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Political Participation among the Youth of Kerala, India

Förrer, Benthe

Citation

Förrer, B. (2022). *Political Participation among the Youth of Kerala, India*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Political Participation among the Youth of Kerala, India

Benthe Arjanne Willemijn Förrer

Leiden University

Abstract: Academics are concerned about declining political participation among the youth in established democracies and for a good reason. In recent years, declining voter turnout of citizens under the age of 29 has demonstrated the youth's indifference towards politics. There are several contradicting theories on why this phenomenon takes place. However, we can roughly distinguish two views: On the one side, academics condemn youth for having no political interest or knowledge and thus label the youth as 'apathetic.' Alternatively, some scholars agree that growing levels of education and income have resulted in young people acquiring more political understanding. As a result, the youth has managed to apply this newfound knowledge and employ alternative ways of political participation. Similar theories about youth participation and apathy exist in the world's largest existing democracy, India. However, considerably less research has been conducted on alternative trends of youth participation in this 'non-Western' region. To raise awareness of this issue, this thesis will contribute to the existing literature by establishing a pattern of youth political participation in the Indian state of Kerala. This research will show that a unique combination of exceptional socio-economic standards and traditional Indian values has produced a unique pattern of political participation, invalidating the theory of youth apathy.

Keywords: Political Participation, Voter Turnout, Youth 'Apathy,' Unconventional Political Participation, 'Kerala Model of Development.'

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Introduction

Many scholars in established democracies insinuate that electoral participation is the primary mechanism behind a fully functioning democracy. From their point of view, active public participation in decision-making is required for a thriving representative government. However, these same scholars are concerned about a sizable proportion of society who are seemingly abandoning politics. They argue that the democratic representative system has broken down as a growing proportion of individuals, particularly the younger generation, reject conventional politics by not voting or disengaging from political and civic activities (Putnam, 2001; Norris, 2002; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2005; Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Sloam, 2007).

The youth's political inactiveness is sometimes interpreted as indicating a democratic crisis. Moreover, it is especially troubling as a global trend, given that the younger generation comprises the world's most significant demographic groupings. Youth apathy is an even greater concern for India. This massive and rapidly developing country has one of the world's largest and demographically youngest democracies, with nearly 900 million eligible voters and over 45 million voters under the age of 25 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). For India, it would thus become a top priority to unravel the complexities of youth political participation to grasp the youth's concerns, needs, and ambitions before their potential is wasted.

Meanwhile, another perspective has emerged in reaction to rising concerns about youth disengagement. This argument holds that the youth's lower levels of electoral involvement are exaggerated, considering that many youngsters are simply engaged in alternative types of political activity that cannot be measured (Zukin et al., 2006). The rise of

protest activism, social movements, and single-issue pressure groups, for example, has radically altered how young people participate in politics, leading multiple scholars to believe that the waning of traditional forms of political participation is accompanied by a widening of political repertoires (Putnam, 2001; Zukin et al., 2006; Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Sloam, 2007; Norris, 2007).

Youth Political Participation in India

The absence of meaningful research on youth political engagement in India has led young people to be labelled as an 'apathetic' generation like youngsters in other democracies. Therefore, it is necessary to mention that, while declining political engagement is not simply a European or American phenomenon, research reveals that India's younger generation is less indifferent when it comes to politics and is just as likely to participate in electoral activities as older generations (Kumar, 2014). Findings from the World Bank's 2007 World Development Report on political participation in high-income and low-income countries reflect this argument by demonstrating that youth from lower-income countries are generally more politically active. How is this possible? Why is youth participation relatively high in India? Furthermore, what do we observe in Kerala in terms of youth engagement? Are young Keralites as politically disengaged as peers from higher-income countries, or do they emulate patterns of political participation observed in low-income countries?

The character of youth political participation in India has changed significantly over the last ten years. This change became apparent during the 2014 National Election, which witnessed an impressive turnout of young people in national politics. 2014's high participation rate could be explained by the mobilising efforts of several National parties beginning in the early 2010s. Other factors that might explain the rise of youth political engagement in India could be related to the country's steady socio-economic improvements. Most scholars agree that educated and wealthier people have more time, money, knowledge, and access to political information, becoming more politically active (Verba et al., 1995; Norris, 2002). Looking at India's current socio-economic profile, we see that, economically, India's economy continues to liberalise and grow at a tremendous speed, earning it the title of the world's fastest-growing economy. India has also made significant progress in improving its educational system. Furthermore, advancements such as social media and the internet have altered how the youth consumes information; Nowadays, the youth have additional channels

to acquire political knowledge and express their concerns about public issues more quickly and conveniently than before.

While multiple factors have contributed to the remarkable rise in voter turnout, from 58 per cent in 2009 to 66 per cent in 2014, many researchers still maintain that, although not being apathetic toward politics, the numbers are still not high enough to consider young Indians as politically involved citizens (Kumar, 2014).

While this may be the case in India, we must consider that all-India figures hide complex regional differences. Therefore, this thesis will deal with the intricacies of youth participation in one state, Kerala. This Southwestern state's social progressiveness offers its inhabitants unique opportunities in the socio-economic field and has likely influenced political participation rates among the youths. It is, therefore, fascinating to examine political participation in this context and uncover whether the so-called 'Kerala model of development' (Parayil, 2000), which came to be lauded for progress in human development (Jeffrey, 1992: Dreze & Sen, 1995: Parayil, 2000), has generated patterns of deteriorating political engagement like established democracies or if it has developed into a distinctive Keralan model.

Aim of this Study

To summarise, the main aim of this study is to contribute to an evidence-based analysis of the current debate on young people's political participation in the Indian context. More specifically, this Thesis will analyse whether the patterns of youth political participation in Kerala exhibit distinctive patterns relative to established democracies, if they diverge to a more pan-Indian pattern or if young Keralites demonstrate behaviour that is unique to this state.

Methodological Framework

Considering the civic voluntarism model as our framework for this research is essential. This model allows us to make sense of political participation through socio-economic factors (caste, religion, education, income), resources (time and money), efficacy (political interest), party preference and mobilisation as factors that might have affected the youth's engagement in politics.

After establishing a pattern regarding the '*how*' and '*why*' Kerala's youth is involved in politics, this thesis will go a step further by speculating whether the 'Kerala model of

development' could be broadened to include political objectives. Considering Kerala's remarkable improvement in literacy rates, life expectancy at birth and empowerment of lower castes, its success can teach us a great deal. Although no uniform formula can be applied to all Indian states, some aspects of Keralan society could be examined further as having the potential to be replicated in other states. Perhaps, politics is one of these aspects. Thus, even though this thesis focuses only on one state, it contributes to the literature by examining what India could learn from India. In addition, this thesis will add to the growing literature on youth political participation in under-examined contexts and hint at the future of political engagement worldwide as younger generations replace older ones.

Methodology

The array of evidence on youth political participation in India and other democracies has produced a puzzle that necessitates a clear empirical investigation to uncover which pattern Keralite youths follow. Therefore, this thesis features a comprehensive analysis of empirical literature on expected trends in youth political participation in established 'Western' democracies, mainly consisting of OECD countries, and India. Specific data was obtained through the quantitative analysis of several existing databases, such as the World Values Survey (WVS), election reports and census reports published by the government of Kerala, and survey data on political behaviour and attitudes from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

Because Indian youth as a category is immensely complicated to define and considering that there is no consensus amongst scholars on its minimal classification, this research has chosen to define the youth as those in the age group of 18 (minimum voting age) to 25 years. All other citizens eligible to vote outside this specific range will be classified as 'other.' This is not to say that the youth below the age of 18 are not politically involved. However, since the data from the national election surveys from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) selects its participants from the minimum age of 18, we will align with this methodology.

Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter provides a brief overview of the most prominent publications on youth political engagement and youth studies in what is traditionally considered the 'West.' This chapter will also construct a framework of youth

political engagement by analysing prior literature; this framework will subsequently be compared to the Indian framework of youth political engagement, which will be developed in Chapter two. In Chapter three, we will finally move on to Kerala and determine, through the civic-voluntarism model, what makes Kerala different from/similar to the rest of India. Lastly, we will conclude our findings and speculate whether our results could have positive ramifications for the rest of India as we will try to broaden the 'Kerala model of development.'

Acknowledgement

Before we can present the actual research, it must be acknowledged that, given its large geography and diverse regional cultures, geographical, social, economic and cultural distinctions would unavoidably cause politics to differ significantly from state to state. Considering India's federal government, it is thus highly likely that different intentions and convictions are expressed in different elections. Nevertheless, this study has chosen to compare results from the National election survey with results from the Kerala State Assembly election and specific examples of youth politics in Kerala's unique trends of Political participation. The results might give an imprecise view of reality. However, given the limited time scope and resources, this thesis has loosely established a broad 'all-India' pattern of youth political participation, hopefully stimulating further research on this topic.

