

## **Lok Sabha Election Results in Assam**

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**Abstract:** The BJP has become successful in enduring its victory in Assam despite being criticized for its stand on Citizenship Amendment Bill. The party leadership both at the Centre and the state could be successful in neutralizing the issue. While AGP-BJP-BPF alliance helped the party to win 2019 elections, the organizational machinery of the party and the populist schemes introduced by the BJP Government has gone in favor of the party.

Keywords: BJP, Lok Sabha, Assam, leadership, AGP.

### **1. Introduction:**

Assam is one of the newly emerged BJP dominated state where it has wiped out the Congress dominance since 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP contested in the 2019 election with its former alliance Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) which had proved successful in the 2016 Assam Assembly elections. The Congress and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) contested the 2019 election on their own. The 2019 elections is different from 2014 election in two way- i) in 2014 there was Congress led government in the state whereas in 2019 there is a BJP led government in the state. ii) In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, people overwhelmingly supported BJP across communities barring the Muslims under the decisive leadership of Narendra Modi. But after the 2014, the BJP has adopted multiple strategies to accommodate each and every community of the state. These strategies become more apparent after 2014 elections and its impact can be seen in the 2016 Assam assembly elections and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The party's continual success from a marginal position indeed provides enough scope for many interpretations of factors responsible for its remarkable victory.

### **2. The Verdict:**

The Lok Sabha elections were held in three phases in Assam on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 18<sup>th</sup> April and 23<sup>rd</sup> April. While five constituencies- Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Kaliabor, Lakhimpur and Tezpur – went to the polls in the first phase on 11 April, another five constituencies- Karimganj, Silchar, Autonomous District, Nagaon and Mangaldoi- went to the elections in the second phase on 18<sup>th</sup> April. The rest of the four constituencies- Guwahati, Dhubri, Barpeta and Kokrajhar went to the elections on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. The state recorded a massive voter turnout of 81.52 percent, 1.52 percent point jump since 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

*Table 1: Party's performance in the 2019 election*

Parties	Seat contested	Won	Vote (%)	Vote (%) per seat contested
BJP	10	9	36.05	54.32
AGP	3	0	8.23	32.41
BPF	1	0	2.48	30.2
INC	14	3	35.44	34.44
AUDF	3	1	7.8	33.35
INDEPENDENT	45	1	4.25	-

Source: Lokniti CSDS survey

*Table 2: Constituency wise party's performance in 2019 elections*

Constituency Name	Voters Turnout	BJP	INC	AGP	AIUDF	BPF
Tezpur	79.16	57.40	37.02	-	-	-
Jorhat	71.49	51.31	43.50	-	-	-
Dibrugarh	77.26	64.92	29.03	-	-	-
Kaliabor	82.09	-	55.17	40.43	-	-
Lakhimpur	75.05	60.47	33.16	-	-	-
Karimganj	79.08	44.57	11.35	-	40.96	-
Silchar	79.40	52.53	43.44	-	-	-
Autonomous District	77.47	61.71	22.93	-	-	-
Nowgong	83.24	48.40	49.52	-	-	-
Mangaldoi	83.60	48.82	39.62	-	-	-
Guwahati	85.11	57.19	37.60	-	-	-
Dhubri	90.66	-	29.22	23.72	42.65	-
Barpeta	86.60	-	44.22	34.60	17.04	-
Kokrajhar	83.16	-	9.94	-	-	30.19

Source: computed from the ECI data

The table 1 and 2 presents the summary of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The election is significant for various reasons. For the first time, a pro-incumbency trend has been seen with the BJP's continued success after 2014 elections. With the NDA's victory, for the first time a non-Congress Government is coming to power again after its successive first full term. In Assam too, the party could manage to continue its success. Here in Assam, the BJP has smartly stitched up its own alliances- the AGP and BPF. The BJP contested for 10 seats, where as its alliance partners AGP and BPF contested for 3 and 1 seat respectively. The alliance was expected to sweep Assam by consolidating the Hindu votes, and it become successful in bringing the desired result for the BJP, but unfortunately it failed to bring fruitful result for AGP and BPF. This time the BJP's seat tally went up to nine against seven in the 2014 election with 36.05 percent of total vote. AGP got 8.23 percent of vote whereas the BPF got 2.48 percent of total votes. The INC contested for 14 seats but managed to win 3 seats with 35.44 percent of total votes. The AIUDF which won three seats in the 2014 elections contested for 3 seats only and could manage to win one seat by the party chief Badaruddin Ajmal in Dhubri constituency. The verdict witnessed a complete polarization of Hindu votes. Although a section of people expected that the introduction of Citizenship Amendment Bill will pose a challenge for the party to retain its position in the state, however, it didn't make any impact in the Brahmaputra

