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**GEOGRAPHIC  
INTELLIGENCE  
MEMORANDUM**

CIA/RR-GM-59-1  
14 August 1959

***KERALA***

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND REPORTS**

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The Indian Government's recent action of ousting the Communist-dominated Kerala state government and replacing it with Presidential Rule has focused attention on this Indian state. An understanding of the dynamics of the physical and cultural elements that comprise the Kerala environment offers an insight into the current situation.

Kerala is one of the new linguistic states based on the State Reorganization Act, which became effective on 1 November 1956. According to data of the 1951 census, the major language is Malayalam, which is spoken by 12,666,000 people. Tamil ranks second, with 593,000, followed by Konkani, Kanarese, Telegu, and Marathi, with a total of somewhat less than 180,000. The new state includes the former integrated state of Travancore-Cochin (except for five Tamil-speaking taluks, district subdivisions, which were transferred to Madras) and the old Malabar District, formerly part of Madras State (excluding the islands of Laccadive and Minicoy, and the Kasaragodtaluk of South Kanara). Administratively, Kerala is divided into nine districts -- Trivandrum, Quilon, Alleppey, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Trichur, Palghat, Kozhikode, and Canannore. Alleppey, which was established by the recent Communist-dominated Kerala Government on 17 August 1957, has the largest concentration of Communists and is the site of the famous Punnambra-Valayar CPR uprising of 1945, which gave a major fillip to the Communist movement in Travancore-Cochin. Alleppey town, the district headquarters, is commonly known as the "Moscow of Kerala."

