

A comparative analysis of the upcoming assembly elections in Assam, Keralam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry

The Legislative Assembly elections held in 2021 in Assam, Keralam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry marked a pivotal moment in India's federal political landscape. These elections reflected diverse regional political cultures, varying degrees of incumbency resilience and the interplay between national and regional party systems. As these states approach the next electoral cycle, this article examines the structural foundations of the 2021 verdicts, region-wise party distributions, demographic patterns, alliance structures and governance trajectories. Through a comparative framework, it evaluates whether upcoming elections will reinforce incumbent mandates or trigger regime alternations. Drawing upon official election documentation and district-wise winner distributions, the article situates these five states within broader debates on anti-incumbency, sub-national identity politics and federal competitive democracy.

Federal diversity and electoral cycles

India's state elections often serve as laboratories of democratic variation. Unlike parliamentary contests that aggregate national narratives, state elections reveal region-specific alignments shaped by language, ethnicity, welfare regimes, leadership charisma and coalition structures.

In 2021, the Election Commission of India conducted Assembly elections in Assam (126 seats), Keralam (140 seats), Tamil Nadu (234 seats), West Bengal (294 seats) and Puducherry (30 seats), following constitutionally mandated expiry of terms. Together, these states and the Union Territory account for 824 seats, which constitutes around 20% of the total 4,123 Assembly seats in India. These elections were administered under stringent pandemic protocols, including expanded polling stations and enhanced absentee ballot provisions.

The electoral outcomes were strikingly heterogeneous across the states. Assam reaffirmed a BJP-led alliance in power, while Keralam re-elected the Left Democratic Front (LDF), breaking its long-standing pattern of alternating governments. Tamil Nadu witnessed a shift in power to the DMK-led alliance, whereas West Bengal further consolidated the dominance of the Trinamool Congress (AITC). In contrast, Puducherry experienced alliance-driven political fragmentation, reflecting a more fluid and competitive electoral landscape.

Institutional context: electoral roll revision

In addition to procedural innovations such as expanded poll-

ing stations and VVPAT deployment in 2021, the electoral landscape ahead of the forthcoming Assembly polls has been significantly shaped by the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls — one of the most comprehensive voter list revision exercises undertaken in India in recent decades. SIR is a constitutionally grounded and legally sanctioned process under Article 324 of the Indian Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1950, in which the Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts deep-cleaning, verification and re-enumeration of voters to update and purify electoral rolls beyond routine annual summary revisions. Launched nationwide in late 2025, the SIR targeted more than 51 crore electors across multiple states and union territories, with Assembly election-bound states such as Assam, Keralam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry among the first to be included in the implementation. The exercise involves house-to-house verification by Booth Level Officers, identification and removal of deceased, duplicate or relocated voters, remapping of unverified entries and the addition of previously omitted eligible citizens through Form 6 submissions. Compared to routine revisions, SIR's intensive data verification and document-based scrutiny introduce greater institutional rigour and a renewed emphasis on roll accuracy, aiming to uphold the constitutional principle of "one person, one vote" through more inclusive and precise voter lists. At the same time, the scale and contentious implementation of SIR have stirred debate about inclusivity, procedural fairness and perceptions of the revision process, particularly in politically polarised contexts such as West Bengal, where it has become a salient pre-election issue. For the upcoming elections, the contextual embedding of SIR within the institutional framework underscores that electoral legitimacy now extends beyond polling-day logistics to encompass the foundational accuracy and acceptability of the voter rolls themselves.

