukumaran Nair is the general secretary of the NSS. National Democratic Party (NDP) was the political party of NSS until 1986. The NSS had its allegiance with the Congress-led UDF. But also claims to follow the policy of equidistance from all political parties. Because of this equidistance policy, political parties continue to woo the community to gain support. NSS was the first to stage a protest against the Supreme Court's verdict on the Sabarimala issue and the LDF government's decision to execute the order. However, when BJP protested for the same, the NSS leadership never showed interest.

Muslim Community

The Indian Union of Muslim League (IUML) has its presence in the districts of Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Kasaragod in Kerala where the Muslim population is dominant. UDF has been garnering the support of IUML for 40 years now. Along with IUML, there are other influential Muslim communal groups too. One of them is Sunnis led by Kanthapuram A P Aboobacker Musaliyar. In the last Assembly elections, the Sunni group supported the LDF in Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Kasaragod districts. With this essential support from Sunnis, LDF defeated UDF in 10 seats. There has been a difference of opinion between Kanthapuram and the Muslim League and thus Sunni lent support to LDF. On various occasions, IUML has tried reconciliation talks with the leader. All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Tariq Anwar, who is responsible for affairs in Kerala, had visited Kanthapuram at Malappuram and sought his support for the Congress. Another prominent group with a strong influence on the Muslim community is Samastha Kerala Jamiyat Ul Ulema also known as the Ek Sunni faction. This Sunni faction has decisive power in a dozen seats in Malappuram and Kozhikode. The regions are close to both the alliances. Another Muslim

organization is Jama-at e Islami and its political arm called Welfare Party of India, which was later formed, has been pledging allegiance to the LDF. In the last Lok Sabha elections in 2019, the Welfare Party supported the UDF.

Christian Community

Christian community forms 18.38 percent of the populace of the state of Kerala residing mainly in the districts of Idukki, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Pathanamthitta, and Thrissur. The community has various groups such as Syro- Malabar, Syrian Catholic, Latin Catholic, Malankara Catholic, Jacobite, Orthodox, Mar Thoma, Church of South India (CSI), Nadar Christian, Dalit Christian, and Christians with no caste or other Christians.

Syro Malankara Catholic Churches influence most of the total Christian populace of 18.38 percent. The community has great support in the Central Travancore belt, specifically the Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, and Idukki districts of Kerala. UDF leaders under Oommen Chandy, who has a strong bonding with the Christian churches, met with the group. Another group Syro Malabar Catholic Church is important among the Christians in Thrissur, Ernakulam, Wayanad, and Kannur districts. UDF leaders also met its head Cardinal Mar Joseph Alanchery at the headquarters in Thrissur for support in North Kerala. The community has been UDF's vote bank traditionally. But it is suspected the community supported the LDF in the Local Body elections 2020. The Jose K Mani faction of Kerala Congress which had huge Church support made alliances with LDF after splitting from UDF. This could be the reason according to analysts. If this trend continues, Congress could witness a setback in at least 30 constituencies. The Latin Christians who form 4 percent of the total populace are highly influential especially in the Coastal constituencies in Kerala. Their political influence in some constituencies of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Ernakulam, and Thrissur districts cannot be avoided. Most of the Latin Christian voters have supported the Congress alliance. Poll victory in 7 constituencies in Ernakulam district is in the hands of the Latin Christians.

POLITICAL HISTORY AND PAST ELECTORAL ANALYSIS

Politics in Kerala has been dominated by two political fronts: the Indian National Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) since late 1970s. The pre-poll political alliances of Kerala have stabilized strongly in such a manner that, with rare exceptions, most of the coalition partners stick their loyalty to the respective alliances. Due to this, the two alliances have consistently held the reins of government since 1979, with no deviations, until the Kerala Legislative Assembly election of 2021 ended this trend.

However, from 1957 to 1980, Kerala's political landscape was marked by a constant churn of coalitions, party mergers and splits, factionalism within political parties, and the emergence of various splinter organisations. Two major pre-election political coalitions were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s: the Left Democratic Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the United Democratic Front, led by the Indian National Congress.

In terms of individual parties, the state has strong leanings towards socialism and thus Communist parties have made strong inroads in Kerala. The Malabar region, particularly Kannur and Palakkad, are considered the heartland of the Communist parties. The Kollam and Alappuzha districts, where trade unions have a strong presence, are generally inclined to Left parties, though several times the UDF has won.

The Indian National Congress has had a very strong presence in Kerala since pre-Independence days. The Congress party has great popularity in the Thrissur, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta and Thiruvananthapuram regions, whereas it has a strong influence in some parts of Idukki regions.

