Journal of Social and Political Sciences

The online version of this article can be found at:
https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/

The Asian Institute of Research *Social and Political Sciences* is a peer-reviewed International Journal. The journal covers scholarly articles in the fields of Social and Political Sciences, which include, but are not limited to, Anthropology, Government Studies, Political Sciences, Sociology, International Relations, Public Administration, History, Philosophy, Arts, Education, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies. As the journal is Open Access, it ensures high visibility and the increase of citations for all research articles published. The *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* aims to facilitate scholarly work on recent theoretical and practical aspects of Social and Political Sciences.

ASIAN INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH
Connecting Scholars Worldwide

Is the Anti-Incumbency Sentiment Changing in Tamil Nadu? A Case Study of 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections

Anurag Piyamrao Wasnik[1], Divya Saroja Chayanam[2]

[1] Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India
[2] XLRI, Jamshedpur, India

Correspondence: Anurag Wasnik, Plot no.91, Indora Sadhu Mohalla, near 10 no. Bridge, P.O. Bezonbagh, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Pin- 440004, India. Tel: - +91 9490168469, +91 9492871568 /
E-mail: p17anuragw@iima.ac.in, divyasaroja.nitw@gmail.com

Abstract
Elections are the most important pillar of democracy. A voter's behaviour is influenced by many parameters that can turn the outcome of the election. Many constituencies follow a certain voting pattern. The voters of the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, have often been categorized as having an anti-incumbency sentiment, where the ruling party has often switched in every consecutive election. However, there seems to be a gradual shift in this sentiment. This paper presents a case on the relaxation of the anti-incumbency sentiment by analyzing the voting data across the constituencies in the five elections of the last two decades. Some aspects which could have contributed to this voting behaviour are also discussed.

Keywords: Elections, Tamil Nadu, Voting Behaviour, Anti-Incumbency

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Politics in India

Elections are a crucial component of democracy. Ever since India's independence in 1947, India has held 17 national elections, multiple state elections and many other local elections like Panchayat and municipal elections. Right to vote is a very important fundamental right, because, at the very basic level, it supports the premise that the Government is 'for the people, from the people, by the people.' Having established the importance of a vote and the role it plays each year, it becomes important to preserve its sanctity and prevent it from bias.

1.2 Voting Behaviour

Historically, few regions may have naturally aligned with an ideology or a political party and continued their previous judgment in the voting process. There might be few other regions that have collectively voted for different governments each time.

According to 2018 data from the Election Commission of India (ECI), 45 million new voters have been added to India's electoral roll since 2014. The road to the parliament is long, expensive and exhausting. Persuading voters is the essence of a political campaign. From theme songs, advertising, freebies to negative campaigning, all are part of this game. Over the time as the media has changed, the campaign strategies have also changed. Ahmed, S. et al (2016), detail into how different political parties used Twitter to influence general public through their ideas, helplines for common issues, answering their questions and criticizing other parties. Apart from traditional media, social media coupled with statistical analysis and the science of influence is nowadays a preferred tool for the political parties to woo voters.

Voting behaviour can be affected by better / worse economic conditions and the political party that is directly deemed responsible for it. These conditions might affect an independent voter, one who is not historically affiliated with a party or ideology, and may contribute to electoral 'swing' (Arvind, ICRIER, 2004). An incumbent is usually at an advantage to reclaim the office as they have access to other politicians, elites and other social groups. Counter-intuitive to this incumbent advantage is the case of India, specifically the case of Tamil Nadu politics.

1.3 Politics in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu, with a current population of 67.9 million and 59.1 million registered voters, has seen four national elections and five state elections in the past two decades. There are 50+ political parties that have contested in the Tamil Nadu assembly elections, but the most popular ones are a host of parties led by AIADMK and another host of parties led by Dravida Munnetra Kazagham (DMK). The political ideologies and election manifesto of these major parties are not significantly different. Even the operational style, while in power is comparable, as no party has been much worse off or much better off than the other.

Tamil Nadu's voting choices are often categorized as anti-incumbency due to the power – switch that happens every 5 years. This is largely attributed to the swing population who like to experiment with their voting choices. Swaminathan et all, 2019, in their research of first time voters in Tamil Nadu, proposed that certain influencing tools, societal factors, demography and technological trends as factors governing political mind map of such voters. In fact, data shows that a swing of 5% votes is enough to make a winner out of a loser and vice versa. Taking example of 2006, 2011 and 2016 elections, for example, the average vote share for AIADMK alliance was 44% and that of DMK alliance was 40% (election commission website) Yet AIADMK won only two out of the three elections. The Hindu & CSDS Lokniti post poll survey, 2021 infers that there are certain vote blocks that contribute to this swing, which refers to the rise of caste-based ideologies, which we will discuss more in the 'Analysis' section.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