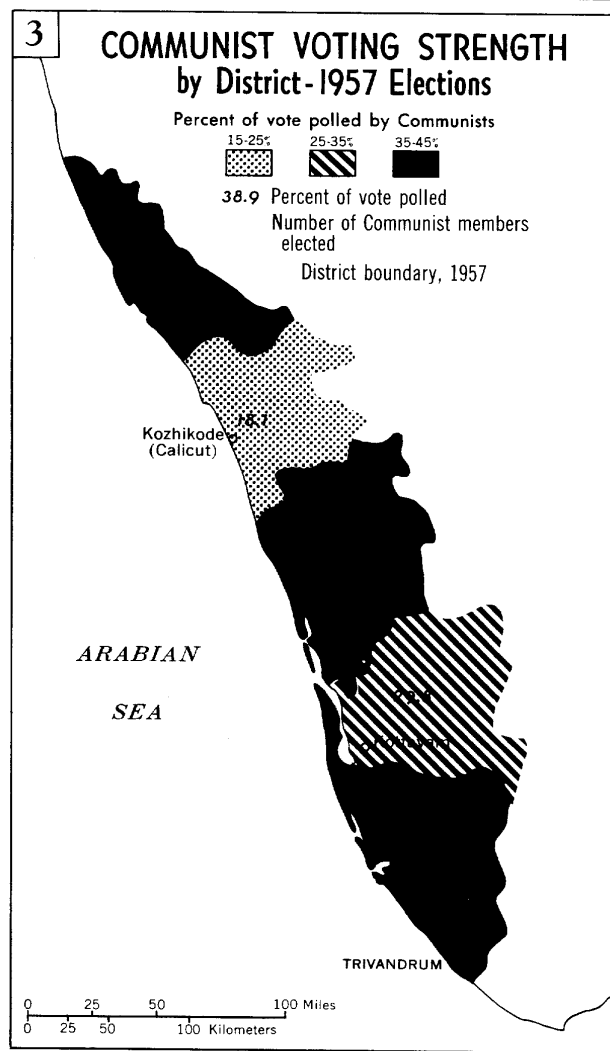
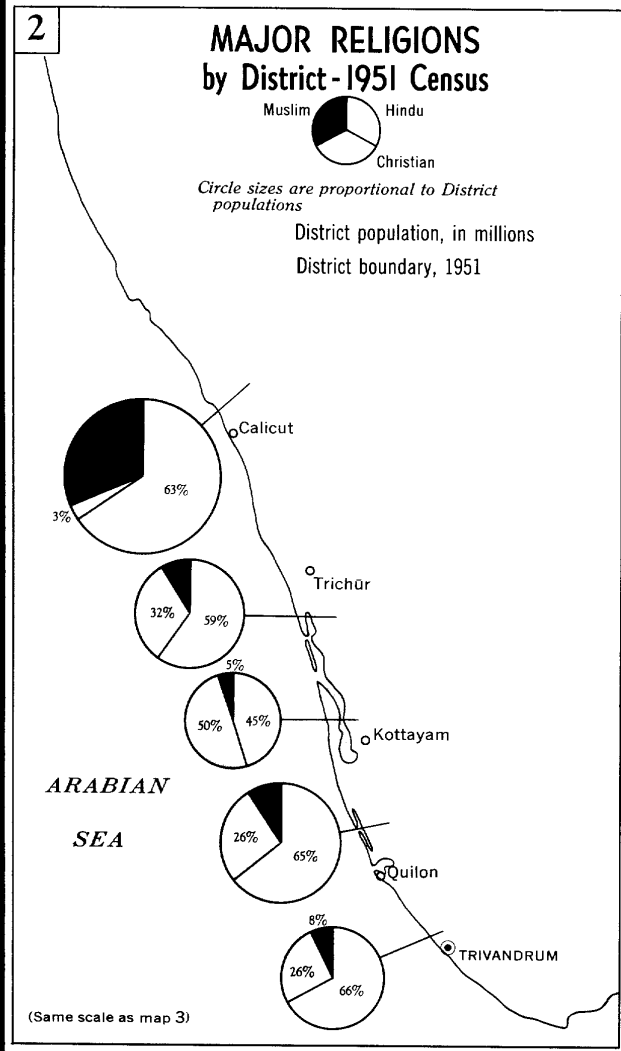
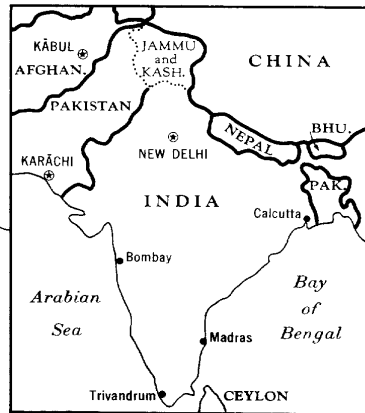
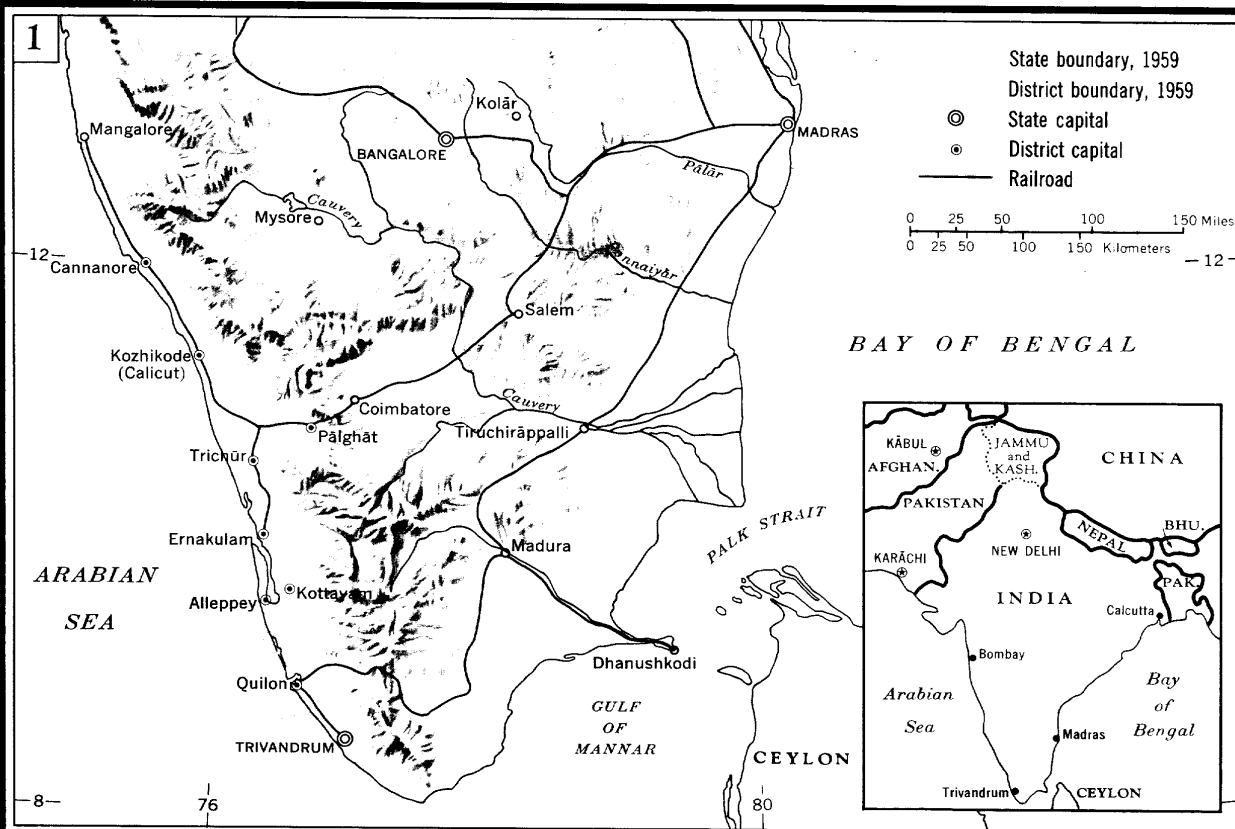
Kerala, with an area of about 15,000 square miles, or about twice that of the state of Massachusetts, is the smallest of the Indian States. Located in the extreme southwestern part of peninsular India, it extends from about 35 miles north of Cape Comorin, the southern tip of India, northward for about 360 miles. Its long littoral on the Arabian Sea has historically left it open to maritime invasions; conversely, its mountainous eastern borders have tended to isolate it to some degree from the remainder of India.