The Bharatiya Janata Party is also active in Kerala, but is not part of either coalition. It is associated with NDA along with Kerala congress and Bharath Dharma Jana Sena. It lacks an elected representative in the Parliament, lost its sole Legislative Assembly member in the Kerala Legislative

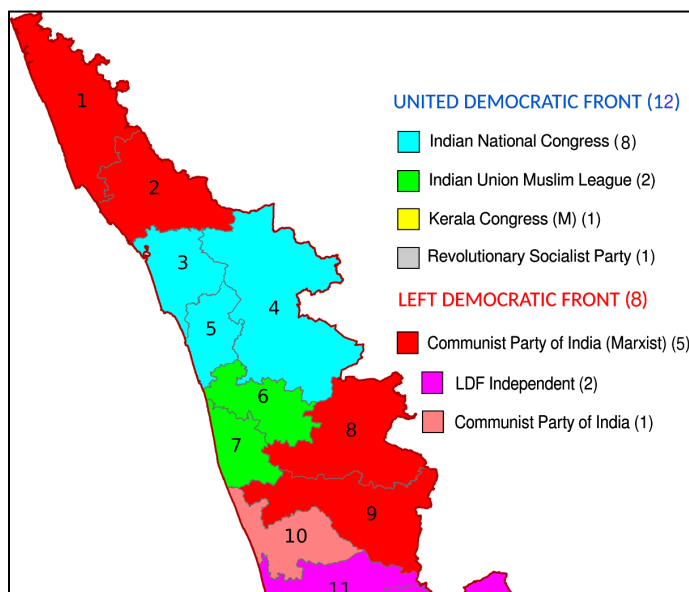
Assembly election of 2021, and has appointed representatives in each Corporation, several Municipal Councils, and a sizable number of Local Panchayats.

TABLE: PAST ELECTION RESULTS (Vote Share)

Party	2021 (VS)	2019 (LS)	2016 (VS)	2014 (LS)	2011 (VS)	2009 (LS)	2006 (VS)	2004 (LS)	2001 (VS)
CPI (M)	25.38%	25.97%	26.7%	21.59%	28.2%	30.5%	30.45%	31.5%	21.4%
INC	25.12%	37.46%	23.8%	31.10%	26.4%	40.1%	24.1%	32.1%	31.4%
CPI	7.58%	6.08%	8.2%	7.59%	8.7%	7.4%	8.1%	7.9%	7.3%
IUML	15%	5.48%	7.4%	4.54%	7.9%	5.1%	7.3%	4.9%	7.6%
BJP	11.30%	13%	10.6%	10.33%	6%	6.3%	4.7%	10.4%	5%

2014 Lok Sabha Election

Kerala has 20 Lok Sabha seats out of which six went to Left Democratic Front(LDF), 12 went to United Democratic Front (UDF), and two to independent candidates.



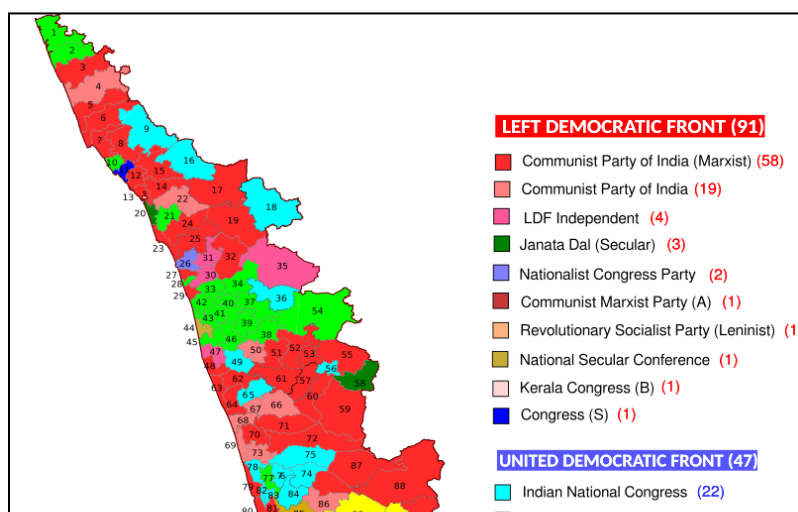
BJP failed to win even a single seat in the state but it emerged second in Thiruvananthapuram and increased its vote share in many of the seats across the state.

Even though the Congress lost some of its traditional strongholds like Thrissur and Chalakudi, the UDF did well in minority-dominated areas like Malappuram and Kottayam.

Politburo member of CPI(M), M A Baby was defeated by RSP's N K Premachandran in Kollam. One of the major setbacks for the CPI(M) was its defeat in Vatakara, where the party had been on defensive over the politically sensitive murder of RMP leader T P Chandrasekharan in 2012. CPI(M) failed to regain its hold over Vatakara, for the second time, where Congress's Mullappally Ramachandran narrowly won.