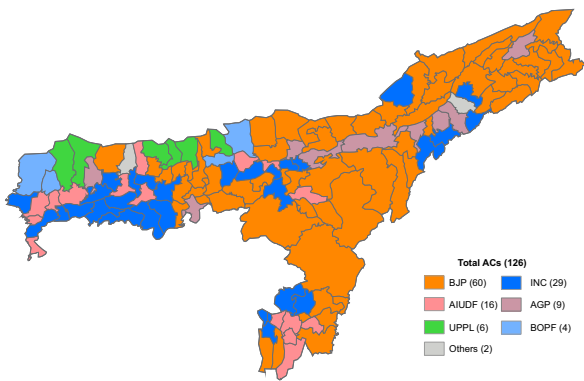
Assam: identity consolidation and competitive fragmentation

Assam enters the 2026 Assembly elections with a total electorate of 2,50,21,408 voters, including 2,49,58,139 general electors and 63,269 service voters. The state also reflects a strong infusion of young voters, with 5,75,258 electors in the 18–19 age group, indicating continued electoral expansion. Social inclusion metrics show 2,03,709 PwD electors, 343 third-gender voters and 1,04,238 senior citizens (85+), underlining the broadening voter base. Polling stations have increased signifi-

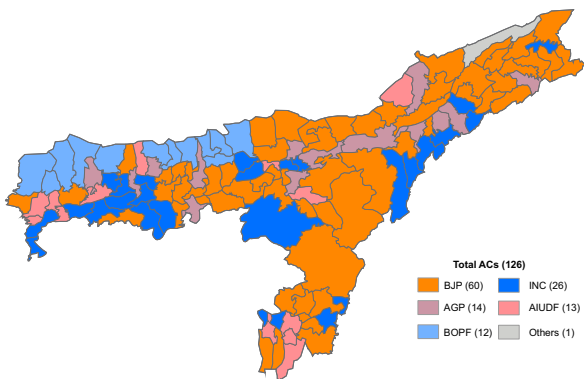
cantly from 28,650 in 2024 to 31,486 in 2026. The election in Assam will be conducted in a single phase on 9 April 2026, with counting scheduled for 4 May 2026.

In 2021, Assam’s 126-member Assembly returned a BJP-led coalition with the BJP securing 60 seats, followed by INC (29), AIUDF (16), AGP (9), UPPL (6) and BOPF (4). Regionally, the electoral map divides into: Barak Valley (20 ACs), Lower Assam (50 ACs), Upper Assam (56 ACs). The BJP performed strongly in Upper Assam and urban Lower Assam, while Congress-AIUDF retained influence in minority-dominated constituencies in Barak Valley and Dhubri district. Winner parties in assembly election 2021 & 2016 are illustrated in Map 1 and Map 2 respectively.

Map 1: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Assam 2021



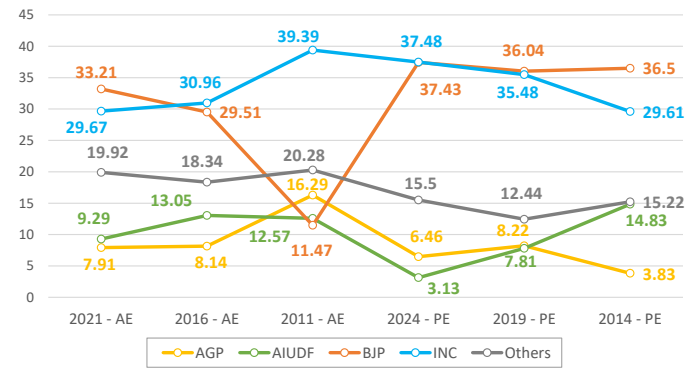
Map 2: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Assam 2016



The BJP’s consolidation was underpinned by Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) mobilisation, infrastructure expansion, welfare distribution and strategic alliance with regional actors (AGP, UPPL). The 2021 result reflected a calibrated fusion of Assamese nationalism and development politics.

