

Local Body Polls 2010 in Kerala: UDF Smashes LDF Fortresses

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Articles 243 E and 243 U of the Constitution of India deal with the question of duration of Panchayats and Municipalities and periodicity of elections to the rural and urban local bodies. It is stated therein: "Every Panchayat/Municipality unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force shall continue for five years from the appointed date of its first meeting and no longer." This constitutional provision also prohibits any dissolution of a Panchayat/Municipality during its life by amendment of law. It also provides that an election to constitute a Panchayat/Municipality shall be completed before the expiry of its duration of five years and in case it is dissolved, the election shall be completed before the expiration of six months from such dissolution. If, however, a dissolved Panchayat/municipality had a tenure of less than six months left, there is no need for election for such a short period. Thus conduct of election to the rural and urban local bodies at a five-year interval is mandatory.

The local body elections in Kerala assumed great significance because local level democracy is the basic foundation on which the entire democratic edifice rests. The legitimacy of these elections as crucial instruments of a democratic political process at the local level is increasing day by day. Obviously all the social, economic and political factors affecting the State and parliamentary elections influence the local government elections too.

Against this backdrop the present study examines the diversified aspects of the recently held local body polls in Kerala. The State of Kerala went for local body polls on October 23 and 25, 2010, for the eighth time since independence. The first poll was held in 1953 under the provisions of the then Travancore-Cochin Panchayat Act, 1950. The second election was held in 1963 after the formation of the State in 1956 and after the passing of the Kerala Panchayat/Municipality Acts of 1960. It was followed by elections in 1979, 1988, 1995, 2000 and 2005.

I. Pre-poll Scene

THE local body elections 2010 had attracted more attention from political parties, media-persons, and general public alike due to a number of reasons: Notable among them were:

- 1) the local bodies, both urban and rural, enjoy increased powers and resources: for example, a grama panchayat used to get barely Rs 1 lakh a year for all its activities before decentralisation; the annual allocation is around Rs 70 lakhs now;
- 2) the most important factor deciding the fortunes of both the UDF and LDF was the strategic alliances at the local level between parties belonging to even opposing political views and visions, a constant feature of local body polls in Kerala;
- 3) for the LDF the civic polls 2010 were a means to examine whether the welfare, popular measures of the V.S. Achuthanandan Government, namely, rice for Rs 2, EMS Housing Scheme, Asraya Project and a lot more for the welfare of the downtrodden, would produce positive outcome or not;
- 4) the LDF had also tried to examine whether their well-oiled political and organisational machinery throughout the State would give gains to the Front;
- 5) the LDF had an edge over the selection of better women candidates through their organisational network and developmental initiatives like Kudumbashree. Through the poll the party made an inquiry into the future prospects of this mechanism;
- 6) the poll was also considered as a referendum on issues like interference of the church in politics, alleged attempt of the LDF for the consolidation of Hindu majority votes;
- 7) the UDF on the other hand considered the polls to bring out its political strength and mass base with new constituents like Socialist Janatha (Democratic) and Kerala Congress (Joseph);

- 8) the UDF also tried to explore the anti-incumbency factors by exposing the internal troubles within the leading partner of the LDF, personal rivalries between the Chief Minister and party Secretary, charges of corruption, nexus with lottery and land mafia etc;
- 9) compared to earlier polls the internal troubles and differences within the UDF camp were resolved well in advance particularly with the JSS, CMP and Kerala Congress;
- 10) the poll was also treated as a means to validate the strength of the SJD in Malabar and Kerala Congress (M) in Central Travancore. The Kerala Congress (M) was seeking a twin result—a vote against the LDF and reassertion of its claim of being a larger player in the region.

II. Polls in Two Stages

ELECTIONS to the local bodies in the State were held in two stages. The first stage was on October 23 and the second on 25th. Over 75.72 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise during the first stage held in seven districts, namely, Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathana-mthitta, Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargod. Barring stray incidents of violence and booth capturing in the Kannur district the polling passed off peacefully. According to electoral statistics, Wayanad recorded the highest polling 79.78 per cent and Thiruvananthapuram the lowest 69.27 per cent. The voter turnout in Kollam was 73.58 per cent, Pathana-mthitta 70.54 per cent, Alappuzha 77.75 per cent, Kozhikode 76.99 per cent and Kannur 79.48 per cent.

The voter turnout in the second phase held on October 25 was pegged at 75 per cent. According to the official figures of the State Election Commission (SEC), Alappuzha registered the highest polling 77.75 per cent, followed by Malappuram 75.6 per cent, Kottayam 75.64 per cent, Ernakulam and Palakkad 75 per cent and Thrissur and Idukki 73 per cent.

During the first phase of the poll barring a few incidents of violence and booth capturing in Kannur, the polling passed off peacefully as referred to earlier. Based on the Collector's report the SEC ordered repolling in five places. A marked indifference on the part of the voters in urban centres seemed to have upset the candidates and their campaign managers initially. Polling in the Thiruvananthapuram city limits remained below 10 per cent till 9 am. It gradually picked up to reach 36 per cent by 2 pm, and 52.5 per cent by 4.30 pm. Meanwhile the State average increased from 45 per cent at 2 pm to 64 per cent by 4 pm. The polling rate was by and large consistent in Kozhikode, Kannur and Wayanad. Kollam also recorded an impressive turnout of 46 per cent by 2 pm and 65 per cent by 4.30 pm.

During the second phase of the poll, violent incidents were reported from Alappuzha and Kannur where repolling was held at seven booths in five places; these incidents marred the election. A sub-inspector from the Special Branch was hacked when he tried to tackle a person, reportedly a CPI-M activist, who entered a booth at Ambalappuzha in Alappuzha district with a sword. The police officer sustained serious injuries. Three CPM and two BJP activists were reported to have suffered injuries in a clash that followed. Skirmishes were reported from polling booths at Kainakari in Alappuzha district. Ballot papers in a booth at Bharanikavu in the same district had to be replaced on detecting a mix-up in the names of candidates.