CPI, which drew a blank in 2009, won one of the four seats it contested in 2014 as its nominee C N Jayadevan wrested Thrissur's seat from Congress.

The solar scam controversy had little impact as the election results favored UDF. The Kasturirangan report played a major role in the victory of Left Democratic Front-backed Independent candidate Joice George who campaigned against the suggestions of the Kasturirangan committee and Madhav Gadgil committee.



2016 Vidhan Sabha Election

Coalitions led by either the communists or the Congress Party – since 1982 the Left Democratic

Front (LDF) or the United Democratic Front (UDF) – have alternated in winning all but one of thirteen elections (the exception was in 1977). The LDF succeeded in ousting the UDF from office, claiming 91 of the 140 state assembly seats to 47 for the UDF.

Bharatiya Janata Party had been in power at the center since 2014 but gained a seat for the first time in 2016. The domination of the two fronts faced more of a challenge than ever before from the BJP and its allies who captured 15 percent of the popular vote; the BJP alone saw its vote rise from 6.1 to 10.8 percent despite contesting only 98 seats (it fought 138 in 2011).

The main fronts were unable to project an agreed sole campaign leader and chief ministerial candidate at the polls, a reflection of the internal problems bedeviling both.

BJP in Kerala had been able to count on the support of a longer and better-developed network of local branches (*shakhas*) of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) than in the other states of south India, a region where it has historically been weak. Kummanam Rajasekharan, an RSS *pracharak* who had spearheaded several Hindu nationalist agitations in Kerala over the past three decades, was appointed the party's state president.

Until 2016, BJP had never won more than 6% of the vote in assembly polls despite twice (in 2004 and 2014) claiming over 10% in national parliamentary elections. Marketing the Modi Wave, PM Modi himself made repeated visits to the state, making particular overtures to those Backward Class (BC) and Scheduled Castes (SC) and Tribes (ST) leaders unhappy at not being accommodated by the two main fronts in the way they wanted.

BJP succeeded in attracting the Bharat Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS) into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) fold. The BDJS (a new party in 2016) was launched by Vellapally Natesan, the secretary-general of the SNDP Yogam, the main socio-religious organization of the Ezhavas which is Kerala's main Backward Class and largest Hindu caste. The BJP also drew one or two Dalit leaders.

While this helped the NDA retain the support of the minority of OBC and SC voters who voted for it in 2014, the BDJS had a dismal performance. The polling data indicated that, like in other parts of India, BJP voters were still more likely to be upper caste, more affluent, male, young, and urban.

The LDF won the seats the UDF lost, despite the fact that the BJP seems to have profited from voter apathy toward the UDF, whose vote share went below 40% for the first time. In exchange for the BJP's victory in Nemom, the LDF won 24 seats.

By highlighting the advancement of infrastructure projects like the Smart City and Metro rail in the state's largest city, Kochi, and the fact that Chandy was still relatively well-regarded even after two terms as chief minister, the UDF hoped to defy the regular swing of Kerala's electoral pendulum. This was rejected by public outrage over the chief minister and his government's involvement in corruption scandals, particularly the charges of sexual favors and bribery made by Saritha Nair, the director of a sham solar energy firm. The UDF's contentious decision to establish a policy that would completely outlaw the sale of alcohol within ten years—a plan supported by the state unit president of the Congress Party, V.M. Sudheeran—also resurged. The allegations of UDF leaders taking bribes to renew bar licenses and the involvement of the then Finance Minister K.M. Mani forced him to resign in the preceding November; Mani was the veteran leader of the Kerala Congress (Mani group), the Congress's principal partner in the UDF alongside the Muslim League.

Divisions within the UDF did not help the cause; Sudheeran's attempt to withhold tickets from close associates of the chief minister under investigation for corruption caused a delay in the allocation of tickets to Congress candidates.