The forthcoming election will hinge on CAA implementation politics, opposition coordination between INC and AIUDF, performance evaluation of the Himanta Biswa Sarma government and Bodo territorial politics (UPPL vs BOPF) and other affairs. Assam remains competitive, but unless opposition fragmentation reduces, the BJP alliance retains structural advantage. The election in 2026 will also be the first assembly election after recent Delimitation in Assam and the SIR exercise across the country. Historical vote share trend is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Historical vote share of major parties in Assam

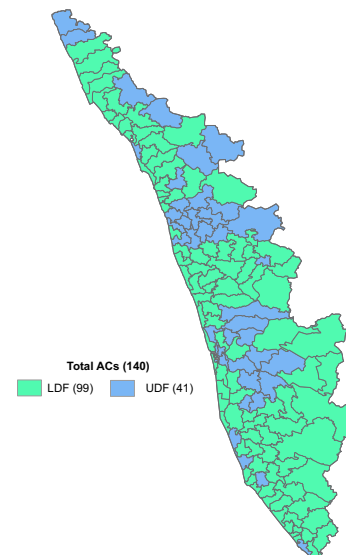


Keralam: governance legitimacy versus alternation norm

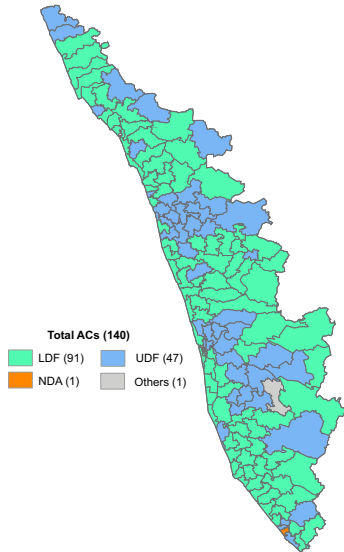
Keralam’s electoral landscape is marked by a highly engaged electorate of 2,71,06,059 voters, including 2,70,52,007 general electors and 54,052 service voters. The state has 4,24,518 young voters (18–19 years), reflecting steady generational participation. Additionally, Keralam reports 2,44,250 PwD electors, 273 third-gender voters and a notably high 2,04,317 senior citizens (85+), indicating an ageing yet active electorate. Polling stations have increased significantly from 25,231 in 2024 to 30,471 in 2026. Keralam will go to polls in a single phase on 9 April 2026, with vote counting on 4 May 2026.

Keralam’s political history is characterized by alternation between the LDF and the United Democratic Front (UDF). However, in 2021 the LDF won 99 of 140 seats, while the UDF secured 41. Regionally, Keralam divides into: Malabar (49 ACs), Central Keralam (42 ACs), Travancore (49 ACs). The LDF’s strong performance in Malabar and gains in Central Keralam proved decisive. Winner parties in assembly election 2021 & 2016 are illustrated in Map 3 and Map 4 respectively.

Map 3: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Keralam 2021



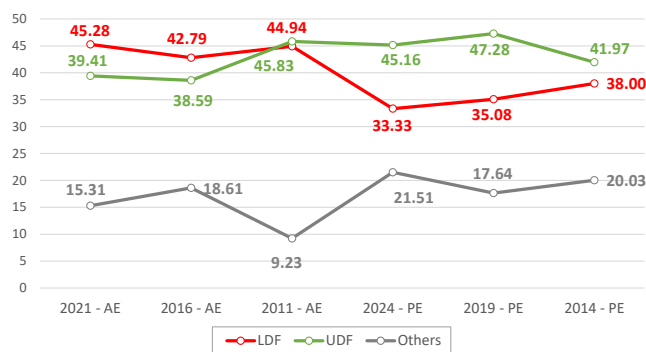
Map 4: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Kerala 2016



The LDF’s re-election was attributed to: Effective crisis management (floods and pandemic), expansion of welfare entitlements, strong leadership image and decentralised administrative coordination. Kerala thus became a case of governance-based incumbency resilience.