The repolling in Kannur district was marred by complaints of intimidation of voters and clashes near the booths in Pattuvam and Thillankeri grama panchayats. This was despite a heavy deployment of the Kerala and Karnataka Police. The booths recorded impressive turnouts, Mattool 74.5 per cent, Pattuvam 73, Irikkur 79, Thillankeri 63 and Payyannur 80.47 per cent. The United Democratic Front (UDF) boycotted the repolling in two booths in the district alleging that the poll authorities failed to ensure free and fair polling. The UDF accused the CPI-M of intimidating voters. A hartal called by the BJP in the district in protest against the attack on the vehicle of a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh functionary at Kelanpeedika, near Iritty, on Sunday (October 24) was near-total. Three police personnel, including a Deputy Superintendent of Police, were injured in a bomb attack reportedly by the BJP-RSS workers at Iritty following a protest march. The police opened fire in the air.

When polling drew to a close in the evening, queues were seen in the Malappuram district, which witnessed heavy polling. As many as 254 booths in the district were identified as sensitive and 50 vulnerable, but no untoward incident was reported. The

Ernakulam district registered an impressive turnout. The rival Fronts claimed that the higher turnout will work to their advantage. The State Election Commission ordered repolling at Booth No. 4 in Ward 20 of the Kochi Corporation on Tuesday (October 26). This was following a snag in the electronic voting machine.

Incidents of minor violence were reported from Palakkad, which witnessed a 10 per cent increase in the polling compared to the 2005 elections. Owing to a dispute over ballot papers, polling was held up for nearly 30 minutes at Ward 5 in the Thrikkaderi grama panchayat. Following a minor scuffle, the police scared away CPI-M and Janakeeya Vikasana Munnani workers at the Akkipadam booth in the Kumaramputhur grama panchayat. Minor incidents were reported from the Thiruvzhamkun-nu and Attappady tribal belts.

Voting Percentage in the Local Body Polls

<i>District</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2005</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	69.27	52.87
Kollam	73.58	59.50
Pathanamthitta	70.54	62.00
Alappuzha	77.75	62.80
Kottayam	75.64	64.34
Idukki	73.00	64.64
Ernakulam	75.00	56.90
Thrissur	73.00	58.76
Palakkad	75.00	61.00
Malappuram	75.60	63.73
Kozhikode	76.99	62.25
Wayanad	79.78	61.00
Kannur	79.48	63.00
Kasargod	77.68	60.00

III. Post-Poll Speculations

THE polling percentage in the local body elections held in 2005 was 62.71; it has gone up to 79.78 per cent in 2010. The total electorate in 2005 was 2.93 crores; it came down to 2.27 crores in 2010. This would mean that though the total number of electorate had come down in 2010 the polling percentage had gone up. It was the massive deletion of names from the voters' list which resulted in the decline of the total number of voters. However, it is interesting to note that in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the total number of electorate in the State was 2.18 crores and the polling percentage was 73.33.

So, when the polling percentage was 62.71 in 2005, the LDF swept the local body polls. When the polling percentage was 73.33 per cent in 2009, the UDF swept the Lok Sabha polls in the State. Who will have an edge when the polling percentage has reached 79.78 became the million dollar question. It is evident that there has been an increase of 12.8 per cent in the polling percentage this time. But this could not be claimed to be advantageous to any particular party. This showed that neutral voters have voted more this time and this was a vital factor in determining the winners. A marginal swing of neutral votes was able to determine who will have the edge this time.

The high percentage of polling in the current local body elections signals the success of the political parties in mobilising voters to the polling booths. Given the average of 75 per cent voting in the two stages of elections, it was safe to assume that the issues that came up during the campaign, local as well as State-wide, had polarised the voters to come out in large numbers to vote.

The United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) leaderships, in their post-election analyses, have made tall claims about the outcome being in their favour on the basis of the higher percentage of polling. The focus of the political parties was on the results of the district panchayats, municipalities and corporations, which provide a ready-made yardstick to gauge their performance. The fact that the percentage of votes polled would be later reckoned for recognition by the election authorities gave a competitive edge to the outcome.

While the secret was firmly locked in the ballot boxes and EVMs till the counting day, it was becoming clear that the results would throw up answers to two issues: popularity or un-

popularity of the LDF Government, and the validation of redrawing communal equations since the 2009 Lok Sabha elections.

Senior leaders observed that the voting would reflect the changed equations—the erosion in the LDF with the departure of the Socialist Janata (Democratic) and the merger of the Kerala Congress (J) with the Kerala Congress (M). A major poll issue was the “interference” of the Church in politics, with the LDF accusing the UDF of appeasing the Catholic Church, and the UDF leaders retorting that the LDF was trying to consolidate the Hindu majority votes. Sources said that the results would validate this process triggered off in the Lok Sabha elections. There was also a sub-script to the results for the UDF. The results would validate the strength of the SJD in Malabar and the Kerala Congress (M) in Central Travancore. The Kerala Congress (M) was seeking a twin result—a vote against the LDF and the reassertion of its claim of being a larger player in the region. Either way, political leaders believed that the results would have a long-standing impact on the State’s politics as it moved towards the Assembly elections early next year.

IV. People’s Verdict 2010

THE people’s verdict in the 2010 polls clearly shows that, for the first time, the UDF has stormed the grassroot citadels that were hitherto monopolised by the Left. The UDF’s muscular showing has decimated the myth that grama panchayats and block panchayats are the bastions of cadre-based political parties. The Congress has finally bridged the urban-rural divide. The Congress’ war cry, which was generally considered suited only for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha polls, percolated right down through the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system. Taking even the Congress leadership by surprise, the party has put up an unprecedented performance in the local body polls almost sweeping the entire Central Travancore and even some of the Marxist bastions in the southern districts.