In addition, the terms 'West' or 'Western' that are used in this study, do not indicate a geographic unity or alliance of countries associated with the specific values they share. Instead, these terms are merely used to simplify a collection of OECD countries such as the United States, Italy, Great Britain and Australia that are often referred to in literature regarding youth participation in the traditional 'Western' hemisphere.

Chapter 1: Understanding and Explaining Youth Political Participation and Non-Participation in a 'Western' Context

The following Chapter will examine existing empirical evidence on young people's political engagement to determine the extent to which previous studies understand youth political participation and non-participation in general. The references included in this study were intended to present a comprehensive overview of academic discourse on youth political involvement in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations. These nations were considered not only because a large quantity of academic literature is

dedicated to them but also because, despite being considered the cradles of modern democracy, some of these countries report some of the lowest indicators of youth political participation throughout the democratic world.

1.1 The importance of Citizen Participation

Political participation, meaning democratic engagement and its impact on processes and happenings in the struggle for how society should be constituted, is a multifaceted and contentious subject that can be viewed from various perspectives. Generally, the active engagement of politically aware individuals is widely recognised as a distinguishing feature of democratic citizenship (Verba et al., 1995). According to Verba and Nie (1972), the more society is involved in decision-making, the 'more' democracy there is.

This argument that citizen participation is vital to a smooth-running democracy is assumed from a popular conception of democracy. The primary tenet of the popular democracy theory is that a political system should encourage as many citizens as possible to participate in decision-making (Verba et al., 1995). Following this perspective, unless individuals participate in the debate on public policy and their choices shape political action, democratic procedures are meaningless. Moreover, without the people's political participation, democracy loses both its legitimacy and its guiding force (Barber, 1984).

On the other side of the spectrum, social scientists claim that citizens alone are ineffective actors and should therefore play a limited role in the political space and rely on expert representatives. This elitist conception of democracy would seem a bit old fashioned; however, the elitist debate on democracy is integral in determining whether Indian political elites support or discourage young people from being politically active citizens. Regardless, the popular idea of democracy is particularly relevant in contextualising the findings of this thesis because it presents a persuasive justification for why involvement is desired for all citizens – especially new generations of young people.

1.2 Problem: Lack of Youth Involvement

While many social scientists vouch for the active engagement of all citizens for a democracy to properly function, they are simultaneously witnessing the problem of low youth participation throughout the democratic world. Over the last decades, scholarly debates across democratic nations have focused on young people's political involvement, and many of these studies confirm that the younger generation is indeed less likely to vote in elections than their older counterparts (Marsh et al., 2007; Dalton, 2008; Farthing, 2010). Young

people's reluctance to vote is echoed in other formal political activities as well; Young individuals exhibit lower party identification and are less likely to join political parties or come in personal contact with politicians (Norris, 2003; Henn and Foard, 2012); young citizens are less likely to participate in traditional institutions such as labour unions and religious denominations (Putnam, 2001); lastly, some research even goes as far as accrediting adolescents with an insufficient degree of political knowledge compared to older individuals (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995). For some, this decline in youth engagement in mainstream politics is associated with the hypothesis of youth apathy. This view assumes that the youth are politically ignorant since numerous young individuals are disengaged from political activities, show low levels of political concern and are poorly represented at all levels of government.

1.3 Critique on the Political Apathy Theory

Although young people may be perceived as being less involved in political activities such as voting, campaigning or demonstrating than older generations, this should not be interpreted as political indifference (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995). On the contrary, the following section will discuss literature that will reveal that the younger generation is not 'dropping out' of politics; it is merely shifting to novel and divergent forms of political participation.

1.3.1 Methodological Flaws

Firstly, we must acknowledge that the definition of political participation is more complex than what can be measured using methodological designs offered by major international comparative studies (e.g., World Values Survey, European Social Survey, Barometer Survey). Scholars such as O'Toole et al., (2003), Marsh et al. (2007), and Henn et al., (2012) underline several issues with conventional (survey-based) political science. They criticised the field's methodological foundations for over-reliance on closed-ended questions in assessing youth political engagement and presuming that older individuals maintain similar views about politics as young people (O'Toole et al., 2003). They argue that this heavy reliance on quantitative approaches has undermined the importance of 'alternative' forms of political action and thus embraces only a narrow definition of political participation. According to them, it is necessary to employ qualitative and quantitative techniques, use a broad concept of political participation, explore youth-based definitions of politics, and

include new political repertoires outside of mainstream politics instead of simply charging the youth of apathy.

1.3.2 Alienation

Scholars have noted that, far from being apathetic, young people instead appear to be alienated from the political process and its actors and institutions (Henn et al., 2005; Marsh et al., 2007). According to this youth alienation perspective, young people's estrangement is attributed to a lack of credibility in political actors due to their unresponsiveness in keeping commitments and their insufficient prioritisation of young people's interests (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995; Henn et al. 2002). When the established institutions deny young people the chance to express their opinions, it prevents them from actively participating since they assume their government's institutions are not meeting their needs.

Additionally, some argue that one of the grounds for youth political disengagement is a lack of political awareness and understanding among young people (Henn and Foard, 2012). In this sense, it is widely assumed that young people are mainly oblivious of how the system and government function. Because of this inability to connect with information sources such as the media (Bennett, 1997) and political parties, young people seem unable to cultivate political awareness and promote political engagement (Campbell et al., 1960; Butler and Stokes, 1969). According to Verba et al. (1995), this alienation of large population segments from political decision-making could impair the democratic apparatus because these people's interests will not be accorded the same priority as politically active citizens. As a result, when a significant number of people lose their voice in political decision-making or lose their say in whoever gets to represent their political preferences, the democratic principles of society cannot be enhanced (Hague and Harrop, 2001). Someday, this could lead to total political exclusion, which occurs when individuals or groups are deliberately excluded from governance networks and decision-making processes (Bang, 2005).

1.3.3 Shifting Political Values

Conventional politics is recognising changes in the conceptualisation of political activity and accepting a broader repertoire of political acts. Stuart (2015) recognises three factors contributing to the shift in political participation methods. First, he notices that individuals are becoming more politically aware due to the emergence of new media. Now that citizens can effortlessly access news and opinions via online platforms, it allows for them to participate in political activities in new ways, such as internet involvement, consumer

boycotts, and petition signing, while still relying on established institutions such as political parties (Norris, 2001). Secondly, increased educational levels have produced more politically knowledgeable individuals who are more equipped to obtain and evaluate information and utilise it to achieve their political objectives. According to Dalton (2013), politically intelligent Citizens have more political understanding and expertise and are less reliant on political actors for advice and resources (Norris, 2001). Even if political parties do not mobilise them, they can nonetheless be politically engaged citizens, particularly in non-conventional political activity (Dalton, 2013). lastly, scholars are witnessing a breakdown of traditional political cleavages such as class, religion and race, which historically characterised party rivalry and bound voters to specific parties (Dalton, 2000). The decline of such 'identity politics' has been accompanied by rising individual autonomy and self-expression. Citizens are now understood to have an increased ability to express attitudes without being constrained by factors such as religion, class, race, gender, and so forth. In this context, as a result of changes in society and economy, including rising living standards and the expansion of education, individuals' concerns for materialist issues have decreased, causing them to be more concerned about 'postmaterialist' values (belonging, identity, and overall wellbeing) (Inglehart, 1990). This shift in ethics has brought new political concerns to the fore, like environmentalism, and given fresh fuel to social movements.

1.4 Conventional and Unconventional Political Participation

Because the repertoire of political engagement is extensive and occasionally overlaps, this research emphasises the distinction between conventional and unconventional forms of political involvement. This typology is relevant for this study because it enables an inquiry into diverse modalities of political activity to determine whether the youth are apathetic or if they have shifted to a broader range of cause-oriented political activities.

Conventional political participation or 'elite-directed participation' (Inglehart, 1990) can be defined as any political participation method accepted by the prevailing representative democracy and associated with institutionalised actions or behaviour authorised and influenced by politicians. Conventional political participation is thus essentially a matter of elites mobilising mass support through established organisations like political parties, labour unions, and religious institutions. It is commonly linked with conservative behaviours or activities rooted in the legal institutionalised framework, such as voting and electoral politics, and 'ordinary' activities such as informal political chat, party membership, and contacting

politicians (Barnes and Kaase, 1979). like many other academics, Barnes and Kaase (1979) feel that voting and other institutionalised actions should not be the only way to assess public political involvement. They argue that in order to influence political decisions, various modes of involvement, or so-called “unconventional” participation, such as demonstrations, riots, and civil disobedience, should be considered. These Non-institutionalised acts include the premise that they are not fundamentally rooted in the political system, that they are often directed against the system, and that they are at the very least intended to alter the status quo.

