



Research Article

# Postal Ballot Voting Patterns in India: A Comparative Analysis of State Assembly Elections 2026

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## Abstract

Postal ballots have emerged as a crucial mechanism of electoral participation in India, particularly for government employees, armed forces personnel, election-duty staff, persons with disabilities, essential service workers, electors above the age of 85 years, and other categories of voters who are unable to participate through conventional polling methods. Understanding postal ballot behaviours is weighty because it provides insights into the political preferences of influential administrative groups and contributes to broader studies of electoral dynamics. However, existing electoral research has largely focused on general voter behaviour and party performance through Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) based results in general, while limited attention has been given to the voting patterns of postal ballot voters in particular. This study aims to analyse the voting patterns of postal ballot voters in the 2026 Legislative Assembly elections of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal by comparing postal vote shares with overall EVM-based electoral outcomes. The study adopts a comparative quantitative approach using Election Commission of India data on postal ballots, EVM votes, and alliance-wise electoral performances with their previous election trends. The key findings reveal significant variations between postal and general voting trends. In Kerala, and Tamil Nadu, West Bengal changes in postal vote shares (2026) reflected shifts in a way from incumbent alliances with LDF 38.9% and DMK+ 38% and TMC+ 33.7%, against to their previous election (2021) postal ballot vote share to 48.7%, 62.2%, and 46.9% respectively witnessed significant decline, whereas Assam and Puducherry demonstrated different patterns, where postal ballot trends did not always correspond directly with overall electoral outcomes. The study highlights the distinct role of postal ballots and its largest share of service voters as an informed electoral segment and offers a unique perspective on bureaucratic electoral preferences and enhances understanding of occupational groups in contemporary Indian electoral politics.

## Keywords

Postal Ballots, Bureaucratic Voting Behaviour, Voting Patterns, Service Voters

## 1. Introduction

Electoral participation is a fundamental dimension of democratic governance, reflecting the ability of citizens to influence political decision-making through voting. Across democratic systems, voting behaviour has been widely studied to

understand how social groups, institutions, identities, and political environments shape electoral choices [11, 23]. The study of electoral behaviour has gradually expanded beyond general voter turnout and party competition towards analysing

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specific occupational, social, and institutional groups that contribute to electoral outcomes [5, 8, 47]. Among these groups, postal ballot voters occupy a significant position because of its facility and availability nature to some specific groups as they represent integral threads of the nation's democratic fabric; this group includes service personnel and government employees who possess direct administrative insights with state structure, institutional role, media personnel who serve as vital conduits of public information, and electors above the age of 85 and above whose participation honours their lifelong contributions and ensures inclusive electoral access. The economic theory of rational voter behaviour suggests that individuals participate in elections when the expected net benefits outweigh the costs. Previous studies have generally supported this relationship, though often with tenuous findings [2].

Postal ballot systems represent an important institutional mechanism that ensures electoral inclusion for citizens who cannot participate through conventional polling procedures due to professional responsibilities, geographical mobility, or service-related constraints [45]. Internationally, postal voting has been recognised as an instrument for improving accessibility and strengthening democratic participation, particularly among specific categories of voters [29, 32, 49]. Government employees represent a politically conscious and institutionally significant group whose voting decisions are influenced by the direct impact of public policies on their professional and economic interests [2, 19].

In India, the Election Commission has expanded postal ballot facilities, which include elderly voters aged 85 and above, persons with disabilities, service voters (like armed forces and paramilitary personnel), voters on election duty, media persons authorized for poll coverage, and essential service workers such as those in health, fire, electricity, traffic, aviation, and long-distance transport. Each category applies through designated forms or nodal officers, and ballots must reach the Returning Officer before counting begins. This ensures that those unable to physically attend polling stations can still exercise their right to vote for an informed, participatory and inclusive democracy in India (ECI-India, 2026).

