

Changing Trend of Assam Politics in 21st Century with Special Reference to Lok Sabha Election Performances of AGP, BJP and INC



Bijaya Konwar

Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Political Science,
Sankardeva Mahavidyalaya,
Pathalipahar, Lakhimpur,
Assam, India

Abstract

The study of party politics in Assam is a very complex phenomenon because, a heterogeneous society like Assam, which is divided on the basis of their particular language, religion, ethnicity etc, is very difficult. So, in such a diverse society, many factors influence the state politics. Through the study of electoral performances of AGP, BJP and INC, the dominant parties in Assam, try to understand the changing trend of party politics in Assam. It is true that, the number of seats won by any political party is not reflected the entire scenario. Because study of percentage of valid votes polled to political parties is also important to understand this trend. So this study, try to analyse the factors responsible for change the trend of party politics in Assam.

Keywords: Election, Factor, Party, Politics, Society, Vote.

Introduction

India, the largest democracy in the world has been the most successful in South Asia in the peaceful transition of power with the periodic election. After the Second World War, election studies in India is started which gives an important insights into the functioning of political system of the country. The study is based on the statistics of the four Lok Sabha elections of 21st century in Assam; these are 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019. The proposed study covers only Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC). Though there are many other political parties like communist party, state level parties in political scenario of Assam, but mainly these three political parties are considered more influential in terms of support base, broader cover area, dominant role etc.

The party politics in Assam is a pre-independent phenomenon. The oldest political organization All Assam Ahom Association (AAAA) formed in 1893, which was later renamed as Ujani Ahom Rajya Parishad (UARP) in 1970. On the other hand, the first political organization under the leadership of Tribal group, All Assam Tribal League, was established in 17th April, 1933. The emergence of regional feeling in this part especially among hill peoples was encouraged by the British for creation of regional parties. The Naga National Council of 1946 was the good example of it. After independence, in 1960, the first voice for separate state for hill district raised from All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC). The other parties of Assam are Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), Asom Jtiyatabadi Dal (AJD), Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP), Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (Biplobi), Karbi Anglong People's Conference, etc. However, the Congress Party had a strong role till 1985 except in 1978 when the Janata Party was voted to power.¹

After the resign of Janata Government in September, 1979, there was a chronic political instability and the Presidential Rule was declared for the first time in 11th December, 1979. In 1983, election to the State Assembly was held, but most of the political parties boycotted the election due to the election boycott call given by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) on the issue of foreign nationals. As a result, from 1979 to 1985 Assam movement took place and came to end by signing of historical Assam Accord on 15th August 1985.

After long six years of movement and signing of Assam Accord, the people of Assam felt for a regional political party and led to the formation of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), on 14th October, 1985. But

immediately after opposed to the Accord, the minorities particularly the Bengali speaking Hindu and Muslim formed United Minorities Front (UMF) on 10th November, 1985.²

Immediately after the Assam movement, Assembly Election of Assam was held in 1985. In 1985 election, 3 regional political parties namely, AGP, PTCA and UMF contested along with 12 other political parties. This election, for the first time, voted a regional party, AGP to power with absolute seats, which indicated a strong base of regional party in Assam. AGP secured 64 seats, UMF secured 17 seats, PTCA secured 3 seats and Independent candidates secured 10 seats. Another important point of this election was that UMF emerged as third largest single party, while all 3 regional political parties together secured 84 seats out of 125 seats, which was new trend in Assam party politics. In this election the strong base of regional political party was shown and AGP, the newly emerging regional political party, formed the Government in Assam.

The party politics in Assam especially after the 1985 election becomes more complicated and multidimensional. The rise of AGP implies a culmination of regional aspirations of the Assamese people. This paved the way for the multi-party system in Assam with the Congress system; it gave the space to political parties of various ethnic groups or smaller cultural communities. For example: Bodoland People's Front (BPF), Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF), Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) have emerged in political scenario of Assam. Among them, BPF emerges as one of the most important ethnic political parties, which represents the Bodos. Since 2006, the BPF becomes three time partner of ruling Government in Assam. The emergence of BPF in Bodo politics is another dimension of politics in Assam.

Table 1: Lok Sabha Election Performances of AGP, BJP and INC

Party	AGP		BJP		INC	
	Seat Won	%Valid vote	Seat Won	%Valid vote	Seat Won	%Valid vote
2004	02	19.95	02	22.94	09	35.07
2009	01	14.60	04	16.21	07	34.89
2014	0	3.87	07	36.86	03	29.90
2019	0	8.23	09	36.05	03	35.44

Source: Government of Assam, State Election Office, 2004, 2009, The General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha, 2014: A Statistical Report, Assam and Lokniti-CSDS Survey, 2019.

