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Potential determinants of voting behaviour of the electors of Assam

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Abstract

The political parties are the backbone of the democratic form of government. The political parties are constituted to capture the power of the state and rule thereof. The composition, nature, and ideology or principle of every party is different but the primary objective is to capture the power of the state is the same. So, in order to capture the power, the political parties initiated different strategies and considered various determinants. The determinants might differ from party to party and place to place. Assam as a state of India is run by a state government following the parliamentary form of government and the party that gets the majority in the Legislative Assembly of Assam is allowed to form the government. Hence, there are many contesting political parties in Assam, and out of that some are national and others are state and regional level parties. During the election, the national, state and regional political parties of Assam considered certain factors to win the confidence of the people. These factors determine the fate of the elections. Thus, this paper is intended to focus on the determining factors in Assam, and by analyzing the factors past experiences of the political parties are analyzed to justify the arguments.

Keywords: Democracy; Government; Political Parties; Determinants; Parliamentary system

1. Introduction

The Indian democracy is adhered to multiparty system, and political parties are established to seize power of the government. The article 79 of the Indian constitution provided the parliamentary system of government and article 74 of the constitution stipulates that the party who get majority in the Lok Sabha can form government at the national level. The party who got majority in the state assembly may form government in a state. From 1951 to the present day altogether 16 numbers of parliamentary elections have been held and several assembly elections have been held in different states or provinces during the years.

There are three kinds of political parties in India i.e. national, state and regional parties. The Election Commission of India recognizes national parties to participate in elections across the country, whereas regional parties are formed to contest elections within a particular region or state. Of the national and regional parties in India the Indian National Congress (INC) party is the oldest one. In the subsequent periods various other national parties have formed and contested elections. However, the national parties have their branches or units in states and contested Assembly elections too. As like as national parties, several regional parties are formed in different regions to contest elections in their respective states (Sudha Pai). The nomenclatures of the regional political parties are mostly connected with their state name and working inside the state. The reasons behind the formation of various regional parties are different and no resemblance is seen in its objective, mission, and vision. But still, the rise of regional political parties can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, they offer a more direct and localized representation of the people, focusing on the specific issues and concerns of their respective regions. This personalized approach resonates with voters who feel that their needs are not adequately addressed by national parties. Secondly, regional parties often have a deeper understanding of the local socio-cultural fabric, which allows them to connect with voters on a more intimate level. They can articulate

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the grievances and aspirations of their people in a way that resonates strongly with the electorate (Pal, Kushal). Furthermore, regional parties have been successful in mobilizing support by highlighting the unique cultural and linguistic identities of their regions. By championing regional pride and emphasizing the preservation of local heritage, these parties have struck a chord with voters who feel a sense of attachment and loyalty to their own distinct identities.

Since the regional parties are formed to represent the regions or states, hence, a personated conception of analysis is needed. Thus, this study attempted to discuss the Assam election politics only. In Assam influential political parties are BJP, Congress(I), AIUFD, AAP, Trinamool Congress, CPI, CPM (National parties), Axom Gana Parishad (AGP), Raijor Dal (RD), Axom Jatiya Parshad (AJP), Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM), Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) (Regional parties).

Thus, this paper is an academic exercise to understand the political scenario of Assam and the potential determining factors which can stimulate the voters to vote for a particular national or regional party. So in order to produce opportunities for political parties understanding the dynamics of socio-economic and political circumstances is very essential. It is believed that if the political parties give importance to these potential sectors then they will gain in future elections.

Objective:

The study intended to understand the different potential sectors where the political parties need to do for generating support from the electorates of Assam.

1.1. Research question

What are potential determinants to generate support from the voters of Assam in elections?

2. Methodology

In the study content analysis method is used to understand the subjects and empirical presumption is drawn to justify the arguments. Secondary data sources like printed books, journals, published and unpublished theses, newspapers, and internet sources are applied to build the arguments.