If the UDF outplayed the CPM-led LDF in Kochi and Thrissur Corporations, it shocked the Marxist party in Thiruvananthapuram. The UDF has secured an absolute lead in the grama panchayats, block panchayats, municipalities and district panchayats. Among the block panchayats, the UDF led in 79 while the LDF could secure a lead in only 60. The grama panchayats, perhaps, threw up the biggest surprise. The UDF led in 510 panchayats while the LDF led in only 362. Among the municipalities, the UDF led in 39 and the LDF led in only 18. Among the district panchayats, the UDF led in eight and the LDF in only five. This is the first time that the UDF has secured such a massive lead in all the sectors irrespective of the rural and urban areas of the State. Kollam, Alappuzha, Palakkad and Kannur are the only districts where the CPM-led LDF could put up a good show. In all the other districts the UDF gave a tough fight to the CPM. In the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Malappuram, and Wayanad, the Congress-led UDF dominated the show.

Factors that worked for UDF in Central Travancore

In addition to the widespread resentment among the voters against the LDF dispensation, the massive mandate in favour of the UDF in the local body polls in Central Travancore under-scores the sway of a host of other factors, especially the role of the Church in determining the final outcome in a decisive way. It is also notable that the Christian consolidation in favour of the UDF candidates had not led to a corresponding wave among the majority communities favouring the opposite political camp. One of the salient features in the run-up to the current polls in the Christian-dominated areas in the region was that the interference of the Church leadership was on a low-key pattern in the eyes of the common society, but had a serious impact on the faithful.

The strategy has apparently worked out very well without creating bad blood among the majority communities and eventually helping the UDF in a big way. The Church was systematic in roping in every vote upon which it can have a say, going by the fact that all those associated with it and residing in far-flung areas outside the district were directed to reach their native places and cast their votes. The phenomenon was visible everywhere on the polling day.

Despite the reservations expressed by some quarters within the UDF, the poll results reveal that the unification of the Kerala Congress factions led by K.M. Mani and P.J. Joseph

has created an added political muscle for the regional party in its strongholds. Conversely, the UDF bandwagon in Central Travancore will never be the same again since the notable aspect will have to be addressed collectively by the front in any poll in the region in future. It could even give the much-needed breather for a beleaguered Joseph politically, probably before the Assembly polls slated for early next year. The landslide victory of the UDF in the Kottayam district has also called into question the role of a few prominent local CPM leaders.

It was well known that over and above the cadre-based character and collectivity of the CPM, the final stamping on the candidature of many under the LDF banner was according to the wishes of such leaders against whose style of functioning the people nurtured a deep grudge. The region to face the worst in the people's mandate against the Left was the Vaikom belt, considered to be one of its few strongholds and which was expected to give some relief to them amid the UDF sweep. The ruling LDF could manage just one-third of the total 26 seats in the Vaikom municipality, indicating that the CPI, which had outstanding political issues with the major coalition partner, had pulled the rug from under the feet of the CPM, eventually bringing about the downfall of the Front. That even a highly politically conscious voter could take decisions on the basis of grassroots realities and would not get carried away by mere political considerations were also borne out from the verdict.

The Church had played a crucial role in a few pockets in Vaikom too to hand out impressive gains for the UDF. The role of women voters against the backdrop of a large number of women candidates in the fray with the scope of a lot of them poised to take over the reins of many local bodies, was one of the factors which led to a huge poll percentage; this is also believed to have aided the big sweep for the UDF across the district and adjoining ones. The trend among the voters in favour of the UDF was also noted with both urban centres and rural pockets working in unison to turn the tide.

UDF conquered territory that had hitherto eluded it

The United Democratic Front (UDF) has every reason to feel proud about its electoral performance given its record in the previous elections to the panchayats and civic bodies. The victory has been even across the three tiers of panchayats, which many perceive as a vote against the Left Democratic Front's rule at the State and local levels.

The victory, by and large, maintains a pro-UDF trend witnessed during the Lok Sabha elections in 2009 and the subsequent Assembly by-elections. The Kollam district is, perhaps, the only exception with the Opposition Front way behind. The UDF went into the elections with reservations about delimitation of wards and the voters' list and apprehensions about bogus voting. But the results show that all these have been misplaced. Similarly, its misgivings about its chances with 50 per cent of the seats reserved for women appear to have been baseless, more so when the coalition appears to be the major beneficiary of this reform. Though the counting of votes in the Kozhikode district was held later, the UDF gained by the political shift that took place in a year with the entry of the Socialist Janata (Democratic) into its fold and the merger of the Kerala Congress (J) with the Kerala Congress (M).

In Wayanad, the Socialist Janata (Democratic) has contributed much to its victory, but a clear picture emerged only when votes were counted in Kozhikode. The election results in Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and Thrissur indicate that the UDF has benefited from the consolidation of the Catholic community behind it. In Malappuram, parts of Kannur and Kasaragod, the UDF has benefited from the consolidation of Muslim votes. The most significant aspect of the elections is the inroads that the UDF has been able to make into the grama panchayats, cornering nearly 55 per cent of them.

Impressive performance of the BJP

Early preparations and united work have paid off for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the elections to local self-government institutions in the State, though marginally. The party had started its preparations ahead of the ruling and Opposition Fronts and managed to choose relatively better candidates this time than in the last elections. Not many social or political factors could be reckoned as the reasons for the party's improved performance in the polls. But party sources say that it could tap its social base better this time.