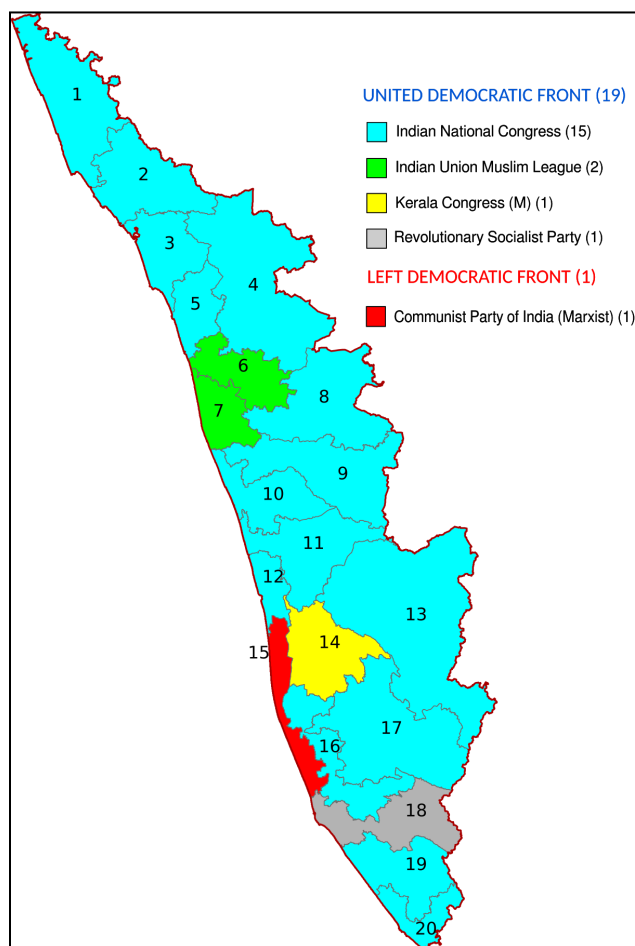
The LDF avoided putting forth a clear candidate for chief minister, allowing both the 92-year-old former chief minister Achuthanandan, who is still regarded as the party's most popular campaigner and his 71-year-old rival, Pinarayi Vijayan, the longtime state secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) to run for assembly seats.

Despite this uncertainty, the usually more disciplined LDF still performed better at putting up a united front by emphasizing the government's record on corruption and appealing to voters uneasy about the political killings and clashes of RSS/BJP and CPM workers. It reaped close to 43.5% votes which is also the lowest share for any winning coalition in Kerala's electoral history.

2019 Lok Sabha election

Congress-led United Democratic Front won 19 of the state's 20 parliamentary constituencies. Among its allies, the Indian Union Muslim League won two seats while the Kerala Congress (Mani group) and Revolutionary Socialist Party won one seat each.

Rahul Gandhi's presence in Kerala appears to have helped the Congress gain the votes of Muslims and Christians, the two prominent minority communities in the state. His decision to contest from Wayanad created ripples in all the 20 Lok Sabha seats

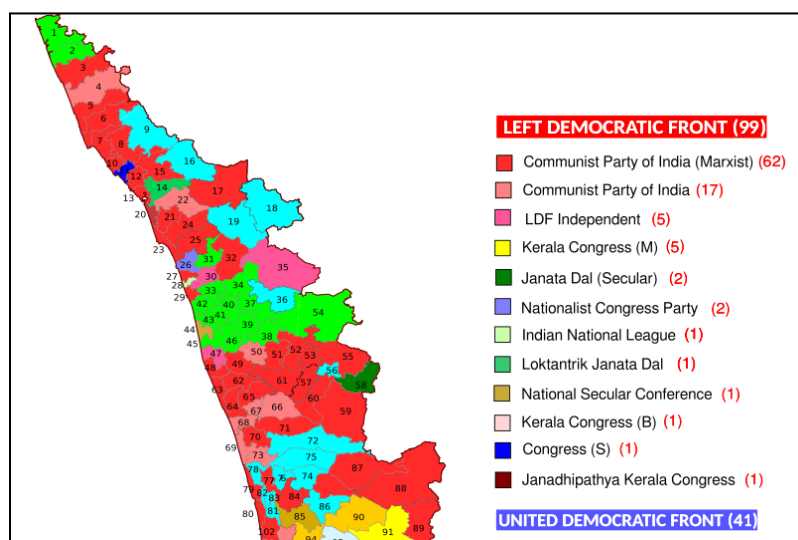


Members of the minority communities gave their votes to the United Democratic Front. Due to the state government's handling of the Sabarimala controversy, Congress also received support from the community who make up the majority. The Pinarayi government tried to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling allowing women between the ages of 10 and 50 to visit the shrine. BJP conducted agitation and several of its workers were jailed, however the votes did not convert. Some saw it wasteful to vote for BJP as the main competition was between LDF and UDF. Thus, to teach the government a lesson they chose to vote for congress. BJP lost in Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta and Thissur also, where BJP's win was anticipated. One of the reasons was that the Nair service society also supported BJP's agitation but didn't vote. They thought the problem could have been swiftly resolved if the BJP government at the centre had brought ordinance.

However, BJP candidates made impressive strides in Pathanamthitta and Thrissur. K Surendran, the state general secretary of the BJP, received close to three lakh votes in Pathanamthitta, the epicentre of the Sabarimala controversy. But in a close fight, he came in third. In Thrissur, actor and politician Suresh Gopi also followed the same.