3. Discussion

3.1. Potential determining sectors of Assam

In order to connect with the voters of Assam the national and regional parties should give importance to the following sectors:

3.1.1. Understanding the requirements of the voters

Any political party wishing to win the election must understand the requirements of the voters ([Michal Mochtak](#)). In this aspect, the political parties of Assam should try to study the requirements of the voters of Assam. Although Assam is a multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic society with distinct cultures of different communities and therefore, their expectation is also different. Thus, the political parties should examine the requirements of the people before contesting the elections.

As a multi-lingual society, the people of Assam speak Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Bodo, Mising, Manipuri etc. Different sub-linguistic groups like Karbi, Dimasa, Hazong, Nepali, Uria, etc. speak their languages (Paul, Subhajit 2018). Every linguistic and sub-linguistic group wants to preserve and protect their languages. So the political parties who want support from these communities need to address their issues. Moreover, there are multiple ethnic communities in Assam i.e. Assamese, Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Dimasa, and others. Each ethnic community raised the question of ethnic identity and wanted to protect their ethnic identity, culture, language, and other indigenous practices (Singha, Y. Monojit). So the political parties should learn the diversities of ethnic groups as well as their demands and accordingly, the political parties should frame their policies to win their support from them. By respecting the communities' requirements the political parties should initiate different steps to gather their support. Although there are tribal and non-tribal, schedule caste, schedule tribe, and general caste people in Assam also have certain demands, so the political parties should also listen to them and their demands.

3.1.2. *Community-based issues: Community-wise demands or expectations*

Assam is the homeland of more than 41 communities with tribal-non-tribal and hills-plains. Hence the political parties should scientifically survey the demographic compositions of the communities and try to address their issues (Basu, Sajal 1992). The demands of the communities of Assam are different from one community to another. The Bodo communities want a separate state, Karbi, Dimasa, Mishing and Hazong, Tiwa, Rabha, Karbi, Dimasa, etc. communities demanded autonomous councils (Chuchengfa Gogoi, 2018), Ahom, Chutia, Moran, Mattack, Tea community, and Koch Rajbanshi demanded the ST status. As a result, Bodo Territorial Council was formed in 2003, Tiwa autonomous council in 1995, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in 1952, the North Cachar Hill Autonomous Council in 1995, the Rabbha Hasong Autonomous Council, Mising Autonomous Council, the Tiwa Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council, Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council. Further, there are 33 development councils of Moran, Mottok, Maimal, Moria, Gorkha, Adivasi, Chutia, Nath Jogi, Koch Rajbanshi, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Tai Ahom, Mech Kachari, Manipuri, Sadharan Jati, Singpho (Man Tai), Amri Karbi, Sarania Kachari, Barak Valley Hill Tribes, Tea and Ex-Tea Garden, SC, Chaodand, Madahi, Kumar, Hajong, Sut, Goria, Barman, Karbi (outside Karbi Anglong), Hindi speaking, Bengali Speaking, Jolha, Brahmin and Kalita Development Council (Singha, Y. Monojit). But still, the other communities also demanded autonomous councils in Assam. So, the political parties who wish to win the confidence of these communities need to settle the different community base demands rationally.

3.1.3. *Bold and charismatic leadership*

To win the confidence of the voters every party should have strong and charismatic leaders. Since independence, congress leaders like Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Hiteswar Saikia, Tarun Gogoi of Indian National Congress, Dr. Prafulla Kr. Mahanta of Axom Gana Parishad, Sarbananada Sonowal, and Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma of BJP are some political leaders who played a dominant role in the politics of Assam. They are bold in making decisions to attract the people of Assam and therefore, the people vote for the INC, AGP, and BJP in different elections. Gopinath Bordoloi's role in establishing and protecting the interest of the people is always been remembered in Assam (Sanjay Hazarika, 2022 & Lily Mazumdar Boruah, 1992). Hiteswar Saikia's role during the Assam Movement (1979-85) and handling the insurgent groups of Assam was remarkable (Mahendra Bora, 1994). Dr. Prafulla Mahanta's role in the Assam Movement and handling of insurgency in Assam is outstanding (S.R. BBakshi et.al 1998). Tarun Gogoi was a non-corrupt, simple, leader who was very popular among the people (Sushanta Talukdar, 2020). Sarbananda Sonowal's slogan "Jati, Mati, Vetri" was popular and it created a new wave in the heart of the people of Assam. Furthermore, their charismatic leadership was visible in placing the issues of Assam at the central government level. Thus, the leader of a political party can change the attitude of the people, and based on that the voters of Assam voted for their parties in elections.