Existing studies on electoral behaviour in India have extensively examined voter preferences, party competition, caste, class, and regional political dynamics, primarily based on overall election results and EVM-based voting patterns [24, 39]. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the electoral behaviour of specific service groups, particularly service and informed voters, through the lens of postal ballots. Although postal voting serves as an important mechanism for ensuring participation of service voters and election-duty personnel, its role as an indicator of bureaucratic voting preferences remains unexplored. Previous research has largely focused on the turnout and political influence of government employees in general elections, while comparative analysis of postal ballot patterns across different states and UTs assembly elections is relatively absent.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by adopting a

comparative quantitative research design to examine the postal ballot voting patterns of government employees in the 2026 Legislative Assembly elections of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal and to find out whether postal ballot behaviour represents a distinct pattern of occupational voting among government employees and how it contributes to broader interpretations of electoral behaviour in contemporary Indian state politics.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature on the postal ballot system highlights its significance as a method of voting that enhances accessibility and convenience for voters, particularly those unable to participate in traditional polling processes. The concept of the postal ballot has been examined across various contexts, highlighting its significance in facilitating democratic participation and ensuring transparency in voting processes [32, 37].

In the broader political sphere, the impact of postal voting on electoral participation has been examined through various empirical studies, revealing nuanced effects across different contexts. [35, 36] highlights that while e-voting at home or work, which can be seen as analogous to postal ballots, has generally had little or no effect on voter turnout. Conversely, evidence from the UK local elections indicates that all-postal voting facilities significantly increased turnout by approximately 15%, alongside enhancing public satisfaction with the electoral process [36, 46]. This suggests that postal voting can serve as an effective mechanism for boosting electoral participation under certain conditions. Empirical studies from Switzerland provide further insights into the effects of postal voting on voter behaviour using a natural experiment-based study on the staggered introduction of postal voting across Swiss cantons, demonstrating that the availability of postal voting correlates with increased voter turnout [33]. Similarly, [17] explores the social incentives associated with postal voting, finding that social pressure can motivate individuals to participate, especially when voting is conducted via mail, as it creates a visible act of participation that can be observed by others.

Duenas-Cid, D et al. [14] provides a comprehensive re-examination of the concept of convenience voting through a qualitative meta-synthesis of 106 studies. The authors argue that the traditional understanding of convenience voting, which primarily emphasises voting outside the polling station or on Election Day, has become inadequate due to the rapid expansion of digital voting technologies and diverse electoral practices. They identify inconsistencies in the terminology and classification of voting methods across countries and propose a revised conceptual framework that classifies convenience voting into six archetypes based on changes in the place, time, voting medium, and the person authorised to cast the vote. The study further contends that convenience voting should not automatically be assumed to reduce voting costs or increase electoral participation, as its adoption is often influenced by administrative efficiency, technological innovation,

resource constraints, or political considerations. Further, [25] reported a field experiment demonstrating that targeted messaging about downloadable ballots and early voting can increase usage of these options. Their findings suggest that emphasizing government responsiveness and addressing voter demand can effectively promote convenience voting methods, thereby potentially increasing overall participation.

Regarding bureaucratic voting behaviour reveals a multifaceted understanding of how bureaucrats influence and are influenced by political processes. Bureaucrats' voting behaviour is a complex interplay of personal beliefs, organisational constraints, and political pressures [20, 48]. Early work by [2, 7] demonstrated that bureaucrats participate in elections at significantly higher rates than private-sector employees, arguing that public employees possess stronger incentives to vote because government policies directly affect their employment conditions, salaries, and job security. Building on this argument, [7, 18] proposed the bureau voting model, suggesting that bureaucrats generally hold more favourable attitudes toward government expenditure and are more likely to support political parties or candidates advocating expanded public services and higher public spending. Their findings indicate that bureaucratic policy preferences translate into distinctive electoral behaviour, making public employees an important electoral constituency. As the recent study [1] argued that, democratic competition and universal suffrage can strengthen merit-based bureaucratic institutions, while the quality and autonomy of bureaucracy are shaped by electoral incentives and political contestation. Rather than viewing bureaucracy as politically neutral, they demonstrate that bureaucratic development and electoral dynamics are mutually reinforcing. Collectively, these studies suggest that bureaucratic voting behaviour is influenced by occupational self-interest, institutional incentives, and preferences for administrative stability and public sector welfare [34].

