

# Analyzing 2023 Karnataka Election Results

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## Introduction

*“Jaya Bharata Jananiya Tanujate, Jaya he Karnataka Maate”*- written by *Kuvempu*, which translates to *'Victory to you Mother Karnataka, The Daughter of Mother India,'* there is an idealized vision of Karnataka as a state that acknowledges its place within the Indian union and promotes harmonious coexistence with its fellow states. However, this poetic portrayal stands in contrast to the complex political landscape of modern Karnataka. This is because especially in Karnataka it is said people do not cast a vote, they vote for their caste. Nevertheless, Karnataka, with its diverse population, has experienced significant political transformations in nearly every election. This research paper aims to examine the evolving political trends in Karnataka's Assembly elections, with a specific focus on the 2018 and 2023 elections.

## Analyzing the political trends in Karnataka's Assembly Elections

Until November 1, 1956, Karnataka didn't exist as a unified region. Instead, the areas where people spoke Kannada were divided into nineteen different parts. These were: 1. Bombay Province, 2. Madras Province, 3. Princely State of Mysore, 4. Princely State of Hyderabad, 5. Chief Commissioner of Province of Coorg, 6. Princely State of Kolhapur, 7. Princely State of Sagnili, 8. Princely State of Miraj (Senior), 9. Princely State of Miraj (Junior), 10. Princely State of Kurandawad (Senior), 11. Princely State of Kurandawad (Junior), 12. Princely State of Jamakhandi, 13. Princely State of Mudhol, 14. Princely State of Ramadurg, 15. Princely State of Jath, 16. Princely State of Akkalkot, 17. Princely State of Aundh, 18. Princely State of Savanur, and 19. Princely State of Sondur. Then, on November 1, 1956, a lot of the areas where people spoke Kannada were brought together to form a single region called **New Mysore**, which later became Karnataka.

In the **1950s and 1960s** Mysore state at that time was the bastion of the grand old party of India, the **Indian National Congress "INC"**. Therefore earlier the party never really had to work hard to regain its power as it was its stronghold since the reorganization of the states in 1956. During the period from 1956 to 1972 in Karnataka (formerly known as Mysore State), the political landscape was largely shaped by the Indian National Congress party. The party held sway for most of this time. From 1956 to 1962, the Indian National Congress, under the leadership of **Kengal Hanumanthaiah**, held power. This was followed by a continued Congress leadership under **S. Nijalingappa** from 1962 to 1967. However, the political scene saw a temporary shift with President's Rule from 1967 to 1969, a period marked by direct central government control due to political instability. The Indian National Congress regained power under the leadership of Veerendra Patil from 1969 to 1971.

After Mysore was renamed Karnataka in **1973**, the INC continued to maintain control of the state government. When the Indian National Congress split in 1969 into Samstha- Indian National Congress (O) “O” stood for ‘Organization’ or ‘Old’ and Indira Congress (R) “R” stood for ‘Requisition’, **Devaraj Urs** sided with Indira Gandhi. He became the Chief Minister of Karnataka during the fifth Assembly, serving from 20 March 1972 to 31 December 1977. However, this era of uninterrupted governance by the INC faced a turning point with the emergence of the JP Movement. **Jayaprakash Narayan**, popularly known as JP, led a movement that aimed to address corruption, inequality, and mismanagement in politics. This movement challenged the long-standing rule of the INC in Karnataka and other parts of India. Narayan and Desai established the **Janata Morcha** (People’s Front) in 1974, the precursor to the Janata Party. The political trajectory of Karnataka during the period from 1978 to 1988 was characterized by significant upheavals, leading to a profound transformation in the state’s political landscape.

In **1978**, Devaraj Urs played a pivotal role in Indira Gandhi’s political comeback after the Emergency, helping her win the Chikkamagaluru by-election. However, by 1979, tensions emerged as a consequence of Sanjay Gandhi’s reentry into the Congress fold. This internal discord culminated in the bifurcation of Congress into **Congress (Indira)** and **Congress (Urs)**. Devraj Urs then served for the second time from 17 March 1978 to 8 June 1980 during the sixth Assembly. He faced a vote of no confidence, but with more MLAs on his side, he proved his majority, holding onto power. He holds the record for being the **longest-serving** Chief Minister of Karnataka in terms of days in office. R. Gundu Rao served as a minister in the government of D. Devaraj Urs and later became the Chief Minister of Karnataka from 1980 to 1983 following the collapse of the Urs government.

In **1983**, a major tectonic shift happened in Karnataka as it witnessed its **first coalition government**. The Janata Party, Kranti Ranga (led by Urs), and the BJP formed an alliance, with **Ramakrishna Hegde** becoming the Chief Minister. During this period, a failed poaching attempt occurred when **C Byre Gowda** accused Congress leader **Veerappa Moily** of offering him money to defect. Despite evidence in the form of a recorded conversation, the case was later dismissed due to authenticity concerns.

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, Congress swept general elections, including in Karnataka (won 24 out of 28 seats). Taking responsibility for the loss, Ramakrishna Hegde dissolved the government in 1984, leading to fresh elections. In **1985**, despite Congress’s parliamentary victory, once more the people of Karnataka brought the Janata Party into power (Hedge continued to be the Chief Minister) with a large majority who had earlier voted for Congress in the Parliamentary elections. During this time, Karnataka experienced its first instance of resort politics when Andhra

Pradesh Chief Minister **NT Rama Rao** sought help from Hegde to save his government. Rama Rao succeeded in the floor test.

Ramakrishna Hegde resigned in 1988 amid corruption allegations and was replaced by **SR Bommai**. Bommai's tenure saw significant political developments and a court case that set legal precedents for future crises. The Janata Party merged with Lok Dal to form Janata Dal in September 1988. However, within the same month, defection and withdrawal of support letters led to the dismissal of Bommai's government. This event marked the famous **SR Bommai vs. Union case**, a landmark Supreme Court decision that imposed restrictions on the use of Article 356 to prevent its misuse.

By the early **1990s**, there was a growing sentiment among the electorate for an alternative to the Congress-led government. The Congress had been facing criticism on various fronts, including governance issues, unemployment, poverty, inflation, and allegations of corruption. Moreover, the frequent use of "President's rule" to remove opposition-led state governments was seen as authoritarian. The **1994** elections witnessed a significant shift in voter sentiment. There was an increasing demand for more transparent and accountable governance. In this election, Janata Dal (S) secured a triumphant win, capturing a majority of 115 seats, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) secured 40 seats, and the Indian National Congress secured 34 seats. Following its victory, the Janata Dal formed the government in Karnataka. **H. D. Deve Gowda** became the Chief Minister, leading the state with a mandate for change and reform. Two significant takeaways from this election were: first, the **once-mighty Congress was reduced to just 34 seats**; and second, **the Lotus of the BJP finally bloomed in Karnataka**, led by **B S Yeddyurappa**, spearheading the BJP to become the second largest party. This marked the point from which Karnataka Politics evolved into a three-way battle for power.