Despite losing every single seat it ran for, the BJP-led NDA saw an increase in its vote share. The NDA received 10.85 percent of the vote in 2014. According to figures released by the Election Commission, the alliance's share of the vote increased to 15.20 percent in 2019 with the BJP receiving 12.93 percent of the total votes.

2021 Vidhan Sabha election



The traditional social basis of voting in Kerala underwent some important changes contributing to the larger-than-expected victory of the LDF over the UDF. A modest

but significant shift was noticed among the Muslim and Christian communities, who constitute 27 and 18% of the State's population, respectively. While the UDF has consistently received a substantial majority of the votes from the two communities and they did so again this time, both the communities also warmed up to the LDF at the expense of minor players, giving the LDF a further advantage over the UDF.

The post-election survey results from Lokniti-CSDS show that about two-fifths (39%) of Muslims and Christians supported the LDF this time around, compared to around one-third (35%) in the 2016 elections. On the other side, the UDF received a gain in support from Christians (57%) while maintaining support from Muslims (58%). However, support for the UDF considerably declined among the two minority communities compared to the 2019 Lok Sabha election. Back then at least two-thirds of Muslims and Christians had voted for it. For the LDF, the vote gains compared to the Lok Sabha elections were 9(Muslims) and 14(Christians) percentage points, respectively.

Regionally, Muslim support for the UDF remained very high (at around two-thirds) in the Malabar region (a region largely fought by the UDF constituent — the IUML), but it severely decreased to less than half in the Cochin region. The LDF outperformed the UDF among Muslims in this area. Much of the greater Christian support for the LDF originated in the Travancore and Malabar districts, so far as that is concerned.

The BJP which had secured around 10% of the votes from the Christian community in the 2016 elections, managed only about 2% in 2021. This decline is significant given that the party had actively raised the issue of 'love jihad' and conversions to impress Christian voters in the run-up to the elections and the fact that the BJP's top leadership including Prime Minister Narendra Modi had held discussions with several church leaders to find a solution to the long-standing feud between Orthodox and Jacobite sects of the Malankara Syrian Church. However, none of that seems to have worked.

Despite working out a Nair-Ezhava binary and securing the confidence of a section of the Christian community, the BJP could not hold on

State leadership failed to communicate to its core voter base about the Central schemes. Voters' perceptions of the state president K. Surendran, who was running in two Assembly districts, Shobha Surendran's candidacy, and RSS ideologue R. Balasankar's outburst against party state leadership negatively impacted the voters. The party also faces trouble with the nominations filed in the Thalassery and Guruvayur constituencies.

Class Aspect

The shift of Christian and Muslim votes towards the LDF this time is fairly significant. It was the poorer Muslims and Christians that were far more likely to have voted for the LDF this time than in the 2016 elections. Support for the LDF among the lower class and poor Muslims increased from 35 to 46% and among the lower class and poor Christians from 36 to 44%.

As far as the majority Hindu community is concerned, its voting pattern has remained largely unchanged since the 2016 elections. The LDF, the UDF, and the NDA each received slightly higher levels of support than they did previously, while support for the LDF increased slightly but noticeably. Although there were some notable caste-based differences - the Scheduled Caste or Dalit minority, which makes up roughly 10% of the population, was the most affected. The LDF's support from Dalits surged dramatically this time, reaching over 69 percent. When compared to the 2016 elections, where the LDF received 51% of the Dalit vote, this is an increase of 18 percentage points. Once again, significantly, like Christians, much of this Dalit support for the LDF came at the expense of the BJP which saw a 16 percentage point decline in Dalit support.

The non-Ezhava OBCs were the other significant source of support for the LDF among Hindus, and their support increased from 49 to 61 percent, primarily at the expense of the UDF. The voting

patterns of the Ezhavas, who make up around 20% (2011 census) of the population, did not significantly change. With the LDF receiving more than half of their votes, they continued to support it as they did in the past. Additionally, the BJP gained some support from Ezhavas, which appears to have come at the UDF's expense. The Nair community provided the UDF with the only real wins. Approximately two-fifths of their support went to the Congress-led Front, up from one-fifth in 2016. Nairs and other upper castes were the only community among whom the LDF did not perform well.

BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP)

The politics of Kerala has majorly revolved around the minority community that forms the major population of the state like Ezhavas, Christians, Muslims, SCs, STs and other OBCs. Most of the political leaders in the state are appointed from these communities only.