Considering that the general public has become wealthier, more educated and has shifted to more cause-oriented political activities, academic discourse has also observed this phenomenon. Over the last decades, numerous scholars acknowledge a broadening of political participation from a one-dimensional to multi-dimensional understanding. Electoral activity and passive participation, such as casting a vote and party membership, are the most common instances of one-dimensional understandings of political engagement. For example, Milbrath and Goel (1977) advocate this one-dimensional view. In their study, citizens are classified depending on involvement in conventional political activity, ranging from political activists to citizens who observe but do not participate in politics to indifferent citizens who do not participate or care about political issues. However, as educational levels rose, the individuals’ willingness to engage actively in more straightforward techniques of influencing political decision-makers, such as protest-oriented actions, increased. Therefore, broadening the definition of political engagement to include non-conventional approaches (two-dimensional) became more widely accepted. (Barnes and Kaase, 1979). The majority of contemporary research, however, suggests that political involvement is an even more complex phenomenon in which individuals participate in a variety of different forms of political participation with varied possible aims, disseminated over a broader range of mobilising agencies (Norris, 2001; Marsh et al., 2007; Dalton, 2013). Because it is more relevant and practical to youths, this multifaceted understanding of political involvement is more likely to reflect their patterns of political activity.

Having reviewed the empirical evidence in the existing literature concerning young people’s political participation in OECD countries, the next chapter moves on to establish Indian patterns of youth participation.

Chapter 2: Understanding and Explaining Youth Political Participation and Non-Participation in India

By analysing the National Election Survey data gathered by the Lokniti-Centre for the Study Developing Societies (CSDS) in 2014 and 2019, we may uncover specific trends in youth political participation that are exclusive to India. As a result, a more comprehensive model of participation will be developed, one that includes well-studied ‘Western’ phenomena but also incorporates those determinants that motivate young Indians to participate or not participate in the political process.

In order to set up this alternative framework, this chapter will be structured as follows; first, we will provide a broad overview of Indian politics so one will have a better understanding of the limitations of using National Election Survey Data. We will then highlight specific data from the National Election Survey of 2014 and 2019 to uncover the factors that incite political (dis-) engagement. Lastly, we will report some examples of subnational politics to construct a comprehensive overview of how Indian youths participate in Indian politics.

2.1 Complexities of Indian Politics

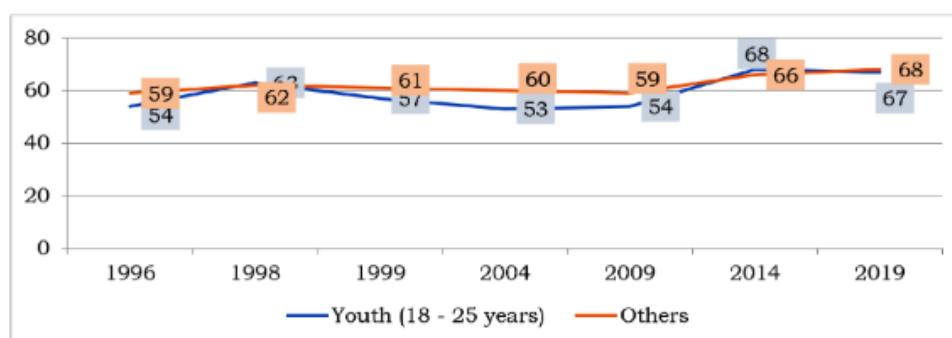
India’s federal political system originated from a fundamental political question central to Indian post-independence nation-building: how might democracy and ethnic diversity coexist? For Centre-state relations, in particular, the question of how democracy could flourish despite social diversities such as caste, religion, language and tribe was particularly important (Varshney, 2013). In the end, language and tribe became the cornerstones of the Indian federation as neither of these identities, unlike religious distinctiveness, was seen as posing existential threats to the Indian union (Varshney, 2013). However, India’s aspiration to accommodate to diversity in a multilevel constitutional space while maintaining a stable central government has encouraged a strong sense of regionalism. Recognising this phenomenon whereby people more strongly identify with their region than their nation is essential to comprehend the complexities of building an Indian framework of youth political participation. That is to say that, while studying youth politics as a pan-Indian phenomenon is possible, regional differences are inevitably concealed, making it impossible to create a comprehensive all-India model. In this line of thought, one must also consider that, for most Indian youths, national political parties and politicians are far removed from their

homes. Hence, different causes and actors will likely mobilise the youth to vote. For instance, when Indians cast their vote in the general elections, their vote is determined by whom they believe is the best candidate to execute union list subjects such as defence, foreign affairs, inter-state affairs, national resources and more. On the other hand, state governments are more likely to be selected based on factors that directly impact the quality of life of the state's citizens.

Regardless of these complexities, this chapter has nevertheless chosen to consider general patterns of youth political participation as 'typically Indian' or as an alternative to the patterns established in Chapter one.

Starting with the first general statement, India's youth turnout figures in the national elections show a somewhat convoluted trend: While there was a significant discrepancy in turnout between the youth and other age groups until the 2009 National elections, after the 2014 elections, the divide between the youth and other voters had narrowed significantly. Nonetheless, results from the 2019 national elections suggest that youth turnout decreased slightly again (Figure 1). However, in terms of alternative forms of political participation, research has indicated that the youth's involvement in these activities has always been higher than that of voters in older age groups (Kumar, 2014). With this in mind, this research will continue to examine the factors that have influenced India's youth's political participation in national politics and establish a framework of political participation employing the civic voluntarism model.

Figure 1: Voter turnout among youth and 'other' 1996- 2019 National Elections



Source: CSDS National election Surveys. The data is weighted according to the actual voter turnout. All figures are expressed as percentages.

2.2 Youth Participation in National Politics According to the Civic- Voluntarism Model

The civic voluntarism model, as proposed by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), is a model for explaining political participation that goes beyond the standard socioeconomic model (SES) to also include recourses, engagement, party identification, and recruitment as possible justifications for (non-) participation. While the SES places emphasis on the positive relationship between education, income and class and political participation, the civic voluntarism model complements this paradigm in various ways:

1. Resources: Recourses here do not only include educational and economic resources but also resources of time and civic skills. For example, individuals might be interested in politics but do not have the time, money, or skill to act on it.
2. Engagement: Borrowing from the rational choice model, citizens' sense of efficacy is crucial. People are more willing to engage in political activity if they believe their views and efforts will impact the outcome of decisions. An individual's sense of political information, political interest, and trust in the system are also factors that facilitate them to participate.
3. Party identification: The civic voluntarism paradigm highlights the necessity of party identification as this should encourage electoral engagement. On the other hand, disengagement from the party structure would provoke non-conventional political participation.
4. Recruitment: Recruitment is considered in terms of social networks in mobilising citizens' participation. Persons who have the requisite finances, motivation to engage, free time, and a strong sense of efficacy may nevertheless fail to engage if they are uninformed of the value of their participation or if no one has attempted to elicit their cooperation. In other words, other people's invitations to participate are a powerful motivator for individuals to join in the political domain.

Through these factors, this chapter will unravel what motivates Indians to engage in the political process or moves them to detach from politics altogether.

2.2.1 Socio-Economic Model

Voting behaviour and involvement in campaign-related activities are generally positively related to socio-economic factors such as education and economic class as these activities include potential costs in terms of time and money. However, in relation to this, the case of India witnesses a paradox; India sees substantially greater participation among the lower economic class, marginalised social groups, and the less educated.

While in other countries, the social upper class should lead voter outcome statistics, it is the Dalits (untouchables), Adivasis (tribal people), and other backward castes (OBCs) who are more likely to be frequent voters in Indian elections. Indeed, in the 2019 national election, voter turnout declined among all the categories of youth, with the exception of youth belonging to scheduled castes and poor classes (Attri & Mishra, 2020). One must bear in mind, though, that while these marginalised people seem to vote more regularly, they are less likely to participate in other types of electoral activities due to a lack of resources such as time, money or civic skills.

Similarly, we also notice a discrepancy relating to education (Table 1). Even while highly educated adolescents are more likely to participate in election campaign activities, they are less likely to vote in elections than those who are less educated. Furthermore, when the variable of locality is added to the issue of education and electoral engagement, more inconsistencies arise. Rural respondents, for instance, are more likely to participate in election-related activities if they have received some form of formal schooling, but this is not the case for their urban counterparts. On the contrary, urban illiterates are most engaged while the urban, college-educated adolescents are the least engaged of the entire demographic. As a result, the participation gap between college-educated youth in rural and urban regions is the widest.

Table 1: Turnout among Youth Belonging to Various Social Demographics, National Elections 2019 vs. 2014

	Turnout 2019 (%)		Turnout 2014 (%)	
	Youth	Other	Youth	Other
Caste and communities				
Upper Caste	66	69	73	67
Other Backward Classes	69	71	69	69
Scheduled Caste	72	69	68	68
Scheduled Tribe	73	75	81	70
Muslim	58	61	60	58
Other religious minorities	56	61	58	60
Level of education				
Non-literate	63	65	70	65
Up to primary education	64	71	75	71
Up to matric education	69	69	63	67
College and above education	67	69	69	64
Locality				
Rural	67	70	71	69
Urban	66	64	62	62
Economic class				
Poor	68	67	61	60
Lower	66	67	71	67
Middle	67	71	67	69
Upper	68	69	72	67

Source: The data from the CSDS National election Surveys 2014 and 2019 was used to calculate turnout for various socio demographic categories. The data is weighted according to the actual voter turnout. All figures are expressed as percentages.