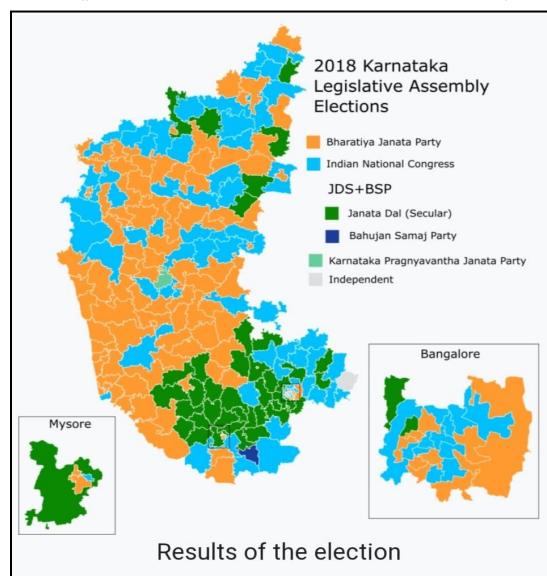
The 2004 Karnataka election marked a significant turning point as it tested the hypothesis of equal performance by three major parties: the INC, BJP, and JD(S). This anticipation was validated with the BJP securing 79 seats, Congress securing 65, and JD(S) securing 58. The election resulted in a hung assembly, drawing attention to JD(S) as the pivotal player in the formation of the government. Given the scenario, JD(S) earned the title of "**kingmakers**," symbolizing their crucial role in deciding the subsequent political direction. The post-election alliance between the Congress and JD(S) became significant, forming a coalition government under **Dharam Singh's** leadership until 2006. However, the coalition government eventually collapsed, and **HD Kumaraswamy** succeeded Singh. During his tenure, Kumaraswamy faced allegations of corruption, leading to his resignation. Subsequently, the President's rule was imposed for over 30 days. After this period, **B. S. Yeddyurappa** took up the role of chief minister in 2007. However, his tenure lasted only seven days, as the President's rule was reinstated, lasting for 189 days until the subsequent elections were held. These events highlighted the political instability and shifting leadership dynamics within Karnataka during this period.

In **2008** for the first time in the political history of Karnataka, the **Lotus of BJP bloomed like never before**, as the party formed the government with a victory of 110 seats. Although falling just three seats short of an absolute majority, the party strategically forged an alliance with six independent candidates to secure the necessary support. Conducted in three phases on May 10, May 16, and May 22, 2008, the polls brought about a transformative change in the state's governance. **BS Yeddyurappa** assumed the role of Chief Minister, marking a significant turning point. However, his tenure was marked by controversy, and he ultimately resigned in 2011 due to corruption charges. Following Yeddyurappa's resignation, DV Sadananda Gowda took the helm in 2011, followed by Jagadish Shettar from 2012 until 2013.

The 2013 elections witnessed a fractured mandate. The BJP's tally dropped to 40 seats due to internal party issues and anti-incumbency factors. The Congress made a resurgence by securing 122 seats, forming the government under Siddaramaiah's leadership. JD(S) secured 40 seats, leading to a strong opposition presence. During these elections, several factors influenced voter decisions. Local issues, leadership qualities, and coalition dynamics played pivotal roles. The rise of regional parties, especially JD(S), as kingmakers highlighted the significance of alliances in achieving a majority. However, within JD(S), there appeared to be a noticeable aspiration to assume a position of power this time.

### Analyzing the 2018 Karnataka Assembly Elections

The 2018 Karnataka Assembly election resulted in a situation where no party secured a clear majority, leading to a hung assembly. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged as the largest single party with 104 seats, while the Congress won the popular vote. Despite this, the BJP, under the leadership of Yeddyurappa, decided to form the government based on being the largest single party, even though Congress and JD(S) formed a post-election alliance that had a majority.



The appointed Governor extended a 15-day window for the incoming government to demonstrate its legislative majority—a move criticized by the opposition for perceived favoritism towards the BJP. However, the Supreme Court intervened and reduced the time window to 3 days. Ultimately, Chief Minister Yeddyurappa resigned just 10 minutes before the scheduled trust vote.

Subsequently, the INC-JD(S) coalition came together to form the government, with **HD Kumaraswamy** as the Chief Minister. This coalition government lasted for about 14 months before facing internal strife. Over a span of 2 days, 16 legislators from the ruling coalition resigned, and 2 independent MLAs switched their support to the BJP. This altered the balance, reducing the coalition's majority to 101 seats and giving the BJP 107 seats. After weeks of political turmoil, HD Kumaraswamy faced a trust vote in the assembly on July 23, 2019, which he lost by a margin of 100–107. As a result, he resigned as Chief Minister. On July 26, 2019, B.S. Yediyurappa again took the oath as Chief Minister of Karnataka. This marked a transition of power from the INC-JD(S) coalition to the BJP.

### **Effective Campaign Strategies**

The BJP executed a meticulous three-tier strategy, effectively utilizing various levels of campaign engagement. Spearheaded by Amit Shah, the party strategically orchestrated a comprehensive campaign approach, from social media to grassroots mobilization. This approach extended to a staggering **20,000 WhatsApp groups** created by the BJP's cyber cell, connecting with the electorate and fostering interaction. A remarkable strength was its tireless booth-level campaigning, even in remote areas.

The BJP's grassroots campaign resonated well due to its strong connection with the local leadership. The party's foot soldiers tirelessly engaged in door-to-door canvassing and engaged with voters, while the Congress faced a shortfall in grassroots efforts. This discrepancy enabled the BJP to maintain a strong presence even in rural and remote regions, a significant factor in its success.

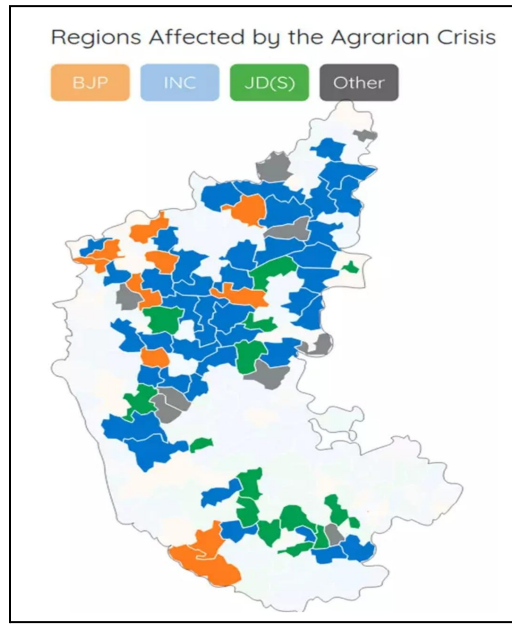
BJP harnessed the influence of key leaders to bolster its campaign. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**, often referred to as the 'Brahmastra,' along with party strategist **Amit Shah** and Uttar Pradesh CM **Yogi Adityanath**, lent their charisma and energy in the campaign's final stages. Adityanath's rapport with prominent Lingayat leaders played a positive role.

### **Narratives that dominated 2018 Karnataka Assembly Elections**

#### **Agrarian Crisis**

The Siddaramaiah government's tenure in Karnataka was significantly marked by the issue of farm distress. Over the period between April 2013 and November 2017, a distressing number of **3,515**

farmers took their own lives in the state. The agricultural department acknowledged that 2,525 of these deaths were a result of drought and crop failure. A closer examination of the 2013 electoral map reveals that the agrarian crisis had the most pronounced impact on districts such as **Bagalkot, Raichur, Shivamonga, Gulbarga, Bellary, Bijapur, Dharwad, Koppal, Mandya, and Belgavi**. Notably, in the 2013 elections, Congress secured **40** out of **74** seats in these distressed areas.



The BJP's compelling focus on addressing the agrarian crisis played a pivotal role in securing a larger number of seats in the Karnataka elections. During the campaign, the party adeptly spotlighted the decline in rural incomes, a pressing concern that had not been adequately addressed during Siddaramaiah's tenure with the Congress government. The data from the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** starkly demonstrated the significant drop in crop production, affecting essential commodities like rice, wheat, cereals, foodgrains, oilseeds, cotton, and sugarcane by **20-38%** between 2013-14 and 2016-17.

The issue of farmers' distress and the tragic spate of farmer suicides was a central theme of the BJP's narrative. Amit Shah, the BJP President, led the charge, accusing Siddaramaiah's Congress administration of neglecting the farming community and adopting an "**anti-farmer**" stance. The BJP's assertion that 3,781 farmers had lost their lives in the span of four-and-a-half years in Karnataka due to these challenges drew public attention.