Though BJP did not win a single seat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the vote share has significantly increased. The Kerala unit of BJP (K Surendran) was ridden with allegations of corruption, bribery, and abduction during the 2019 elections. Negative campaign strategies in and outside Kerala have also resulted in the consolidation of votes against the BJP. State leadership also failed to get across the message of the Central schemes to its core vote bank. The rift between political leaders within the state had also been growing. Several senior leaders in Kerala have also expressed their dissent with how the party functioned in the state. The state president has also been accused of making decisions on his own and functioning closely with his people only.

The center has thus, it seems, planned to directly influence Kerala. The nomination of track star P T Usha to the Rajya Sabha shows the intent. Four Union ministers—Anurag Thakur, Bhagwanth Khuba, Shobha Karandlaje and S Jaishankar—have toured Kerala to publicize the Modi government's achievements. Six Lok Sabha seats in the state—Thiruvananthapuram, Mavelikkara, Pathanamthitta, Attingal, Palakkad and Thrissur are among those identified across India for outreach programs, and a Union cabinet minister will be in charge of each.

PR exercises and high-voltage campaigns are to be conducted by BJP in the state. BJP, RSS and its allies are preparing the ground to float 'Hindu banks' in Kerala under the Nidhi Companies Act which doesn't require Reserve Bank of India registration. The BJP central leadership is employing new political tools such as forming

cooperatives, 'Hindu' banks, micro-enterprises and women and youth self-help groups to win over Kerala. RSS-affiliated Sahakar Bharati has floated some 7,300 Akshayasree Self Help Group units in the state which has over 140,000 members now. The Akshayasree units run tailoring units, bakeries, tea stalls, and manufacture curry powders. Another affiliated group runs the Samrudhi stores, supermarkets with the help of Bharath Agro Processing and Marketing Cooperative Ltd (BAMCO) in the state.

Indian National Congress (INC)

The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, often known as the K. P. C. C., is the state entity of the Indian National Congress. The United Democratic Front (UDF) alliance, the main opposition force in the Kerala Legislative Assembly, is led by the Indian National Congress (INC). A distinguishing aspect of Kerala's party structure is the existence of strong caste-religious divisions beneath political coalitions. Christians and Muslims which form 45% of the population of the state are major voting groups of the United Democratic Front (UDF). Christian party leaders of Congress party and factions of Kerala Congress party with Christian following gather Christian votes for United Democratic Front (UDF) while Muslim votes are gained by Indian Union Muslim League.

Since the first general elections held in 1951-52, the state has witnessed two-party politics, largely around alliances formed by Congress and the Communists. Left Democratic Front (LDF – alliance led by the CPI (M)) and United Democratic Front (UDF – alliance led by the Congress) governments have been alternatively in power in Kerala since 1982.

The Congress-led UDF won in the 2019 Lok Sabha Elections in 19 out of 20 seats. For the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led LDF, which won the assembly election in 2016 with big margins, this was a major loss. Also in the 2014 general elections, the Congress-led UDF had won 12 seats, overcoming the anti-incumbency wave, while LDF was left with only 8 seats. However, in the 2016 assembly elections, the LDF secured 91 seats while the UDF finished with 47 seats. The BJP won one seat in the same elections.

Since the bipolar coalition politics trend in 1982, the Congress-led UDF had the advantage over the Communist-led LDF in the Lok Sabha general elections, save in 2004. However, both the fronts came to power alternatively in assembly elections.

The 2019 elections also saw a tremendous increase in the vote share for the UDF, since 2014. This increase in vote share for UDF was mainly from the LDF rather than the BJP.

One reason for such a sweep by UDF in Kerala has been Rahul Gandhi contesting in the state increasing the vote share for the party. In the Wayanad constituency, Gandhi won the elections with a record margin of above four lakhs.

Experts have argued that two factors influenced the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in favor of UDF. These include an anti-incumbency wave against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the center level and LDFs' decision to hastily implement Supreme Court's verdict on the Sabarimala Temple causing uproar in the public.

The anti-incumbency issue against the NDA alliance has been the major issue according to the National Election Study (NES) survey 2019.

According to the findings of NES Survey 2019, the general mood of the public in Kerala has been against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The decision of the government regarding demonetization and controversies around the Rafale aircraft was not well received by the people of Kerala. These impacted the election verdict against the party and in favor of UDF, seen as an alternative to the BJP-led NDA at the center level.

The Sabarimala issue and the Supreme Court's verdict on lifting the ban on entry of women also changed the political scenario of the state which was an important issue to people. NDA tried to woo the traditional Hindu voter group, who strongly opposed the LDF government's decision to implement the decision hastily, but in vain. The BJP-led NDA was unable to turn the tables for itself because many people were not willing to support the party. On the other hand, UDF exploited the

situation well by using soft diplomacy during protests, supporting the devotees, and opposing the then government's actions.