Physically, Kerala may be divided into three longitudinal zones: an alluvial coastland, a belt of low lateritic plateaus and foothills, and highlands (the Western Ghats). On the alluvial lowland is an extensive series of lagoons and backwaters, both saline and fresh. With some artificial cuts, they provide excellent protected waterways from Trivandrum northward to the mouth of the Ponnani River, a distance of 150 miles. The plateau and hills zone to the east has elevations of 200 to 600 feet and is generally grass and scrub covered. In this zone the best agricultural soil for rice growing is in the valleys formed by the rivers that flow from the Ghats to the sea. The rugged forest-covered Ghats rise precipitously to the east and reach elevations of over 7,000 feet. With their heavily dissected, steep slopes, the Ghats are formidable barriers between the Kerala lowlands and the great plateau area of central peninsular India and throughout history have impeded commercial and cultural contacts between the two areas.

The characteristically monsoonal climate of Kerala has a great influence upon a people who depend chiefly upon agriculture for their livelihood. The annual cycle is largely dominated by two periods of rainfall -- southwest monsoon from June to August and the northeast monsoon from October to December. Two-thirds of the annual precipitation occurs during the southwest monsoon. During June, July, and August, rain falls on about 25 days a month but rains become less frequent in September. As the southwest monsoon retreats and the northeast monsoon becomes established in October and November the intensity of the rainfall increases. During this season, rainfall is heavier in the hills than on the coastal plain.

Two essential features of the distribution of the rainfall are its increase from the south to the north and from the coast inland. Average rainfall is about 67 inches at Trivandrum, 115 inches at Cochin, and about 200 inches on the western slopes of the Ghats. Since the area receives rain during both monsoons, failure of rains and consequent famines are unknown. Occasionally, however, flooding causes considerable damage to crops.