The people's disenchantment with the ruling Front and the development agenda put forward by the party would have contributed marginally to the party's performance. However, the impact of local factors and local development issues was more significant. The biggest break for the party this time has been in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation where it could recover lost ground. The party had experienced a heavy erosion in its support base in the by-election to the Lok Sabha from the Thiruvananthapuram constituency just a month after the elections to local bodies in 2005. The BJP's campaign had been undermined from within, following dissensions in the party. Five years since then, the party could make a concerted effort and translate its support base into six seats in the city Corporation. An Independent representing the Dheerva Sabha and supported by the party has also won the polls. The BJP had only one seat in the outgoing Corporation Council.

However, the party's performance is poorer in the Kasaragod district and Palakkad municipality where it has a political base. In the Kasaragod district, the BJP had its presidents in six grama panchayats, and five of the panchayats were under its control. This time it has had to be satisfied with a majority in two panchayats and possible control of two other panchayats with the support of Independents. In the district panchayat, its tally has come down from two to one. In the Palakkad municipality, its seats have dropped from 17 in 2005 to 15.

At the same time, the party could expand its reach to other parts of the State. It had fielded candidates for 9922 out of 21,456 seats and could win in new areas. In the grama panchayats, it has won about 450 seats, compared to 236 in 2005. This figure excludes Independents supported by the party, which exceed 50. Its score in the block panchayats at the moment is the same as last time, seven. In the municipalities the party has expanded its representation. It has won 79 seats in 28 municipalities against 71 in 23 municipalities in the last elections. Besides, 11 Independents supported by the BJP in different municipalities have got elected.

The BJP has improved upon its tally compared to the previous local body polls. The party has got significant representation in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation—six seats, two in Kochi, one in Thrissur and 76 seats in various municipalities, the highest of 15 in the Palakkad municipality. The party candidates finished runners-up in eight wards in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. The party will play a crucial role in deciding the rulers in four municipalities.

The SDPI has also opened its account by securing one seat each in Kannur and Thodupuzha municipalities. A distinct feature of the local body elections this time is that 50 per cent of the over 21,000 seats are reserved for women in the multi-tier local self-government bodies.

The UDF wrested the Kochi Corporation from the LDF after three decades, winning 46 out of the 74 seats. The LDF won 23 wards, the BJP two and Independents three. The UDF also emerged victorious in the Thrissur Corporation, winning 44 out of 55 seats. Here, the LDF got six seats, the BJP one and Independents four seats. The LDF has retained the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation winning 51 out of the 100 seats, leaving 41 to the UDF, six to the BJP, and two to Independents. The LDF won the Kollam Corporation for a third successive term bagging 34 out of the 55 seats. The UDF got 18 seats and others three seats.

The SDPI factor

An unexpected SDPI (Socialist Democratic Party of India) factor, which managed to garner a considerable number of votes, has raised an alarm bell forcing the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) to deliberate on the circumstances that led to a large-scale flow of Muslim votes from their base to the SDPI. Though the IUML had strongly opposed the SDPI right from its inception, it never considered it as a threat to its vote-base in the block panchayats and grama panchayats in the Ernakulam district.

Nevertheless, the IUML had cashed in on the opportunity resulting from the attack on Thodupuzha Newman's College teacher T. J. Joseph by alleged SDPI activists, to lacerate the SDPI as a 'communal organisation with bad credentials'. However, the results of the local body polls has come as a shocker to both the IUML and the PDP as the SDPI has managed to attract quite a number of Muslim votes contesting alone against the IUML and

PDP. While the SDPI candidate, Prof Anas, an accused in the lecturer attack case, won the Vanchinad division of the Vazhakkulam block panchayat by garnering 3992 votes, the PDP candidate could manage only 223 votes. The SDPI made considerable inroads into the vote-base of the IUML and in most of the divisions the PDP was pushed to fifth and sixth positions. The blocks where the PDP was relegated to lower positions included Malleppalli (SDPI-111, PDP-66), Cheravalloor (SDPI-573, PDP-76) and Kotepeedikka (SDPI-57, PDP-40).

The SDPI, which had fielded candidates in all the seats where the IUML had contested, was able to gain some votes but not enough to defeat the League candidates. At Kunjunnikkara in Aluva where the SDPI and the League had clashed head-on, the former was able to get 379 votes, which was same as that garnered by the League candidate. The other major panchayats where the SDPI garnered votes while being pitted against the League included Eramam South (IUML-658, SDPI-331), Kadavuppadam (IUML-629, SDPI-201), Edayyappuram West (IUML-366, SDPI-182) and Mulavoor North (IUML-489, SDPI-112).

LDF retained Kozhikode

The LDF had escaped without any grievous hurt in the civic elections in the Kozhikode district. The poll results were announced on October 31. With its 39 councilors, the CPI-M alone secured simple majority in the 75-member Kozhikode Corporation Council and had the support of two members representing its ally, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The Congress-led UDF won 34 seats. The LDF has retained power in the Vadakara municipality: 27 out of the total 47 seats. The UDF bagged 17 seats. Three independent candidates, including a Congress rebel, also got elected. In the Koyilandy municipality, the LDF secured 27 out of 44 seats. The UDF won 14 seats eight more than what it had in the previous Council. The BJP secured three seats.