3.1.4. *Sensitiveness toward the people*

Sensitiveness is another quality that is needed in every party. The party should have a good sense and sensitivity towards the feelings of the people. Certain sensitive issues started in Assam since independence and the ruling government has amicably tried to resolve them. The first sensitive issue arose in 1960 when Assamese was declared as the official language and as a result which hill districts of Assam vehemently opposed it. Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha settled this issue amicably with the consultation of hill district leaders. When the Assam movement started in 1979 on the issue of deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, then Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia played a vital role. During the CAB and later CAA movement in 2019, the Sarbananda Sonowal played an important role in normalizing the situation. During 2020-2022 the health minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, played a vibrant role during the Covid-19 pandemic situation in Assam. As a result, the electors of Assam voted for the BJP in the 2021 election. So, the sensitiveness towards the burning issues of the state attracted the attention of the voters of Assam.

3.1.5. *Connection with media*

In the age of the 21st century, the media plays a vital role. It can reshape the situation because this is the only communication medium that transmits the information to the public as a whole. Thus, the political parties should have a good connection with the media whether it may be print, electronic, or social media.

It is important to note that the print and electronic media of Assam are playing an important role in politics and political parties. Nowadays the media publishes the views and comments of the political parties of Assam and disseminates the perspectives of the political parties. There are 8 popular English dailies, 15 Assamese dailies 6 Hindi dailies, 6 Bengali dailies, 3 Karbi dailies, 3 Bodo dailies, and one Nepali daily in Assam. There are also 63 Weekly, Bi-weekly, and fortnightly Newspapers and 26 numbers of Magazines are published. The television news channels are concerned, altogether 6 news channels broadcasting daily news in Assam. Thus, the political parties of Assam should take advantage of these print and electronic media to inform the perspectives and vision of the party to the general electors.

3.1.6. Understanding demographic diversities and their demand (expectations)

In any electoral politics, demography plays an important role. It became more crucial when the demographic composition is diverse and heterogeneous. In Assam, the communities are distinctive in caste, community, religion, language, culture, etc. So the political parties that expected the support of the people of Assam must take care of it and work on it.

The demography of Assam is diverse. As per the 2011 census, 61.47% are Hindus and 34.22% are Muslims. Out of the 33 districts Hindus are majority in 24 districts and 9 districts are Muslim majority. The SC population is 6.9%, ST is 12.44 % and OBC accounts for 25% of the total population of Assam. Out of the total ST population, 14% are ST plains and 15% are ST hills. The tribal and non-tribal population of Assam also played a dominant role in election politics. Almost 3.88 million tribal people are living in Assam which accounts for 12.45% of the total population as per census 2011. The remaining 87.55% of people are non-tribal but out of that ST, SC, and OBC constitute 44.35% and 55.66% belong to general or unreserved category people. The above statistics portray that the political parties need to frame different strategies to get support from these diverse categories of people of Assam.