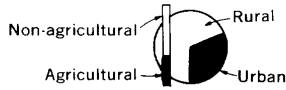
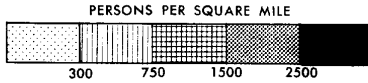
In this environment live some 15 million people. The population density averages about 1,000 per square mile, making Kerala the most densely populated of the 14 Indian states (see Map 4). Locally, as in the lowland of Trivandrum District, the density is over 2,900 people per square mile. By contrast the average density is 49 per square mile in the United States, and 600 in Japan. The rate of population increase for the decade 1941-51 for the old Travancore-Cochin was 24 percent; and, for the former Malabar District, 21 percent. For the same decade the all-India average was 13.4 percent. This high and rapidly increasing population density is directly related to the economic depression and political instability of Kerala.



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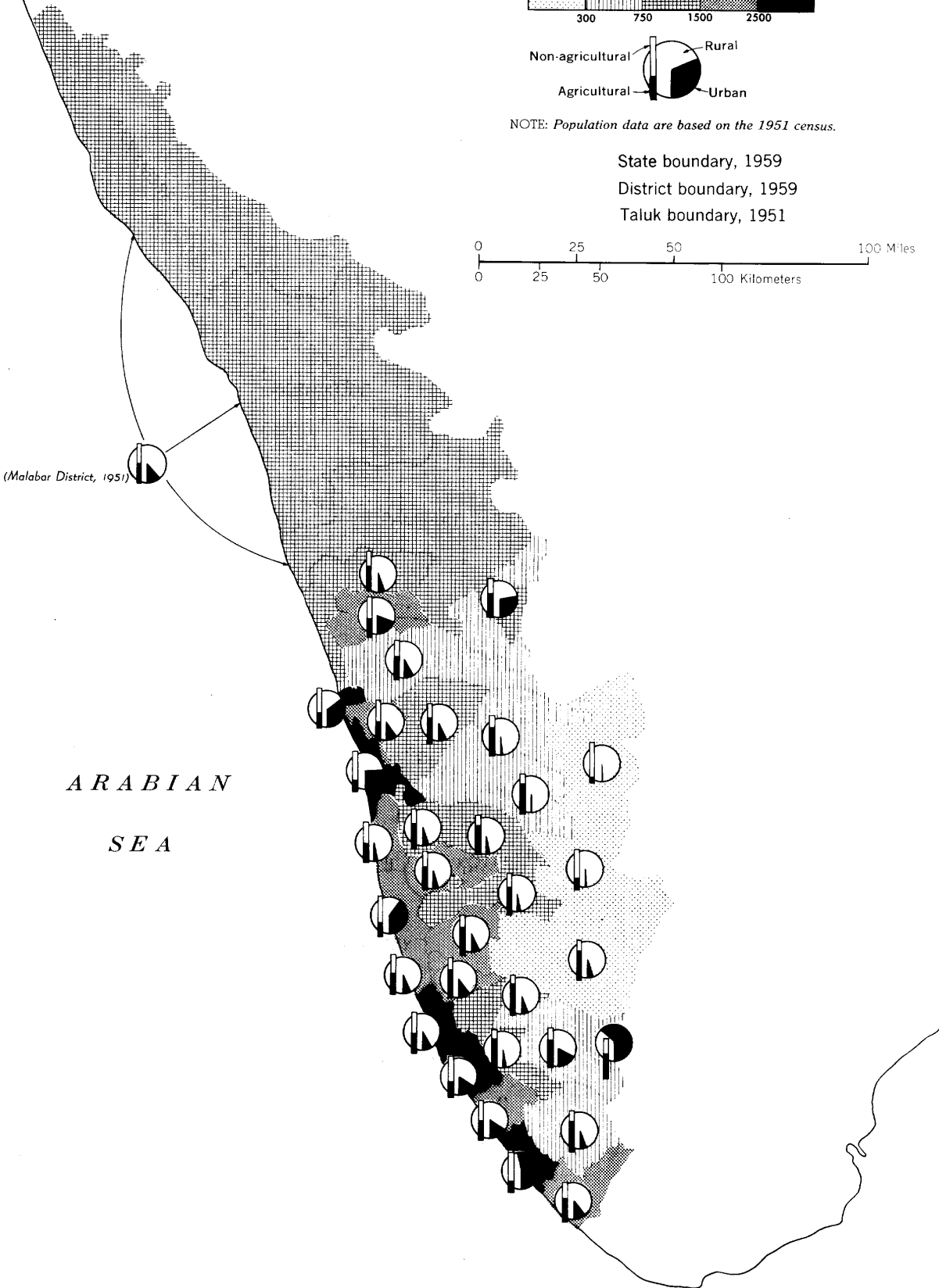
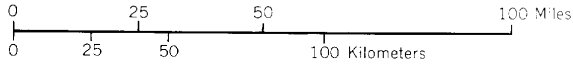
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# POPULATION



