

# Local Government Election Results in Kerala

## Towards a Tripolar Polity

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The 2025 local government elections in Kerala signal a major political realignment, weakening the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front's long-standing dominance and paving the way for a tripolar polity. The LDF's defeat reflects centralised governance, erosion of participatory democracy, corruption allegations, and loss of secular credibility. The verdict highlights growing grassroots demands for accountability, responsive governance, and renewed democratic decentralisation.

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) registered a decisive resurgence across gram panchayats, municipalities, and municipal corporations in the 2025 local government elections in Kerala, significantly undermining the long-standing political dominance of the ruling Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M])-led Left Democratic Front (LDF). More significantly, the elections marked the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as a formidable political force, as it emerged as the single largest front in the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation by securing 50 of the 101 wards. This unprecedented outcome constitutes a major setback for the CPI(M), which had exercised uninterrupted control over this high-profile corporation for over three decades, including an absolute majority during the previous term. For the CPI(M)-led LDF, the result represents not merely an electoral defeat, but a symbolic erosion of its near-continuous political hegemony over Thiruvananthapuram corporation since the 1980s.

According to the data released by the Kerala State Election Commission, voter turnout in the 2025 local government elections stood at 73.69%. District-wise variations in electoral participation were evident, with Wayanad recording the highest voter turnout at 78.29%, while Pathanamthitta registered the lowest turnout at 66.78%. This represents a decline in voter participation when compared to previous local government elections. Notably, voter turnout had reached 75.95% during the 2020 elections, which were conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and was even higher at 77.76% in the 2015 elections.

In absolute terms, a total of 21,079,609 voters exercised their franchise in the 2025

local government elections. These voters elected representatives across 23,573 wards in 1,199 local self-government institutions, comprising 14 district panchayats, six municipal corporations, 86 municipalities, and 941 gram panchayats.

### Electoral Outcomes and Emerging Political Realignments

This outcome marks a significant departure from previous electoral trends. In the 2020 local government elections, the LDF had dominated the Thiruvananthapuram corporation with 51 seats, while the NDA and the UDF secured 35 and 10 seats, respectively. Similarly, in the 2010 elections, the LDF retained control with victories in 42 wards, followed by the BJP-led NDA with 34 wards and the UDF with 21 wards.

Beyond the state capital, the NDA achieved another notable success in Tripunithura municipality, where it narrowly surpassed the LDF in a closely contested election. The NDA secured 21 seats in the 55-member municipal council, marginally ahead of the LDF's 20 seats, while the UDF won 12 seats. This victory marks the first instance of NDA control in Tripunithura municipality, a local body that has historically alternated between the LDF and the UDF. In the 2020 local government elections, when the municipality consisted of 49 wards, the LDF had emerged victorious with 23 seats, while the BJP secured 17 seats.

In Palakkad municipality, the NDA retained power for a third consecutive term despite losing three seats, securing 25 of the 53 seats. However, the alliance suffered a setback in Pandalam municipality, which was won by the LDF, signalling a significant political shift in the central Pathanamthitta district. Of the 34 wards in Pandalam, the LDF won 14 seats, the UDF secured 11, and the NDA was reduced to nine seats. Pandalam had previously been considered a stronghold of the BJP-led NDA in southern Kerala, owing to its association with political, social, and religious mobilisation surrounding the Sabarimala temple. Notably, despite the BJP's expectations of electoral gains following the recent Sabarimala gold plate controversy, this strategy failed to translate into electoral success.

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**Table 1: 2025 Kerala Local Government Election Results**

Local Government	LDF	UDF	NDA	Others	Hung	Total
Corporations	1	4	1	0	0	6
Municipalities	28	54	2	1	1	86
District panchayats	7	7	0	0	0	14
Block panchayats	63	79	0	0	10	152
Gram panchayats	340	505	26	6	64	941

Source: The Election Commission.