The BJP artfully aligned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "**farmer-friendly**" schemes as vital solutions to the crisis. Included in its manifesto, the BJP pledged a loan waiver of Rs **1 lakh** from both nationalized and cooperative banks, along with a substantial allocation of Rs **1.5 lakh crore for irrigation projects**. By articulating these farmer-centric initiatives and highlighting their potential to

ensure a brighter future for the agricultural community, the BJP struck a chord with a significant portion of the electorate.

### ***Kannadiga Swabhimana (Pride)***

While the advocacy for Kannadiga's pride is not a new concept, this movement stands out due to its unique leadership - not driven by chauvinism, but guided by a cohort of forward-thinking individuals, primarily software professionals, united under the *Banavasi Balaga* and *Kannada Grahakara Koota* banners. This movement gained momentum and formed a robust **Kannada constituency**. In response to this sentiment, various changes were implemented: the **Kempegowda International Airport** introduced Kannada in flight information displays, the Railways added Kannada to tickets for intra-state trains, and even international airlines like Lufthansa, British Airways, and Dragon Air began announcing in Kannada for Bengaluru-bound flights.

The Congress government, headed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, was quick to seize the opportunity presented by this movement. It actively embraced the Kannada cause, aligning its actions with the sentiment of Kannada Swabhimana. It removed Hindi name boards from metro stations, proposed **100% reservation** for Kannadigas in private sector jobs (excluding IT/BT companies), and pushed for Kannada to be included in passports issued within Karnataka. A notable move by Siddaramaiah was his advocacy for a **separate state flag**, positioning it as a symbol of regional identity and federalism. This decision allowed the Congress to deflect criticism and portray itself as a guardian of Kannadiga pride.

On the flip side, the BJP, driven by its "**one nation**" ideology, encountered hurdles while countering this narrative. The party's emphasis on a unified nation appeared in contrast with Siddaramaiah's cooperative federalism outlook, causing complexities. While the Congress embraced the Kannada cause wholeheartedly, the BJP grappled with a balancing act, navigating its nationalistic stance alongside the surging regional sentiment. As a result, the BJP's focus on broader national issues and ideology garnered more support, which was reflected in the election results. Siddaramaiah's Kannada Swabhimana card, in this context, did not yield the anticipated dividends.

### ***Tipu Sultan Jayanti***

The **Kodava** community, which includes the people of Kodagu district in Karnataka, has historically expressed strong opposition to Tipu Sultan due to his actions during his rule. Tipu Sultan's campaigns in the region are remembered as having led to violence and disruptions for the Kodavas. The BJP, aware of the Kodava community's sentiments, strategically positioned itself as a party that understood and respected their historical grievances. The BJP invoked the state Congress' use of Tipu Sultan to underscore its Hindutva agenda. This narrative of opposition to Tipu Sultan's legacy resonated with the Kodava community, leading them to view the BJP as a party that aligned with their sentiments.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi directly criticized the Congress-led government for prioritizing the celebration of "**Jayantis of Sultans**" over honoring local heroes like *Veera Madakari* and *Onake Obavva*. By highlighting the opposition to Tipu Sultan within the local **Coorg community** and connecting it to broader sentiments of religious identity, the BJP successfully portrayed itself as a champion of the Hindu cause and rallied support from those who held similar views.

### **Lingayat Factor**

The Siddaramaiah government in Karnataka took a significant political gamble before the election by requesting the Central government to recognize Lingayat as a **separate religion**. This move was aimed at appealing to the Lingayat community, which comprises around **17 percent**<sup>1</sup> of the state's population and wields influence in a substantial number of assembly constituencies (approximately 100 out of 224).

The intent was to sway the traditionally Lingayat-leaning community away from their **historical affinity for the BJP**. However, the gamble seemed to have backfired, as many voters were uncertain about how this move would actually benefit them. In the North Karnataka region, where the majority of Lingayat votes are concentrated, the response to the move was negative. The **Veerashaiva-Lingayat** faction managed to consolidate its opposition to Siddaramaiah, convincing people through religious centers (mutts) that this attempt to recognize Lingayats as a separate religion was a deliberate effort to divide their community.

The strong support for the BJP among Lingayats in the Old Mysuru region, which isn't traditionally a stronghold for the party, reinforced the idea that both the **Vokkaligas** and Lingayats united against Siddaramaiah and voted against him resolutely.

### **The region-wise voting pattern of the 2018 Karnataka Assembly Elections**

The voting patterns in Karnataka were not uniform across the entire state. While minority appeasement played an important role in deciding the outcome in some areas, in other areas, the outcome was influenced by civic issues. Karnataka can be categorized into six distinct regions: **Old Mysuru, Bengaluru Urban, Coastal Karnataka, Mumbai Karnataka, Central Karnataka, and Hyderabad Karnataka**. Examining the results within these regions provides insight into the diversity of voting trends and influences in each area.

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<sup>1</sup> [Lingayat](#)

### Old Mysuru region/Mysuru Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 elections
BJP	15	Won 7 more seats
INC	20	Lost 6 seats
JD(S)	30	Won 4 more seats

In the Old Mysuru region, a total of **66** seats were contested. This area encompasses significant districts like **Mysuru, Chikkaballapur, Hassan, Mandya, Kolar, Ramanagaram, Chamarajnar, Kodagu, and Chikkamagaluru**. The region is predominantly influenced by the **Vokkaliga** community and has historical ties to the former **Maharaja of Mysore**. Traditionally, this region has been a battleground between the Congress and JD(S), posing challenges for the BJP.

In the 2018 elections, the BJP performed notably better in comparison to 2013, securing a total of 15 seats, an increase from the previous 8 seats. The Congress, relying on the support of the Dalit and minority voter base, experienced some setbacks due to their approach towards JD(S) leaders **HD Kumaraswamy** and **HD Deve Gowda**. While the Congress had won 26 seats in 2013, they managed to secure 20 seats in 2018. Meanwhile, the JD(S) emerged as the dominant force in this region, clinching 30 seats. Notably, JD(S) CM candidate HD Kumaraswamy won seats from Ramanagara and Channapatna constituencies.

### Bengaluru Rural and Urban

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 elections
BJP	11	No Change
INC	13	No Change
JD(S)	2	Lost 1 seat

**Bengaluru**, the capital city, and its surrounding rural areas constitute this district. A total of **28 seats** were up for contest in this area. Predictably, urban issues took center stage, influencing the outcome of the elections. Matters such as traffic congestion, potholes, environmental pollution, corruption, and efficient service delivery played pivotal roles in shaping voter preferences.

Although the district is predominantly home to Tamil-speaking residents, there's also a sizable Malayalam and Telugu-speaking electorate. Notably, the region is often criticized for its low voter turnout. In the recent election, Bengaluru Urban witnessed a voter participation rate of only **57.28%**. In specific constituencies, **Bengaluru North** and **South** observed turnouts of **53.21%** and **52.8%** respectively. In terms of election outcomes, minimal shifts were observed.

### Coastal Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 election
<b>BJP</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Won 13 more seats</b>
<b>INC</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Lost 10 seats</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>No Change</b>

Coastal Karnataka encompasses three districts: **Uttara Kannada**, **Udupi**, and **Dakshina Kannada**. This region has thrived due to trade, but its **communal sensitivity**—where personal identification as a minority or majority is highly pronounced—makes it a potential flashpoint. Historically, this area has been a stronghold for the **BJP**.

Continuing the trend from the 2013 elections, the JD(S) failed to secure a single seat in this region. The BJP capitalized on the rise of **religious extremism** and concerns about **minority appeasement**, securing a total of **16 seats**. In contrast, the Congress managed to retain only 3 of the 13 seats they had won in 2013. It's worth noting that the Congress had secured those 13 seats in 2013 partly due to the division of the BJP's votes between the **BJP** and the **Karnataka Janata Paksha at that time**.