Tamil Nadu, is seeing a cool down on its traditional anti-incumbency sentiment. The research is a high-level historical and social analysis on publicly available election data. The five state elections post 2000 were chosen for the study. Electoral statistics data has been collected from websites of Election Commission of India and Tamil Nadu Government Electoral website. For analysis and presentation of data, Microsoft excel and Microsoft Power BI have been used. The political environment is limited to 2 – 3 key players who alternate almost every election, it can be assumed that every shift of power suggests anti-incumbency. The research proposes to investigate if there is a shift in the strong anti-incumbency sentiment that Tamil Nadu was known for and proceeds to analyze what that would mean to different stakeholders.

There are two limitations to this study. Firstly, the proposed factors affecting voter behaviour may not be exhaustive. Secondly, the framework doesn't consider outliers or one-time mega events. These could be events like recessions, natural disasters, epidemics like the Covid crisis and other events that could significantly change a voter's perception towards the political parties. Further research could be undertaken to fine-tune some of the factors.

3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

For the analysis, 231 constituencies have been considered from the total of 234 constituencies. Three constituencies are found to have invalid or unusable data. Based on the 2001 Census of India and following draft proposals, constituencies were delimited in 2007. Some constituencies are reserved for candidates from the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). There are five elections that happened in the last two decades: 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016 and the latest elections in 2021. In 2016, Jayalalithaa won the elections and became the first ruling party to be re-elected in Tamil Nadu since 1984, though with a simple majority. Going by the deviation, it is worth examining if the overall sentiment and voting behaviour has changed. We study three aspects to explore the premise: Consistent & Deviant constituencies & their voting behavior, switch frequency and caste-led voting behaviour.

3.1 Consistent and Deviant Voting Behaviour

The party that secured a majority in each election was recorded for each election. Based on their aggregate voting behaviour, constituencies are categorized into largely consistent or largely deviant. If a constituency, at an aggregate level, voted for the same government in that particular election as they did in the previous election, it is largely a consistent constituency and similarly, if a constituency switched their choice, it is largely deviant. Every constituency is either consistent or deviant, neutral or invalid cases have not been identified. Higher number of consistent constituencies lead to an incumbent-favourable situation while higher number of deviant constituencies may signify an anti-incumbency sentiment.

Table 1: Consistent and deviant constituencies

Election year	Consistent constituencies #	Percentage of total	Deviant constituencies #	Percentage of total
2006	119	51.52%	112	48.48%
2011	54	23.38%	177	76.62%
2016	113	48.92%	118	51.08%
2021	122	52.82%	109	47.18%

In table-1, it can be seen that the contribution of consistent constituencies has been continuously increasing in the past 10 years. In the 2021 elections, more than half the constituencies voted for the incumbent. This could be an indication that people might be changing their decision making patterns.

3.2 Switch frequency

The number of times a constituency has seen a decision switch in electing their ruling party is recorded against each constituency. This is termed as switch frequency. Constituencies with high switch frequency refer to a voting population who are more volatile or experimental with their voting choices. These constituencies are also called swing constituencies. Conversely, constituencies that have always voted for a particular party will have zero switch frequency. Switch frequency is calculated for the last 3 elections prior to 2021. The voting behaviour of constituencies in 2021 is grouped by their switch frequencies in the table

Table 2: Voting behaviour in TN 2021 elections by switch frequency. The red values indicate a deviation from expected behaviour.

Voting behaviour	Total constituencies	Switching frequency		
		0	1 & 2	3
Voted for incumbent	122	17	78	27
Voted anti-incumbent	109	8	78	23
	Total	25	156	50

From table-2, there are 25 absolutely consistent constituencies from the previous elections. 17 of them stayed consistent and voted for the same party in 2021 as they did in 2016. 8 of them deviated from their expected voting pattern, i.e., they switched their voting choice. The surprise, however, is from the 50 constituencies, which are the absolutely deviant constituencies, i.e, they have never repeated their voting decision. Ideally, all 50 of them would have switched again and voted for anti-incumbency as per their historic behaviour. Strikingly, 27 of them decided to stick to their previous voting choice. In summary, the number of constituencies that stuck to their earlier voting choice is about 3.5 times the number of constituencies that switched their choice, which is a clear indication of the favouring the incumbent.

The difference is not huge if the values are looked at individually. However, given the number of first time voters, younger voters and rise in participation levels from urban voters, and most importantly given the fact that a 5% vote share can swing an election either way, this could be a major turn of events that could prove favourable to the incumbent government.