<i>District</i>	<i>Total votes polled</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>Others</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	16,82,099	7,11,869 (42.32%)	7,20,286 (42.82%)	1,34,039 (7.96%)	1,15,905 (6.89%)
Kollam	14,34,817	6,26,318 (43.65%)	6,88,545 (47.98%)	67,095 (4.67%)	52,859 (3.68%)
Pathanamthitta	6,78,132	3,12,327 (46.05%)	2,74,565 (40.48%)	56,417 (8.31%)	34,823 (5.13%)
Alappuzha	12,58,095	5,63,417 (44.78%)	5,71,612 (45.43%)	68,424 (5.43%)	54,642 (4.34%)
Kottayam	11,26,151	5,61,723 (49.87%)	4,35,016 (38.62%)	49,211 (4.36%)	80,201 (7.12%)
Idukki	6,43,231	3,42,078 (53.18%)	2,58,413 (40.17%)	19,617 (3.04%)	23,126 (3.59%)
Ernakulam	18,42,321	8,96,072 (44.29%)	7,54,313 (40.94%)	89,037 (4.39%)	1,02,899 (5.58%)
Thrissur	17,98,343	8,20,412 (45.62%)	7,61,114 (42.32%)	1,26,337 (7.02%)	90,480 (5.03%)
Palakkad	15,54,728	6,81,317 (43.82%)	6,92,017 (44.51%)	98,616 (6.34%)	82,778 (5.32%)
Malappuram	20,79,413	11,08,349 (53.30%)	6,99,973 (33.66%)	1,08,514 (5.21%)	1,62,577 (7.81%)
Kozhikode	17,34,212	7,82,047 (45.09%)	7,49,428 (43.21%)	1,21,642 (7.01%)	81,095 (4.19%)
Wayanad	4,34,912	2,15,414 (49.53%)	1,74,983 (40.23%)	24,213 (5.56%)	20,302 (4.66%)
Kannur	13,78,964	5,49,217 (38.82%)	7,24,016 (52.50%)	71,418 (5.17%)	34,313 (2.48%)
Kasargod	6,80,949	2,77,417 (40.72%)	25,921 (38.06%)	1,12,712 (16.55%)	31,609 (4.64%)
Total	1,83,26,367	84,47,977 (46.09%)	77,63,495 (42.36%)	11,47,297 (6.26%)	9,67,598 (5.27%)

Front-wise and District-wise picture

Compared to the previous local body polls held in 2005, the UDF got 15.65 lakh more votes this time. The United Democratic Front has received 46.09 per cent of the total votes polled in the State. Out of the 1,83,26,367 votes polled, the UDF captured 84,47,977 votes. In the year 2005 the UDF got 68,82,314 votes out of a total of 1,69,84,236, that is, 40.52 per cent. In 2010, the UDF has received 6,84,482 more votes than the LDF. In all, the LDF has received as many as 77,63,495 votes in 2010. In 2005 the LDF had won the electoral support of 45.32 per cent voters and in 2010, this has been reduced to 42.36 per cent. Compared to the previous poll, there was an increase of 13,42,131 voters in 2010. It shows that a majority of the new voters extended their faith and confidence in the UDF. Compared to the UDF and LDF, the position of the BJP has increased dramatically. In 2005 the party got 9,64,133 votes and in 2010 this has gone upto 11,47,297, that is, an increase of 1,83,164 votes. The LDF has experienced bitter results in the Malappuram, Ernakulam and Kottayam districts. In these districts the UDF has increased or strengthened its mass base by capturing over four lakh, 1.5 lakh and 1.25 lakh votes respectively. The table in the previous page further reveals the mass base of various political combinations in State politics—front-wise, district-wise and percentage-wise.

Ward-wise picture

The ward-wise evaluation of the poll shows that the Congress has made a spectacular performance this time as compared to the 2005 poll. The party has captured 3161 more wards this time. It is an exemplary performance by the Congress party in recent times in State politics. In the 2005 poll, the Congress party came victorious in only 4454 wards. In 2010 the figure has gone upto 7615.

The second leading partner of the UDF, the Muslim League, performed well this time. In 2005, the League had electoral control over 1919 wards. In 2010 it has gone upto 2235. The other leading UDF partner, the Kerala Congress (M), too performed well. In 2005, the KC (M) had 411 wards. This has gone upto 818 in 2010. The socialist Janata Dal, which left the LDF and joined hands with the UDF just before the poll, won in 174 wards. The INL captured 45 wards. In toto, the UDF has won 11,200 wards whereas the LDF has been confined to 8527 wards and BJP 480 wards.

Compared to the Congress, the CPM has suffered heavy losses. The party has lost 1055 wards, compared to the 2005 poll. In the 2005 poll the CPM had captured 8056 wards. This has decreased to 7001 in 2010. Its partner, the CPI, too suffered humiliation. In 2005, the CPI had won in 1392 wards. In 2010 the figure has declined to 1017. The seat share of the RSP, another partner in the LDF, came down to 70 from 77.

The following tables illustrate the details regarding front-wise, ward-wise and party-wise performance.

Ward-Wise Performance

	<i>Grama Panchayat</i>	<i>Block</i>	<i>District pality</i>	<i>Munici-ration</i>	<i>Corpo-</i>
UDF	8501	1230	194	1097	178
LDF	6607	828	134	803	155
BJP	384	7	1	79	9
Others	1183	30	3	202	17

Performance of the UDF

<i>Party</i>	<i>GP</i>	<i>Block</i>	<i>Dist</i>	<i>Mun:</i>	<i>Corpn.</i>
Congress	5729	873	123	746	144
Muslin League	1717	220	35	248	15
KC(M)	643	95	21	55	4
Socialist					
Janata	127	19	8	11	9
KC (B)	31	4	2	0	0

KC (J)	30	9	1	2	0
INL	32	4	3	7	0
JSS	27	1	0	2	2
CMP	18	5	1	7	3
KRSP(B)	12	0	0	0	1
UDF (Independent)	135	0	0	19	0

Performance of LDF

<i>Party</i>	<i>GP</i>	<i>Block</i>	<i>Dist</i>	<i>Mun:</i>	<i>Corpn.</i>
CPI-M	5431	680	106	661	123
CPI	778	122	24	77	16
RSP	51	5	4	2	9
NCP	34	8	0	2	2
JD(S)	14	3	0	2	0
KC					
(Thomas)	14	3	0	2	0
Con (S)	6	0	0	4	1
LDF (Indep)	279	7	0	51	4