valley, rather we can say that it helped the BJP to consolidate its Hindu vote in Barak Valley region thereby winning Silchar and Karimganj seats. The party could manage to win the Karimganj seat after 1996.

*Table 3: Region wise vote and seat Distribution:*

Region	Total seat	INC		NDA		AIUDF		Others	
		Seat won	Vote (%)	Seat won	Vote (%)	Seat won	Vote (%)	Seat won	Vote (%)
Barak	3	0	25.88	3	51.52	0	16.54	0	6.06
Lower	5	1	32.24	2	33.56	1	12.26	1	21.94
Upper	6	2	42.18	4	53.08	0	0	0	4.74
Overall	14	3	35.44	9	44.28	1	7.8	1	12.45

Source: CSDS survey data

The region wise analysis of the voting pattern (Table 3) in reflects an interesting trend. A significant shift of the tea community and caste Hindu and the ST communities to BJP from Congress has attributed BJP's success in the state. The table shows the complete dominance of the BJP in the Barak Valley<sup>i</sup> region. The region is mostly dominated by the Bengali speaking population. According to 2011 census data 50.1 percent belongs to Hindu where as 48.1 percent belongs to Muslims. None of the Lok Sabha constituencies was under BJP in 2014 Lok Sabha election. Silchar was under INC where as Karimganj was under AUDF control. Hence, BJP's success in the region is significant. In the upper Assam<sup>ii</sup> region, the party got 4 out of 6 seats. The tea community voters play an important role in this region. Prior to 2014 elections, the upper Assam could be regarded as a Congress bastion. However since 2014 Lok Sabha the shifting of votes towards BJP could be seen apparently. Even if we analyze the result assembly segment wise, then we can see that the tea community voters have shifted to the BJP. In fact, in Kaliabor Lok Sabha constituency, the assembly segments that are dominated by tea community voters, like Kaliabor, Khumtai, Golaghat, Bokakhat BJP's alliance AGP did comparatively well than other segments. Although Kaliabor constituency went to Congress, but in these segments AGP did remarkably well than Congress.

### 3. Issues Mattered:

While analyzing the electoral outcome of a political party, multiple factor needs to be look into. There are multiple factors that went in favour of the BJP. It was expected that the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) will play a decisive role in the 2019 Lok sabha elections in Assam. The bill aims at granting Citizenship to Hindus, Sikh and Buddhist migrants from Pakistan, Afganistan and Bangladesh who have entered India before 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2014. Those migrants can apply for Indian citizenship if they have lived in India for six of the previous 14 years before the date of their application. The provision of the bill dilutes the 1985 Assam Accord which stipulates that those who entered Assam after 24<sup>th</sup> March 1971 be identified and deported. A massive protest against the bill was initiated by Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), All Assam Students Union (AASU) and North East Students' Organization (NESO) along with 30 other organizations. AGP also walked out from BJP's alliance. However, as the election drew closer, AGP again made alliance with the BJP. Besides, the protests also showed signs of cracking as some of the loudest voices swiftly switched over to the AGP and BJP. This includes the Vice president of AASU, Mani Madhab Mahanta who quits AASU to join AGP<sup>iii</sup>. He is the younger brother of AGP leader Keshab Mahanta who contested from Kaliabor Lok Sabha constituency. Apart from him, the advisor of All Assam Tai Ahom Students

