

Palakkad By-Elections Analysis

I. Introduction

The Palakkad constituency in Kerala was the focal point of intense political activity due to its first-ever by-election, necessitated by the resignation of Shafi Parambil, who won a Lok Sabha seat. The election was set against significant political maneuvering, controversies, and clashes among the major parties. The Palakkad by-election held on November 20, 2024, resulted in a substantial victory for Rahul Mamkootathil of the United Democratic Front (UDF), who won by a margin of 18,840 votes against BJP's C. Krishnakumar.

II. Caste/Community Analysis

Sr. No.	Caste/Community	%	Remarks
1.	OBC- Ezhava	30%	1. Staunch supporters of the BJP. Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP), a social organisation representing the Ezhava community, was also backing the BJP candidate. ¹
2.	GEN- Muslim	25%	1. A majority of this community votes for the UDF and has been a traditional voter. The party has the additional support of Jamaat-e-Islami and the unofficial backing of SDPI.
3.	GEN- Nair	10%	1. The community votes get divided between the BJP, UDF and LDF.
4.	SC/ST	7.5%	1. The community votes get divided between the LDF and UDF.
5.	GEN- Christians	6%	1. The community has traditionally supported the LDF and UDF before 2024 AE but after the Waqf Board's claim over the Munambam land, the votes have been divided between the BJP, UDF, and LDF. The Congress and the CPM were

¹ [The Print, November 2024](#)

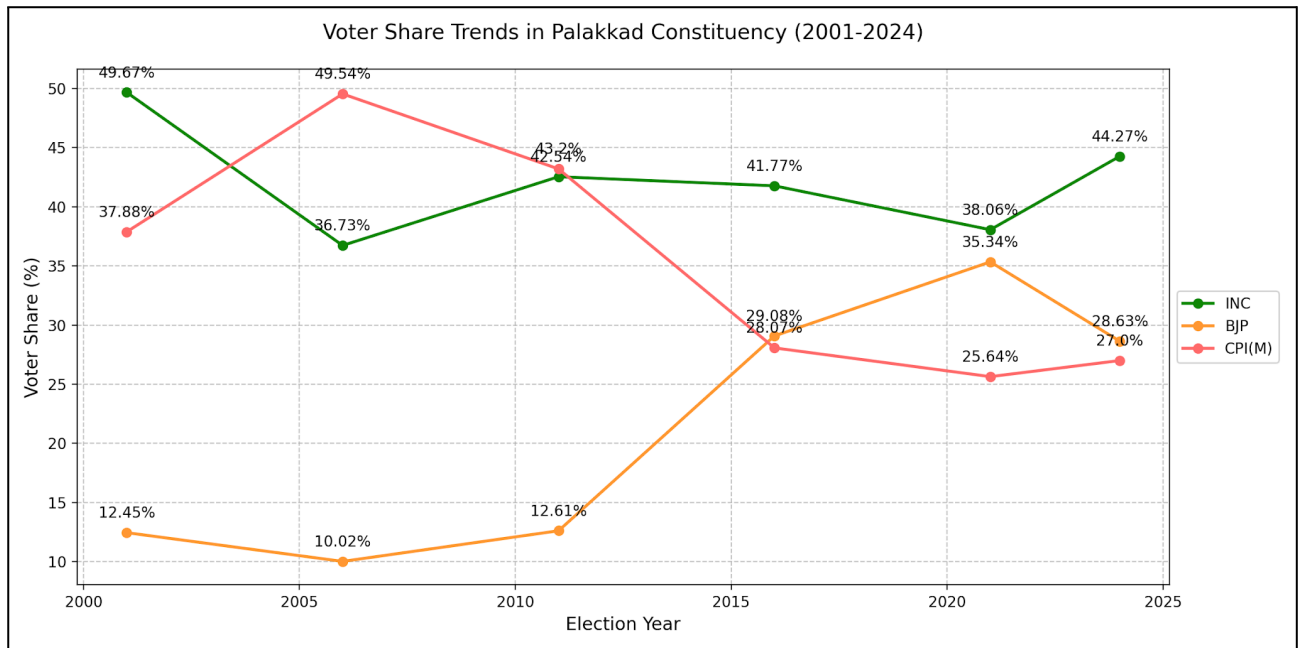
Sr. No.	Caste/Community	%	Remarks
			conspicuously silent on the protests by Munambam residents against the Waqf Board's claim over their land, whereas the BJP backed the protesters and campaigned against the alleged double standards of the two fronts. ²

III. Past Election Analysis

- A. The UDF has maintained a stronghold in Palakkad, winning the seat in both the 2016 and 2021 Assembly elections. Shafi Parambil won with a comfortable margin in 2021 against BJP's E. Sreedharan.³ The UDF focused on social welfare programs and infrastructure development, appealing to SC/ST communities and urban voters.
- B. The BJP has seen a gradual increase in its vote share, particularly in urban areas. In the 2021 elections, Sreedharan lost by a narrow margin of 3,859 votes, indicating growing support. The BJP aimed to consolidate Hindu votes and present itself as a viable alternative through development narratives and local governance successes.
- C. The LDF's influence has waned in recent elections, with its candidates struggling to secure significant votes. In the 2024 by-election, Sarin received about 27.10% of the vote share. The LDF attempted to attract disenchanted Congress voters but faced challenges due to internal party dynamics and candidate selection issues.
- D. The contest between the political parties has shifted from a triangular to a bipolar fight. Currently, the contest is between UDF and BJP.