People's Verdict 2010—at a Glance

	<i>Total</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>Others</i>
Grama							
Panchayats	978	565	57.77	348	35.58	2	63
Block							
Panchayats	152	92	60.52	60	39.47	0	0
District							
Panchayats	14	8	57.14	6	42.85	0	0
Municipalities	57	40	70.17	17	29.82	0	0
Corporations	5	2	40.00	3	60	0	0

UDF established control over 90 Assembly segments

Another remarkable feature of the poll was that the UDF had established a clear lead over LDF in 90 Assembly segments. As far as vote-share is concerned, the UDF has captured only 40.52 per cent cotes in the 2005 poll. This has gone upto 46 in 2010. Compared to the UDF, the LDF had won 49 per cent votes in 2005. This has decreased to 42 per cent in 2010. In 2005, the LDF got a total of 84,90,258 votes. This figure has come down to 77,67,888 in 2010. The Front has lost over four lakh votes. The only solace for the LDF is that it has made a slightly better performance compared to the 2009 parliamentary poll. In total, the Front has increased its vote share of about one per cent. In the 2006 Assembly poll the LDF captured 48.63 per cent votes. The BJP had captured 5.68 per cent votes in 2005. The party has made a slight improvement this time

Post-poll claims by the CPM leadership

The CPM State Secretary in his post-poll review claimed that the UDF has secured 84,55,193 votes, whereas the LDF has garnered 77,67,888 votes. Percentage-wise too the difference between the two Fronts was 3.69 per cent. According to him, while the UDF has won 46.01 per cent votes and the LDF got 42.32 per cent votes. He further stated that the LDF had contested the 2010 polls without several of the allies who were with it—KC(J), INL, JD(S)—during the 2005 local body polls and 2009 Lok Sabha polls. According to the party Secretary, in 2005, the LDF secured 49.22 per cent of votes. Since the alliance has got only 42.32 per cent cotes in 2010, it would mean that the LDF suffered a loss of 6.9 per cent votes. The allies and outside-backers of 2005 had secured 9.18 per cent votes. Democratic Indira Congress (Karuna-karan) DICK- had 4.67 per cent; Janata Dal (Secular) had 2.30 per cent, Kerala Congress (Joseph) had 1.79 per cent and Indian National League 0.35 per cent. He also added that: “if it were an automatic subtraction of their share, the percentage this time would have been only 40.04 per cent”.

The actual percentage, on the contrary, showed a 2.2 per cent increase in the vote share of the LDF. In the 2000 local body polls, the LDF had got 42.64 per cent votes which would mean that the erosion of votes this time was only 0.32 per cent, as he claimed. Further, the LDF's total share of votes has also gone up as compared to the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. In the Lok Sabha polls, the LDF had captured only 38.40 per cent vote-share against 40.23 per cent in 2005 and 41.47 per cent in 2000. The actual increase from 2009 in terms of votes came to 10.64 lakhs from 67,47,438 to 77,81,671.

V. What went Wrong for the LDF?

1) *Anti-incumbency factors*

The poll outcome, showing a clear advantage for the Opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) in both urban and rural local bodies, indicates that the Opposition was successful in whipping up a wave in its favour across the State and that the poll strategy of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) had little in it to carry the ruling Front to safety, and worse, had a lot in it to harm its cause. Given the nature of the verdict, it will be hard to rule out a strong anti-incumbency mood among the electorate across the State.

The UDF's success in unleashing a focussed campaign over State-level issues, such as the lottery scam, may be one of the major reasons for this, but there will be others such as the inability of the CPI-M to put its own house in order and the way it virtually drove parties with local-level clout out of the alliance. On issues such as the lottery scam, the government was seen to be pulling in opposite directions with Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan being seen as proactive even as the rest of the government and the alliance seemed far from decisive in their response to the whole issue. The State Government's argument, that the onus of controlling the State lottery mafia rested with the Centre, fell flat with each new development.

2) *Welfare Measures failed to catch votes*

The UDF has bagged 544 grama panchayats, 89 block panchayats, 39 municipalities, eight district panchayats and two municipal corporations. The UDF could not have scored so emphatic a victory if the LDF campaign managers were right, which means that welfare pay-outs and benefits did not create a politically educated category but only an easily swayed, largely consumerist mass.

3) *Row with Church*

The strong showing by the UDF in the central districts suggest that the CPI-M bid to take on the Church was counterproductive. It did not help the LDF to win the votes of the majority community and resulted only in hardening of the Christian votes. The crushing defeat that the LDF suffered in the Thrissur Corporation and the loss of the Kochi Corporation, which it had been controlling for the past three decades, could be the direct fallout of this. It could even be the case that the real beneficiary of the anti-Church campaign of the CPI-M was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has put in a noteworthy showing in some of these districts.

Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan and CPI-M State Secretary Pinarayi Vijayan have described the setback temporary, but CPI State Secretary Veliyam Bhargavan has, in his initial response to the poll outcome, admitted that an anti-incumbency mood might have also influenced the outcome to a certain extent. When the UDF routed the LDF in the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the Opposition had led in 100 Assembly segments. This time, it should be a matter of some relief for the LDF that the number of constituencies where the UDF has established its sway will be less than that figure.