Union (AATASU), Ashwini Chetia along with Jadav Das from KMSS who stripped naked to protest the bill, joined BJP. This has neutralized the issue to some extent. However, the BJP is determined to introduce the bill after coming to power. The election manifesto of the party thus stated "We are committed to enacting the CAB for the protection of individuals of religious minority communities from neighboring countries escaping persecution". Unhappy with BJP's commitment in its poll manifesto to reintroduce the CAB if it comes back to power, AASU and KMSS have appealed to the people to choose their representatives keeping in mind the threat posed by the bill. KMSS along with Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad and 70 other organizations had led a movement against the Bill and also appealed to the people to vote against BJP<sup>iv</sup>. In this backdrop, the election campaign by the BJP has crafted such a manner that, the party leaders kept silent on the issue in the Brahmaputra valley. While in their campaign rally to Brahmaputra valley, the BJP President Amit Shah and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi didn't make any comment on the bill. On the other hand PM Narendra Modi, in his first campaign speech in the Barak Valley, mentioned about the bill stating "We will take care of the sentiments of Assamese communities before reintroducing the Bill so that no one is hurt. The bill will be tabled and passed after thorough discussions with all stakeholders in Assam".<sup>v</sup> Therefore, the controversy over the CAB does not seem to have affected the BJP among the Assamese Hindus. According to the CSDS survey data, the BJP alliance managed to secure 59 percent of the Assamese Hindu vote. This is despite the fact the majority of the Assamese Hindus were against the bill. The CSDS survey found that 75 percent of Assamese Hindus were opposed to the Bill. Among those who opposed the bill 56 percent voted for the BJP whereas 28 percent voted for the Congress (Ahmed, Sharma, Tripathi 2019). It indicates that the bill has been limited to a small section of educated middle class in the Brahmaputra Valley despite anti-BJP forces used it as a major poll issue. However, the Bill worked in favor of the BJP in the Barak Valley region thereby consolidating the Bengali Hindu votes. The BJP was successful in diverting the issue from CAB to development.

The leadership factor played an important role in this election. It is clear that in the leadership sweep stakes, the BJP did much better than the INC. there is no match to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi- for his energy, oratorical skill, charisma and personal popularity. The BJP is playing its strength by crafting a presidential-style campaign around Modi. Not only did the BJP candidates canvas for votes in the name of Prime Minister Modi, the candidates from the NDA alliance also made the Prime Minister the focus of their campaign. According to CSDS data, while one of the every three of those who voted for the BJP said that they would have voted differently had Mr Modi not been the Prime Ministerial candidate (Shastri 2019). In Assam, 68 percent Hindus preferred Narendra Modi as PM candidate where as 74 percent Muslims preferred Rahul Gandhi as PM candidate (Ahmed, Sharma, Trpathi 2019). Apart from Modi's Charisma, what other leadership factor that helped BJP in Assam is Himanta Biswa Sarma. The latter's decision to join the BJP in 2015 has proven to be beneficial for the party in the state. He not only led the BJP party to a spectacular rise in Assam in 2016 but also led to the victory in other Northeastern states after he became the convener of the North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA). Apart from party's politics, the credit is due to BJP state Leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, whose unique style of campaign which includes dancing on the street has helped the party by diverting the minds of the electorate and media from the Citizenship issue to his dance moves

#### **4. BJP's Populist Schemes:**

The reason for BJP's success could be a result of the various schemes launched by the Central Government and the State Government. Modi led Central Governments scheme like Ujjwala Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Swaccha Bharat etc. became successful in translate its vote. Apart from the Central government schemes, the BJP government at the state announced budget for 2019-20 on