The electoral behaviour of public employees is a multifaceted subject that has garnered attention across various studies. Examining the 2011-2012 provincial elections reveals that public employees' voting behaviour and ideology differ notably from those in the private and non-profit sectors, suggesting sector-specific influences on electoral choices [42]. Furthermore, [10] found that government employees in the United States were significantly more likely to participate in elections than non-government employees, even after controlling for socio-economic and demographic variables and also argued that public employment itself encourages electoral participation because government policies have direct consequences for employees' professional interests and workplace conditions. [3, 9, 15] demonstrated that public-sector employment has a positive causal effect on voter turnout, particularly among local government employees working in their residential communities. A study on local councillors in Switzerland suggests that public service motivation influences their political conduct, although this relationship is embedded within the electoral system and institutional environment [40].

Unlike many Western democracies, where postal voting is widely available to the general electorate, India's system is designed primarily to ensure the franchise of voters who cannot physically attend polling stations. Consequently, while international literature focuses on postal voting as a mechanism of convenience and electoral reform, the Indian context presents an opportunity to examine postal ballots as a distinct institutional mechanism reflecting the electoral behaviour of government employees and other eligible absentee voters.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

This study uses Public Choice Theory as a general framework of study because of the research gap. It was developed by James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock's *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (1962), which applies the principles of economic rationality to political behaviour by assuming that voters, politicians, and bureaucrats are rational actors who seek to maximize their individual utility [6]. Political decisions, therefore, are understood as the outcome of rational calculations in which individuals evaluate the expected costs and benefits associated with alternative political choices. This theory also explores the strategic interactions among political actors, such as voters, politicians, and interest groups. For instance, [38] applies public choice insights to urban policy, illustrating how electoral shifts and voter preferences influence land-use planning and urban containment policies. It underscores the role of macro-electoral dynamics and interest group influence in shaping policy decisions. McGinnis, 2014 discussed Buchanan and Tullock's work, particularly *The Calculus of Consent*, which challenges the presumption of majority rule in constitutional democracies. This work underscores the importance of constitutional constraints and individual incentives in shaping political institutions, aligning with the broader public choice emphasis on self-interest and calculated behaviour.

In addition to the general framework, while Public Choice Theory establishes the broader institutional and political incentives, this study also integrates Rational Choice Theory as a complementary theoretical lens. This enables a more focused examination of the granular, individual-level cost-benefit analysis that guides the voting decisions of the different individual postal ballot voters. Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), developed this theory to explain that the voters are rational individuals who make electoral decisions by comparing the expected costs and benefits of competing political parties and selecting the option that maximizes their personal utility [5, 13]. Recent analyses have examined the limitations and extensions of Downs' model [43], which introduces a primary election context into the spatial voting model, demonstrating that primaries alone do not necessarily lead to polarization, thus challenging some assumptions of the median voter theorem. Similarly, [4] applies Downs' principles to local government spending, illustrating how party competition influences policy decisions at the municipal level.

Policy Feedback Theory (PFT) provides a framework for understanding how policies influence political behaviour, public perceptions, and institutional dynamics over time. This study is anchored in Policy Feedback Theory, which explains that public policies are not merely the outcomes of political processes but also shape future political attitudes, participation, and voting behaviour. The intellectual foundations of this perspective can be traced to E. E. Schattschneider (1935), who famously argued that “new policies create new politics” public policies restructure political conflict by creating new interests, redistributing power, and redefining the scope of political participation. Building on this insight, Theda Skocpol (1992) demonstrated that state policies and institutions actively shape citizens' political identities, organizational capacities, and patterns of political engagement, rather than simply responding to societal demands. Paul Pierson's (1993) “When Effect Becomes Cause” further developed these ideas by explicitly formulating Policy Feedback Theory, arguing that policies generate feedback through resource effects, which alter individuals' material incentives and opportunities, and interpretive effects, which influence how citizens perceive government, political institutions, and political parties. Together, these scholars contend that policy experiences influence subsequent political behaviour by affecting both citizens' material interests and their political perceptions. Additionally, the systematic review by [26] consolidates the core of policy feedback theory by emphasizing that “new policies create new politics,” reinforcing the idea that policies are both products and producers of political change. This review underscores the importance of feedback loops in understanding policy stability and change.