3.1.7. Conscious responsiveness among party workers

To bring a positive response from the electors in electoral politics of Assam must increase the conscious level of the party workers. They must be always alert about the happening in their areas and if the anti-party activity is seen anywhere by them, they should inform the higher leaders of the party organization to resolve the same immediately. The existing parties of Assam, i.e. BJP, INC, AGP, and other regional parties mentioned above have their ground base organizations. The BJP and INC are more convenient positions in district and village-level party organizations in Assam. Both parties have strong party organizations and their workers are working at the ground zero level and have conveniently spread the party ideology and principles. Although the Congress is a very old party and its members are all working at the ground level but still the BJP's workers are working very sincerely at the village level. Besides, AGP, the AJP, RD, AGM, UPPL, and BPF are newly formed parties and have less ground-zero support. The AGP has lost its support from the electors due to certain weaknesses of the party. The AIUDF is concerned about the Muslims and therefore, their presence is seen only in Muslim-dominated 9 districts only. BPF and UPPL concentrated their activities in Bodoland areas of Assam and therefore their presence is seen in Bodoland only. Thus, it seems that conscious responsiveness created by the BJP party at the grassroots level resulted in the increasing number of vote share in the 2016 and 2021 elections. The INC has also a strong ground base with responsive party members but still the party failed to achieve success in the last two elections of Assam. The AJP and RD are the newly born parties and have fewer members at the ground level, therefore, they are unable to motivate the voters to vote in favour of them in the last election. AGM is noted to be a high middle-class people's party and has less impact at ground level.

3.1.8. Close vigilance of other opponent political parties

The close vigilance of the political party is a life care medicine to reach the voters. The party workers should be vigilant regarding the activities of the other political parties. The multiparty system is visible in Assam and last two elections i.e. 2016 and 2021, 37 political parties are contested in the elections comprising of national, regional, and other state parties and registered parties including independent candidates. In the election BJP got 42.12% votes, INC 32.06%, AGP 33.37%, AIUDF 21.34%, BPF 39.20%, and Independent 11.51% votes. Notably, other contesting parties got less than 3 % votes. In the 2021 election 42 political parties are contested including independent out of which BJP got 45.71%, INC 39.45%, AGP 32.91%, AIUDF 53.79%, BPF 37.78%, UPPL 40.58%, CPIM 45.38%, CPI 17.43%, and RJD 10.17%. The independent candidate vote share reduces to 1.91%. The result of 2021 shows that the vote share in the percentage level increased to BJP, INC AIUDF, and UPPL and reduced the vote percentage of AGP BPF and independent candidates. The above statistics of the vote share of different political parties of Assam clarify that every political party should mechanize to a close vigilance on other parties if any party wants to win the elections in the future.

3.1.9. Party ideology and image of a political party

The party ideology, image, and faith of any political party can boost its chances to win the elections easily. The existing parties of Assam follow the right-wing ideology of Liberalism or Capitalism excluding CPI, CPIM, and All India Forward Block which follows the ideology of Marxist, Leninist, and Communist. Besides, the BJP follows the ideology of the Hindutwa principle of S. D. Sabarkar, the INC follows the common principle of both 'left and right', AGP is the follower of regionalism and Assamese people domination in Assam, the AIUDF wants to safeguard the interest of Muslim communities of Assam, the RD is dealt with peasant and workers of Assam and to some extent leftist ideology, AJP is focusing on Assamese people domination over Assam etc. Thus, it is observed that party ideology matters during elections and voters cast their votes according to the party ideology and principles.

Further, the image of the party within the people also works in determining the vote of the electors. Those parties' image is better they get more votes in elections. The BJP party's image was better during the 2016 and 2021 elections due to the entry of Sarbananda Sonowal and his guarantee to protect Assam from illegal immigrants and safeguard the interest of the indigenous people of Assam. It has created a good image of the party which helped to secure more seats in 2016 election. Later, during the 2021 election, the role played by Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at the crucial moment of Covid-19 and his role in vibrating the education and health department created a good image of the BJP party. Likewise AJP and the other parties should also try to create a good image among the people.