Research Question

It is to be seen how the party once considered strong regional party in Assam, i.e. AGP, electoral performance of party is going down. At the same time, BJP emerges as a dominant national political party in Assam. It enters into every corner of Assam politics. INC, another oldest and strong national party, had dominated politics in Assam for a long, electoral performances of it also important. So the research question is "What are the factors responsible for change the trend of party politics in Assam?"

Objective of Study

The main objectives of the study are to:

1. Understand change the trend of party politics in Assam;
2. Analyze the factors responsible for change the trend of party politics in Assam.

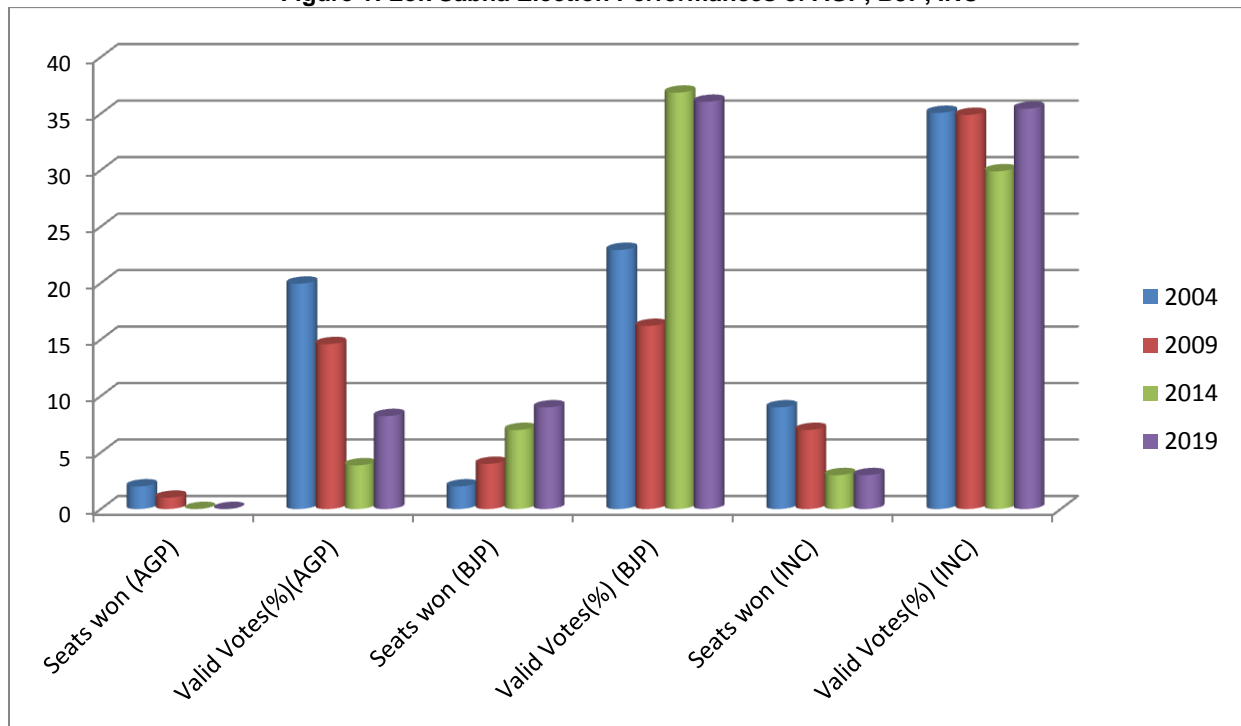
Methodology

It has adopted an historical method to understand the history of party politics in Assam. The relevant data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of information have been collected from Government Acts, Rules, Public Documents and Assam Election Handbooks, Report on General Election to the Assam Legislative Assembly, Statistical Report on General Election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam, etc. Secondary data have been collected from published books, journals, newspaper, reports and unpublished thesis.