NOTE: Population data are based on the 1951 census.

State boundary, 1959  
 District boundary, 1959  
 Taluk boundary, 1951



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The distribution of population is closely related to the terrain zones. In the area of the former state of Travancore-Cochin, for example, the lowland, with about 18 percent of the area, contains 44 percent of the population and has an average density of 2,448 people per square mile; the hilly transition zone, with 37 percent of the area, has half the population and a population density of 1,381 per square mile; and the Western Ghats, covering 45 percent of the area, have only 6 percent of the population and a population density of only 147 per square mile.\* Throughout Kerala, the wide discrepancies between population and size among the various districts are directly related to the type of terrain (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Area, Population, and Population Density of Kerala  
by District a/

District	Area (Square Miles)	Population	Density (per Square Mile)
Trivandrum	846.3	1,508,000	1,782
Quilon	1,981.9	1,686,000	851
Alleppey	705.3	1,720,000	2,439
Kottayam	1,998.6	1,507,000	754
Ernakulam	1,558.5	1,738,000	1,115
Trichur	1,147.8	1,548,000	1,349
Cannanore	2,226.5	1,517,000	681
Kozhikode	2,555.0	2,279,000	892
Palghat	1,971.7	1,727,000	876

a. 1958 official estimates.

Kerala's total area is generally given officially as 9,412,000 acres. Of these, about 5,387,000 are suitable for cultivation, and 4,477,000 are under cultivation (989,000 acres are double cropped), leaving some 910,000 acres or about 16.9 percent as fallow and cultivable waste land. Since much of this is marginal agricultural land, possibilities for extension of farming are limited.

The agricultural situation in Kerala is complicated by the size of the landholdings, which are generally very small, and by the system of land tenure, which is still inequitable, particularly in the old Malabar District. Even under favorable conditions, the land reform laws that were passed in June 1959 cannot remedy the situation immediately, and the laws will probably be modified by successive governments. The land available per capita of total population is less than three-quarters of an acre. Actually, probably 50 percent of the agricultural holdings in the state are less than 1 acre in size, and the average is about 3 acres. In the old Travancore-Cochin area, 82 percent of the holdings are smaller than 1 acre; 15 percent are between 1 and 5 acres; and only 3 percent are larger than 5 acres. As of December 1958 the size of holdings in Kerala was estimated as follows:

Size	Number of Holders	Total Acreage
5 acres or less	2,347,476	2,621,472
5 to 15 acres	234,830	2,092,958
More than 15 acres	86,000	3,400,000
Total	2,668,306	8,114,430

About 42 percent of the land is held by 3 percent of the landowners in holdings of more than 15 acres. Since land redistribution has been extensive in the Travancore-Cochin area during the last few years, the larger holdings are chiefly in the Malabar area.

About 55 percent of the total population of Kerala depend upon agriculture for their livelihood, a figure lower than that for any other Indian state except Bengal. Because of the density of the population the pressure on land, however, is heavy; and the per capita income from agriculture is low. The proportion of farmers to the total population is lowest in the coastal zone and highest in the hilly transition zone. Population distribution and employment are reflected in Map 4.

\* Comparable data are not available for the area of the former district of Malabar, but percentage and density figures should be similar in view of Malabar's close physical and cultural similarity to the rest of Kerala.