3.3 Rise of the caste-based parties

Traditionally, most political parties lean on promoting economic growth, jobs and beneficial schemes in their election manifestos. Mary Ranganathan (2014), mentions that an ideological blur happens when different political parties promise benefits not too different from one another. This can render a voter to look for other distinct relatable aspects from that political party. People are finding refuge in caste-based parties as the empirical evidence suggests the rise in the vote-share of the caste-based parties.

In Tamil Nadu, OBCs comprise 68% of population, SCs comprise 20%, forward communities comprise 10.9% and STs comprise 1.1%. Therefore, in order to win an election, it is but natural to woo the approximately 70% population of the state. Hence, whether it is AIADMK, DMK, BJP or Congress, wooing the OBC communities is the key to Tamil Nadu politics. One ploy used by these parties is to give tickets to candidates belonging to the dominant caste in any constituency. In 2016 Legislative Assembly elections, of the 227 constituencies it contested, the AIADMK had fielded 41 Vanniyars, 33 Mukkulathors (Thevars) & 30 Gounders whereas the DMK had fielded 20 Vanniyars, 4 Mutharayars, 25 Mukkulathors (Thevars) and 20 Gounders (figure 1).
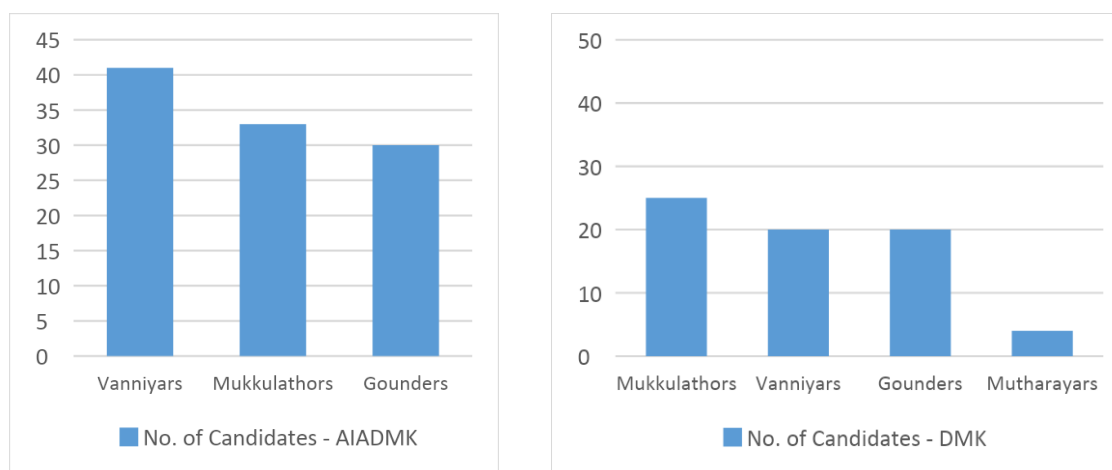

Figure 1: Dominant OBC/MBC-caste candidates fielded by dominant TN parties

Chola Naadu, Thondai Naadu, Nadu Naadu, Kongu Naadu and Pandya Naadu were the broad classification of ancient Tamil Nadu based on its rulers and their architectural and literary contribution to that particular region and its economy (figure 2 and table 3). Though the actual ancient Tamil Nadu boundaries were different we have shown the present day boundary for better visualization and understanding. Our analysis shows that these ancient geographical divisions have become the home turf of the various caste-based parties (figure 2).

Table 3: Present day caste-based parties and dominant castes in those regions

| Ancient geographical division of Tamil Nadu	Thondai Nadu	Nadu Nadu	Chola Nadu	Pandya Nadu	Kongu Nadu
Dominant castes	Vanniyars		Thevars/ Mukkulathors	Nadars	Gounders
Present day dominant caste- based parties	1. PMK (Pattali Makkal Katchi)		1. MMK (Manithaneya Makkal Katchi)	1. AISMK (All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi)	1. KMK (Kongunadu Munnetra Kazhagam) 2. KMDK (Kongunadu Makkal Desia Katchi) 3. KIP (Kongu Ilaingar Peravai)
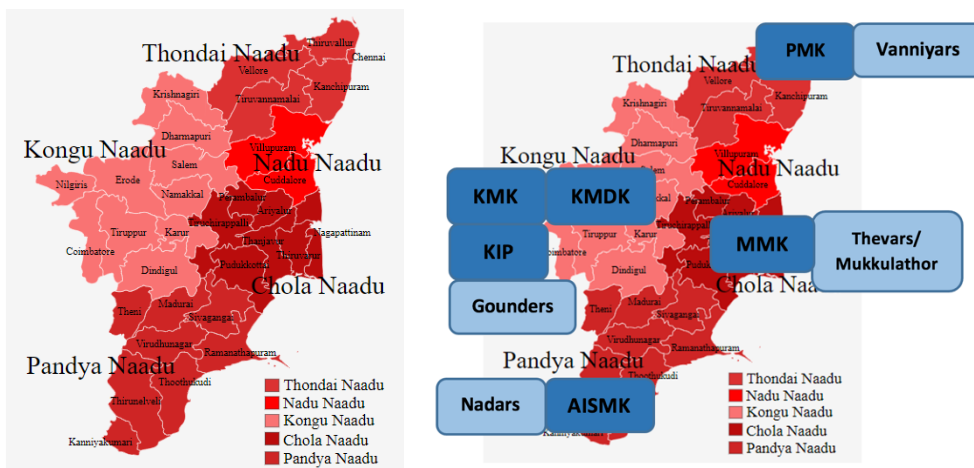
Figure 2: Ancient Tamil Nadu and it's classification into it's five regions and the present day caste-based parties

