

KERALA ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2016 : THE USUAL CYCLE BUT NOW A VIABLE THIRD FRONT

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ABSTRACT

One could have easily predicted the results of the Kerala State Assembly Elections held on 16 May, 2016, by studying the voting pattern since 1970s. But what makes this result different is, with this, the BJP opens its political account in the state by winning a single seat. This paper highlights the various reasons that has enabled the Left Democratic Front to come to power, and more importantly, examines the reasons for the BJP led National Democratic Alliance surprising success and what this means for its competitors.

KEY WORDS : Kerala State Assembly Election 2016, Left Democratic Front, United Democratic Front, National Democratic Alliance, BJP, anti-incumbency, solar scam

Kerala might probably be the only state* in India to see power alternate between two groups: the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF). But, what marks this election from the previous ones is the coming of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in the southern state. **Districtwise performance of Political**

District	LDF	NDA	UDF	Others
Kasargode	3	0	2	0
Kannur	8	0	3	0
Wayanad	2	0	1	0
Kozhikode	9	0	2	2
Malappuram	1	0	12	3
Palakkad	9	0	3	0
Thrissur	12	0	1	0
Ernakulam	5	0	9	0
Idukki	3	0	2	0
Kottayam	2	0	6	1
Alappuzha	8	0	1	0
Pathanamthitta	4	0	1	0
Kollam	10	0	0	1
Thiruvananthapuram	9	0	4	0
Total	85	1	47	7

Fronts in Kerala General Elections, 2016. Available at: <http://ceo.kerala.gov.in/>

Kerala's political landscape has seen the alternate domination of these two coalitions since the late 70s. Here, most of the major political parties are part of either alliance, except for the BJP. It is therefore difficult for a single party to contest and win, as people vote for fronts and not individual parties. The BJP led NDA, which has been trying to open an account in this state since the 80s, is now the third largest front. Despite this, it had a very little presence in the assembly elections, but this election changed all that.

THE VERDICT

The general election for the fourteenth legislative assembly was held on May 16, 2016 to elect representatives of 140 constituencies in the state of Kerala. The Left democratic Front has won the contest with 85 seats. The Congress led United Democratic Front came second with 47 seats, and the BJP led NDA gets its first ever single seat by winning in Nemom constituency by O Rajagopal.

THE CHANGE

By studying the vote share of parties from the assembly elections in 2011 to the Lok Sabha elections in 2014, one can find that the UDFs vote share has come down. Its share came down from 45.8 % in 2011 to 42% in 2014, whereas LDFs share also decreased from 44.9% in 2011 to 40.1% in 2014. This shows UDF is still leading. But the important feature is the gaining popularity of the

BJP led alliance in Kerala. The party began increasingly popular since it won the centre in 2014. It saw its vote share rise from 6% in 2011 to 10% in 2014.

THE RISING POPULARITY OF THE BJP

A survey conducted by CSDS shows that, during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, 22% of the upper class voters voted for BJP and 27% for LDF. In the urban centres, BJP secured 13.7 which is more than its state average of 10%; whereas, LDF secured only 36.5 % which is less than its state average of 40.1%. This shows a shift in urban upper class voters who seemed to prefer BJP. Apart from this BJP has been wooing the Nair community by associating with the Nair Service Society (an upper-caste Hindu organization) and other similar organizations. It has also gained the support of Bharat Dharma Jan Sena, which is the new political outfit of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana organization, which is popular among the Ezhava community.

The nairs and ezhavas which constitute the major groups among hindus, account for 23 and 14% of Kerala's population. These hindu groups, which traditionally have never voted as a single group, is being brought under the 'unified hindu vote bank' by the BJP along with other groups. These groups which include the OBCs, the SCs, STs along with ezhavas which altogether constitute the lower class among hindus has traditionally favoured the LDF. This is now changing with the BJP trying to align with leaders of these communities. C.K. Janu, the most popular tribal leader, who is the leader of both the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha and its newly formed political wing Janadhipathya Ooru Vikasana Munnani (JOVM), is standing as an independent candidate with BJP's backing. The other major minority religious groups include the christians at 18% and muslims, 26%. Muslims have traditionally favoured the Muslim League and remains so. The upper class among christians which consist of Syrian Christians have always favoured the Congress and the other minorities like Latin Catholics have favoured both.

The BJP, apart from making a dent in the upper caste hindu vote is now attracting the upper class among the christians--the Syrians. Modi's community outreach programme in the state saw his meeting the leaders of Syrian Christians among others. (1) According to, H Raja, BJP national general secretary in charge of Kerala, the Syrian Christian leaders in Gujarat played an important role in bringing the community closer to the BJP. The Syrian community is said to have been converts from upper-caste hindus and have similar customs and rituals.

This is a strategic move, considering the fact that the minorities comprise majority of the state population. Seeking christian support has successfully worked in Goa with the Manohar Parrikar led BJP government going out-of-the-way to gather christian votes. (Paul, Cithara. 2015)

What is interesting is the fact that the RSS had tried to create a christian organization on the lines of Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM), but found no success. All these factors enabled the BJP to perform well in the local body polls in Kerala. In panchayats, it has won in 12 out of 941; in municipalities it has won 1 (Palakkad) out of 81, and has managed to come second in six of them. Further, it has got 34 out of 100 seats in the Thiruvananthapuram corporation, and is the main opposition. (Economic Times. 2015)

REASONS FOR ANTI INCUMBANCY

Some of the issues that led to anti-incumbent voting are: the bar liscence issue, the solar scam, tainted ministers, strikes, fall in rubber price, tea plantation works wage agitation, black money etc.

CONCLUSION

Though this election saw the usual cycle of the opposite front winning alternatively, what makes it different, is the emergence of a viable third front by the BJP led National Democratic Alliance. Its victory of a single seat may not look stunning, but is significant because of the groundwork it has done to achieve it. Now, the people has voted the LDF into power, but it is also at the same time a warning that if it fails to meet the development aspirations of the people of Kerala, it may go the way of the Congress led UDF. It could also lead to the gradual growth of the BJP, whose minor success was at the cost of LDFs vote share. What this shows is that the LDF has much more to worry in the immediate future and Congress much later.

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