Contrary to common belief, youth from urban areas are virtually as engaged or indifferent as youths from rural areas. In fact, more than half of youngsters residing in major cities (53%) expressed no interest in politics at all, while rural youths expressed slightly less disinterest in politics (45%). Usually, the correlation between the impact of urbanisation and the level of political awareness generates a divergent trend of political participation than what is to be witnessed in India. Namely, due to industrialisation and urbanisation, youth receive higher education and more often discuss political and social issues with their peers and family. One could thus say that urbanisation increases the amount of political communication, which leads to greater awareness of social and political demands. In the case of India, not only has this been disproved, but the opposite of the trend has been observed. Paradoxically, Youths who participate in election-related activities are particularly active among the rural upper class, while the urban upper class shows the lowest degree of electoral involvement.

Furthermore, low political engagement has been documented in political activities in metropolitan regions, such as voting, campaigning, and demonstrating (18%), while rural youth show higher participation by a significant margin (27%). The perplexing image created by locality could be explained through the classical studies of Wirth. His study suggested that the urban context of living generates isolation, estrangement, individuality, and a refusal to accept social standards (Wirth, 1938). As a result, the urban individual will instead participate in politics when it suits him or her. In other words, this individual would not likely act out of a sense of duty or solidarity with one's community.

Lastly, we should not leave out gender as a variable that could influence political participation. In a 'Western' context, women are less likely to consider running for office or engaging in other political activities, according to the extensive literature on gender variations in political participation (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019). In India, despite women being educated and urbanized, political participation is significantly lower amongst young women compared to young men (Kumar, 2014). Women's low political awareness and engagement could be explained through deeply rooted societal norms interwoven in Indian politics, as women in politics are widely perceived as inappropriate and undesirable. Also, among the youth, this gender-biased view is pertinent. While young people have a modestly liberal attitude regarding women pursuing higher education and obtaining leadership positions, men also show considerable opposition to women achieving equality with men (Lokniti, 2017).

2.2.2 Resources

Because resources are distributed differently to groups with various requirements and desires, focusing on this factor provides a comprehensive and theoretically compelling explanation for differences in the extent to which people participate in politics. Not only do specific recourses vary per social group, but the significance of resources also varies depending on the participatory act: Donations to political causes, for example, obviously necessitate money. Campaign labour and voting take time. Furthermore, organisational and communication skills (civic skills) are needed to make political participation less complicated (Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2018).

People participate in various political activities, spanning from attending election meetings to personally supporting candidates to boycotting certain events or products. Often these types of engagement are election-specific and hence constrained by time. However,

there are also non-electoral kinds of engagement that do not always take place during campaign seasons, such as public protests and demonstrations. These events are regarded as essential political activities because they usually express opposition/favour of government policy or demand that the government intervene in a particular situation. In the last few years, India specifically saw an increase in student demonstrations as a manner of political participation outside mainstream political parties.

According to the 2017 Lokniti survey, not all classes participate in this type of political activity. Their findings demonstrate that this extra-electoral participation appears to be somewhat elitist. The wealthiest in rural regions and the middle classes in urban areas are found to be more engaged, which may have to do with the potential cost of participation, sociocultural variables, and associational activity. For example, the working class and those concentrated in the economy's informal sector show little engagement in formal associational activity. While farmer unions do exist in this sector, there are very few that operate for the margins of agricultural society. In addition, most people in these informal professions work for a daily wage. As a result, political activity has a high cost since it directly loses revenue. On the other hand, protest involvement among professionals, government officials, and skilled workers are relatively high because they have enough resources due to their relative economic well-being. Furthermore, these occupational classes have more powerful collective bodies.

In terms of voter turnout, we see the opposite happening. In this case, economically or socially marginalised people are most politically active. This has to do with voting being free of cost and not very time-consuming. When we move to other types of conventional political participation that are higher in cost, such as donating to a campaign, or take more time, like campaigning itself, youths who are affluent are more likely to participate in such activities.

2.2.3 Engagement

Political efficacy, or the belief that one's vote could make a difference, has been proven to be positively linked to political participation. Internal, external, and collective efficacy have been identified in academic literature as three unique types of efficacy: Internal political efficacy is the belief that one comprehends political matters and is able to participate effectively in political situations; external political efficacy is the belief that politicians and political institutions are responsive to citizens' demands (trust in government); and lastly,

collective political efficacy is the belief that one's community is able to affect political situations (Barrett & Pachi, 2019).

2.2.3.1 Internal Efficacy

Political awareness, or understanding of, and interest in current events and concerns, determines individuals' attitudes and whether they actively engage in a democracy. Individuals in a democracy ought to have a basic grasp of the political system through which they express their views and elect representatives since knowledge is required for effective political participation. Citizens who are not aware of what is happening around them inevitably become non-participatory citizens. A well-informed public is thus the 'backbone' of every democracy (Kumar, 2014).

Results from Wave 6 of the World Values Survey, conducted in 2012, shows that more than half of the Indian youth (51,5%) express little to no interest in politics (Table 2). Results from the 2017 Lokniti survey already display a steady increase in political interest. This study indicates that 46% of Indian youth have no interest in politics. Overall, political interest levels are still lacking, but India's youth has undoubtedly become more politically aware within a short time.

Table 2: Interest in Politics (2012).

V84.- How interested would you say you are in politics?

	TOTAL	Sex			Age				
		Male	Female	Missing Unknown	Up to 29	30-49	50 and more	No answer	Don't know
Very interested	9.1	12.1	5.2	33.3	11.0	9.0	7.7	-	7.7
Somewhat interested	27.8	33.4	20.8	-	32.1	27.8	24.4	25.0	19.2
Not very interested	23.8	24.9	22.5	-	23.9	24.7	22.3	-	26.9
Not at all interested	33.0	25.5	42.6	66.7	27.6	33.3	36.9	75.0	34.6
Don't know	6.3	4.2	8.9	-	5.5	5.2	8.7	-	11.5
(N)	(4,078)	(2,290)	(1,785)	(3)	(968)	(1,951)	(1,129)	(4)	(26)

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2012). The data is weighted according to the actual survey findings. All figures are expressed as percentages

When studying youth, it appears that the significance of studying the impact of media cannot be overstated. Exposure to the media increases people's knowledge about current events; hence, it also improves their interest in politics, opinions on election changes, and support for young political leaders (Kumar, 2014). The relevance of media exposure derives

from the fact that it has an immediate, rather than a gradual, influence on people. Comparing those who were not exposed to media and those with minimal media exposure, the abrupt increase in the percentage of respondents conscious and interested in political events is unmatched and much beyond the influence of socio-economic factors such as education and urbanisation. Considering that earlier surveys have already pointed out the youth's higher exposure to traditional media (WVS survey, 2012: V217, V219, V221) and that daily social media exposure among youth has been steadily increasing since 2014 (Lokniti, 2017: 89), we could say the new generation is more politically knowledgeable than their elders.

Apart from media influence, Socio-economic and sociodemographic factors primarily determine interest and awareness levels among the youth. For example, interest in politics seems to be positively related to education, as college-educated youth (56%) are more likely than non-literate youth to be interested in politics (25%). However, while schooling appears to increase political interest, the respondent's economic status or social class regulates the effect. In other words, as one advances through the educational system, one's interest in politics rises. However, when comparing respondents of the same educational level, upper-class individuals claim to have a significantly greater interest in politics than poor respondents. Overall, the study found that only around a quarter (26%) of youths from low-income homes were interested in politics, compared to 37 per cent of youngsters from upper-income families. However, as indicated in section 2.2.2, interest does not always translate to actual participation if one does not have the needed recourses.

2.2.3.2 External Efficacy

The 2017 Lokniti survey did not reveal much about the level of trust Indian youth have in their government. However, we can get a glimpse of the external efficacy of Indian youth by analysing the results from Wave 6 of the World Values Survey, conducted over ten years ago. Therefore, we must remember that this survey was conducted when another party ruled India. For this reason, more recent survey data could portray a whole different picture. Nevertheless, results from this database show that youth up to 29 years of age are relatively more trusting of the government than their elders (Table 3). On a more negative note, we can also see that a slight majority of youths do not trust their government.