The Vanniyar community and it's use of political power is a case in point. The Vanniyars who were earlier part of the backward class category now come under the Most Backward Classes (MBCs). In 1989, PMK (Pattali Makkal Katchi) was formed by S. Ramadoss as a political outfit for the Vanniyars (OBC). The party is also known for its violent protests against Dalits. The PMK's vote-share has grown about 1476% since 1991-2016 (figure 3).
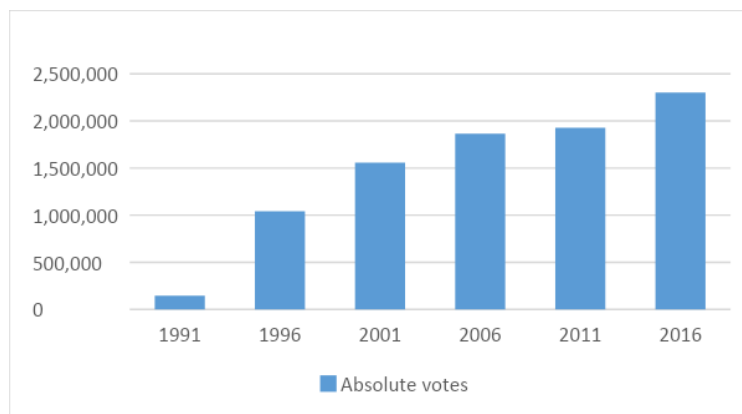

Figure 3: PMK absolute votes in TN Assembly elections

Since the 1980s, DMK and the AIADMK have lost influence in several regions in the state which has led to a vacuum. This vacuum is filled by the emergence of various OBC parties such PMK, KMK, KMDK and other Dalit parties. Hence, we are observing that these smaller, caste-based parties are figuring in major alliances for TN Assembly elections.

4. IMPLICATIONS

People voting on caste-lines is not a good trend for any democracy as it just breaks the society and makes the divide inevitably deepen. If we take the example of Lebanon, according to Lebanon's Constitution, the President should be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and the Parliament Speaker a Shia. Political parties are largely divided along sectarian lines which has led to development of policies beneficial for a particular sect thus putting the nation on the backburner. Taking cue from Lebanon's near-collapse of political system, Dravidian parties need to re-think whether they are amplifying or minimizing the sectoral divide in TN political arena. Apart from this, such a sectoral divide puts additional burden on the administrative forces to maintain communal harmony and peace within the state.

References

Virmani, Arvind (2004) : Economic growth, governance and voting behaviour: an application to Indian elections, Working Paper, No. 138, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi.
Dr. R. Swaminathan *et al* (2019) "Political Mindmap of Tamil Nadu – First Time Voters and Others," Global Journal of Political Science, Vol-7, Number 1, 2019
Leigh L. Linden (2004), "Are Incumbents Really Advantaged? The Preference for Non-Incumbents in Indian National Elections", Doctoral thesis, Department of Economics, MIT
Rajalakshmi Kanagavel, Velayutham Chandrasekaran (2014), "Creating Political Awareness Through Social Networking – An Empirical Study with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu Elections 2011", Journal of Social Media Studies.
Ahmed, S., Jaidka, K., Cho, J., (2016), "The 2014 Indian Elections on Twitter: A comparison of campaign strategies of political parties", Telematics and Informatics
Mary Ranganathan (2014), "Indian Elections 2014 Commercial Media Pushes Social Media into Focus," Asia Pacific Media Educator
https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/in-free-fall/article36088107.ece
https://www.thehindu.com/specials/the-hindu-csds-lokniti-post-poll-survey-2021/article34486078.ece