Most farmers are engaged in the cultivation of rice, coconut, and other money crops. Since almost all of these crops require only seasonal care, the farmers are actively engaged in land cultivation about 8 months of the year. Roughly a fifth of the farmers have subsidiary sources of income; the remaining four-fifths are either underemployed or unemployed for nearly 4 months a year.

Although a family garden may produce many different crops, certain ones are characteristic of each terrain zone. In the lowland, rice and coconut predominate. In the hilly transition zone tapioca, coconut, pepper, lemon grass, cashew nuts, ginger, and rubber are typical in the hills and rice in the river valleys. On the slopes of the forested Ghats, the cultivated area (about 12 percent of the total) is largely in plantation crops -- tea, rubber, and cariamom.

Rice and coconut together account for 56 percent of the total cropped area and contribute 50 percent of the total value of agricultural production. Although plantation crops occupy only 6.8 percent of the cropped land and contribute 7.9 percent of the total value of agricultural production, Kerala produces about 90 percent of the rubber of India, 92 percent of the pepper, 70 percent of the cashew nuts, 69 percent of the ginger, and 60 percent of the cardamom; it also includes 95 percent of India's tapioca acreage.

Although almost 70 percent of the total cropped area of the state is in food crops, Kerala is faced with a chronic food shortage, producing only about 50 percent of its food-grain requirements. Rice is the chief item in the diet, supplemented by manioc, but the rice yield averages only 1,300 pounds per acre as compared to Japan's 3,680 pounds. Since half of the families (averaging 5.5 people) have annual incomes of about 600 rupees (U.S. \$120.00), much of the population has almost no purchasing power and must live on a substandard diet. Kerala's per capita consumption of milk is two ounces daily compared to the all-India average of 5.5 ounces. Vegetable products from the home garden and the easily caught fish compensate to a very limited extent for the low cash incomes.

The fact that 45 percent of the population is nonagricultural is not evidence of a large urban population or a high level of industrialization. Only 17 percent of the total state population is classified as urban. During the decade 1941-51, an urban population increase of 66 percent was unprecedented. Nevertheless only 3 population centers in the state -- Trivandrum (population, 186,931) Kozhikode (158,724) and Alleppey (116,278) -- met the 1951 census criteria for a city, population over 100,000 within municipal limits.

Only a small section of the population is engaged in organized industry. Fishing, the coir industry, and various other small industries such as the textile, paper, glass, and fertilizer, give part or full time employment to many among the population. As in rural areas, urban unemployment and underemployment are critical. According to a survey in the former state of Travancore-Cochin, the unemployed numbered 1.4 million and the underemployed 2 million, half of whom were women. Of the unemployed 74 thousand were educated people.

Communal (religious community) consciousness rather than political consciousness or class consciousness has long been the dominant social force in Kerala. Loyalty to one's own community is primary and cuts across all others. The major communities are the Hindu, Christian, and Muslim (see Map 2). According to the 1951 census, Hindus numbered 8.6 million, or 61 percent of the population; Christians, 3.1 million, or 22 percent; Muslims, 2.3 million, or 16 percent and other religions accounted for the other 1 percent of the population. The distribution of these religions, by district as of 1951, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
Distribution of Major Religions in Kerala, a/  
Number of Adherents by District  
as of 1951

District	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Total
Trivandrum	1,432,789	551,951	169,283	2,154,192
Quilon	1,972,622	795,665	258,254	3,026,822
Kottayam	811,868	888,540	83,336	1,783,771
Trichur	1,370,573	731,874	210,354	2,315,640
Malabar	3,009,823	153,956	1,593,406	4,758,342

c. Religious groups other than Hindu, Christian, and Muslim comprise less than 1 percent of the total. These small groups are not reflected in the break-down figures but are included in the figures in the totals.

All three of these religions are of ancient origin in India. In Kerala, Christianity dates from the first century A.D. and Islam from a few years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed.

