

A comparison of factors behind Electoral Violence for the states of Maharashtra & Kerala

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A study conducted by Höglund(2009) and Birch et al.(2020) define electoral violence as a tool that is employed to change the course of the elections by actors that are dissatisfied with the expected outcomes. As explained by Höglund (2009), electoral violence takes place before an election, during an election, and even post an election. It comes in forms of riots, violent and non-violent demonstrations, murders, kidnappings etc. The precise reasons that cause the actors (who conduct such violence) cannot be determined.

Post the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaigns, the state of Kerala saw violent outbursts after peaceful rallies. Roadshows by Congress leaders were blocked by a group of LDF activists in the capital district of the state. Kerala, one of top performing states in terms of human development indices in the country has had a long history of political violence present within. The Crime Records Bureau of the state has estimated that around 100 people have been murdered and more have been injured by politically motivated causes during the years 2006-2016. The crimes are mostly being reported in the northern part of Kerala, especially from the district of Kannur. In Kannur, which is commonly known as the ‘Sicily of Kerala’, political violence has been normalised now. This part of the state has been a victim to the ongoing political violence between the RSS and the CPI(M). In most of Kannur, social life is not much distinguished from political life. Party politics start influencing the youth from the days of their school education, or rather it

would be easier to say that as and when a new child is born, it becomes automatically assigned to the party that its family is affiliated to. This affiliation need not be in the form of an official membership. This structure works the same way social initiation to a caste or religion takes place with one's birth. Quite different to the violent state in Kannur, other districts in Kerala are not known for violence to be its only political narrative. The first political murder in Kerala was recorded in 1969 and to nobody's surprise it was recorded in Kannur. Despite being well-developed in terms of human development indices, it is interesting to investigate why Kerala, especially the northern region has normalised political violence in their daily lives.

Maharashtra has always been a hotbed of electoral violence due the politics being steeped into the day-to-day functioning of a majority of the people in the state. Dynastic politics is prevalent in Maharashtra. The state also wide and deep reaching local government systems with rural administration comprising of 34 zilla parishads (district councils), 355 Taluka Panchayat samitis (district Sub-division councils) and 27,993 Gram panchayats (village councils) and urban administration comprising of 7 Municipal Corporations, 222 Municipal Councils, four Nagar Panchayats and seven Cantonment Boards. The multiple layers for a single area is more often than not controlled by one family unit, and therefore whenever clashes occur, be it personal, it often evolves into a scuffle between political parties. As a result of this reporting on electoral violence in Maharashtra is a murky affair as it can often be difficult to distinguish between scuffles between a political party and those that are personal in nature. This dynastic politics also carries over to the state parliament as well with the Shiv Sena/ Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The MNS is an off shoot of the Shiv Sena led by Raj Thackeray who only formed as he was not picked for the position of the party chief by then party chairman and his uncle, Bal Thackeray, who went on to choose his youngest son Uddhav Thackeray as the

party chief. The state's prominent parties also have diametrically opposed political philosophies. Nehruvian politics with the Indian National Congress (INC), Maratha first politics with the MNS & the Shiv Sena, classic Hindutva Politics with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with the differences often being settled via violence. Due to politics being prevalent in each aspect of the state, people are indoctrinated into each party's school of thought from a very young age, which depends purely on where they were born and which party is in power.

Demographics of the states

Kerala, a state established in 1956, is one of the smallest states in the country. As of 2021, its population stood at 35.6 million (approx. 2.56 per cent of the country's total population). Its sex ratio is unlike majority of the states in India with the share of women in the population being larger than the share of population of men. Back in 1991, the state had achieved the status of universal literacy. Population growth rate is on a decline, the mortality and fertility rates are both one of the lowest compared to how the other states in the country perform. Kerala made significant achievements in its demographic transition in the 2000s, owing to the low birth and death rates along with delivery of quality education. The state has a strong connection with the middle east as post 1970s a large share of the population migrated to this region in search of better livelihood. This helped the state in advancing its economic state as remittance money that came into the economy changed the consumption patterns of the society. A point to be highlighted in this section is that the state is proud of having one of the highest literacy rates for many years now.

Maharashtra was formed in 1960 by splitting the state of Bombay into Gujarat and Maharashtra itself. It is the state with the second highest population with 125.5 million residents and is the third largest state in the country. Much like Kerala, Maharashtra has a significantly higher literacy rate,

at 82.34, compared to the national average of 74.04. However, unlike the southern state, Maharashtra's population has been consistently on the rise, mostly due to people from all over the country migrating to Mumbai and adjacent districts like Thane, looking for job opportunities, with the decadal growth rate has remained higher than the national average. This population increase is restricted only to Mumbai, Konkan, Thane, and Pune, with some districts such as Ratnagiri witnessing a decline in population growth. The state also has an incredibly young population, In 2011, 128.48 lakhs people in Maharashtra are in the 0-6 years age group, constituting 11.43 percentage of the state's total population. According to Census 2001, 367.24 lakhs individuals were below 18 years in Maharashtra. Maharashtra is the third most urbanized state among major states in India.

One wouldn't expect some of the most educated states to have high rates of political violence prevalent in its daily life. To understand this relationship, we shall investigate the determinants of political violence.