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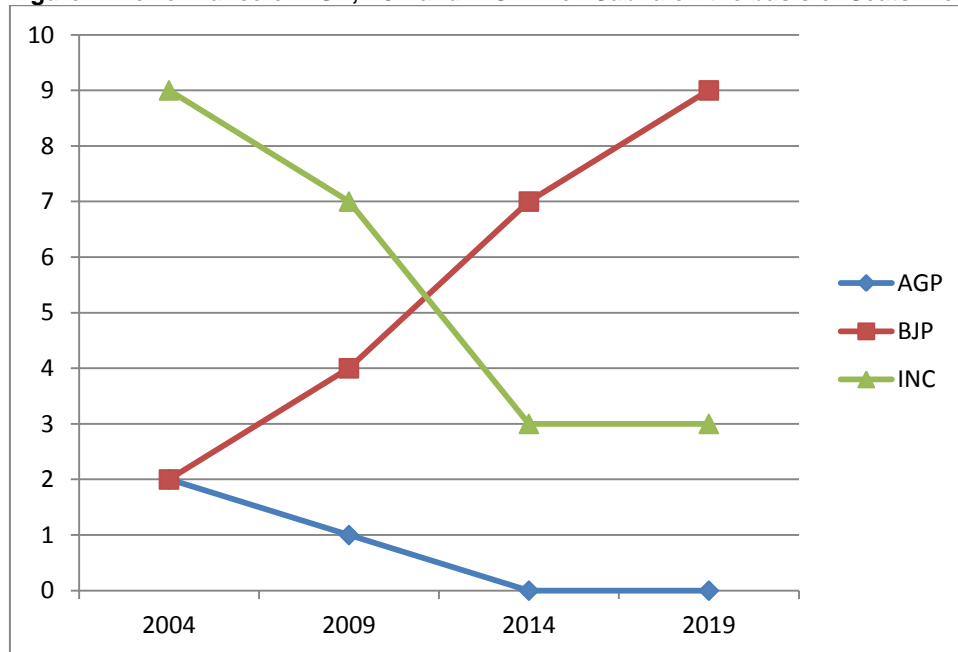
In 21st century, politics in Assam has shown a remarkable change in Lok Sabha results. To analyse this trend of change election performances of four Lok Sabha results (2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019) of AGP, BJP, and INC are taken for the study.

Figure 1: Lok Sabha Election Performances of AGP, BJP, INC



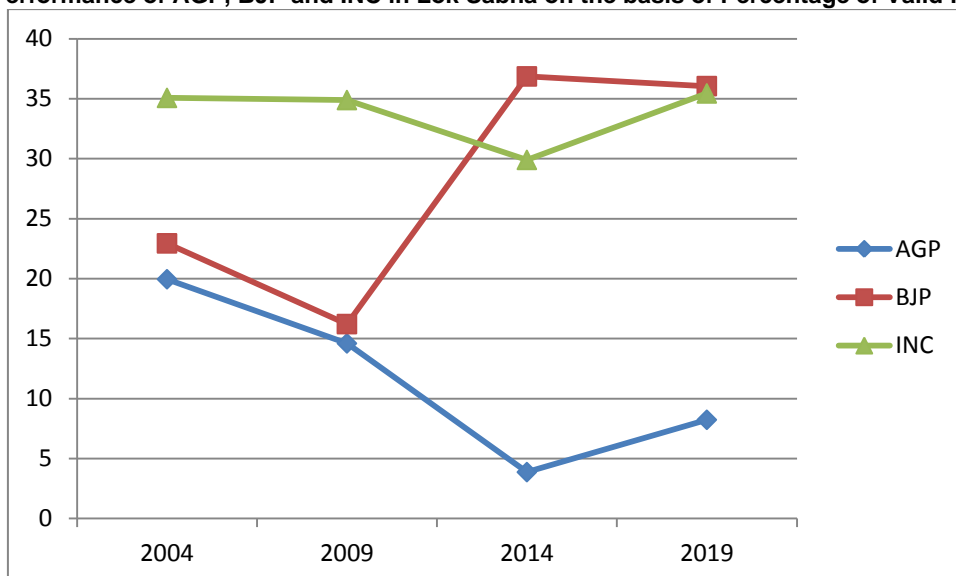
Source: Government of Assam, State Election Office, 2004, 2009, The General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha, 2014: A Statistical Report, Assam and Lokniti-CSDS Survey, 2019.

Figure 2: Performance of AGP, BJP and INC in Lok Sabha on the basis of Seats Won



Source: Government of Assam, State Election Office, 2004, 2009, The General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha, 2014: A Statistical Report, Assam and Lokniti-CSDS Survey, 2019.

Figure 3: Performance of AGP, BJP and INC in Lok Sabha on the basis of Percentage of Valid Polled Votes



Source: Government of Assam, State Election Office, 2004, 2009, The General Election to the 16th Lok Sabha, 2014: A Statistical Report, Assam and Lokniti-CSDS Survey, 2019.

From the above table 1 and figure 1, the performance of AGP, BJP and INC are shown in terms of number of seats won and percentage of valid votes polled to particular parties. Figure 2 depicts the performance of AGP, BJP and INC on the basis of number of seats won. If we see the performance of the AGP, in 2004 lok sabha elections, they won two seats, similarly, in 2009 Lok Sabha elections, they won only one seat, while in 2014 and 2019 lok sabha elections they could not manage even a single seat. The performance line of AGP, the regional party of Assam is going down.