### Mumbai Karnataka/ Kittur Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 elections
<b>BJP</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>Won 14 more seats</b>
<b>INC</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Lost 10 seats</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Won 1 more seat</b>

Mumbai Karnataka comprises districts that were formerly part of the **Bombay Presidency**, including **Karwar** or **Uttar Kannada**, **Vijayapura**, **Belagavi**, **Bagalkot**, **Haveri**, **Dharwar**, and **Gadag**. A total

of **44** seats were contested in this region, which is primarily rural and characterized by a dominant **Lingayat** community presence.

In this region, the BJP emerged as the clear winner, securing the majority of seats. This outcome can be attributed to several factors. Notably, the hope for resolving the **Mahadayi water dispute** between Goa and Karnataka through a BJP presence in power in both states, along with **Narendra Modi's** role as Prime Minister, played a significant role. Additionally, the BJP's Chief Ministerial candidate **Yeddyurappa's** strong leadership within the Lingayat community contributed to their success. As a result, the BJP secured a substantial total of 26 seats, while the Congress managed to reserve only 16 seats in this region.

### Central Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 elections
<b>BJP</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Won 17 more seats</b>
<b>Congress</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Lost 12 seats</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Lost 3 seats</b>

Central Karnataka encompasses **Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Ballari, Davangere, and Shivamogga** districts, where **27 seats** were up for grabs. The election results in this region were notably shaped by concerns such as unemployment, industrial scarcity, and inadequate access to clean drinking water. The BJP asserted its dominance in this area, with **Yeddyurappa** securing victory in **Shikaripura**. It's worth noting that Yeddyurappa's previous split from the BJP had inflicted significant electoral losses on the party in 2013.

### Hyderabad Karnataka/ Kalyana Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2018	Differences as compared to 2013 elections
<b>BJP</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Won 11 more seats</b>
<b>Congress</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Won 3 more seats</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>No Change</b>

Hyderabad Karnataka derives its name from its historical association with the former **Hyderabad state**. A total of **40 seats** were contested in this region, encompassing districts like **Bidar, Ballari, Koppal, Raichur, Kalaburagi**, and **Yadgir**.

This area is prominently marked by the presence of **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Lingayats** and is recognized as one of Karnataka's less-developed regions, despite the **Ballari mining controversy** involving the **Reddy brothers**, the BJP's calculated decision to support them paid dividends, resulting in victories for both candidates.

The BJP also garnered significant support from the **Lingayat** community. Although the Congress secured the majority of seats in this region, the BJP exhibited noteworthy progress by clinching 11 more seats than it had in the 2013 elections.

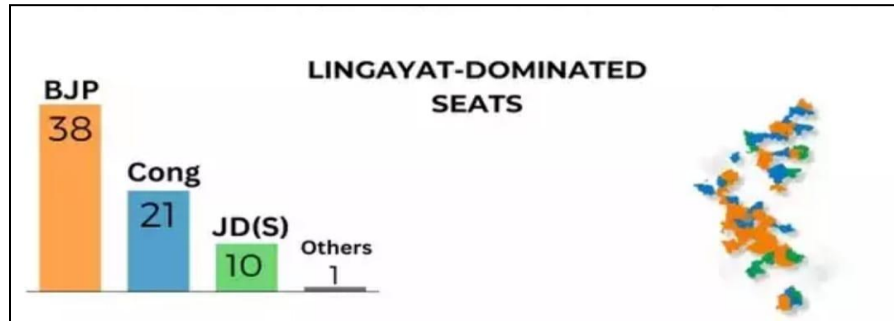
### **The caste-wise voting pattern in the 2018 Karnataka Assembly Elections**

#### ***Lingayat Community***

Lingayatism is a monotheistic faith that originated in the 12th century as a reform movement within Hinduism, led by the philosopher and social reformer **Basava**. The Lingayat Veerashaiva community are the devotees of **Shiva**. In recent years, there has been debate and discussion about recognizing Lingayatism as a **separate religion** distinct from Hinduism. The Lingayat community, comprising roughly **17%** of Karnataka's population, holds a widespread presence across the state. They are dominant in as many as **70 seats** in the 224 assembly. They are largely concentrated in **north Karnataka**, particularly in the districts of Belagavi, Dharwad, and Gadag. They also have a strong presence in Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Bidar, and Raichur. They are also present in significant numbers in some parts of **South Karnataka**, such as Bangalore, Mysore, and Mandya.

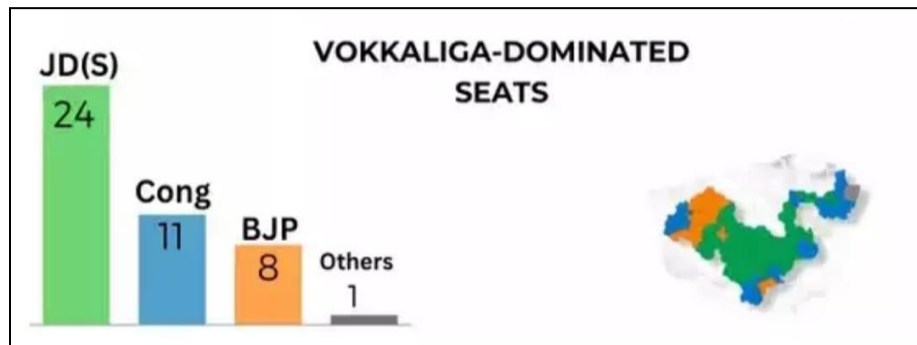
The voting pattern of the Lingayat community has significantly influenced the political landscape in Karnataka. Historically, the state has seen a predominant presence of chief ministers from either the **Lingayat** or **Vokkaliga** community, making them two of the most influential caste groups in Karnataka politics. The trajectory of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) rise in the state is closely intertwined with the shift in the allegiance of the Lingayats away from the Congress, a change that began in **1990**. Before 1990, Lingayats were staunch supporters of the Congress party. However, a pivotal moment occurred when powerful Lingayat leader **Veerendra Patil**, who held the position of Chief Minister of Karnataka, was abruptly removed from office by the then Congress president Rajiv Gandhi. This decision was made in the aftermath of communal riots in certain parts of Karnataka. When Veerendra Patil was suddenly removed from power by Congress, the Lingayat **community felt let down**. As a result, they moved away from supporting Congress and started opposing it. This change opened a **big chance for the BJP**. They took advantage of this situation and gained a lot of

support in the state. In **1994**, Lingayat leader **Mr. Deve Gowda** allied with the Lingayats and challenged the Congress, winning elections. This weakened Congress, reducing their seats to 35. At the same time, the BJP gained ground, securing **44 seats**. The Janata Dal split in 1999 into Janata Dal (Secular) and Janata Dal (United). In Karnataka, **Janata Dal (Secular)** represented **Vokkaliga** interests, while **Janata Dal (United)** and **BJP** gained **Lingayat support**. With BJP's national influence growing, Lingayats leaned towards the party.



**Vokkaligas**

Vokkaligas are a prominent **agricultural community** in Karnataka and are considered to be one of the dominant communities in the state. The other is the Lingayats. They constitute around **15-17%** of the state's total population. Vokkaligas hold sway in **70-80 assembly constituencies** and **10-15 Lok Sabha constituencies**. They are especially dominant in **44 constituencies**. Vokkaligas are traditionally supporters of the **Janata Dal (Secular)** party, which has its roots in the Vokkaliga community. In **2018**, JD(S) won a staggering **13 of the 14** seats in the Vokkaliga-dominated regions of Mandya and Hassan.