Table 3: Trust in Government (2012)

V115.- I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?: The government (in your nation's capital)

	TOTAL	Sex			Age				
		Male	Female	Missing Unknown	Up to 29	30-49	50 and more	No answer	Don't know
A great deal	19.2	19.6	18.7	33.3	19.6	18.8	19.5	50.0	15.4
Quite a lot	26.5	27.7	25.0	33.3	29.9	27.1	23.1	-	11.5
Not very much	29.5	30.2	28.7	-	28.9	29.9	28.9	25.0	50.0
None at all	15.5	16.7	14.0	-	15.2	15.6	15.8	25.0	3.8
Don't know	9.2	5.9	13.6	33.3	6.4	8.5	12.8	-	19.2
(N)	(4,078)	(2,290)	(1,785)	(3)	(968)	(1,951)	(1,129)	(4)	(26)

Source: World Values Survey Wave 6 (2012). The data is weighted according to the actual survey findings. All figures are expressed as percentages

2.2.4 Party Identification

Party preference, or partisanship, is a strong indicator of how the youth involve themselves in conventional political activities (see 1.2). Even though the 2017 survey showed that a sizeable percentage of young people do not support any political party, this lack of party identification should not be regarded as indifference toward politics in general. Instead, despite their strong interest in politics, some young people may not see themselves as loyal to one political party and switch parties depending on their preferences during elections.

Overall, party identification was demonstrated to be higher in rural provinces where only 43 per cent of youngsters are politically unaligned. India's current ruling political party, the BJP, received support from rural and urban areas, but its core constituency mainly consists of the urban upper class and other scheduled castes. The National Congress party primarily amasses votes from the middle- and lower castes and other marginalised youths such as Adivasis and Muslims. According to a community-level examination of party preferences, the 2017 survey found that partisanship is substantially greater among Muslims and Sikhs. This could indicate that these religious minorities would rather vote for religion-based political parties to secure their position in political affairs.

Overall, strong partisanship is thought to be negatively related to unconventional political actions. This has to do with the conviction that strong party affiliation represents a person's overall integration into the established democratic system, mostly encouraging traditional forms of participation (Finkel, 1991). However, this is not all the way accurate in the case of India since the ruling political party of India (BJP) has a history of provoking demonstrations and boycotts (McGuire & Reeves, 2003).

2.2.5 Recruitment

Individuals typically become politically engaged spontaneously when they are passionate about political topics related to their own values and concerns or matters that incite a feeling of civic duty. However, more frequently, individuals become active via recruitment directly by others or via social media (Brady, Schlozman & Verba, 2018).

2.2.5.1 Mobilization Through Others

Many believe that the youth represent an autonomous political constituency that votes outside caste boundaries; therefore, political parties and administrations attempt to entice this demographic with specific policies and programs that represent their concerns. The Election Commission of India has taken on this challenge to raise youth voter turnout through a massive mobilisation campaign. It has done so with considerable success: The 2017 survey demonstrated a four-point decrease in non-voters and a nine-point increase in those who indicated to have voted in every election compared to the 2007 Youth Survey. According to the statistics, youth voting engagement has thus overall increased, with a significant share of the youths voting regularly. However, involvement in other conventional forms of political participation remains substantially lower. Only around one-fifth of the young attend electoral gatherings or demonstrations, and around a tenth of respondents (9%) have done door-to-door canvassing or leaflet and poster distribution (8%). It is worth mentioning that more than three-quarters (75%) of the youngsters have never engaged in any of these activities.

A sizeable fraction of the youth is involved in unconventional political activities through associational activity. Participation in student unions is nearly on par with mainstream political bodies; more than a quarter of the respondents (26%) claimed they had attended events organised by a student organisation. Farmer organisations (23%) and labour unions (20%) also display high levels of youth engagement. The Lokniti study also demonstrated that associational engagement leads to high participation in protests and demonstrations. More than a quarter of the youth who participated in protests or demonstrations were linked to either a political party, trade union, student association or farmer organisation. In contrast, only 7 per cent of individuals who had no associational engagement had participated in a demonstration.

2.2.5.2 Mobilisation Through Media

Although media exposure has a favourable effect on electoral engagement across classes, its effects are significantly smaller than its impact on political interest. Moreover, media exposure slightly affects political mobilisation or engagement across social classes and educational levels.

2.2.6 Outside the Civic Voluntarism Mode: Shift in political values?

In the previous chapter, it was indicated by some scholars that the youth's disengagement from politics was, among other factors, due to the breakdown of traditional political cleavages such as class, religion and race (Dalton, 2000). The thawing of these political divides and the emergence of liberal values supposedly caused youth to become fragmented, individualistic and disenfranchised, leading to a shift in political engagement. In India, while the youths have welcomed modern goods and adapted to new forms of entertainment and consumer commodities, their modes of thinking have not changed accordingly. In terms of political ideas, the study observed a slight incline towards a conservative stance on political issues.

However, despite the re-emergence of conservative values, traditional political cleavages such as class, religion, and caste have weakened in the last decades. Nevertheless, in the contemporary period, Indian political parties have orchestrated divisions based on such identities through institutionalised identity politics. The remaining significance of such identities is in stark contrast to their disappearance in the western hemisphere and could help explain Indian youth's relatively high voter turnout: Duty-based norms of citizenship, encouraged by social- and religious communities, stimulate electoral participation. Furthermore, these norms stay within the confines of traditional politics and therefore do not encourage a broader repertoire of political participation (Dalton, 2008).

2.3 Youth Participation in Subnational politics

Now that we know the driving factors behind youth political participation in India's national politics, we can compare these findings to the Keralan situation and examine whether Kerala follows similar patterns. However, before this can be done, we must first understand Indian subnational politics to fully grasp the intricacies one must consider when researching an Indian state.

2.3.1 State politics

The federal union of India is comprised of twenty-eight states and eight union territories, each with its own administrative divisions, taxes and state legislature. In the context of India's economic reforms, the 1990s saw the increased salience of state-level politics when greater financial autonomy generated greater administrative autonomy (Harris, 1999). Still, as Indian states function within a federal democratic framework outlined in the Indian constitution, they are never fully autonomous. Nevertheless, differences in the democratic functioning and organizational structure of Indian states have led to significant 'regime' variations across the Indian subcontinent (Harris, 1999). In turn, the nature and extent of political mobilization and civil participation may vary from state to state. Other factors such as ideology, governance, structure, and stability further determine citizens' political participation. For example, by identifying different regime types based on the balance of caste/class power and the implementation of poverty reduction policies in India, Harris (2003) demonstrated that well-organized, left-of-centre parties such as Kerala and West Bengal experience much greater political participation in all classes/castes as supposed to populist regimes. Another positive influence on citizen participation is the extent to which a state is governed by a political party that advocates the state's ideology. The BJP in many northern Indian states and the CPI(M) in Kerala, for instance, are powerful national parties on their own but flourish in states where they have developed distinctive localized expressions of their ideology (Harris, 1999).

2.3.2 Local Politics

Subnational Politics in India, thus, vary from state to state depending on party structure, ideology and level of citizen participation in politics. Within the state, we find another level of political administration, namely the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). In creating these institutions, the 73rd/74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 endowed municipalities with a certain level of self-governance and the authority to pursue social justice and economic advancement locally (Jha, 2022). Panchayati Raj institutions represent India's attempt at direct democracy at the grassroots and are believed to increase local public participation in the planning and implementation of developmental programmes (Lakshmi, 2016). However, youth participation in local governance is still not happening to the desired extent (Gireesan, 2017). For example, in Haryana, they are concerned about the reintegration

of youth clubs into local politics to ensure active participation of youth from all layers of society (PRIA, 2007), and in Himachal Pradesh, where there also is little interaction between youth and local government, education and awareness campaigns were launched to increase political knowledge (Gireesan, 2017).

2.3.3 College Politics

India has had a rich and turbulent history of student activism since the struggle for independence. Currently, college students have the opportunity to impact both local and global concerns via the civic engagement initiatives that colleges and universities have taken up through academic and extracurricular activities. In studying the various manifestations of student politics, Klemenčič and Park (2018) distinguish between activism and representation as two distinct yet complementary tasks. The first relates to students coming together to form representative student organizations, like student governments, graduate student unions, student organizations with political affiliations, or other student pressure groups. Activism here refers to behaviours of student collective action through various political engagements, whereby students take action in favour of or against a particular cause. As reported by students, getting involved in politics at this age helps them succeed in this field, notably since several Indian politicians have emerged out of student politics. According to another perspective, however, those with opposing opinions condemn student politics for taking hostage of educational institutions (Bagchi, 2019). Nevertheless, student politics give the Indian youth a sense, albeit false sense, of political agency.

Chapter 3: Understanding and Explaining Youth Political Participation and Non-Participation in Kerala

Specific circumstances and resources determine how young people become politically (in-)active citizens. According to the civic voluntarism model, the influence of one's socio-economic situation, the pertinence of political knowledge and the reliance on the interactive process of political mobilisation provide valuable answers that elucidate youth political participation (Schlozman, Brady & Verba, 2018). These considerations help to account for the many contextual factors of political involvement. Continuing this line of thought, this thesis will investigate how specific contextual elements may affect Keralan youngsters' ability to manoeuvre within their state and engage in politics.