On the other hand, there is reverse result in case of BJP. In 2004 General elections, BJP won two seats, while in 2009 elections; they made it twice, four seats they captured. In 2014 elections, BJP got better result, they won seven seats, while, 2019 is the best result for BJP. They won nine seats in Assam. The line of BJP is going up.

In case of the oldest political party in India, the INC has faced problems in recent era. The performance of INC is gradually declining in 21st century. In 2004 general elections, INC won nine seats; while in 2009 it came down to seven seats. On the other hand, in 2014 and 2019 both elections, the INC has to satisfy with only three seats. In 2009 General elections, AIUDF and BPF emerged and both of them won single seat respectively. In 2014, AIUDF managed to secure three seats, which mainly impacts upon result of other political parties directly. In 2019, it won single seat. In case of BPF they could not win single seat in both 2014 and 2019 general elections.

At the same time if we study the percentage of valid votes polled to AGP, BJP and INC, there is some different pictures. In terms of AGP, the valid votes polled in 2004 was 19.95 per cent, while in 2009, it was 14.6 per cent. Similarly, in 2014, total valid votes polled to AGP were 3.87 per cent, while, in

2019 it was 8.23 per cent. Though in 2014 and 2019, AGP could not win single seat, but in 2019, percentage of valid vote is increasing from 3.87 to 8.23.

On the other hand, in 2004 and 2009, percentage of valid votes polled to BJP was 22.94 per cent and 16.21 per cent respectively. While, in 2014 and 2019, percentage of valid votes polled to BJP were almost similar, 36.86 per cent and 36.05 per cent respectively. Though their percentage of valid votes were similar, but their number of seats won is increasing, seven to nine seats. Similarly, in case of INC there are also some changes. Except, 2014 (29.9%), the percentage of valid votes polled to INC were almost same, in 35.07 per cent (2004), 34.89 per cent (2009) and 35.44 per cent (2019). In 2004 and 2009 INC won nine and seven seats respectively. Though, in both 2014 and 2019 elections, they got three seats, but percentage of valid votes polled to INC is different 29.9 per cent (2014) and 35.44 per cent (2019). Another thing is important that, though in 2019 BJP as well as INC won nine seats and three seats respectively, but their percentage of valid votes polled was almost equal, 36.05 per cent and 35.44 per cent respectively.

So it is clear from above analysis that there are various factors impact upon the politics in Assam. On the basis of language, ethnicity, caste, class and religion, voters of Assam has divided. As all small groups become aware about their political rights, voters of Assam are divided into small parts. All political parties try to attract their own support base. Pre- and post-poll alliances become inevitable. A party alone can no longer influence the majority of voters. BJP made alliance with regional political parties like AGP, BPF and small ethnic groups like Ganashakti, Tiwa Jatiya Aikya Manch, Rabha Jatiya Aikya Manch etc. There is a fusion of ideologies,

objectives. Politics is about power, and in such a fragmented political system, political parties make all efforts to gain power. So in 21st century trends of party politics in Assam has changed.

Another important factor of politics in Assam is the role of middle class. From the Independence struggle to Assam Movement, the middle class of Assam took the leading role in all important aspects including in the creation of regional party, AGP. However, as the politics of Assam has changed, the role of middle class has also changed. The middle class is now divided based on their ethnicity, religion, language and interests. The same middle class that was once the main support base of regional party like AGP, is now divided into many small groups. All of them play their own game of group politics.

The provision for autonomy has hugely impacted the politics in Assam, too. Under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, three Autonomous Councils (Bodoland, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong) and six tribal councils (Tiwa, Rabha, Deori, Mishing, Thengal Kachari and Sonowal Kachari) are provided for tribal people of Assam. This politics of autonomous council has fragmented the people of Assam even further, which have long-term impact on the support base of the political parties.

The AGP came into existence as result of the Assam Movement or Foreign National Movement. To solve this problem, the Assam Accord was signed. Immediately after this, people of Assam elected AGP to power to resolve the long-term problems, which threatened the identity of Assamese people. Unfortunately, people's expectations were never met, and AGP, in their two tenures, could not even keep its own promises. So people have changed their choice.

Conclusion

The study of changing trend in party politics in Assam is a very complex phenomenon. Because, it is a heterogeneous society, which is divided on the basis of their particular language, religion, ethnicity etc. So, in such a diverse society, many factors influence the state politics. In latest Lok Sabha elections, it is revealed that, BJP is consolidated as a dominant party in Assam politics, which reflects in the results of both Bidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections in Assam. But it is true that, the number of seats won by any political party is not reflected the

entire scenario. Because though there is difference between BJP and INC in terms of seats they won, but there is very less difference between these two parties in terms of percentage of valid votes polled.

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