**Kurubas, AHINDA, and Muslims**

Kurubas come under the **Other Backward Classes (OBC)** category. They are seen as a dominant OBC after the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. **Siddaramaiah** is a Kuruba. AHINDA stands for "**Alpasankhyataru, Hindulida, Dalitaru, and Adivarugaru**" in Kannada, which translates to "Minorities, Backward Classes, Dalits, and Tribal People" in English. While Kurubas are a specific

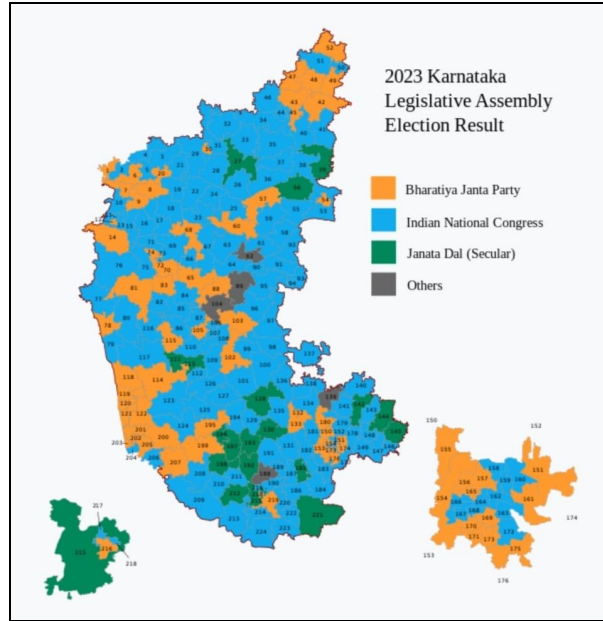
community, AHINDA encompasses a coalition of multiple communities and groups, including Dalits, tribals, and backward classes, to work together for their collective interests. The AHINDA movement was championed by Karnataka's former **Chief Minister Siddaramaiah** and aimed to consolidate the support of these marginalized sections of society. The majority of the Kurubas, who fall under the category of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), along with individuals from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Muslims, and Christians, have shown their support by voting for the Congress.

### **Analyzing 2023 Karnataka Assembly Elections**

The Karnataka Assembly elections of 2023 witnessed an exceptional voter turnout of **73.19%**, marking the highest participation ever recorded in the history of such elections. In a remarkable victory, the **Indian National Congress** secured a landslide win by clinching **135 seats**, while BJP and JD(S) managed 63 and 20 seats respectively. This victory stands as Congress' best since **1999** when they won 132 seats and formed a government with **S M Krishna** as Chief Minister. Following their victory, the Indian National Congress assumed power, forming the government with **Siddaramaiah** at the helm as the Chief Minister.

The backdrop of this election was set by the collapse of the coalition government in July 2019, prompted by the resignations of several members from the **Congress** and **JD(S)** within the assembly. In the aftermath, the Bharatiya Janata Party took the reins and formed the state government, elevating **B. S. Yediyurappa** to the position of Chief Minister. However, the dynamics took another turn on 26 July 2021, as Yediyurappa stepped down from the Chief Minister's post. This marked a crucial juncture, leading to the swearing-in of **Basavaraj Bommai** as the new Chief Minister on 28 July 2021, thus signaling a shift in leadership and potential policy directions.

The 2023 Assembly elections not only reflect the changing preferences of the electorate but also underscore the evolving political landscape of Karnataka. The resounding victory of the Indian National Congress and the consecutive leadership transitions highlight the intricacies of power dynamics in the state's political narrative.



## Masterstrokes of Victory: How Congress Conquered the 2023 Karnataka Assembly Elections

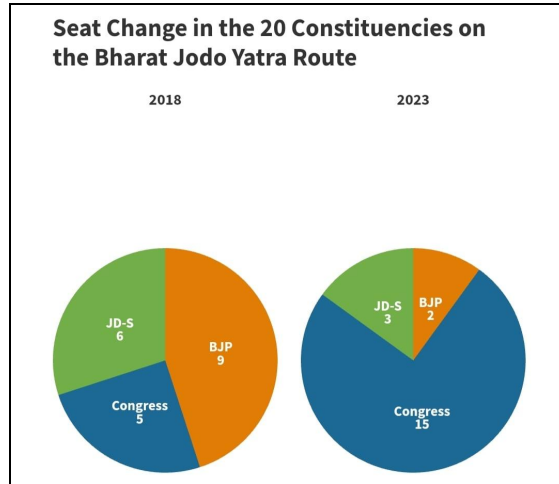
*Sunil Kanugolu*, now hailed as the 'heart' and 'mind' behind the Karnataka Congress campaign, played an instrumental role in orchestrating the party's remarkable resurgence in the state. This resurgence saw the ousting of the BJP from its southern stronghold. He led Congress's '**Mission Karnataka**' to success by coming up with innovative campaign strategies and was influential in the Congress choosing its candidates. The party's successful local campaign, led by KPCC President **DK Shivakumar** and former Chief Minister **Siddaramaiah**, played a vital role in their performance.

### **Bharat Jodo Yatra**

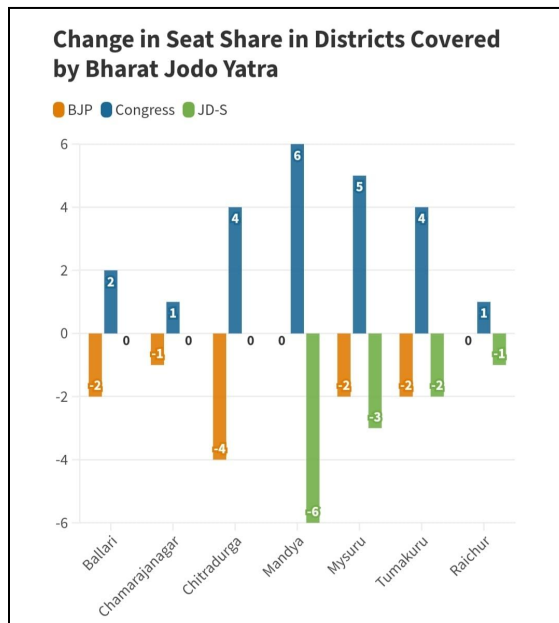
The Bharat Jodo Yatra (Unite India March) movement, as per the INC's perspective, aimed to bring the nation together against what they perceived as the "**divisive politics**" of the BJP-led Government of India. Spearheaded by **Rahul Gandhi** and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M. K. Stalin**, the Bharat Jodo Yatra movement was initiated. Covering over **4,000 km in 150 days**, including a 511 km stretch in Karnataka, the yatra passed through **seven districts and 20 Assembly constituencies**. Rahul Gandhi was also able to establish a mass connection with voters and party workers. Notably, the Congress secured **15 out of the 20 constituencies** covered, with gains in areas previously held by BJP and JD(S). This included support for **Darshan Puttannaiah** from SKP in the Melukote constituency, Mandya district.

Within the 20 constituencies along the Bharat Jodo Yatra route, the Congress surged from **5 to 15** seats, while the BJP saw a drop from **9 to 2**, and JD-S decreased from **6 to 3**.





In Molakalmuru, **Chitradurga district**, the vote share surged by **32.01%**, largely due to a candidate change. However, there were deviations, like in **Challakere** of Chitradurga district, where the Congress emerged victorious but experienced a decline in votes for independent candidates. Likewise, in **Chamundeshwari**, traditionally a JD(S) stronghold, the party witnessed a loss of votes to the BJP. Considering the districts under the Yatra's coverage, the Congress made substantial gains in **Mandya, Mysuru, Tumakuru, and Chitradurga**.