4) *Communal votes*

The LDF leadership is, however, right on one point: that there was a massive consolidation of communal votes across the State. If it was a consolidation of Christian votes in the former Central Travancore, in the north and in many pockets across Kerala, it was consolidation of Muslim votes. With the Communist Party of India-Marxist rebels and former allies hitting back at the alliance with a vengeance, the LDF's cup of woes just

overflowed. It was, in many ways, a backlash that the LDF did not deserve as a government, but could not avoid as a political formation. And, in that sense, it is difficult to analyse the outcome as a verdict on the performance of the LDF Government. The reason why and how the Christian consolidation came about is complex, but the way the CPI-M strategy of taking on the Church contributed to it is there for everyone to see. The whole debate over mixing religion and politics, an old theme used to its full potential by none other than E.M.S. Namboodiripad, obviously did not win it any new friends. Coming as it did on the heels of the incidents at CMS College, Kottayam, it also further alienated the Church of South India (CSI), though not acutely in the coastal belt of south Kerala.

Only the Latin Catholic community appears to have taken a relatively neutral position in the whole debate. In the case of the Muslim community too, the CPI-M appears to have failed to look closely at the nuances of the developments within the community and its organisational representations, the beneficiary being the Bharatiya Janata Party. In the event, the debate did not remain what it should have been and the LDF paid a heavy price for it as it did not have the means or ability to reach out to the other side of the political divide with cogent arguments.

However, though figures to prove anything are yet to come by, the Kudumbasree initiative appears to have done some good for the LDF, particularly in grama panchayats. But, even here there could be some surprise in store. Preliminary indications are that the Congress also might have benefited from the participation of Kudumbasree activists in the elections. Only the final figures would tell the whole story. Equally interesting would be the way women have, if at all, performed in general wards. All the relevant figures could be pointers to the way women's politics evolves in the new political situation at the grassroots and the UDF's responsibility is much greater here than it ever was.

At a purely organisational level the CPI-M and other LDF constituents would also have to see how their inability to put up a joint fight in many places contributed to their collective failure; Kottayam, where the CPI-M and CPI were openly at each other's throat, being an example. And, within the CPI-M, though factionalism as a pan-Kerala, centrally-driven phenomenon has been snuffed out to a very large extent, much appears to have come unhinged at the time of the elections on account of various local factors. All this simply means that the LDF collectively and its constituents individually have their tasks cut out.

List of Candidates in Civic Polls 2010 in Kerala

<i>District</i>	<i>Grama Panchayat</i>	<i>Block Panchayat</i>	<i>District Panchayat</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Corp</i>	<i>Total</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	4689	500	115	489	642	6435
Kollam	4163	460	106	332	276	5337
Pathanamthitta	2712	350	77	351	-	3490
Alappuzha	3866	499	84	697	-	5146
Kottayam	3941	458	98	536	-	5033
Idukki	2518	324	58	116	-	3016
Ernakulam	4425	579	122	1213	378	6717
Thrissur	5092	701	127	799	251	6970
Palakkad	4800	540	125	589	-	6054
Malappuram	6251	763	145	919	-	8078
Kozhikode	4408	552	123	276	410	5769
Wayanad	1407	197	78	88	-	1770
Kannur	3336	411	95	603	-	4445
Kasargod	2009	338	69	329	-	2745

Civic Polls 2010 in Kerala—Detailed Results

Corporation		
Total	-	5
UDF	-	2
LDF	-	3
BJP	-	0

District Panchayats

<i>District</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>Hung</i>	<i>Others</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	26	14	12	0	0
Kollam	26	8	18	0	0
Pathanamthitta	17	9	8	0	0
Alapuzha	23	19	4	0	0
Kottayam	23	19	4	0	0
Idukki	16	16	0	0	0
Eranakulam	26	22	3	0	1
Trissur	29	17	12	0	0
Palakkad	29	11	18	0	0
Malapuram	32	30	2	0	0
Wayanad	16	13	2	0	1
Kannur	26	6	20	0	0
Kargode	16	6	9	1	1
Kozhikode	27	12	15	0	0

Block Panchayats

<i>District</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>Hung</i>	<i>Others</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	11	6	4	1	0
Kollam	11	3	8	0	0
Pathanamthitta	8	7	0	1	0
Alapuzha	12	7	5	0	0
Kottayam	11	10	1	0	0
Idukki	8	8	0	0	0
Eranakulam	14	13	1	0	0
Trissur	16	9	7	0	0
Palakkad	13	5	8	0	0
Malapuram	15	14	1	0	0
Wayanad	4	4	0	0	0
Kannur	11	0	11	0	0
Kargode	6	3	3	0	0
Kozhikode	12	4	8	0	0

Grama Panchayats

<i>District</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>Hung</i>	<i>Others</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	73	36	25	12	0
Kollam	70	24	37	9	0
Pathanamthitta	54	36	14	4	0
Alapuzha	73	32	37	4	0
Kottayam	73	58	10	5	0
Idukki	53	41	10	2	0
Eranakulam	84	66	6	12	0
Trissur	88	45	33	10	0
Palakkad	91	36	51	4	0
Malapuram	100	88	8	4	0
Wayanad	25	21	3	1	0
Kannur	81	27	54	0	0
Kargode	38	15	13	8	2 (BJP)
Kozhikode	75	34	40	0	1

Municipalities – District Wise

<i>District</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>LDF</i>	<i>Hung</i>	<i>Others</i>
Thiruvananthapuram	4	1	1	2	0
Kollam	3	1	1	1	0
Pathanamthitta	3	2	0	1	0
Alapuzha	5	2	0	3	0
Kottayam	4	3	0	1	0
Idukki	1	1	0	0	0
Eranakulam	11	10	1	0	0
Trissur	6	2	4	0	0
Palakkad	2	0	2	0	0
Malapuram	7	6	0	1	0
Wayanad	1	1	0	0	0
Kannur	5	1	4	0	0
Kargode	3	2	1	0	0
Kozhikode	2	0	2	0	0