Although Hindus predominate, they do not comprise a homogeneous community. Castes divide them sharply. According to the Travancore census of 1951, there were nearly 77 main castes and 423 accessory castes. The castes were rigidly exclusive and permitted no common social life. Untouchability and unapproachability were worked out systematically to keep the segregation of castes as complete as possible. Now, however, all external practices of caste segregation are prohibited by law throughout India. Even so, the residual elements of complexes, superiority or inferiority, remain particularly strong in Kerala. Within this divisive social structure, Communism found fertile ground for the spread of its ideology, with its theoretically casteless and classless society. Nevertheless, a degree of unity among religious communities, probably temporary in nature, was achieved through their common campaign against the recent Communist-dominated government.

Education in Kerala is above the Indian standard. Nearly 41 percent of the population is literate, as compared to the all-India average of 15 to 20 percent. In the old Travancore-Cochin area the percentage is well over 50 percent. Kerala has more than 10,000 educational institutions, including 8,000 primary schools -- one primary school for every 1.25 square miles of inhabited area and for every 300 children in the 6- to 11-year age group. Elementary instruction is almost universal in Kerala. Four-fifths of the educational institutions are privately run but aided by the State; the remainder are entirely State operated. Most of the private schools are conducted by the Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities. To a large extent the recent anti-Communist demonstrations were sparked by the opposition of these religious groups to the Kerala Education Bill, which was passed in final form in December, 1958, and would have given the Communist-dominated government greater control over the private schools.

The recent Communist-dominated government came into office on the basis of the general elections of 1957. The Communist received about 2 million of the 5.8 million votes cast out of total electorate of 7.5 million, or about 35 percent of the votes polled. The opposition parties together secured 3.8 million votes -- the Congress Party, 2.2 million; others 1.6 million. In the 127-member assembly the party position was as follows: Communist, 60; Congress, 43; Praja Socialist Party, 9; Muslim League, 8; and Independents, 6. The assembly also included one nominated member. The Communists did not receive a majority of the popular vote, and they could not have formed a Ministry without the support of some of the Independents, five of whom were elected with the support of the Communist Party. At the time of the election, the Party had 25,000 active members.

The distribution of the votes cast for the Communist Party, the percentage of Communist vote to the total vote, and the number of Communist assembly members for each Kerala district (as of 1957) are shown in Table 3 and on Map 3.

Table 3  
Distribution of Communist Votes in the 1957 General Elections  
in Kerala

<u>District</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Percent of Total Vote Polled</u>	<u>Number of Members</u>
Trivandrum	237,054	43.4	8
Quilon	609,237	37.7	19
Kottayam	229,276	29.8	3
Trichur	356,552	36.3	10
Palghat	258,993	39.0	10
Kozhikode	140,503	18.1	3
Cannanore	258,003	38.9	7

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Whether elections are held in 6 months or whether Presidential Rule continues for an extended period (legally it may remain in effect for 6-month periods for three years), Kerala's basic problems of too large a population for the present stage of economic development, unemployment and underemployment, insufficient food, and communalism will persist. The food deficit could be relieved to some extent by further land redistribution, the extension of irrigation, improvement in the methods of rice culture\* and intensification of the fishing industry on the rich banks off the coast of Kerala. If it can be effected, industrialization will be a major aid. The state has a high hydroelectric potential, 5 percent of India's total; and other factors favor some degree of industrialization. Among these factors are raw materials (rubber, timber, coconut byproducts, pottery, clays, and large reserves of ilmenites, monazite, and sillimanite in its beach sands) and fair transportation facilities. Capital must be found, however, if large-scale industrial development is to be achieved.

That Namboodiripad, former Chief Minister of Kerala, favored direct aid from the Bloc countries is evident from his statements of January 1959, just before his trip to Moscow. As an official of a state government he was not authorized to formulate aid agreements with a foreign power. His only resort was through indirect pressure on the Indian Government. The effect of such pressure is evidenced by the unprecedented orders from the Soviet Union for coir after the establishment of a state-subsidized coir factory in Kerala. Whatever the future government of the state may be, Kerala will need outside financing if new development is to be undertaken and the state to achieve economic solvency and political stability.

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\* A publication of the recent Communist-dominated government indicates that the Japanese method, which is distinguished by heavy use of fertilizers, is now practiced on 500,000 of 19,600,000 acres of rice cultivation in Kerala.

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