In the end, considering caste and class factors, UDF has retained the support of minority communities (Muslims and Christians). While Muslims dominate in many northern districts, most of the Christians reside in central Kerala.

In the last 2021 Kerala Legislative Assembly election to elect 140 members to the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly LDF came into power winning 99 seats. Since the 1977 elections, this is the first time for an alliance to win two terms consecutively. Congress-led UDF on the other hand could secure 41 seats, 6 less than last elections.

One of the critical reasons for UDF's performance has been regular corruption charges. This includes ministers quitting over allegations of bribery and controversial land deals. Chief Minister Oommen Chandy, a Congress politician and legislator for nearly 50 years also has been accused of being involved with a fake solar energy corporation, bringing in demands of resignation from the opposition. Congress alliance UDF has been constantly called for corruption charges specifically for the last two years. Communist alliance LDF on the contrary in its manifesto made anti-corruption promises. Other promises included employment, health and education, social security, liquor policy, transport, and agriculture. While voting, employment also came out to be a major concern.

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced the formation of its alliance called People's Welfare Alliance with Twenty20 backed by the Kitex group. The alliance has made promises of working for the welfare of the people if elected to power.

The Anna Kitex Group, a major garment corporation and the world's second-largest manufacturer of children's apparel was founded by businessman and philanthropist the late MC Jacob in 1968. At present Sabu M Jacob, son of the late conglomerate is the managing director of the corporation and also the chief coordinator of Twenty20.

Twenty20 started in 2013 as a part of the Kitex group to disburse its CSR funds. The group began various welfare and developmental activities in the form of making roads, housing projects, water supply schemes, and other community-related endeavors like making toilets, sponsoring surgeries for the needy, and handling weddings.

In local body elections held in November 2015 in Kizhakkambalam Twenty20 secured 17 out of 19 wards. It spearheaded an anti-alcohol movement in Kizhakkambalam and made the village alcohol-free. In the 2021 Assembly elections of the state, Twenty20 contested from 8 constituencies of Ernakulam. It came up third in 6 constituencies and pushed the national party BJP to fourth place.

People Welfare Alliance of AAP and Twenty20 made its debut by contesting the by-poll election held in the Thrikkakara constituency, one of the most urban regions in the state. The alliance according to political analysts targeted the urbane and young voters who are cynical of conventional political choices. Congress candidate Uma Thomas however retained the Assembly seat of the Thrikkakara defeating the nearest rival of CPI (M) Dr. Jo Joseph.

AAP had some presence in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections with candidates like Sara Joseph and Anita Pratap. But currently, AAP is facing issues like factionalism and leadership crises. It is suggested that the party needs to work on strong ground-level machinery and bring a credible face. Besides how the party performs in the state of Punjab will also impact the political dynamics in the state of Kerala.

Twenty20 also did well in the 2020 Kerala local body elections. However, Twenty20 is currently a small political outfit with its presence limited to panchayats of the Ernakulam district which failed to make its mark in the 2021 Assembly election.

Therefore to make inroads in Kerala People Welfare Alliance has a long way to go.

THREATS TO BJP

Factionalism

There is a lot of factionalism and rift within BJP in Kerala. Much of it has been highlighted in the mass media. BJP state president K Surendran belongs to the faction of Union minister V. Muraleedharan. K Surendran is often accused of not consulting the senior BJP leaders of the state and sidelining them. He has also been accused of ignoring the observations and opinions of the fact-finding committees within the BJP in Kerala. It was recently accused that he revamped the BJP national executive according to his will.

Another faction is the P.K. Krishnadas faction, some popular followers of this faction are State general secretary M.T. Ramesh and state vice-president A.N. Radhakrishnan. Another prominent leader is Sobha Surendran, who does not belong to either of the factions but is a strong critic of the state president. She also has supporters up her sleeves.

Her rift with K Surendran was highlighted when she expressed her differences with the leadership earlier after K Surendran was made the party's state president while she was made state vice president along with two others.

The deepening of the rift between the two leaders was again highlighted when Shobha Surendran shot off a protest letter seeking the removal of State president K. Surendran.

Also, the factions led by Mr. Krishna Das and Minister of State for External Affairs V. Muraleedharan all these years indulged in carving a niche for themselves within the organizational apparatus rather than preparing the party to take on the established coalitions.

Allegations of corruption

The Kerala unit of BJP has found itself struggling amidst accusations of corruption, bribery and kidnapping. Post the Vidhan sabha elections in 2021, allegations of electoral fraud emerged quickly dragging K.Surendran into the controversy. The robbery linked with this particular controversy caused a rift within the BJP as many suspected that the heist was an inside job by party men who knew about the money transit.