This integrated theoretical framework therefore provides a comprehensive basis for analysing whether postal ballot voting represents a distinct pattern of occupational electoral behaviour and contributes to a deeper understanding of voting behaviour in contemporary Indian State Assembly elections.

## 4. Methodology

The present study examines the voting patterns of postal ballot voters over both incumbent and anti-incumbent political

parties in the 2026 Assembly Elections of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. It uses the comparative quantitative research method with secondary data analysis collected from the Election Commission of India, final assembly election result of 2026, official reports and statistical data, including postal ballot votes, EVM-based vote shares, and alliance-wise electoral performances. The unit of analysis includes the major political alliances and their performance through postal ballots in comparison with overall electoral outcomes. A comparative framework is used to identify variations between postal voting trends and general voting patterns across the selected states. The study also incorporates a longitudinal perspective by comparing 2026 postal ballot trends with previous assembly election, 2021 data to examine changes in postal ballot voters' electoral preferences over time. Quantitative techniques such as percentage analysis, comparative assessment, and trend analysis are employed to interpret differences between postal and EVM voting patterns. This study has certain limitations as postal votes account for only a minuscule percentage of the total votes cast in the elections, and therefore may not fully represent the broader electoral behaviour of the entire electorate.

## 5. Data Analysis

### 5.1. State-wise Electoral and Postal Ballot Profile

The electoral profile of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal provides the broader context for understanding the scale and relevance of postal ballot participation in the 2026 Assembly Elections. Since postal ballots are primarily used by service voters, government employees on election duty, and other eligible categories, the number of service voters indicates the potential size of this specific electoral segment. The Election Commission of India's Facts at Glance data from the final respective state result report shows significant variation in the size of the electorate and service voter population across the selected states.

**Table 1.** State/UT-wise Distribution of Electors, from selected States and UT (Assembly Election 2026).

| States/UTs | Assembly Constituencies | Total Electors | Male Electors | Female Electors | Third Gender | PwD Electors | 85+ Electors | Centenarians | Service Voters | First Time Voters (18-19 Years) | Total Polling Stations | Total Candidates |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Assam      | 126                     | 2,51,17,886    | 1,25,93,036   | 1,25,24,532     | 318          | 2,05,085     | 1,02,302     | 2,466        | 63,423         | 6,42,314                        | 31,490                 | 722              |
| Kerala     | 140                     | 2,71,96,936    | 1,32,72,141   | 1,39,24,522     | 273          | 2,44,927     | 2,04,174     | 1,555        | 53,984         | 4,66,408                        | 30,495                 | 883              |
| Puducherry | 30                      | 9,50,639       | 4,46,667      | 5,03,832        | 140          | 13,968       | 6,020        | 54           | 328            | 24,919                          | 1,099                  | 294              |

| States/UTs  | Assembly Constituencies | Total Electors | Male Electors | Female Electors | Third Gender | PwD Electors | 85+ Electors | Centenarians | Service Voters | First Time Voters (18-19 Years) | Total Polling Stations | Total Candidates |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| (UT)        |                         |                |               |                 |              |              |              |              |                |                                 |                        |                  |
| Tamil Nadu  | 234                     | 5,74,11,793    | 2,80,97,003   | 2,93,07,062     | 7,728        | 5,15,439     | 3,98,513     | 2,155        | 68,501         | 14,59,039                       | 75,064                 | 4,023            |
| West Bengal | 294                     | 6,83,61,940    | 3,50,41,132   | 3,33,19,551     | 1,257        | 4,18,620     | 4,01,422     | 7,267        | 1,09,430       | 8,18,401                        | 85,377                 | 2,926            |
| Total       | 824                     | 179039194      | 89449979      | 89579499        | 9716         | 1398039      | 1112431      | 13497        | 295666         | 3411081                         | 223525                 | 8848             |

Source: Election Commission of India, Assembly Elections 2026 Report.