The upcoming election will test: fatigue after two terms, corruption narratives, Church-state dynamics and BJP’s limited but symbolic expansion efforts. Kerala remains bipolar and even modest vote swings can yield significant seat shifts. Historical vote share trend is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Historical vote share of major alliances in Kerala

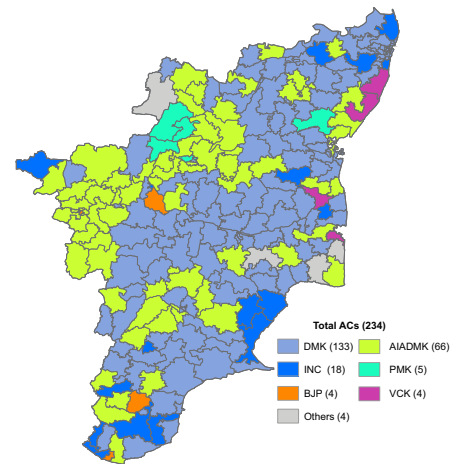


Tamil nadu: dravidian resilience and emerging triangularity

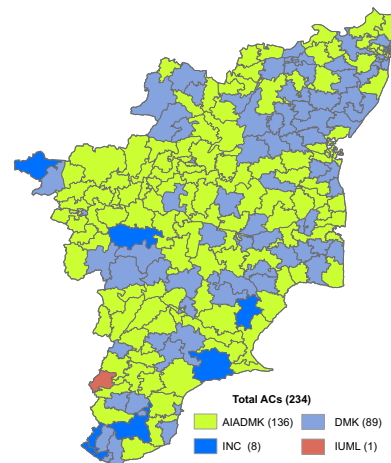
Tamil Nadu enters the 2026 Assembly elections with a total electorate of 5,67,74,436 voters, including 5,67,07,380 general electors and 67,056 service voters. The state reflects a strong youth presence, with 12,51,749 electors in the 18–19 age group, indicating robust first-time voter participation. Social inclusion indicators show 4,63,398 PwD electors, 7,617 third-gender voters and 3,99,668 senior citizens (85+), highlighting the diversity and inclusiveness of the electorate. Polling stations have increased significantly from 68,321 in 2024

to 75,032 in 2026. Tamil Nadu will go to polls in a single phase on 23 April 2026, with counting scheduled for 4 May 2026. Tamil Nadu’s 2021 election restored the DMK-led alliance to power after a decade. The state’s 234 constituencies, distributed across North (90 ACs), West, Delta and South zones, largely favored the DMK coalition. The contest remained predominantly bipolar between DMK and AIADMK, with BJP as a junior ally of AIADMK. Winner parties in assembly election 2021 & 2016 are illustrated in Map 5 and Map 6 respectively.

Map 5: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Tamil Nadu 2021



Map 6: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Tamil Nadu 2016

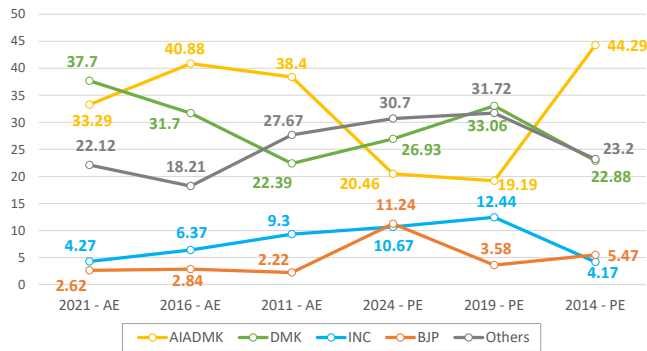


The election followed the passing of iconic leaders Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi, marking a generational transition. The DMK capitalized on anti-incumbency against AIADMK and presented a governance-focused alternative.

Key issues in the upcoming election: performance of the DMK government, AIADMK’s organisational coherence, BJP’s independent growth strategy, Industrial belt politics in Coimbatore, imposition of Hindi and Salem and Agrarian concerns in Kaveri Delta.