Tally of Municipalities—Municipality Wise

Municipality	Total	UDF	LDF	BJP	Others	Municipality	Total	UDF	LDF	BJP	Others
Thiruvananthapuram											
Niyyatinkara	44	20	20	0	4						
Nedmangad	39	16	18	2	3						
Attingal	31	13	17	1	0						
Varkala	33	18	11	1	3						
Kollam											
Karunagappally	35	21	14	0	0						
Paravur	32	15	16	1	0						
Punalloor	35	11	24	0	0						
Pathanamthitta											
Adoor	28	17	9	0	2						
Pathanamthitta	32	17	10	2	3						
Thiruvalla	39	17	5	0	0						
Alapuzha											
Alapuzha	52	25	26	0	1						
Cherthala	35	18	10	0	7						
Kayamkulam	44	21	16	2	5						
Mavelikkara	28	13	8	2	5						
Chegannur	27	14	10	1	2						
Idukki											
Thodupuzha	35	22	6	4	3						
Kottayam											
Kottayam	52	27	18	3	4						
Pala	26	18	1	0	7						
Vaikom	26	17	8	0	1						
Changanassery	37	14	12	0	11						
Ernakulam											
Eloor	31	14	13	3	1						
Maradu	33	22	10	0	1						
Thripunithura	49	25	22	1	1						
Aluva	25	22	2	0	1						
Angamaly	30	15	13	0	2						
North Paravur	29	14	13	0	2						
Kalamassery	42	22	17	0	3						
Perumbavoor	27	15	9	1	2						
Thrikakkara	43	28	13	0	2						
Kothamangalam	31	23	8	0	0						
Muvathupuzha	28	10	14	0	4						
Thrissur											
Guruvayur	43	17	25	1	0						
Chavakkad	32	11	21	0	0						
Kunnamangalam	37	14	15	2	6						
Chalakkudy	36	23	4	0	9						
Irinjalakuda	41	28	9	1	3						
Kodungalloor	44	11	26	5	2						
Palakad											
Palakad	52	23	9	15	5						
Chottur	29	26	3	0	0						
Ottappalam	36	11	15	4	6						
Shoranur	33	8	13	3	9						
Malapuram											
Malapuram	40	30	8	0	2						
Manjeri	50	38	8	0	4						
Perinthalmanna	34	17	16	0	1						
Tirur	38	28	7	0	3						
Ponnai	51	25	22	1	3						
Kottakkal	32	24	5	2	1						

Nilambur	33	21	8	0	4
Wayanad					
Kalpetta	28	20	7	0	10
Kannur					
Kannur	42	33	8	0	1
Thalassery	52	14	35	2	1
Koothuparamba	28	4	24	0	0
Taliparamba	44	13	31	0	0
Payyannur	44	16	28	0	0
Kasargod					
Kasargod	38	24	2	11	1
Kanhangad	43	22	16	5	0
Neelaswaram	32	10	20	0	2
Kozhikode					
Koilandi	44	14	27	3	0
Vadakara 47	17	27	0	3	

Concluding Observations

As cited earlier, it can be stated that in the 2010 polls for the first time the UDF has stormed grassroot citadels that were hitherto monopolised by the Left. The UDF's muscular showing has decimated the myth that grama panchayats and block panchayats are the bastions of cadre-based political parties. The Congress has finally bridged the urban-rural divide. The Congress' war cry, which was generally considered suited only for the Assembly and the Lok Sabha polls, percolated right down through the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system taking even the Congress leadership by surprise. The party has put up an unprecedented performance in the local body polls almost sweeping the entire Central Travancore and even some of the Marxist bastions in the southern districts.

The UDF established absolute control over corporations in Kochi and Thrissur. Similarly the UDF got absolute control over grama panchayats, block panchayats and district panchayats throughout the State. In block panchayats the UDF secured 89 and the LDF captured 49. The grama panchayats, perhaps, threw up the biggest surprise. The UDF won control in 525 while the LDF had to be content with 301. The BJP had established control over two and others in 75. Among the municipalities the UDF got 34 and LDF 12. In 11 municipalities none secured absolute majority. Among the district panchayats the UDF got eight and LDF five. This is the first time that the UDF has secured such a massive lead in all the sectors irrespective of the rural and urban areas of the State. Kollam, Alappuzha, Palakkad and Kannur are the only districts where the CPM-led LDF could put up a good show. In all the other districts the UDF has given a tough fight to the CPM. In the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Malappuram, and Wayanad, the Congress-led UDF has dominated the show.

If a mandate is a slice of social psychology, then the Left in the State has failed to read the mind of its people. The calculation that the development agenda would eclipse all political controversies has miserably failed. The deliberate attempt to showcase development and steer public mind from politics and communal factors only invited disaster.

Long before the UDF zeroed-in on its candidates or even thought of the word campaign, the LDF was taking the development activities undertaken by the local bodies far and wide across the State. Its grassroot machinery had jumped into the election scene much before others had even given it a thought. Seminars, exhibitions, Kudumbasree melas... every possible idea was utilised. Rice for Rs 2, EMS Housing Scheme, Asraya project and a lot more for the welfare of the poor were projected. But all went in vain.

The ballot has shown that it is a misconception of the Left that half the voting population are beneficiaries of their various welfare schemes. If the beneficiaries form a mere 20-30 per cent, it is to be assumed that the rest of 60-70 per cent decided the fate of the Left this time. For the latter, it is not rice or house that matters but improvement of living

conditions, roads, uninterrupted water supply and better facilities. Even the behaviour of politicians in public sphere matters for this group.

The Left often forgets that it can be a centralised and closed party but it cannot impose its character on the people. The party needs to converse with the upper levels of society just the should stress way they communicate with the grassroots. In conclusion one can say that the LDF, particularly the CPI-M, needs to politically educate its grassroot cadres and not feed them only on development activities which have gained acceptance. ■

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