As per the Election Commission of India (ECI), assembly elections of 2026, in the State of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Puducherry together consist of 824 Assembly constituencies with a total electorate of approximately 17.90 crore voters. This includes around 8.94 crore male electors, 8.95 crore female electors, and 9,716 third-gender electors. The total number of service voters eligible for postal ballots is approximately 2.95 lakh across the selected assemblies, representing an important category for analysing government employees' voting behaviour. West Bengal has the largest electorate with around 6.83 crore voters and the highest number of service voters, 1.09 lakh, followed by Tamil Nadu with 5.74 crore electors and 68.5 thousand service voters. Kerala recorded approximately 2.71 crore electors with 53.9 thousand service voters, while Assam had 2.51 crore electors and 63.4 thousand service voters. Puducherry, with a comparatively smaller electorate of about 9.50 lakh voters, recorded 328 service voters (ECI- India, 2026). Although postal voters represent only a small proportion of the total electorate, their gradual participation, evolving partisan alignment and political leanings towards political parties in power/alliances or on oppositions/alliances, it shed light on broader trends in political power. Despite this limitation,

postal votes provide valuable insights into the electoral preferences of government employees and other eligible categories who represent a politically informed and institutionally significant voter group.

## 5.2. Comparative Share of Postal Ballot Against EVM Voting

The collected electoral data from the ECI was first organised and standardised to ensure comparability across Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal Assembly Elections 2026. The data was arranged according to key variables, including EVM votes, postal votes, total votes polled, and the percentage share of postal ballots. The cleaning process involved converting the available figures into uniform units (crore and lakh), removing inconsistencies, and calculating the proportion of postal votes in relation to total votes polled to enable cross-state comparison. This process helps in identifying variations across states and supports the subsequent result and discussion section by enabling comparison of postal ballot preferences with overall electoral outcomes.

**Table 2.** Share of Postal Votes against EVM votes in the four States and the UT of Puducherry.

| State/UT        | EVM votes (in cr.) | Postal Votes (in lakh) | Total Votes (in cr.) | % of Postal Votes |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Assam           | 2.15               | 1.31                   | 2.17                 | 0.6               |
| Kerala          | 2.12               | 3.52                   | 2.16                 | 1.6               |
| Tamil Nadu      | 4.88               | 5.22                   | 4.93                 | 1.1               |
| West Bengal     | 6.33               | 4.66                   | 6.38                 | 0.7               |
| Puducherry (UT) | 0.09               | 0.12                   | 0.09                 | 1.4               |

Source: Data Drawn from Election Commission of India, Assembly Elections 2026.

The prepared dataset indicates significant variations in the scale of postal ballot participation across the selected states. West Bengal recorded the highest number of EVM votes at 6.33 crore, with 4.66 lakh postal votes, accounting for 0.7% of total votes. Tamil Nadu reported 4.88 crore EVM votes and the highest postal votes in absolute terms (5.22 lakh), representing 1.1% of total votes. Kerala, despite having a lower EVM vote base of 2.12 crore, recorded 3.52 lakh postal votes, contributing the highest postal vote share among the states (1.6%). Assam reported 2.15 crore EVM votes with 1.31 lakh postal votes and a 0.6% postal vote share, while Puducherry (UT) recorded 0.09 crore EVM votes and 0.12 lakh postal votes, resulting in a 1.4% postal vote share. However, postal ballots provide a useful indicator of the voting behaviour of government officials, and other postal ballot voters help to assess the level of support or anti-incumbency sentiment among the administrative workforce towards the ruling party/parties.

### 5.3. Variation in Postal Vote Share and Electoral Outcomes of Incumbent Alliances (2021-2026)

The proportional analysis of postal vote shares of incumbent political alliances between the 2021 and 2026 Assembly Elections provides an understanding of changing electoral preferences among postal ballot voters [27]. The analysis examines whether changes in postal vote support correspond with the electoral performance of incumbent alliances and their retention or loss of power. The data highlights variations in postal voting patterns across the four States and one UT, indicating shifts in support towards or away from ruling alliances. Pre-electoral coalitions are also made known to impact electoral outcomes through deliberate seat-sharing and alliance formations, and it strengthens the ability of smaller parties to secure leadership roles, contribute to a more balanced distribution of seats, and can sometimes block any single party from gaining an outright majority [28]. In doing so, they promote a wider reflection of citizens' diverse policy preferences [16, 17].