While the NDA's gains and losses attracted considerable attention, they formed only one dimension of a broader political realignment across Kerala. The most striking feature of the 2025 local government elections was the resurgence of the Congress-led UDF, which recorded sweeping victories across both urban and rural local governments following the official declaration of results.

The UDF emerged victorious in four of the six municipal corporations, seven of the 14 district panchayats, 54 of the 86 municipalities, 79 block panchayats, and 505 gram panchayats (Table 1). In contrast, the ruling LDF was reduced to control over only one municipal corporation, 28 municipalities, seven district panchayats, 63 block panchayats, and 340 gram panchayats. These outcomes suggest a broad-based erosion of electoral support for the LDF across both rural and urban constituencies in Kerala.

Given Kerala's status as the last major stronghold of communist governance in India, the implications of these electoral outcomes extend well beyond the state. A defeat in the forthcoming state assembly elections would, for the first time since the 1970s, leave the communist parties without power in any Indian state, posing a profound challenge to their organisational capacity and national political relevance in the years ahead (Basheer 2025).

Ward-level results further underscore the dominance of the UDF across multiple tiers of local governance. The coalition secured control over 187 municipal

**Table 2: Ward-wise Results for Municipal Corporation, Municipalities, District Panchayats, Block Panchayats and Gram Panchayats**

Local Government	LDF (Wards)	UDF (Wards)	NDA (Wards)	Others (Wards)
Corporations	125	187	93	15
Municipalities	1,100	1,458	324	323
District panchayats	148	196	1	1
Block panchayats	923	1,241	54	49
Gram panchayats	6,568	8,015	1,447	1,299

Source: The Election Commission.

corporation wards, 1,458 municipal wards, 196 district panchayat wards, 1,241 block panchayat wards, and 8,015 gram panchayat wards (Table 2).

### Factors Contributing to the Downfall of the CPI(M)-led LDF

The substantial electoral setback suffered by the CPI(M)-led LDF in the 2025 Kerala local government elections points to a deeper and more systemic political erosion within the party's traditional strongholds and organisational structures (Reghu 2025). What was once a model of participatory politics and decentralised governance is increasingly coming to be characterised by centralised command, rigid discipline, and an intolerance of dissent. The shift from mass-based engagement to a more coercive mode of political management weakened the democratic ethos that historically underpinned the left's legitimacy in Kerala.

Under this evolving governance style, party cadres were increasingly perceived as enforcers rather than facilitators of popular participation, while internal dissent was often construed as disloyalty. Welfare and populist interventions, although expansive in scope, were frequently implemented in ways that lacked dignity, transparency, and accountability. As a result, these measures often generated administrative distortions and public dissatisfaction rather than advancing substantive redistributive justice

(Reghu 2025). Consequently, the LDF government's claims regarding the "eradication of extreme poverty" appeared incongruent with persistent experiences of unemployment, precarity, and food insecurity among sections of the population (Jose and Chathukulam 2025).

The decline of the CPI(M) was further accelerated by the leadership's perceived arrogance, limited willingness for institutional introspection, and mounting allegations of corruption. The extensive allocation of public resources to image-building exercises, public relations campaigns, and foreign visits reinforced the perceptions of political detachment and elitism. Most critically, controversies such as the Sabarimala gold theft episode converged with these existing grievances, intensifying public distrust and undermining the moral and ethical foundations of the party's leadership. Together, these factors contributed to a cumulative erosion of political credibility and organisational legitimacy.

This erosion has also produced broader systemic consequences, including the emergence of new and potentially destabilising political formations within the state. In particular, the weakening of the CPI(M) has created political space for the expansion of right-wing nationalism under the banner of the BJP-led NDA, marking a significant departure from Kerala's historically secular and left-leaning political culture (Reghu 2025).