The Congress' collective vote share in these constituencies exhibited a significant increase of **9.7 percentage** points. In contrast, across all seats in Karnataka, the Congress experienced a more modest increase of **4.7 percentage** points. However, the BJP's loss in terms of vote share was relatively minimal. The BJP's vote share in these seats only decreased by **0.2 percentage** points, considering the entire state of Karnataka, the BJP's overall vote share reduction was slightly more at **0.4 percentage** points. The BJP's decreased vote share in some instances, like in **Bellary City**, was influenced more by

**Gali Janardhana Reddy's** departure than the Yatra. The rise in Congress' vote share in these areas appears to have mostly come at the expense of the JD-S. The most notable surge in Congress' vote share occurred in constituencies previously held by the JD(S). For instance, in seats like **Molakalmuru, Melukote, Nagamangala, and Srirangapatna, the Congress gained 31.81, 7.16, 11.37, and 14.37 percentage** points respectively. In Tumakuru's Gubbi Assembly constituency, Congress gained a remarkable **28.82 percentage** points. In contrast, JD(S) lost **8.88 percentage** points, while BJP gained **2.55 percentage** points. The addition of four-time MLA and JD(S) leader **SR Srinivas** bolstered Congress' gains.

### **PayCM Or 40% Sarkara**

In July 2021, **D. Kempanna, President of Karnataka State Contractors' Association,** wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, claiming significant corruption in awarding civil contracts in Karnataka. Allegations included a 40% commission forced upon contractors by officials from the BJP government across departments. Contractor **Santhosh Patil** (40 years old) accused State Minister **K. S. Eshwarappa** of pressuring him for commissions. Tragically, Patil died by suicide on April 12, 2022, at Shambhavi Hotel in Udupi. In the lead-up to the Karnataka Assembly elections, a series of strategic moves by the Congress party demonstrated their intent to capitalize on key issues and potentially influence the electoral outcome. One such noteworthy tactic was the "**PayCM**" campaign, an attempt to spotlight alleged corruption within the government and particularly target Chief Minister **Basavaraj Bommai (BJP)**. The campaign leveraged a significant allegation raised by a **contractors' body**, claiming that public work contracts involved a substantial **40% commission payment**, basically a **bribe**. Moreover, the strategic utilization of digital mediums through QR codes and a dedicated website, '**40% Sarkara,**' allowed the campaign to reach a wider audience and encourage public engagement.



The campaign's tactic of contrasting "**PayCM**" with the image of the chief minister aimed to create a symbolic association between alleged **corruption** and the **leadership**, ultimately questioning the ethical standards of the government. By urging citizens to report instances of bribery and fraud by scanning the QR code, the Congress party not only attempted to amplify its anti-corruption stance but also offered citizens a channel to voice their concerns, potentially building a sense of shared purpose. The BJP countered with a similar campaign, "**Scam-Ramaiah,**" in response to "PayCM."

However, this effort did not yield significant results. Through “PayCM” the corruption issue resonated deeply with the public, given its direct implication for taxpayers and the perceived misuse of public funds. It is evident that Congress yielded significant dividends through this campaign.

### **Banning Bajrang Dal and Popular Front Of India (PFI)**

Bajrang Dal (Brigade of Lord Hanuman) is a Hindu nationalist militant organization that forms the youth wing of **Vishva Hindu Parishad**, it is a member of the right-wing Sangh Pariwar. PFI is an **Islamic political organization** in India. INC in its manifesto guaranteed to ban bajrangdal and the Popular Front Of India (PFI). The Congress party's inclusion of plans to take action against organizations like the Popular Front of India (PFI) and Bajrang Dal in its Karnataka manifesto had sparked controversy. Originally, the idea was to pledge actions against hate-spreading groups without specifically naming them. However, a central leader suggested adding the names of PFI and Bajrang Dal to maintain balance. This move was likely aimed at **consolidating Hindu and Muslim votes** ahead of the election.

Initially, the Congress party's approach revolved around highlighting the alleged sidelining of Lingayat leaders, a tactic aimed at garnering traction among the Lingayat community. However, the party seemingly recognized that this approach might not yield substantial support from the broader Hindu demographic. Consequently, a shift in strategy occurred, marked by an emphasis on **polarizing** the election to secure a higher percentage of Muslim votes. This shift was possibly driven by an assessment that appealing to Muslim voters held more promise than the previous approach of focusing on Lingayat sentiments. The significance of Muslim consolidation in this election for the Congress party stemmed from a voting trend where Muslims weren't uniformly supporting the INC. While their votes were influential in specific pockets, Muslims strategically aimed to back candidates with the best chance of defeating the saffron party, highlighting their pragmatic approach.

In the region of **old Mysore**, voter preferences were less defined between the JD(S) and Congress. To address this ambiguity and likely to appeal to Muslims, the Congress focused its efforts on these voters, particularly in the old Mysore area and extending to coastal Karnataka. In the coastal regions, the Congress enjoyed support from **OBCs** and minority communities like **Christians, and Muslims**. This move aimed to capture the residual support needed to reach their desired electoral threshold.

This calculated move, driven by the perceived necessity of Muslim consolidation, ultimately resulted in an unforeseen backfire as the BJP managed to reframe the narrative to its advantage. The BJP further contended that Lord Hanuman holds a special place in Karnataka's cultural heritage, branding the Congress' move as an insult to the revered deity and the state's identity. This sentiment was echoed in the form of reciting the **Hanuman Chalisa** and holding protests against the Congress party's stance. The symbolic act of reciting the Hanuman Chalisa was accompanied by some senior BJP leaders

burning copies of the Congress manifesto as a form of protest, likening it to a "**manifesto of the Muslim League**".

Faced with an escalating situation, the Congress party resorted to damage control. Karnataka Congress chief **DK Shivakumar stated that the party's commitment to building Anjaneya** (Lord Hanuman) temples across the state was unequivocal should the Congress come into power. However, it is conspicuous that "banning Bajrang Dal" helped Congress consolidate Muslim votes in the old Mysore region.

### **Nandini vs. Amul**

The entry of Amul (i.e. **the Apex organization of the Dairy Cooperatives of Gujarat**) into the fresh milk market triggered a significant political debate with far-reaching implications in the context of the 2023 Karnataka elections. The concern was that Amul's entry might challenge the dominant position held by Nandini, **Karnataka Milk Federation's cooperative dairy brand**. Outside the **Hindi heartland**, the BJP's biggest challenge has been in states with strong regional identities. This was visible in the **West Bengal elections**, where Mamata Banerjee was able to cash in on the Bengali regional identity. The BJP's initial response to the Amul-Nandini issue reflected their defensive stance. Even before this issue emerged, the BJP was grappling with allegations of corruption, and they were attempting to steer the campaign toward central leadership issues. While the BJP was trying desperately to keep the campaign around the central leadership, the Nandini versus Amul controversy ensured that **local issues remained in focus**. The narrative of **Nandini vs. Amul took on a regional vs. national** tone as it was projected as an attack on Karnataka's dairy farmers and eventually, the **Kannadiga pride**, which posed a challenge for the BJP.

The potential impact of dairy farmers' dissatisfaction was expected to be particularly pronounced in **districts known for milk production**, such as **Belagavi, Tumkur, Hassan, Mysuru, and Mandya**. The election results demonstrated that the Congress effectively leveraged the Nandini vs. Amul narrative. In the top five milk-producing districts, the Congress gained considerable ground. Of the **54 seats** in these districts, the Congress secured victory in **32 constituencies, an increase of 18 compared to the 2018 polls**. In contrast, the JD(S) – a traditionally strong player in agricultural regions – led in only **9 seats**, a **decline of 13** from the previous election. The BJP trailed in six seats, showing a decrease compared to 2018. The Congress' vote share saw a rise of **5.6%** points in 2023 compared to the 2018 elections. In contrast, the JD(S)'s vote share **declined by 5.7%** points. The BJP's vote share remained relatively stable. By framing the debate around a regional issue related to a vital industry, the INC managed to shift the focus away from central leadership concerns and capitalize on local sentiments.