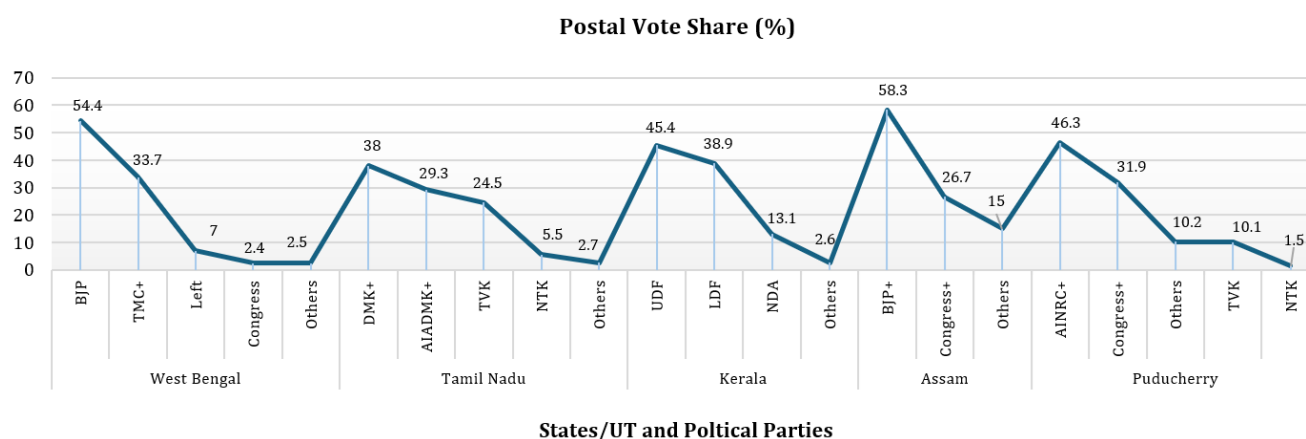
**Table 3.** Postal Vote Share Variation and Electoral Outcomes of Incumbent Political Alliances in Selected States & UT (2021-2026).

| State/UT        | Incumbent Party/Alliance | Postal Vote Share (%) (2021) | Differences (2021-2026) | Postal Vote Share (%) (2026) | EVM Votes% | Pattern                 | Election Result (Power Status of Political Parties) |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Assam           | BJP+                     | 52.7                         | 5.6                     | 58.3                         | 47.6       | Increased               | Retained in Power                                   |
| Kerala          | LDF                      | 48.5                         | -9.6                    | 38.9                         | 36.8       | Decreased               | Lost Power                                          |
| Puducherry (UT) | AINRC+                   | 47.5                         | -1.22                   | 46.3                         | 38.6       | Slightly Decreased      | Retained in Power                                   |
| Tamil Nadu      | DMK+                     | 62.2                         | -24.2                   | 38.0                         | 31.3       | Decreased Significantly | Lost Power                                          |
| West Bengal     | TMC+                     | 46.9                         | -13.2                   | 33.7                         | 41.1       | Decreased               | Lost Power                                          |

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India, Assembly Elections (2021&2026).

The comparative data indicate considerable variation in postal vote share across the four States and Union Territory of Puducherry. In comparison to previous assembly elections among the selected states, Assam recorded an increase in postal vote share from 52.7% to 58.3% in 2026, showing a positive difference of 5.6% compare to the other three states that help ruling party/alliances to continue in power consecutively [30]. Whereas, the other three states, i.e. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, postal vote share dropped signifi-

cantly, which is approximately -10% to -24.2% from the previous election cycle, with a rise of anti-incumbent sentiment in power. Tamil Nadu recorded -24.2% with the most significant decline among the selected cases of states. As a retained incumbent party alliance (AINRC+), slightly slipped its postal voters' support as anti-sentiment against the ruling authority just marginal reduction of -1.22%. This classification provides the basis for further examination of the relationship between changes in postal vote share and electoral outcomes in the subsequent result and discussion sections.



Source: Election Commission of India, Assembly Elections 2026.