A first information report was also filed against Surendran for allegedly bribing a Bahujan Samaj Party candidate in the run-up to the Assembly polls to make him withdraw his nomination.

Communism in Kerala

Birth of communism in India has been intertwined with the struggle for independence. The communist organizations rebelled against landlords, slavery, untouchability and the Feudal systems even under British rule. They identified this rebellion with nationalism. As soon as India attained independence, the demand for land reforms and the reformation movement swept Kerala. Thus, helping the causes of the SCs, STs and OBCs as the ruling Indian class and castes were a minority population. SCs, STs and OBCs still form the majority population and support communalism.

Kerala's communism is unique, it is a tailored version that hasn't ditched religion or discarded the idea of privately owned property. This is also why the major population supporting communism comes from both atheist and religious OBCs, SCs and STs.

Presence of CPI and CPIM

Built on anti-feudal principles, peasant consolidation and welfare state models, CPI (an offshoot of the Congress Socialist Party formed in 1934) won the first elections held in 1957 in the three-year-old state of Kerala. In 1965, CPI gave birth to a faction, CPI-M. Though one party is part of the UDF and another of LDF, it is the communist philosophy that has ruled Kerala either way. From 1996 onwards, the Left and United Democratic Fronts have come to power alternatively. CPI and CPM account for more than 30% vote share, for both Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. Both parties have a dense

network of unions, farmer associations, schools, libraries, cultural organizations, and press organs which make it difficult for BJP, relatively extremely young in Kerala's politics, to grow as an organization among the locals. CPI and CPI(M) haven't allowed the establishment and development of industries and factories like in other developing states, this has also made it difficult for BJP to penetrate.

The minority is the majority

High class and high caste Hindus exist as the minority population in Kerala. Hindu OBCs, STs, SCs, Muslims and Christians which are considered a minority community in national politics form the majority population in Kerala. BJP needs to identify and address the communities within the majority population which feel betrayed and left or insecure.

Violence against BJP

Kannur political murders		
CASES	KILLED	BJP/RSS
2005	3	2
2006	2	
2007	4	2
2008	12	5
2009	7	3
2010	2	3
2011	3	
2012	2	
2013	1	1
2014	2	2
2015	4	1
2016	7	4
2017	2	2
TOTAL	51	25

Since 2016, 55 political murders have taken place in the state and among them, 24 are BJP/RSS workers.

Most often, it is the RSS/BJP workers who fall prey to the political killings in the state. It becomes extremely difficult for people affiliated with BJP or RSS to work without endangering their lives in Kerala.

Earlier, the political killings were restricted majorly to the Kannur district and Malappuram. The political killings have spread to other major districts of Alappuzha and Palakkad which were

considered peaceful for such acts to happen. The workplaces and workstations of the workers have been attacked in broad daylight. The workers are also attacked and killed while they are with family members. Often times the authorities avoid registering complaints or taking action on such murders.

Opportunities for BJP

Factors like the declining influence of the Congress party, weakening regional parties, and national consolidation of the BJP raise hope for BJP to come into power in southern states.

For instance, in a Lokniti survey in 2014, 31 percent of people named the BJP as the most trusted party on national security, a key indicator of the party's nationalist leadership, while just 19 percent selected the Congress. The Congress party has struggled to create its definition of nationalism. The last term of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government (2009–2014), was marked by successive corruption scandals, economic missteps, large-scale protests, intra-party battles, and policy paralysis.

There is no national alternative to the BJP. After the elections in Punjab, the Congress party directly controls just two states at present. Therefore, the BJP is the only national party in India's current party system. It mainly has to compete with a string of regional or supra-regional parties.

In Kerala BJP chief K. Surendran has formulated a plan to introduce a 'shadow cabinet' for every department of the state. The party aims to expose the government's inaction and corruption in the state. For Kerala, BJP has decided to place its focus on six of 20 Lok Sabha seats in 2024. These include Thiruvananthapuram, Attingal, Pathanamthitta, Thrissur, Palakkad, and Kasaragod. BJP has come up with a plan under which Union Ministers will be given targeted constituencies to work and to evaluate the party's prospects, challenges, and development and bring in appropriate strategies.

It has been observed that a sizable block of the Nairs and Ezhavas are aligning with the party. BJP also has been willing to gain support from the Christian community. For the same purpose, the party has decided to organize a mega congregation of churches in Kerala. Besides, PM Narendra Modi has directed the BJP to reach out to non-Hindus. He asked leaders from northeastern states to visit Kerala and discuss the party's efforts to protect the interests of the Christian community.

A major challenge for the party is decreasing votes and the fierce infighting within its ranks. Another issue is UDF and LDF transferring their votes to each other.