### Communal Polarization

The BJP has focused primarily on communal issues like the hijab ban, halal meat, azan, a boycott on Muslim-run shops, and the moral policing of Muslims and Christians. However, this communal approach seems to have backfired, as the party's senior leader **BC Nagesh**, who supported controversial policies including a **hijab ban** and a revision of school textbooks, was defeated by **Congress' K Shadakshari** in the **Tiptur constituency**. Nagesh's loss might be attributed to these controversies, including allegations of **saffronizing the education system** and undermining the unique Kannadiga culture. In a party gathering held in Mangalore, **Nalin Kumar Kateel**, the BJP Karnataka state president, emphasized the significance of focusing on the matter of "**Love Jihad**" instead of what he referred to as "road, gutter, drain, and other minor concerns." This statement attracted condemnation from Congress representatives, and it also led to dissatisfaction among various state BJP leaders. This incident further accentuates how such comments from the BJP have solidified its image as a party associated with divisiveness.

### **The caste-wise voting pattern in Karnataka Assembly Elections 2023**

#### Lingayats

Among the 70 constituencies predominantly influenced by the Lingayat community, the Congress has secured victory in **45 constituencies**. In contrast, the BJP was behind significantly with 20 constituencies. However, this election seems to have tilted the balance in favor of the Congress as it attempts to regain its historical sway over the community. Prominent BJP figures, including former Chief Minister **Jagadish Shettar**, ex-deputy **CM Laxman Savadi**, **Nehru Olekar**, and **NY Gopalakrishna**, all respected leaders within the Lingayat circle, defected to the Congress after being denied tickets by BJP for 2023 polls. The BJP's attempt to bolster **Lingayat reservation** by a mere **2%** shortly before the election might not have yielded the desired results. Factions within the community aspired for a more substantial quota. The Lingayat community's disenchantment with the BJP likely began in **2021** when they replaced **BS Yediyurappa**, a prominent Lingayat leader, as Chief Minister, despite appointing another Lingayat, **Mr. Bommai**, as his successor. The community remained unsatisfied, as shown by the numbers. Moreover, Yediyurappa's recent announcement of retiring from electoral politics had a notable impact on the voting patterns of the Lingayat community for the BJP. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi conducted a "**Yuva Kranti Samavesha**," a youth convention organized by the state unit, in Belagavi. To strengthen its connection with the Lingayat populace, the Congress fielded **51** candidates from this region. Notably, **MB Patil**, a prominent Lingayat figure, was appointed as the head of its campaign committee. **Eshwar Khandre** was designated as the working president, and a ticket was extended to the 91-year-old Lingayat leader **Shamanur Shivashankarappa**. However, in crucial constituencies like **Shikaripura** in Central Karnataka, the majority of Lingayats chose to support the established BJP leaders. The Lingayat vote had not completely shifted in favor of

the Congress as anticipated. Instead, it has fragmented in key constituencies, leading to victories for candidates due to factors beyond mere caste affiliation.

### Vokkaligas

This Karnataka election witnessed a tectonic shift of Vokkaliga allegiance from the JD(S) to the Congress, primarily benefiting **DK Shivakumar**. DK Shivakumar positioned himself as a prominent **Vokkaliga leader** during the campaign. Before the results were out, some Vokkaliga leaders expressed dissatisfaction with the JD(S), citing a lack of financial support for their candidates in Bengaluru. Shivakumar recognized this dissatisfaction within the community and actively engaged with the Vokkaligara Sangha, participating in their pre-election events. His strategy was not to undermine the JD(S) but to gain the trust of Vokkaligas in equal measure to their confidence in the JD(S). He leveraged the demand for over **12% reservation** for the Vokkaligas, placing the blame on the BJP for not fulfilling this promise, which resonated with the community and strengthened his leadership position. The Congress gained substantial support from Vokkaligas in the Old Mysuru region, securing **44 seats** compared to JD(S)'s **14 seats**. The most significant shift in Vokkaliga support towards the Congress was seen when **Nikhil Kumaraswamy**, a JD(S) candidate, lost to Congress candidate **HD Iqbal Hussain** in Ramanagara by a margin of over **11,000 votes**. This pattern also extended to some seats in Bengaluru, where Vokkaliga votes appeared to favor the Congress over the JD(S). The rise of DK Shivakumar at the expense of HD Kumaraswamy was particularly evident in Kanakapura, where Shivakumar won by a significant margin of over **80,000 votes** with a vote share exceeding **75 %**.

### AHINDA

Dalits in Karnataka have shown substantial support for the Congress party in the 2023 elections, and this can be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, Karnataka boasts strong Dalit leaders within the Congress, such as All India Congress Committee President **Mallikarjun Kharge**, former MLA **G Parameshwara**, and the influential Kuruba mass leader **Siddaramaiah**. However, it's not just the influence of these leaders that has led to the consolidation of Dalit-Bahujan-Muslim votes for the Congress, there are several factors that have contributed to their success. **Madigas** make up a significant portion of the Dalit population in Karnataka. Previously, they had supported the BJP since the early 2000s when former Chief Minister and Lingayat leader BS Yediyurappa convinced them to back the BJP in exchange for **sub-caste reservation**. However, in 2023, the Congress managed to win back this caste group, mainly due to their proactive stance on sub-caste reservation issues. The Congress appears to have garnered support from '**Touchable**' Dalits as well, in addition to the **Holeyas or Right-Dalits** who have traditionally been aligned with the party. The BJP's reservation matrix in Karnataka, which allocated **6 %** sub-caste reservation for Madigas, **5.5 percent** for Holeyas, and **4.5 percent** for 'Touchable' Dalits, failed to convince many within these communities. The

Congress made a significant promise to raise the reservation cutoff to **75%** by including it in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution, similar to Tamil Nadu's approach. This commitment to expanding reservation opportunities likely swayed many Dalit (including **Banjaras or Lambanis**) voters in favor of the Congress.

### **Kurubas and Muslims**

With the trend of other communities contributing to the Congress's success, Kuruba votes have seen a **4%** rise, OBC votes have increased by **5%**, and Muslim votes have surged by **10%**. This upward trend is largely attributed to the efforts of Siddaramaiah, who has actively campaigned for greater unity among Dalit, Bahujan (OBC), and Muslim voters in favor of the Congress. BJP had divided the **4%** reservation meant for Muslims, allocating **2%** each to Vokkaligas and Lingayats in the hopes of securing their support. In response, the Congress made a significant commitment to bring the Muslim community back under the BC (Backward Classes) quota if elected to power. This pledge resonated with the Muslim community, instilling confidence in Congress and garnering their support.

### **The region-wise voting pattern of Karnataka Assembly Elections**

#### **Mysuru-Karnataka/ Old Mysuru region**

<b>Party</b>	<b>No. of seats won in 2023</b>	<b>No. of seats won in 2018</b>
<b>INC</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>BJP</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>30</b>

The 2023 Karnataka election results revealed a notable shift in voting patterns within the Muslim community, particularly in the Old Mysuru region. Traditionally, the **Janata Dal (S)** party had enjoyed strong support from Muslim voters in this region, which boasts an **11% Muslim population**. However, this time, the Muslim vote consolidated in favor of the Congress party, marking a significant departure from the usual trend.

Political analysts attribute this shift to concerns that the **Janata Dal (S) might form an alliance with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**, which has faced criticism for implementing policies perceived as discriminatory towards the Muslim community. In contrast, the Congress party pledged to reinstate the **4% reservation for Muslims** under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, a

reservation that had been revoked by the BJP government. The BJP government in Karnataka has faced allegations of implementing policies that disproportionately affect the Muslim community, such as prohibiting the hijab in pre-university colleges, passing laws against religious conversion, and restricting the transportation of cattle in the state. Additionally, some BJP leaders have advocated for a ban on halal meat. Despite the BJP's efforts to polarize the Hindu vote, the Congress party's manifesto commitment to ban organizations like the **Popular Front of India and Bajrang Dal** seemed to resonate with voters and worked in its favor.