Determinants of political/electoral violence

The existing literature has identified a few glaring reasons that act as determinants of electoral violence. Hafner-Burton et al. (2014) distinguishes between types of actors and their motive to use violence as an instrumental tool during elections. Incumbent party members use electoral violence as a tool when they want to remain in power post the election and feel a threat to their share in power. Condra et al. (2018) finds that opposition groups use electoral violence as a tool to show how incompetent the current government is at conducting democratic elections. Electoral violence is used as a tool post-election when the actors are unhappy with the election result and want to contest it. People affiliated to the party can also resort to violence when they want to secure their

election mandate in some way or the other, they believe violent acts will coerce and frighten voters. Fjelde and Höglund (2016) finds in a study that when large parties involved in elections get a disproportionate number of seats, it is more likely for the elections to get violent. Violence is used as an instrumental tool to prevent the loss of power. Another factor that can influence violent elections is the nature of the previous regime. The more exclusionary the former regime was, the more the state is divided along ethnic lines. This increases the chances of violence during elections (Broschè, Fjelde, and Höglund 2020).

The effect of education on electoral violence

A study conducted by the UN peacekeeping mission in Cote d'Ivoire found that the more awareness and education about the election process was given to the voters, the lesser the chances of the election turning violent (Smidt 2020). This can also be understood as the more disinformation is spread during the election process, the likely the elections are to get violent. Educational improvements are known to have a positive influence on the functioning of democracy (Valverde 1999). Having mentioned the relationship between disinformation and the occurrence of electoral violence, where more there is prevalence of disinformation, the more likely is the occurrence of electoral violence. When the level of education in a society is high, it can be said that they have higher cognitive abilities compared to societies with lower levels of education. Having higher cognitive abilities should allow oneself to have higher reasoning power and identify the piece of information as fake, and not act upon it, which eventually will result in lower levels of electoral violence.

However, this is not the case we have been seeing in Kerala and Maharashtra. Both states, have a high level of education (measured through literacy levels) but a significantly high level of electoral violence as well. This could either mean that higher levels of education simply do not reduce the

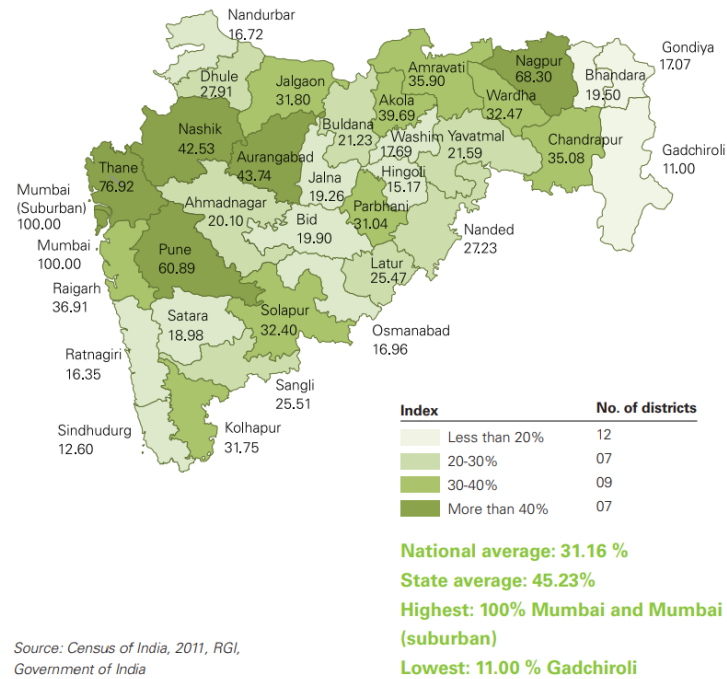
occurrence of electoral violence, or it could also mean that literacy levels are not a good measure of ascertaining whether the cognitive abilities of the state are high or not. Education can also only prove to be helpful in reducing occurrence of electoral violence if it results in productive employment.

The rate of job creation in Kerala is slow, which indicates that there aren't adequate amounts of jobs being created. This can generate dissatisfaction with the government. For the educated population above the age of 15, the rate of unemployment in the state is 16.7 per cent. The Kerala model of development focuses on human development indices but fails to convert these high rates of health and education into fruitful economic opportunities¹. Relative deprivation theories suggest that grievances emerge when the expectations of the people do not match the reality. Kerala also has a strong communist history which began in the early 1950s. This period was followed by the liberation struggle where a large majority of the state's citizens joined to topple the first communist government. This was a success and thus began the constant hassle between the communist party and the opposition in Kerala, which often resulted in violent elections.

Maharashtra however is not like Kerala. It has the highest employability rate in the country, with exceptional investment into human development. However, this development is not uniform. For every one success story coming from Mumbai, there are several stories of suicide due to crop failure from Vidarbha. One of Maharashtra's greatest failures is its uneven rates of development.

¹ Francis, A. M., & Media&PR, C. (2022, August 9). *The problem of educated unemployment in Kerala*. Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR). [https://www.cppr.in/archives/the-problem-of-educated-unemployment-in-kerala#:~:text=For%20educated%20\(secondary%20and%20above](https://www.cppr.in/archives/the-problem-of-educated-unemployment-in-kerala#:~:text=For%20educated%20(secondary%20and%20above)

Level of urbanization³ by districts, Maharashtra, 2011



Source: Census of India, 2011, RGI, Government of India

Higher incidents of violence are found in areas where there is more reports of violence. Thus, we can draw a possible correlation between the two but further data analysis, perhaps on the ground is required to get to the root cause.

With the limited evidence we have gathered, it can be concluded that the prevalence of electoral violence remains high in the state due to its rich communist history, with a possible influence of lack of productive employment and large share of educated unemployed in the case of Kerala and uneven development and differing political philosophies in the case of Maharashtra. High levels of education cannot be a positive influence unless it results in productive economic opportunities. Similarly, literacy rates could be a misleading measure to ascertain a society's cognitive abilities and reasoning power, which helps in reducing violence and promoting free, fair, peaceful, and democratic elections.

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