Tamil Nadu’s political culture remains deeply Dravidian; however, gradual national party encroachment may alter the competitive equilibrium. Historical vote share trend is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Historical vote share of major parties in Tamil Nadu

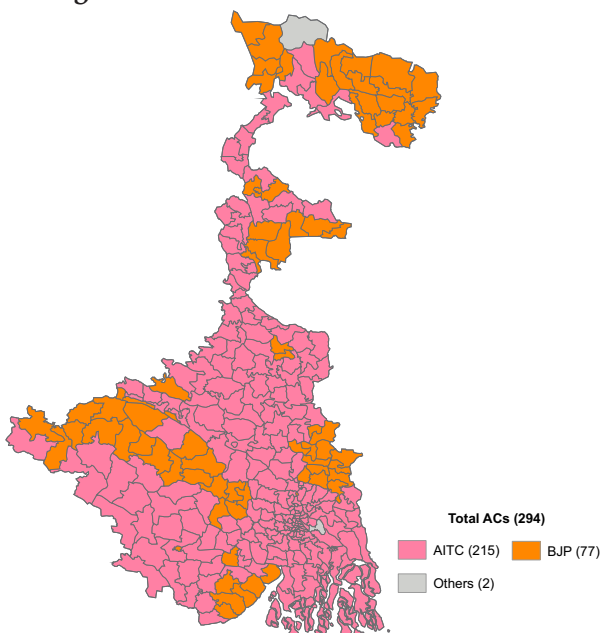


West Bengal: sub-national assertion and national expansion

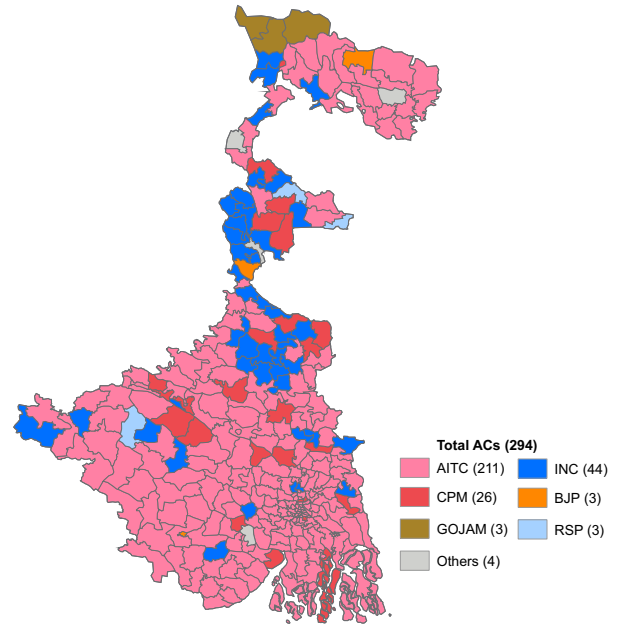
West Bengal enters the 2026 Assembly elections with the largest electorate among the five states, totaling 6,45,61,152 voters, including 6,44,52,609 general electors and 1,08,543 service voters. The state includes 5,23,229 young voters (18–19 years), reflecting continued voter base expansion. Social inclusion metrics show 4,16,089 PwD electors, 1,152 third-gender voters and 3,78,979 senior citizens (85+), underscoring broad electoral representation. Polling stations have seen a marginal increase from 80,530 in 2024 to 80,719 in 2026, indicating near-saturation of infrastructure. The election in West Bengal will be conducted in two phases—23 April and 29 April 2026, with counting scheduled for 4 May 2026.

West Bengal’s 2021 Assembly election returned AITC with 215 seats against BJP’s 77 in a 294-member Assembly. The state’s regional breakdown includes: North Bengal (56 ACs), South Bengal (154 ACs), West/Junglemahal (42 ACs) and Kolkata region (42 ACs). While BJP made gains in North Bengal and Junglemahal, AITC retained dominance in South Bengal and Kolkata. Winner parties in assembly election 2021 & 2016 are illustrated in Map 7 and Map 8 respectively.