3.1 Kerala's youth vote in the Indian National Elections of 2019

Kerala's state politics are usually characterised by the competition between the Left Democratic Front (LDF, led by Communist Party India (Marxist) (CPI(m)) and the United Democratic Front (UDF, led by Indian National Congress (INC)). In the National Elections, however, the LDF and the UDF also need to overcome challenges posed by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Historically, since the LDF has never been a strong contender in national politics, the UDF has often won the majority of the electoral verdicts in Kerala. Especially in the 2019 National elections, the tri-polar competition between the LDF, UDF, and NDA led to a massive victory for the UDF as Keralans considered the UDF to pose the biggest threat to the NDA at the centre.

While the NDA eventually maintained its position in Delhi, Kerala's alleged antipathy towards identity politics refrained Hindu-nationalist ideology from establishing a foothold in Keralan politics (Shastri et al., 2021). Even the youth, who were expected to initiate the rise of the NDA in Kerala (Goutham, 2021), did not manage to secure a single seat.

The extent of this massive defeat came as somewhat of a surprise since the BJP anticipated a favourable political climate following the Sabarimala temple controversy (Shastri et al., 2021). Indeed, while the CSDS post-poll National election survey indicated that people held strong opinions regarding the dispute, Sabarimala was found not to be an electoral issue (Sardesai, 2021). Instead, many young voters believed that the issue distracted from 'real' political issues such as development, women's rights and government performance (The Quint, 2019).

This precedence of political issues over religion is not uncommon in Kerala politics. Former Congress leader Rahul Gandhi even came under fire when he praised Kerala voters for being "interested in issues" as opposed to the northern electorate (Express News Service, 2021). Sanjose A. Thomas, associate professor of sociology at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, also noticed Kerala's tendency to prioritise issues over religion, specifically for the youth voters, as he stated that "Religion as a social institution has not seriously influenced the political preference of youngsters in Kerala." (Trujillo, 2019).

Thus, in National politics, identity politics don't influence political affiliation to a great extent, and it seems that the youth vote is mainly based on how political parties and politicians address political matters. In the next section, we will zero in on Kerala's state and

local politics to better understand what other contextual factors might influence young people to engage in political activities.

3.2 Kerala's Historical Political Context

Like other parts of India, Kerala presented a grim picture of social and religious life at the close of the nineteenth century. However, while the rest of the country held on to its communal traditions, Kerala experienced a tremendous social revolution. As a result, Kerala's social and political climate was eager to be transformed by a new, revitalising spirit of renaissance (Kumar, 2017). This sentiment spearheaded a silent revolution from below, which resulted in the formation of a host of social, political, economic, and intellectual institutions, all of which were progressive in orientation (Williams, 2018). Based on the state's socialist principles, communist hegemony gradually developed during the 1930s and communist influence on the idea of development as a vital agent for economic growth, social welfare, and fiscal redistribution— soon became integral to Kerala's subnational identity pre-independence.

Combined with a spirit of Nehruvian developmentalism, Kerala's left politics flourished in the decades after independence, successfully steering towards a developmental state by attending to public desires for healthcare, land reform, housing, education, and increased wages (Devika, 2016). Leftist parties, led by the Communist Party, effectively brought together several disenfranchised groups and applied pressure on the government for welfare resources (Devika, 2016). However, by the end of the 1980s, the 'Kerala Model' appeared to have reached its limits, with the state facing major economic problems. Additionally, Gulf migration during the 1970s had created pockets of prosperity and averted a full-fledged financial crisis. Nevertheless, it also brought new challenges; economic inequality, brought by consumer disparities, realised a profound shift in Kerala's sense of modernity (Devika, 2016).

3.2.1 Decentralisation

In 1991, the LDF launched a series of novel initiatives to revive the 'Kerala Model' of modernity, including a literacy campaign and initiating a democratic decentralisation process (Kumar, 2017). All of this was part of a broader programme to prepare citizens to participate in municipalities and grassroots economic initiatives. The above reflected a strong commitment to engage and educate the underprivileged and mobilise the middle class to

contribute their time and labour to the democratic process (Williams, 2018). As an ultimate project to strengthen Kerala's democracy, the Peoples Planning Campaign (PPC) was launched in August 1996. It was praised as a one-of-a-kind initiative to include citizens in developmental projects as it eventually ushered in a fundamental transformation in the relationship between politics and civil society. As a result, civil society mobilisation shifted from redistributive protest politics to generative politics that expanded democratic operations (Williams, 2018). The PPC has generally been viewed as a benchmark in deepening democracy through local governance and administration to minimise the negative impact of globalisation and liberalisation (Devika, 2016).

3.2.2 Communism Now

Kerala currently has a social and economic mobility level that is unheard of in the rest of India. Many aspects of Kerala's social, political, and economic context today are the result of a solid Communist influence on the state, which can be traced back to anti-caste and religious reform movements in the late nineteenth century (Kumar, 2017). Recent analyses of Kerala politics have concluded that it is this communist sentiment that gave the poor majority a sense of dignity and raised their political awareness to such a high level that it is assumed they would never submit to oppression (Ratcliffe, 1978).

3.3 Youth Participation in Kerala Politics According to the Civic- Voluntarism Model

An analysis of the historical context shows that Kerala's experience differs from that of the rest of India not because of a single factor but because of a particular set of mutually supporting and reinforcing factors. In The following sections, we will again explore these factors through the civic voluntarism model.

3.3.1 Socio-Economic Model

We will focus on five indicators of socio-economic/ socio-demographic status in this section. Namely: Education, Income (and occupation), Locality, and Communalism (social class and religion), and Gender.

3.3.1.1 Education

Higher education makes citizens more politically aware, positively affecting political participation levels (Dalton, 2013). In some OECD countries, however, younger generations are said to have gained enough knowledge to transcend beyond the realm of traditional politics to become more actively involved in unconventional forms of political actions. In

Kerala, the most literate state in the Indian union (Census of India, 2011), such trends are not yet ascertainable. While Keralan youth do not shy away from political activism, whether, in the public sphere or online, it seems that a shift to unconventional forms of political participation has not taken place yet. Instead, Kerala's high literacy rate, resulting from policy decisions that oriented educational inputs toward the poor majority rather than the elite, proved integral to the dissemination of information within its society (Brush, 2011). Moreover, Mass education has contributed to the political inclusion of those who would have historically been 'left out,' and has also assisted in elevating political consciousness and promoting citizen participation in decentralisation efforts through written communication (Ratcliffe, 1978; Ramachandran, 1997). Thus, as educational levels have risen, Kerala's youth have become politically knowledgeable and are therefore highly invested in politics.

3.3.1.2 Income/Occupation:

As another perk of the "Kerala model" of development, the economy of Kerala is the 9th largest in India (Kerala budget analysis, 2022). Following decades of stagnation, per capita income growth began to pick up in the late 1980s. Since then, Kerala's economy has seen a structural transition, with agriculture-related industries falling from almost 60 per cent of net state domestic product in 1960/61 to 8.5 per cent in 2009/10 (Williams, 2018: 256). However positive this may sound, service sector growth has resulted in high-income inequality: While some are involved in low-wage traditional services like tourism, commerce, transportation, and construction, others participate in the high-wage technology-driven tertiary sector (Williams, 2018: page 256). This high-income inequality could render low-income youth less actively involved in politics as they do not have sufficient resources to participate. However, if we consider Kerala's high education levels, we must assume that low-income youth will have sufficient knowledge and will nevertheless be able to participate in the electoral process. On the other hand, as evidenced in several OECD countries, high income in conjunction with high educational levels could lead to a rise in political activism.

Currently, the biggest issue surrounding the youth's economic status is high educated unemployment (Kuttapan, 2021). The high levels of unemployment are either voluntarily caused by the youth's higher educational aspirations or, to some extent, as the result of an excess supply of better educated in the labour market relative to the demand for that type of

trade (Kuttapan, 2021). Out of discontent, youth take to the streets en masse to protest the state government's ineptitude in improving the situation (The New Indian Express, 2021).

3.2.1.3 Locality:

Urbanisation leads to better access to education and economic opportunities, which improves one's resources in terms of money and knowledge. It is also assumed that there is more political activity in urban areas because of greater social interaction with more people (Verba et al. 1995). On the other hand, urbanisation could possibly lead to individualisation, thereby weakening social affiliation (Wirth, 1938). In this regard, the youth choose to act upon their interests instead of a community's concerns. In India, however, we witnessed a convoluted trend; as decentralisation policies encouraged rural participation in grassroots governance, and communal considerations continue to be a powerful source of mobilisation in urban communities, political participation is stimulated in both rural and urban contexts.