² [Swarajya, November 2024](#)

³ [One India, November 2024](#)



IV. Candidates

The by-election features a competitive three-way race among:

A. Rahul Mamkootathil (UDF): The Youth Congress state president, Mamkootathil is considered a strong candidate backed by the United Democratic Front (UDF). His campaign emphasised addressing local issues and countering the narratives of his opponents-

1. Focused on consolidating traditional support by emphasising local issues and development.
2. Highlighted the achievements of former MLA Shafi Parambil to reinforce their credibility.
3. Engaged in grassroots campaigning to connect with voters directly.

The UDF saw an increase in its vote share by approximately 6.21 percentage points, reflecting effective campaigning and voter mobilization.

B. Dr P. Sarin: An independent candidate supported by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), Sarin previously served as the digital media chief for the Congress before switching allegiances. His candidacy has been bolstered by discontent within the Congress regarding candidate selection.⁴ The LDF attempted to leverage Sarin's candidacy to promise better representation for disaffected Congress voters-

1. Focused on portraying itself as a viable alternative to both UDF and BJP.
2. However, internal divisions and controversies weakened its campaign impact.

The LDF-backed Sarin marginally increased his share by 1.64 percentage points, but this was insufficient to secure a competitive position.

⁴ [Mathrubhumi, November 2024](#)

C. C. Krishnakumar (BJP): The BJP's candidate and former state general secretary, Krishnakumar faces internal party challenges but remains optimistic about enhancing his party's vote share in this election-

1. Attempted to consolidate Hindu votes by portraying Mamkootathil as a liability.
2. Aimed to leverage its control over the Palakkad municipality to showcase governance success.
3. Faced internal dissent regarding candidate selection, which hampered its campaign effectiveness.

The BJP experienced a decline in its vote share by about 6.71 percentage points, indicating erosion of support among urban voters who had previously backed them.

V. Constituency (Voting Trends in Panchayats)

A. Palakkad Municipality: The municipality has a significant urban electorate, with over 80% of voters residing in urban areas. The BJP has gained substantial support here, controlling 28 out of 52 council seats in recent elections, reflecting a strong urban Hindu vote base.⁵ In the last assembly elections, the BJP finished second, indicating a growing acceptance among urban voters. UDF increased its vote share to 41.11%, while BJP's share fell to 35.17%. This shift indicates that urban voters are increasingly moving away from the BJP.

B. Pirayiri Panchayat: Traditionally, Pirayiri has leaned towards the UDF, with the UDF candidate securing a majority in previous elections. In the 2021 assembly elections, the UDF garnered 12,815 votes, while the BJP received only 6,355 votes, showing a clear preference for Congress in this area. UDF achieved a remarkable increase in vote share to 68%, while BJP's share dropped to 20.48%. This area has historically favoured UDF due to demographic factors.

C. Kannadi Panchayat: Kannadi has shown a more balanced distribution of votes among parties. In 2021, the UDF received 5,965 votes, while the LDF and BJP garnered 6,078 and 4,697 votes, respectively. This indicates that while the UDF has a foothold here, the BJP is making inroads. UDF improved its vote share to 37%, whereas BJP's fell to 21.24%.⁶

D. Mathur Panchayat: Mathur has also been competitive, with results showing a close contest among parties. The UDF received 6,445 votes, while the LDF and BJP received 6,475 and 3,960 votes, respectively. The area reflects a mix of support for both UDF and LDF, with potential for BJP growth. UDF maintained a steady performance with a slight increase to 38.52%, while BJP saw a decline to 18.23%.

⁵ [Manorama, October 2024](#)

⁶ [Manorama, November 2024](#)

VI. Controversy

The Palakkad by-election has been marred by numerous controversies that have captivated public attention:

- A. Allegations of Black Money:** A police raid on hotel rooms occupied by Congress leaders raised suspicions of cash intended for electoral bribery.⁷ Although no money was found, this incident was framed by the UDF as a politically motivated attack by the CPI(M). The UDF candidate, Rahul Mamkootathil, used this controversy to connect with voters, portraying himself as a victim of political machinations.

- B. Defections and Internal Party Strife:** The campaign has seen notable defections, particularly Dr Sarin's switch from Congress to LDF after being overlooked for candidacy. The political landscape was further complicated by defections, notably that of Sandeep Varier from BJP to Congress, which stirred tensions within party ranks. Varier's move was seen as a significant blow to BJP's campaign efforts, while also raising questions about party loyalty and strategy.⁸ Additionally, dissatisfaction within both UDF and BJP ranks has surfaced, with factions expressing concerns over candidate selections and campaign strategies.

- C. Bogus Voting Allegations:** The CPI(M) has alleged widespread bogus voter enlistment, claiming that many voters from other constituencies were registered in Palakkad ahead of the election. This prompted protests and a decision to approach the court for legal action against the electoral officials. The District Collector assured that polling would adhere to Election Commission guidelines, emphasising that any fraudulent documentation would lead to legal consequences under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

- D. Double Voting Claims:** The BJP faced scrutiny when it was discovered that their district president's name appeared on two voter lists. This led to allegations of voter fraud against both the CPI(M) and UDF, with claims of approximately 20,000 fake votes being added to the rolls. The BJP's candidate clarified that the duplicate registration was an administrative error.⁹

VII. Conclusion

The Palakkad by-election results reflect a significant shift in voter sentiment against the BJP and highlight the effectiveness of the UDF's campaign strategies under challenging circumstances. The decline in BJP's vote share demonstrates vulnerabilities within its support base, particularly among urban voters, while the UDF's resurgence signals renewed confidence ahead of future electoral contests in Kerala. The outcome also poses challenges for the CPI(M), which must reassess its strategies following a disappointing performance in what has historically been considered its stronghold.

⁷ [Manorama, November 2024](#)

⁸ [Hindustan Times, November 2024](#)

⁹ [Manorama, November 2024](#)