Map 7: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of West Bengal 2021



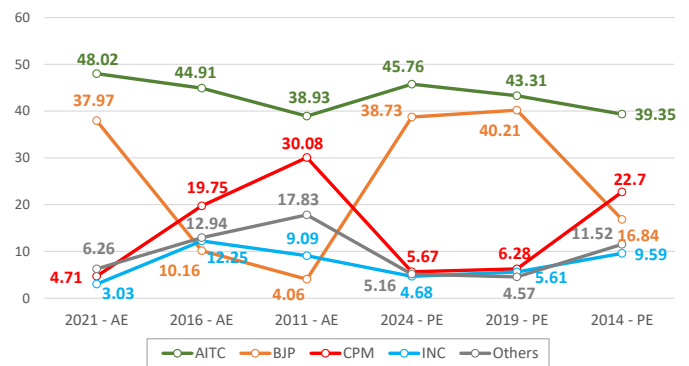
Map 8: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of West Bengal 2016



Key determinants: Bengali linguistic nationalism, welfare expansion schemes, Anti-CAA/NRC mobilization and organizational consolidation by AITC.

Variables shaping the next contest are corruption allegations, inflation and rural distress, BJP’s cadre restructuring, Left-Congress revival attempts and Muslim vote consolidation. West Bengal remains the most intense arena of national-regional contestation. This election will also be interesting to see after the SIT exercise and accusation of deleting the votes on Election commission of India by the political parties. Historical vote share trend is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Historical vote share of major parties in West Bengal



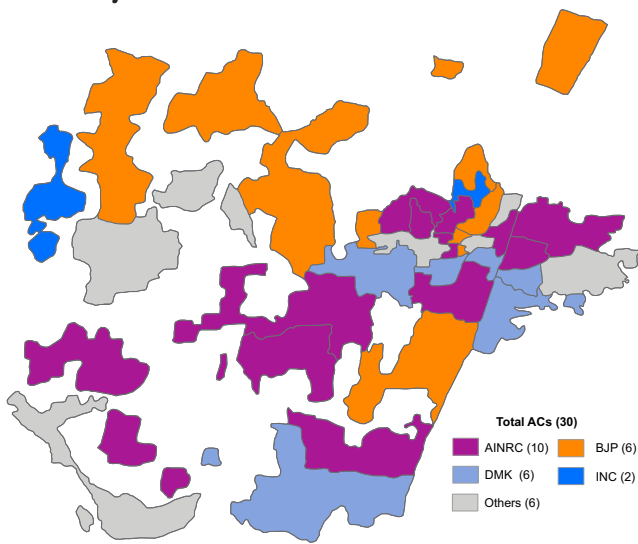
Puducherry: micro-polity and alliance arithmetic

Puducherry enters the 2026 Assembly elections with a total electorate of 9,44,539 voters, including 9,44,211 general electors and 328 service voters. The Union Territory has 23,033 young voters (18–19 years), reflecting a modest but significant addition of new electors. Social inclusion indicators show 12,204

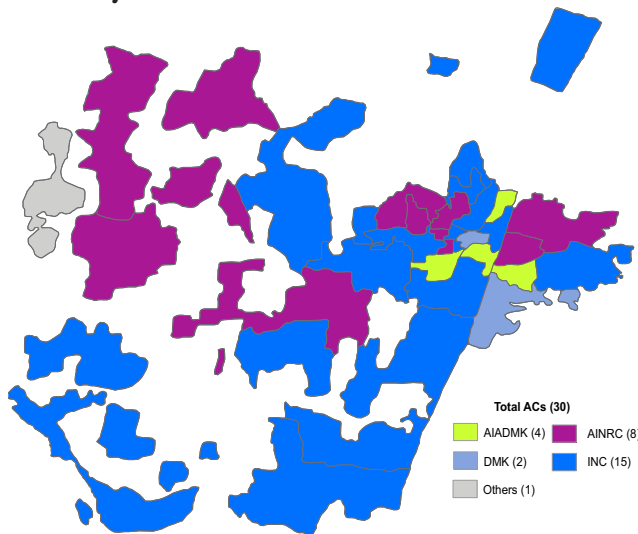
PwD electors, 139 third-gender voters and 6,034 senior citizens (85+), ensuring representation across all sections of society. Polling stations have increased from 967 in 2024 to 1,099 in 2026, indicating focused infrastructure expansion. Puducherry will go to polls in a single phase on 9 April 2026, with counting scheduled for 4 May 2026.