In a Keralan context, the concept of locality is even more complex as numerous historical processes have resulted in an emerging spatial form that is neither rural nor urban. Data from the 2011 census of India affirms Kerala's 'semi-urban' (Sreekumar, 1990; 1987) situation as it demonstrates that the state's population is approximately evenly split between rural and urban areas. This phenomenon is primarily explained by a rise in so-called 'census towns', which are areas that are not legally designated as towns but have urban features and a population of more than 5,000 people (census of India, 2011). Regarding state politics, Kerala's 'semi-urban-ness' provides the youth with easy access to wealth and education, while solid communal bonds equally promote civil and, thus, political participation. In the context of local (rural) politics, young Keralites display elevated awareness of political issues and high political participation at the grassroots. For example, according to a survey conducted in several Gram Panchayats, almost three-quarters of the youths (72.4%) indicated that they often visit the Gram Panchayat office (Sarumathy et al. 2012). While it must be noted that only half of them (44.62 %) participate in Grama Sabha meetings, new positive trends related to involvement in local politics are emerging. According to Prof. G, Gopakumar, former Vice-Chancellor of the Central University of Kerala, the youth have come to understand that national and state political parties should not be actively involved in local issues; instead, issues at the panchayat level call for unconventional non-political movements that are approachable and familiar to the average person (Shaju, 2020). Consequently, the youth's involvement in rural politics through 'non-political' movements not

only brings politics closer to the people of the Panchayat, but it will also prove fruitful for the youth volunteers themselves as they will inevitably become more politically aware.

3.3.1.4 Communal:

As youth in OECD countries are less likely to be bound to a specific social or religious group, many have moved beyond communal politics and would instead vote for single-issue parties or be involved in single-issue movements (Putnam, 2001; Zukin et al., 2006; Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Sloam, 2007; Norris, 2007). Moreover, youths who do not have a strong party identification are more likely to be 'floating voters' and therefore less likely to be mobilised through their respective communities. In contrast, many young Indians still strongly identify with their religious/caste identity. These youths are more closely linked in communal activity and will be more likely to be mobilised through their community as their political efforts could benefit their respective communities (Josukutty, 2019).

Kerala society flourished as a regionalised community of culture in a manner similar to other parts of India on the grounds of the Hindu Brahman religion (Kumar, 2017). As a pan-Indian phenomenon, Kerala society is (was) heavily influenced by the caste system and its related perils. The caste system established a hierarchical order by dividing society into several categories, all of which were immobile. Caste regulations thus determined the standing of an individual in society; The lower castes experienced constant social and economic impediments, whilst the upper castes enjoyed numerous socio-economic advantages.

Around the turn of the 20th century, various struggles and reforms among the marginalised castes aided the emergence of social reform movements. These reform efforts occurred in the context of structural socio-economic changes: the improvement of education under British supervision resulted in the formation of a new middle class. Moreover, substantial changes in the governmental and economic structure and profound land reforms also contributed to the uplift of backward communities (Kumar, 2017). Because social practices and religious beliefs were inextricably intertwined, religious reformers in Kerala realised that this social transformation would bring about religious reforms. Indeed, the fact that Keralans are the least likely to vote based on identity politics (caste or religion) indicates how much social reform movements and communist influences have moulded political affinities (Singh, 2016). New evidence from the Kerala bypoll (2022) also ruled in favour of

maintaining the delicate balance among various communal groups and organisations and facilitating cooperation through institutionalised mechanisms capable of accommodating differences and settling disputes (Mathew, 2022). However, inter-religious political engagement seems to decline in recent years as religiously polarising narratives manifest themselves in political speech and ideology. In other words, although secularism used to be aspired to, everything to do with religion now takes more public concern (Latha, 2016).

Furthermore, Kerala inherited an extremely differentiated, as well as a distinct demographic composition: Kerala has one of the lowest percentages of Hindus among Indian states in terms of population. Muslim (26.6%) and Christian (18.4%) minorities together account for almost half of the population (Census India, 2011). Politically speaking, because the state is experiencing only little sectarianism, Muslims, and other religious minorities, have exhibited more unanimity than in the rest of India (Nossiter, 1982).

3.3.1.5 Gender:

The southern region of India appears to be relatively less patriarchal, according to the 2017 Lokniti poll on youth behaviour. Distinct kinship structures and high educational attainment may have significantly reduced this region's propensity for patriarchal attitudes. In Kerala, in particular, the communist government's successful mobilization of the masses at the grassroots level improved women's sense of agency in society (Williams et al., 2011) which is notably demonstrated by the high proportion of women among elected Panchayat members under 30 (Sarumathy et al., 2012).

Furthermore, in 1998, the CPI (M) launched the Kudumbashree programme to empower women. This Poverty Eradication Mission operates through groups of women that seek to improve their members' economic circumstances and encourage participatory citizenship by interacting with local governments (Williams et al., 2011). Kerala has thus made great strides in increasing female participation, yet despite this, gender discrimination and traditional gender roles are still pervasive within the state. Even though Kudumbashree is undoubtedly creating spaces where women can become more involved, the extent to which women actively participate in local administration is influenced by existing gender standards of "appropriate" behaviour (Williams et al., 2011). moreover, women's participation in Kerala's legislative, judicial, and administrative sectors, although higher than in other Indian states, is still considerably lower than that of men (Gopal & Padmakumar, 2021).

3.3.2 Resources

It can be assumed that most OECD youths have sufficient time, money, and civic skills to participate in politics actively. While heightened levels of wealth and civic skills could lead youth to seek alternative ways of political participation, resources remain a powerful tool for explaining participation. In India, for instance, youth who have received primary education and have stable incomes are most likely to be involved in political participation, while those who rely on unschooled, low-wage labour do not have the time, money nor civic skills to move beyond the realm of electoral activities (Kumar, 2014).

In Kerala, high-quality, accessible education joins forces with communal interest groups to create high civic awareness and skills. Concurrently, moderately high incomes from service sector occupations result in Keralan youth having more time and money to commit to conventional and unconventional activities. Nevertheless, the problem of educated unemployment throws a spanner in the works: Keralan youths who are still in school are limited by *time*, but once their education is finished, unemployment will leave them constrained by *money*. The only constant resource for Keralan youth is *civic skills*. These skills are attained through easy accessibility of public education and frequent interaction with local governance through the Panchayati Raj system. Consequently, many Keralite youths with sufficient civic skills and time to spare jointly take to the streets to protest against unemployment (The New Indian Express, 2021).

3.3.3 Engagement

When it comes to psychological factors of political participation- that is, political knowledge, interest, and efficacy- youth from OECD democracies and the Indian subcontinent are influenced in similar ways. In both contexts, political knowledge is solicited by education and information accessibility. The former significantly positively impacts participation in community-based projects, contacting public authorities, and registering to vote. The latter providing access to information through newspapers, radio, television, mobile phones, brochures, and posters are examples of formal communication channels via which the youth can obtain information on government programmes, rights and responsibilities (Samanta & Nayak, 2012).

For electoral participation, the correlation between political knowledge and political participation has been confirmed (Barret & Pachi, 2019), but it has not yet been established

for other forms of political behaviour. Specifically, a more complex pattern occurs when various forms of political and civic participation are considered. For instance, students with poor political understanding were more likely to participate in unconventional political actions like illegal protests (Barret & Pachi, 2019). Although elite challenging activities are to be expected with low political knowledge, an analysis of Keralan society indicates that those who are aware of their political surroundings express their opinion through elite-challenging political activism as well. In the Keralan case, citizens trust that the state will handle their concerns carefully and expect issues to be dealt with appropriately (Brush, 2011). In other words, the population sees the state as a reliable institution that has successfully played its role as a provider of social services. Alternatively, in some contexts, individuals with higher levels of institutional trust are more likely to vote and less likely to engage in non-traditional political activities such as mass protests and petition signing. This could be explained in the sense that people with high levels of institutional trust may not feel compelled to act outside of traditional channels since they trust political authorities to be responsive to citizen demands (Barret & Pachi, 2019).

In Kerala's local body politics, youths display slightly 'above average' knowledge on aspects like youth association in panchayat functioning, poverty alleviation programmes, functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions and dispute settlement processes (Sarumathy et al. 2012). The above-average score is likely the result of Kerala's high educational standard and high exposure to decentralized political institutions. Concerning external efficacy, young Keralan citizens perform even better as almost all youngsters have favourable attitudes towards the Panchayati Raj (96%) and believe that the Gram Panchayat is the nearest to the people and meets local needs (Sarumathy et al. 2012). Furthermore, the interest in contesting in local elections also reflects the youth's knowledge of local elections and positive attitude towards local governance.

3.2.4 Party Identification

As universal suffrage became a reality, political parties arose as the instrument through which legislative factions could gain mass electoral support. Strong party affiliation would represent a person's overall integration into the established democratic system, encouraging traditional forms of participation and reducing the likelihood of elite-challenging unconventional political activity (Finkel, 1991).