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From a theoretical perspective, the LDF's experience underscores the limits of redistribution without participation, welfare without dignity, and development divorced from a robust democratic framework. Local government elections, often described as a "genuine barometer" of grassroots political legitimacy rather than low-stakes contests (Mathew 2001), provide a particularly sensitive measure of popular trust. The 2025 Kerala local government elections appear to have validated this proposition by revealing a pronounced decline in grassroots confidence in the ruling front. The electoral verdict thus functions less as an aberration and more as an early warning signal for the LDF.

Importantly, the electorate's response does not constitute a wholesale rejection of the Kerala model of development or welfare politics. Instead, it reflects a repudiation of an increasingly authoritarian mode of governance perceived as technocratic, defensive, and insulated from public criticism. In this sense, the CPI(M)-led LDF's electoral setback represents a cumulative judgment on unresolved contradictions within the Kerala development model—particularly tensions between decentralisation and centralisation, equity and employment generation, and innovation and accountability.

The results further demonstrate that crisis-driven or issue-specific mobilisation cannot substitute for sustained, inclusive, and participatory governance (Divakaran 2021; Bhat and Majid 2025). The principal lesson for the CPI(M) lies in the urgent need to reconstruct its participatory foundations. Revitalising the People's Plan Campaign (PPC) and reaffirming a genuinely decentralised democratic framework may be essential for restoring organisational credibility and long-term political legitimacy.

### Factors Contributing to the Resurgence of the UDF

The UDF recorded a decisive resurgence across Kerala in the 2025 local government elections, emerging as a dominant political force, particularly at the municipal level. The Congress-led coalition secured control of four of the six municipal corporations—Kochi, Kollam, Thrissur,

and Kannur—and won 54 of the 86 municipalities. In addition, the UDF established a commanding presence across the three tiers of the panchayati raj system by winning 505 of the 941 gram panchayats, 79 of the 152 block panchayats, and seven of the 14 district panchayats.

The UDF's electoral gains were geographically widespread, encompassing several politically significant districts, including Ernakulam, Idukki, Alappuzha, Malappuram, Kottayam, Kollam, and Pathanamthitta. Among these, Ernakulam emerged as a particular stronghold for the UDF, with victories in nearly all municipalities, the sole exception being the Tripunithura municipality. These outcomes reflect both the breadth and depth of the UDF's resurgence across urban and rural constituencies.

A notable feature of the 2025 elections was the UDF's ability to make substantial inroads in northern districts with sizeable Muslim populations, such as Malappuram and parts of Kozhikode and Kannur—regions that had traditionally been considered strongholds of the LDF. In Malappuram district, for instance, the UDF secured victory in 11 of the 12 municipalities, despite the district's long-standing association with left politics. This shift can be attributed, in part, to growing perceptions that the LDF was deviating

from its secular ideological foundations. Allegations and narratives surrounding a tacit convergence or "unholy nexus" between the CPI(M) and the BJP-led NDA contributed to a trust deficit among minority communities and their political allies, thereby weakening the LDF's support base in these regions.

Historically, sections of the Muslim working class had aligned with the CPI(M) largely because of its secular credentials. However, recent political strategies—such as attempts to mobilise Hindu voters through religious symbolism, initial support for the Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) scheme, and rhetorical positions framed around "league alliances"—were perceived by minorities as ideological departures (Basheer 2025). These developments undermined confidence in the CPI(M)'s commitment to secularism and prompted Muslim and Christian voters alike to increasingly view the Congress-led UDF as a more reliable secular alternative.

At the same time, the LDF's efforts at Hindu outreach did not yield the anticipated electoral dividends. In urban centres such as Thiruvananthapuram, Palakkad, and Thrissur, segments of the Hindu electorate gravitated instead towards the BJP-led NDA, further fragmenting the LDF's traditional support base. This



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dual erosion—among minority voters and sections of the urban Hindu electorate—significantly constrained the LDF’s electoral prospects.