**Figure 1.** Different Political Parties and Alliances Received Share of Postal Votes across the Party Line.

## 6. Results and Discussion

Following the above data analysis of voting patterns among postal voters in the recently concluded Assembly Elections-2026 in the states of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and the Union Territories of Puducherry has revealed certain interesting patterns with some effect on state politics. As we have said earlier this postal vote share account for only a small portion of the total votes cast in election including the four states and one union territory (Table 1). However, it marks to understand the postal ballot voting behaviour who cast their vote as a part of ruling establishment and also some part of strong informed group of behaviour is crucial for analysing the dynamics of political power and representation. The role of government employees in elections is contextualized within broader political systems. The rights of federal officers to vote in elections emphasizing that such participation is a recognised aspect of the public employment relationship. This indicates that federal employees have the legal right to cast votes, which can be exploited or manipulated within the framework of the ruling establishment [41].

Out of four states, three states where the ruling parties lost the trust of the voting behaviour in favour and became out of power, their voting share of postal votes came down compared to their 2021 performance of vote shares (Table 3). Except, the state of Assam where the ruling party maintained its successive position in power with 5.6% of higher margin of postal votes than the previous election result. The biggest sources of positive expectation among Assam government employees were Assam Finance Department constituted the 8th Assam Pay Commission in February 2026 to examine the structure of government employees' remuneration and recommend reforms based on the last revision made with effect from 1st April, 2016, on the recommendation of the 7th Assam Pay & Productivity Pay Commission. Similarly, on 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2026 Election Commission of India announced that to conduct the Legislative Assemblies Elections of Assam, Kerala, Tamil

Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry, and the same day Assam government launched a Scheme as 'Earned Salary Advance (ESA) & Salary-Linked Credit (SLC) Scheme' for regular State Government Employees which will facilitate nearly five lakhs state government employees through a secure digital platform [21, 44]. It will enable to the employees to access advance salary and transparent, hassle-free loans, ensuring greater financial convenience and security and also, it had early beneficiaries within 12 hours of launch; 120 employees had availed the facility, with nearly Rs. 1.9 crores disbursed. The following discussion outlines potential factors that may explain the observed spillover effect on the ruling party's electoral performance in Assam [31]. As the present study employs a quantitative research design, these explanations remain inferential and warrant further examination through qualitative field-based studies.

In Kerala, the voting pattern of postal voters was anti-incumbency. It shows that the Left Democratic Front (LDF), which lost the election, scored only 38.9% postal votes and 36.8% of EVM votes; on the other hand, the United Democratic Front (UDF), which came into power with secured 45.4% of postal votes. A major shift erupted from the subsequent delayed since July 2023, and the denial of Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) arrears comes at a time when people of Kerala were fighting the highest inflation in the country. It caused great anger among employees; moreover, the government went further and said DA is not a right of the employees but a prerogative of the administration. However, this interpretation remains indicative, and an empirical study is justified to measure the socio-economic consequences of this denial, capturing its effects on household welfare, employee morale, and state-citizen relations.

The case of Tamil Nadu presents a notable exception. It was the only state where the alliance led by the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), despite facing electoral defeat, recorded the highest proportion of postal votes (Figure 1). In contrast, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which emerged as the single largest party in terms of overall electoral

performance, secured only the third-highest share of postal votes, receiving 24.5% of postal ballots, nearly 10% lower than its overall vote share. DMK has a history of receiving more support from government employees in past. This indicates a divergence between postal voting preferences and the broader electorate's voting pattern in Tamil Nadu. In the matter of the Union Territory of Puducherry, showing a marginal decline of -1.22% postal votes from its previous record. Despite this decrease, the alliance retained power, indicating that the reduction in postal vote share did not significantly affect its overall electoral performance. The pattern suggests that postal ballot preferences among government employees in Puducherry remained largely consistent with the incumbent alliance, unlike states where major declines in postal support were associated with electoral defeat.