Historically, Kerala has had a unique political landscape in which a Yo-Yo tendency has been keeping the balance between the UDF and the LDF, leaving the ruling party of India (BJP) on the side-lines. Since the BJP's meteoric nationwide growth after 2014, the BJP has also started making inroads into Kerala's bipolar political structure by occupying a decisive place in electoral politics (Goutham, 2021). The rise of the BJP as a new player in Kerala's political arena could have a stabilising effect, for it offers a political alternative to the communist/congress hegemony. However, the emergence of the BJP and its Hindu Nationalist ideals could also strengthen the contradictions between parties or population groups, thus polarising society (Goutham, 2021). The first instance of this occurred when, During the Kiss of Love movement, Keralan youth launched a social media campaign as a way to protest against moral policing propagated by Hindu-Nationalist groups (.)

Until this day, the BJP has not won a single seat in the 2021 Kerala assembly elections. Even more so, according to an AsianetNews vote share prediction, the BJP only managed to obtain a mere 15 per cent of youth votes (Eluvangal, 2020). The INC, the party that won over Kerala in the 2019 national elections, on the other hand, also acquired only 30 per cent of the youth vote. This percentage is relatively low considering the reforms that Rahul Gandhi initiated to win over the youth vote by including a younger lot of candidates on the ballot, including young leaders from its frontal organisations like the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) and All India Professionals Congress (AIPC) (Narayan, 2021).

When discussing party politics in Kerala we cannot neglect the significance of religious (minority) parties. In the Indian context, religious minorities are expected to be strong partisans and will likely align with parties that represent the interest of their religious community. In Kerala, the strong presence of the Indian Muslim Youth League in Muslim-dominated northern Kerala attests to this. However, another significant religious minority, Christians, who comprise 18,7 per cent of the population, do not have their 'own' political party and must rely on other parties to serve their interests. Often, it is the CPI (M) that attracts audiences across communal lines (Philip, 2021). The overall popularity of the CPI(M) in Kerala is confirmed in survey data, as 43 per cent of the youth would vote for the Left Democratic Front (Eluvangal, 2020; Whitney, 2021). According to Harris (2003), this inclination toward left-leaning politics is a strong indicator of high political mobilisation and participation by all classes/castes/communities.

3.3.5 Recruitment

The exclusion of youth outside of mainstream politics has been a concern for many non-partisan, non-profit global NGOs: Initiatives taken by the United Nations, the NDI (National Democratic Institute), UNESCO, and GYM (Global Youth Mobilisation) stress the importance of youth in civil society to stimulate active political participation. In Kerala, for example, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), in partnership with local governments, Gram Panchayats and the local community, aims to facilitate youth engagement by providing support to local Youth Volunteer Schemes (UNDP, 2017)

Political parties also notice the potential benefits of a large youth base as they realise the youth are the future voices. In line with this, attempts are made by both the INC and the Kerala Congress to rejuvenate the party from within and bridge the gap between the youth and state politics (Narayan, 2021; Hiran, 2022). Furthermore, there are plans to introduce a social media division in the KC to increase its interaction with the educated youth, who have been instrumental in determining the course of online political discussions (Hiran, 2022). The improvement of social media communication will be fruitful since young people are mainly mobilised through social media: Research shows that traditional forms of mobilisation, such as personal contact with a representative or calls into action via TV or radio, do not have the desired effect anymore. Mobilisation through social media, however, effectively develops a sense of civic duty and generates greater confidence in one's ability to make a difference (Holt et al., 2013).

In local politics, as an effect of decentralisation, most political institutions in Kerala have dense relations with mass organisations. On every level, politics is infused in civil society to the extent that political parties fundamentally fashion the fabric of Kerala's culture: print media, television networks, and social media platforms directly disseminate their views in society (Williams, 2018). Local governmental administrations themselves also initiate specific programmes to mobilise the youth: over three-fourths of young Keralites (76.9%) indicated that their Panchayat is involved in some form of program benefiting the youth (Sarumathy et al. 2012).

Currently, however, most Keralan youths are not part of any youth organisation (Gireesan, 2019). Furthermore, a practice evaluation of young people's involvement in panchayat governance from ten years ago reveals that slightly under half of the youths

(48.4%) had seen youth clubs organise protests against societal issues or GP corruption. Furthermore, only a modest percentage of respondents (43.1 %) claimed to have contributed to the implementation of development programs, such as by rallying community support or alerting the GP to irregularities. On another note, a small section of youths involved in youth organisations today, most notably student wings of political parties, are ‘hyper-involved’ in politics, sometimes in a bloody manner. Namely, while the claim is that campus politics play a massive role in teaching students democratic values, in some cases, these movements resemble party villages where opponents are not allowed to function or, in extreme cases, allowed to live (TheNewIndianExpress, 2022). The gruesomeness of Keralan college politics resulted in the court banning strikes and demonstrations on campuses in 2020. However, due to objections from several political parties that rely on the support of their student organisations, the bill is yet to be passed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Youth and politics are constantly misinterpreting each other. For some, 'politics' has become synonymous with a narrow interpretation of partisan political behaviour. Considering the decrease in voter turnout, it is hardly surprising that the youth would be deemed 'apathetic' towards politics. However, these charges of political apathy fail to interpret youth activism and unconventional political engagement back into traditional politics. Therefore, instead of 'dropping out' of politics, we should consider shifting youth political participation to include broader incentives.

While most research on youth politics has been conducted in European and American contexts, this Thesis aimed to contribute to the growing literature on youth politics in less developed countries such as India. In this country, similar patterns of youth apathy were noticed. However, rising numbers of youth voters, youth activism and overall efficacy in recent years indicate the growing importance of politics in the youth's daily lives.

The growing political awareness of Indian youth might be explained through the improvement of the youth's economic status and educational attainment: while in OECD countries, these factors have led the youth to transcend beyond traditional politics, in India, the advancement of these socio-economic factors show a positive correlation to political participation. Another factor that significantly influences civic engagement in India is strong partisanship related to caste/class and religious distinctions, which is also reflected in India's identity politics. As demonstrated by a 2017 report on youth behaviour from the Lokniti-

Centre for the Study Developing Societies (CSDS), communal identity still plays a significant role in mobilising the youth and keeping them in line with electoral politics.

Despite Indian youth presenting favourable indicators of political participation, we must keep in mind that the Indian nation is not homogenous and regional differences will affect the extent to which the youth partake in conventional or un-conventional repertoires. Therefore, in this thesis, we emphasised the political situation of one Indian state, Kerala. This small state in the southern tip of India has demonstrated that by effectively providing public services in the domains of health and education, it is feasible to improve the standard of living for a population even at low levels of economic development. Reproducing this so-called "Kerala model" has often been speculated to bring further development to the rest of India. In this thesis, however, we considered whether the "Kerala model" of development had produced unique trajectories of youth political participation that could be replicated elsewhere in India.

Relating to youth political participation, this thesis demonstrated that Kerala has a highly politicized society with a keen interest in state matters. When compared to the general all-India patterns of youth political participation, it appears that, for the most part, socioeconomic indicators, resource accessibility, political engagement, party preference, and recruitment have a similar impact on youth participation. However, Kerala's historical and political backdrop has given rise to distinctive youth engagement trajectories.

In particular, the notion of development as a crucial agent for economic progress, social welfare, and educational improvement became a part of Kerala's subnational identity rooted in the state's communist values. Combined with successful decentralization policies, these socialist sentiments gave the masses—youth, women, and religious minorities included—the space to articulate their political interests and improve their political capabilities through active involvement in participatory processes.

As another result of communist policies, political agency was disseminated across communal lines, consequently including many different perspectives in one common ideology and paving the way for issue-oriented politics inside traditional Indian identity politics. As a result, Keralan youth are less tied to duty-based engagement and are more likely to base their political opinions and actions on their preferences rather than what is expected of them.

Thus, Kerala presents many favourable indicators of elevated participation in elite-directed political activity, including civic skill (education and resources), political efficacy (engagement), party affiliation (communism and communal), associational activity (mobilization), and participation in the grassroots. However, youth in Kerala frequently engage in elite-challenging political activism like student politics, online protest and public demonstrations as well, on the condition that they have the necessary resources to do so.

We could therefore conclude that, when it comes to political participation, young people in Kerala exhibit a mix of Indian and "Western" patterns: On the one hand, they are mobilized, yet to a lesser extent, restrained by religious, caste and gender identities to participate in conventional politics; on the other hand, they have the necessary education, wealth, and sense of political efficacy to move beyond this realm of traditional politics.

Finally, relating to the question of the replicability of the "Kerala model" with respect to youth participation, this Thesis concludes that on the grounds of the historical and sociological characteristics of the state, which have influenced its progressiveness, are unique and cannot be expected to be reproduced elsewhere. While other states could benefit from implementing the same level of decentralization, it is evident that the other supporting factor that brought education and wealth to the masses, namely communism, does not always result in the kind of development we see in Kerala. West Bengal, for example, has been governed by a communist party, yet the state has some of the worst social indices in the nation (Balakrishnan, 2015).

India's regional differences, be it in geography, language, social stratification or religious affiliation, have produced unique trajectories from which all Indian states can learn from each other. However, when it comes to the Keralan "model," a term that denotes optimality and replicability, one should not aspire to emulate it without careful consideration of contextual factors.

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