Puducherry’s 30-seat Assembly produced a fragmented result: AINRC (10), BJP (6), DMK (6), INC (2), Others (6). The territory comprises: Puducherry (23 ACs), Karaikal (5 ACs), Mahe (1 AC) and Yanam (1 AC). Winner parties in assembly election 2021 & 2016 are illustrated in Map 9 and Map 10 respectively.

Map 9: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Puducherry 2021



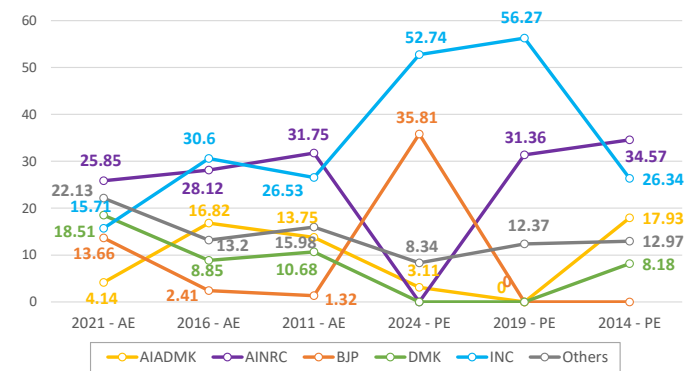
Map 10: Winner parties in assembly constituencies of Puducherry 2016



Its Political Characteristics: alliance-dependence, personalistic leadership and spillover effects from Tamil Nadu politics.

Puducherry elections often hinge on marginal seat swings. Alliance stability and leadership credibility will be decisive. Historical vote share trend is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Historical vote share of major parties in Puducherry



Comparative analysis

Anti-incumbency in these five states appears conditional rather than automatic. Keralam and West Bengal show that incumbency can endure when framed around governance performance and welfare legitimacy. In contrast, Assam and Tamil Nadu reflect structured shifts shaped by identity politics and leadership transitions.

The interaction between regional identity and national party expansion further differentiates these states. Assam and West Bengal feature strong national party presence and polarised competition, whereas Keralam and Tamil Nadu remain dominated by entrenched regional political ecosystems. Puducherry represents a hybrid model, where both regional and national actors compete through flexible alliances.

Alliance arithmetic also plays a crucial role. Fragmented opposition in Assam and Puducherry tends to advantage incumbents, while the bipolar systems of Keralam and Tamil Nadu reduce unpredictability but amplify the electoral impact of even small vote swings.

Conclusion

The upcoming Assembly elections 2026 in Assam, Keralam, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry will not merely revisit the mandates of 2021; rather, they will serve as a crucial test of evolving models of federal democracy in India. In Assam, the contest will examine consolidation versus coalition recovery. Keralam will test governance continuity against its historical norm of political alternation. Tamil Nadu’s election will assess the resilience of Dravidian politics in a post-charismatic era. In West Bengal, the battle will reflect regional assertion vis-à-vis national ambition, while Puducherry will once again highlight the significance of alliance arithmetic within a micro-polity framework.

Together, these elections will illuminate whether India’s federal democracy is trending toward national homogenization or deepening regional pluralism.

Source: Statistical Publication, ECI

— *Indiastat Elections Research Desk*