The TMC+ alliance secured 33.7% of postal votes in 2026, compared to 46.9% in the 2021 election, showing a substantial decrease of -13.2%. This decline in postal vote share coincided with the alliance's electoral setback and loss of power in the state. Compared with its previous performance, the reduced support through postal ballots suggests a shift in the voting preferences of the administrative workforce and other eligible postal voters. The party has witnessed a sharp dropping line of postal vote share from previous elections than the EVM voting. It strongly shows that anti-incumbency sentiment exists among the government employees. Under the TMC governance mechanism, the state has witnessed a number of issues at the governmental level, corruption in state government teachers' recruitment, the rise of post poll violence, and the restriction of the freedom of speech of government employees with a strict circular by the party general secretary to the officials not to speak to the media and so on [12, 24]. Further research incorporating qualitative data from government employees can provide deeper insights into the motivations behind postal voting choices throughout the States and UTs.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined the postal ballot voting patterns in the 2026 Legislative Assembly Elections of Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal to understand whether postal voting reflects a distinct form of occupational electoral behaviour and administrative sentiment beyond general EVM-based voting patterns. Postal ballot trends matter because they provide a unique window into the electoral behaviour of postal voters, which has 2.95 lakh high service voters who occupy a strategically important position within the administrative system. Unlike aggregate election results, postal ballot data reveal the political preferences of an informed occupational group whose voting decisions are often influenced by public policies, employment conditions, salary revisions, welfare measures, and administrative reforms [22].

Although postal ballots constitute only a small proportion of the total votes cast, changes in their voting patterns can serve as an early indicator of support for or dissatisfaction with incumbent governments. Consequently, analysing postal ballot trends enriches the understanding of occupational voting behaviour, complements conventional EVM-based electoral analysis, and offers valuable insights into the relationship between governance, public administration, and democratic accountability.

The study contributes to the existing literature on electoral behaviour by shifting the focus from general voter preferences and party competition towards the underexplored dimension of voting behaviour among government employees. By analysing postal ballot share of previous and current election cycles in a comparative manner helped to exhibit identifiable voting patterns that differ across political and institutional contexts between the States and UT. Therefore, the reduction in TMC+ in West Bengal and other States and UT postal support may reflect a broader shift in the relationship between the ruling alliance and sections of the state workforce, and further individual-level motivations require further empirical investigation to justify.

The findings also have important implications for election administration and democratic governance. For election administrators, postal ballot data should be viewed as more than an administrative record; it provides a valuable source of information for evaluating the participation and electoral preferences of service voters and government employees while strengthening the inclusiveness of the electoral process. For democratic governance, the study suggests that the electoral choices of government employees can serve as an indirect indicator of policy responsiveness, administrative trust, and the effectiveness of public sector governance. Governments that maintain favourable employment conditions and respond to the concerns of public employees may strengthen confidence within the administrative workforce, whereas prolonged policy dissatisfaction may contribute to declining electoral support among this influential group.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations. Postal ballots represent only a small proportion of total votes polled, and therefore, they cannot fully explain the behaviour of the entire electorate. Moreover, the analysis is based primarily on aggregate electoral data, which limits understanding of individual motivations behind voting choices. Future research should incorporate qualitative interviews, surveys, and comparative studies among government employees to examine the social, economic, and institutional factors shaping postal ballot decisions across different states. Overall, this study demonstrates that postal ballots are not merely an alternative voting mechanism but also a valuable indicator of bureaucratic political preferences, offering a new perspective on the evolving dynamics of electoral behaviour in contemporary Indian democracy.

## Abbreviations

|             |                                          |
|-------------|------------------------------------------|
| AIADMK      | All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam |
| AINRC       | All India N.R. Congress                  |
| BJP         | Bharatiya Janata Party                   |
| BJP+        | Bharatiya Janata Party-led Alliance      |
| Congress+   | Indian National Congress-led Alliance    |
| DA          | Dearness Allowance                       |
| DMK Dravida | Munnetra Kazhagam                        |
| DMK+        | Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led Alliance   |
| DR          | Dearness Relief                          |
| ECI         | Election Commission of India             |
| ESA         | Earned Salary Advance                    |
| LDF         | Left Democratic Front                    |
| NDA         | National Democratic Alliance             |
| NTK         | Naam Tamilar Katchi                      |
| SLC         | Salary-Linked Credit                     |
| TMC         | All India Trinamool Congress             |
| TVK         | Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam                 |
| UDF         | United Democratic Front                  |
| UT          | Union Territory                          |

## Author Contributions

**Suryakanta Rout:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Writing – original draft

**Rajshree Dutta:** Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing

**Priyambada Palai:** Formal Analysis, Resources

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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