### **Bengaluru Rural and Urban**

<b>Party</b>	<b>No. of seats won in 2023</b>	<b>No. of seats won in 2018</b>
<b>INC</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>BJP</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>JD(S)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

In the 2023 Karnataka elections, the BJP maintained its 36% vote share in the state, largely due to a **5.4% increase in votes in Bengaluru**. This boost was attributed to '**Operation Kamala**,' where several MLAs from the Congress and JD(S) defected to the BJP in 2019, bolstering the party's hold in the city. Bengaluru has a strong pro-incumbent tendency, allowing the BJP to retain seats and incumbents easily. Voters in Bengaluru favored the BJP for several reasons. First, there was strong support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, particularly for his stance on **national security and economic management** during COVID-19. The "**double engine**" narrative, where BJP rule in the state complements Modi's leadership at the national level, resonated with voters.

Second, voters lacked confidence in the opposition, fearing an increase in crime and lawlessness under the Congress. This concern had a communal undertone, with **Hindutva** ideologies influencing some voters. Additionally, Bengaluru's unique growth trajectory and relative economic stability may have contributed to the BJP's success. The **JD(S) also saw a decline** in its vote share, benefiting the BJP, while the Congress made slight gains. Overall, the BJP's retention of its vote share and success in Bengaluru in the 2023 Karnataka elections can be attributed to factors such as Modi's popularity, concerns about the opposition, and the collapse of the JD(S).



### Coastal Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2023	No. of seats won in 2018
INC	6	3
BJP	12	16
JD(S)	1	0

In the 2023 elections in coastal Karnataka, the political landscape saw some interesting dynamics. The ruling BJP, which had emphasized '**development**' and the '**benefits of the double-engine government,**' while downplaying 'Hindutva,' faced losses in the region, losing three seats to the Congress.

The Congress, in an effort to gain support, had announced a **separate charter for the development** of coastal Karnataka. However, this strategy did not yield significant gains, with the party winning only three more seats in the region. The charter included plans to reconstitute the **Coastal Development Authority as a statutory body with a substantial annual budget, promoting Mangaluru as an IT and garment industry hub, and establishing development boards for various communities and industries in the region.** Interestingly, the Congress's mention of banning the Bajrang Dal did not seem to have a significant impact in Uttara Kannada and Dakshina Kannada, where the party gained seats. Unlike in the previous Assembly election, the BJP did not focus on projecting itself as the guardian of Hindutva. This shift in strategy was influenced by incidents that tarnished the party's image, such as the murder of a BJP Yuva Morcha member and revelations about a case the BJP had previously used for political purposes.

### Mumbai-Karnataka/ Kittur Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2023	No. of seats won in 2018
INC	33	16
BJP	16	26
JD(S)	1	2

The Mumbai Karnataka sub-region, known as the traditional bastion of the Lingayat community, showed signs of a shift in the 2023 Karnataka assembly elections, with the Congress making notable progress in what has historically been a stronghold for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This shift in Mumbai Karnataka suggests that the votes within the Lingayat community, which has traditionally

supported the BJP, may have become **fragmented**. Despite the BJP's efforts to strengthen its appeal among the Lingayats by increasing their reservation by **two percentage points**, a couple of key factors contributed to this potential shift. **Firstly, the BJP's decision to replace Yediyurappa** as chief minister in 2021 with another senior Lingayat leader, Bommai, may have played a role. Secondly, the party's decision to deny tickets to two senior Lingayat leaders, former Chief Minister **Jagadish Shettar and Deputy Chief Minister Laxman Savadi**, both of whom subsequently contested on Congress tickets, may have also influenced this shift.

### Central-Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2023	No. of seats won in 2018
INC	17	5
BJP	7	21
JD(S)	1	0

The Congress's "five guarantees" played a significant role in their success in the central Karnataka region during the 2023 Assembly elections. These guarantees, which included promises such as free electricity (**Gruha Jyoti**), monthly assistance to the woman head of every family (**Gruha Lakshmi**), assured rice allocation (**Anna Bhagya**), free bus travel for women within the state (**Uchita Prayana**), and financial support for unemployed youth (**Yuva Nidhi**), resonated with voters and contributed to the party's victory.

### Hyderabad-Karnataka/ Kalyana Karnataka

Party	No. of seats won in 2023	No. of seats won in 2018
INC	25	21
BJP	11	15
JD(S)	3	5

In the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections, the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, despite its historically underdeveloped status, showed signs of improvement in various development indicators, such as **reduced girl-child dropouts, child marriages, maternal mortality ratio, and infant mortality rates**. While four out of the seven districts in the region voted similarly to previous elections, the Congress made gains in **Ballari, Raichur, Kalaburagi, Yadgir, and Koppal**, compared to the 2018 results. **Unemployment** emerged as a critical issue in this region, particularly in constituencies like

**Chittapur**, where it favored the Congress candidate, **Priyank Kharge**. Priyank Kharge, the son of Congress party president Mallikarjun Kharge, emphasized that the key campaign issues revolved around unemployment and corruption.

Despite expectations of a significant shift in Lingayat voters following the defection of former BJP leaders to the Congress, the Hindutva-based cadre largely remained loyal to their party, unaffected by charismatic candidates. The minority, Muslim, and backward classes continued to support the Congress, maintaining their loyalty to the party.

### **BJP's 'Mission South' Faces Hurdles**

In reality, the BJP faces significant challenges as its policies and priorities are predominantly centered on Northern and Central India, leaving Southern India, including states like Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana, comprising around **22-24%** of the nation's political landscape, somewhat overlooked. The BJP's recent defeat in Karnataka has dealt a blow to its 'Mission South.' The southern states account for approximately **900 state assembly seats and 130 Lok Sabha seats**. Presently, the BJP holds **29** Lok Sabha seats in the southern states, with a goal to secure **60** in the upcoming elections. However, a major hurdle for the BJP is the absence of influential local leaders in the South, with Karnataka's Yediyurappa being a notable exception, though he has retired from active politics. This dearth of established or charismatic leaders in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Puducherry poses a significant challenge for the BJP in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. In the total Lok Sabha seats across the five southern states (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana), they collectively hold about **24%** of the share. Out of the 130 seats, the BJP currently has **29**, while the Congress holds **27** Lok Sabha seats, leaving the rest under the control of regional parties. In terms of vote share, the BJP averages around **18.64%** per state in the South, compared to the Congress's average of **22.72%**. While the results of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections often diverge, potential losses in about **18** Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka, as indicated by Election Commission data, could pose concerns for the BJP. The party's core vote bank, primarily comprising Lingayats, has also faced disruptions in Karnataka, especially in regions like Kittur, where significant losses were observed. It's noteworthy that the Congress's strength in Karnataka and Kerala has played a role in altering the BJP's previously ascending trajectory in the state.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, despite maintaining the same vote share as in previous elections, the BJP faced a decrease in the number of seats in Karnataka. The key factor behind this outcome was the continuous decline of **JD(S)**, which saw its vote share drop from **18% to 13%**. JD(S) had been losing its appeal as a viable regional option due to perceptions of opportunism, domination by a single family, and limited support primarily from the Vokkaliga caste. This decline likely led to a partial shift of votes towards

Congress, including potential support from Muslim voters aiming to keep BJP out. While BJP didn't gain new supporters, the shift of Vokkaliga and Muslim votes towards Congress, even with a slight change in vote share, influenced the election results. Congress presented itself as a credible alternative capable of securing a majority, which contributed to JD(S) voters moving in their direction. In electoral politics, maintaining vote share is not always straightforward, and this election exemplifies the complex dynamics at play.

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