Although the BJP made concerted efforts to engage the Christian community in Kerala, including high-profile outreach by NDA leaders to bishops and other religious figures, these initiatives did not translate into substantial electoral support. Instead, the Christian electorate largely perceived the Congress-led UDF as a more credible political alternative, a factor that played a catalytic role in the UDF’s electoral success in 2025. Nonetheless, this alignment remains contingent rather than permanent, as the BJP has succeeded in creating limited ideological resonance within sections of the Christian community through discourses such as “love jihad” and “narcotic jihad” (Chathukulam and Joseph 2021). These narratives have, in turn, fostered perceptions of Islamophobia within segments of the community, as reflected in public statements and political interventions (Balan 2023).

Finally, the broader anti-incumbency sentiment against the LDF constituted a critical structural factor underpinning both the UDF’s resurgence and the NDA’s selective gains. Public dissatisfaction with governance outcomes, allegations of corruption, perceptions of administrative arrogance, and the normalisation or justification of political violence collectively contributed to the erosion of the LDF’s legitimacy. The 2025 local government election results thus represent not merely a revival of the UDF, but also a cumulative verdict on governance failures and ideological ambiguities that had weakened the once-dominant LDF in Kerala.

## Conclusions

The BJP-led NDA’s breakthrough in the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation represents a significant transformation in Kerala’s political landscape. Over the years, the BJP has gradually consolidated a steady, though relatively limited, vote base, particularly within urban constituencies. This strategy of targeted electoral mobilisation was evident in both the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the 2020 and 2025 local government elections in Kerala. The cumulative effect

of these efforts materialised in the NDA’s historic victory in Thiruvananthapuram, signalling its emergence as a credible third force within Kerala’s traditionally bipolar political system. The rise of the BJP–NDA thus points towards the consolidation of a tripolar political configuration, one that has the potential to recalibrate the secular and political foundations of the Kerala model of development in the years ahead.

The setback suffered by the LDF in the 2025 local government elections constitutes more than a temporary electoral reversal. Despite demonstrating effective crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic and implementing a wide range of welfare and populist initiatives—including the distribution of free food kits and increases in social security pensions—the LDF increasingly exhibited tendencies towards centralisation, top-down decision-making, and political detachment from everyday socio-economic realities. In this process, the ruling front appeared to compromise its own ideological commitments, with governance practices increasingly shaped by considerations of power, patronage, and organisational control.

Decentralisation, once the cornerstone of Kerala’s democratic experiment under the PPC, was progressively diluted and reduced to a symbolic or procedural exercise. Local self-government institutions, rather than functioning as autonomous centres of democratic deliberation, increasingly operated as implementing agencies of the ruling LDF. While welfare measures remained expansive, their delivery was often marked by deficits in dignity, transparency, and accountability. Claims regarding the eradication of extreme poverty proved counterproductive, as they stood in contrast to persistent experiences of unemployment, precarity, and social exclusion. These contradictions, coupled with the party leadership’s perceived arrogance, lack of institutional introspection, and weakening organic links with both grassroots and urban governance structures, collectively contributed to the erosion of the LDF’s political legitimacy.

In this context, both the UDF and the BJP–NDA benefited from the structural

and governance-related shortcomings of the CPI(M)-led LDF. The electorate’s shift towards the UDF should not be interpreted as a decisive ideological realignment, but rather as an expression of demand for accountable, responsive, and transparent governance. This support, however, remains contingent. Should the UDF fail to meet these expectations, it risks ceding political space to the BJP, which has already demonstrated its capacity to capitalise on governance deficits and institutional discontent.

For the left, the 2025 electoral verdict underscores the urgency of a process of substantive self-introspection grounded in political realism and democratic renewal. Failure to undertake such a course may facilitate the emergence of unforeseen political realignments, with far-reaching implications not only for the Kerala model of development but also for the broader trajectory of Kerala’s and India’s political history. The central lesson emerging from this electoral moment—for Kerala and for India more broadly—is that welfare expansion, when detached from the deepening of local democracy and participatory governance, yields diminishing political and developmental returns.

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