6<sup>th</sup> February 2019, just before the Lok Sabha election. The Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has introduced several populist schemes that can be regarded as a well planned strategic move of the party to attract the people into their fold. It has introduced the Affordable Nutrition and Nourishment Assistance (ANNA) scheme under which rice will be sold at Rs. 1/kg for the benefit of 53 lakh households. The pilot implementation of ANNA Yojana has started from April 2019. Apart from this, the government has also decided to provide rice free of cost to 4 lakh families in the tea garden areas and 2 kg of sugar per month to the families of the tea garden workers. The budget also announced the Gyan Deepika scheme to provide free text books to students up to degree level (Arts, Science, and Commerce). A subsidy of Rs. 700 per student per month to be paid for 10 months in a year, irrespective of their economic status, on the mess bills for those students staying in the hostels of government, or provincialised colleges and universities. The government launched a new scheme under which any woman, up to the age of 45 years, who loses her husband, will receive an amount of Rs 25,000 as 'Immediate Family Assistance'. In addition to the immediate assistance of Rs 25,000, for regular maintenance expenses, the widow will also be eligible for a monthly pension of Rs 250 until she attains the age of 60 years, post which, she will be moved to the old age pension scheme. Under the 'Deen Dayal Divyanga Sahayata Asoni', the government announced a monthly assistance of Rs. 1000 to the Divyang covering 1.15 lakh beneficiaries. Apart from these, the government also announced Rs 200 crore for 'Minority Girls Scholarship' scheme to support all girls belonging to minority communities, to encourage and incentivize them to continue their higher education and stay on the formal education system (Budget 2019-20). These strategic moves helped the BJP to consolidate the votes into their fold including the tea tribe community in the state. According to the CSDS survey data, 73 percent of Hindus are satisfied with Central Government and 72 percent Hindus are satisfied with state Government which is much higher to consolidate the Hindu votes in party's fold.

## **5. BJP's Organizational strength:**

One of the major factors that attributed BJP's spectacular rise is its committed party workers. In addition to the charisma of PM Modi, the BJP's organizational machinery had no match with other parties. A party that was marginalized in the state prior to 2014 elections needs an effective organization to reach out to the common people in the every corner of the remote areas and convince them to vote in favor of the party. Hence, the party left no chance to made effort in strengthening its organizational presence in many parts of the state where it was weak electorally, and this move has paid rich dividends. The RSS-BJP combined has been able to build such an organization. While RSS has an innumerable dedicated workers engaged in the interior areas facing all sorts of hardship, the BJP appointed 'Pristha Pramukh' (Page in Charge for each of the electoral roll page) (Patowary 2019). Pristha Pramukhs are the main source of BJP's strength<sup>vi</sup>. On 24<sup>th</sup> February, the party organized the Pristha Pramukh Sanmilan in 96 assembly constituencies to strengthen their organizational work. The Pristha Pramukhs were assigned to meet every voter and make them aware of the policies introduced by the BJP government. Apart from this, the party had deployed around 15000 party activists in 161 call centers to reach out the beneficiaries. They resorted to around 10 crore SMS for the purpose. The party also deployed 3000 activists in 2566 assembly constituencies during the past two years (Patowary 2019). Apart from this, the BJP workers did a door to door campaign. One of the members of BJP Youth Morcha said that she and her team did a door to door campaign and also went to the vendors of daily markets for asking their vote in favor of the party.

## **6. Conclusion:**

The 2019 Lok Sabha election has turned the Politics of the state into a new direction. Perhaps, for the first time religion overplayed identity politics in the state. The result shows a complete polarization of Hindus and other communities in favor of the BJP. It was expected in the sense that, in the context of the rise of AUDF, BJP is dive to rise as a counter narrative. Hence, the Congress and AUDF are equally responsible along with BJP for the religious polarization in the state. Tarun Gogoi's favourable overtones to the AUDF supremo and AUDF's decision to contest only three seats seem to vindicate an age-old skepticism regarding the collaborationist role of the Congress with immigrant Muslims. While, the Muslims votes split between the Congress and AUDF, the Hindu votes went to the BJP.

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<sup>i</sup> Barak Valley is located in the southern region of Assam. It mainly consists of Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi.

<sup>ii</sup> Upper Assam includes Tezpur, Nowgoan, Kaliabor, Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur district.

<sup>iii</sup> 'Ex AASU leader likely to join AGP', The Telegraph, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

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<sup>v</sup> 'PM speaks up on Citizenship Bill in Assam', Times of India, April 12, 2019.

<sup>vi</sup> BJP state President Ranjit Dass has opined that on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. for further details see in Asomiya BJP Barta.

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**Funding:** "This research received no external funding".

**Conflicts of Interest:** "The authors declare no conflict of interest."