3.1.10. Create confidence level among the party members and people

Creating confidence among the people may also be considered as a boosting factor to attract the voters towards a political party. Confidence within the party and voters is essential because the general masses are not organized and have less idea about the political system. As observed in Assam's politics and political parties some parties are capable to stimulate the general voters to vote in favour of them. The BJP stands in the front position in creating confidence among the people. During the last two terms of the BJP government, it is observed that the party leaders particularly the Chief Minister are popular among all voters due to public touching abilities and quick disposal of problems. The AIUDF leader Moulana Badaruddin Ajmal has a connection with the masses. The Tarun Gogoi was popular among the masses due to his simplicity. So, it is the inner quality of the party leaders to connect with the people, and sensitiveness toward the aspiration of the common people encouraged the masses to provide support to that party. It is also presumed that if the ruling party or the leaders of the opposition parties are capable of easy disposal of problems with care and sensitivity then the masses feel safe under them and that quality enhances the support of the people to the party.

3.1.11. Importance of contemporary local issues

The importance of contemporary issues may be one of the factors which can attract voters to a political party. People believe in resolving contemporary problems faced by them. So every political party that seeks support from the voters should give importance to contemporary issues rather than old issues.

In Assam, certain contemporary issues immediately need to be settled down. For example, immigration, flood control, big dam (NHPC), NRC, unemployment problem, constitutional safeguard, identity problem, ST status for six communities, demand for autonomous council, separate state, tea garden labourers issue, 6th schedule issue, Assam accord implementation, border fencing, protest against privatization of government corporations, land patta to indigenous people, protection of ethnic communities, etc. These issues are the demand of the people of Assam and expected by the people of Assam that the political parties should take the initiative to solve them. It is to be noted that the AGP came to power in 1986 due to the Assam Movement (1979-85), The Tarun Gogoi came to power due to the misrule of the AGP in 1990 and 2001 and the BJP came to power in 2016 because of insecurity feelings and identity questions of the Assamese people and 2021 due to the role of BJP government on Covid-19 pandemic situation. Thus, it is evident that the people of Assam give more importance to contemporary issues when going to vote in the elections. Hence, the political party that wants to get support from the public in the election should give importance to contemporary issues.

3.1.12. Importance to youth's problem and their demand and expectations

The youths are emerging voters of a country and they are not only energetic but also prospects of the future. So the political party should give importance to them. In Assam, more than 50 per cent are young voters who determine the fate of a political party in the election. So the political party should give importance to them. Presently, the BJP is in power because of the young voters and they are still initiating to attract them by providing different direct and indirect benefits through welfare schemes. Like as BJP, the other national and regional parties should try to address the issues of the youths of Assam who hope to win the elections in the future.

3.1.13. Party fraction should be avoided

Fractions or division of party regularly demoralized the voters in election politics. The stability of a party with the long durability of a party organization has created confidence among the people and shows its support to them. Internal fraction within the party of AGP has lost its support of the electors in Assam. The internal fraction within INC caused the increase in the support base of the BJP. This is because most of the party leaders of INC joined the BJP party in and around 2015-16. Owing to this fraction the INC lost the confidence of the people in the 2016 election.

3.1.14. Boldness to raise the state demand to the centre and favourable solution

The boldness to raise state demand to the central government and settlement of state problems has become more convenient when the same party is in power in the centre and state. The BJP government of Assam can get advantages due to this condition in 2016-2021 periods. The AGP as a regional party government failed to fulfill its demand in central government for this reason. The Congress government from 2001 to 2015 was also in an advantageous position due to the Dr. Monmohan Singh Congress government but still, the Congress government failed to fulfill the expectations of the people of Assam. Thus, a stronghold in settling the state problems through the assistance of the central government and strong presentation at the central level creates confidence among the voters and ultimately votes for the party.

3.1.15. Choosing the right coalition partners

In the age of this coalition politics, choosing better coalition partners is most important. The BJP-led NDA consists of 28 partners while earlier UPA and now INDIA is the ally of 26 political parties. In Assam, the AGP and UPPL are the allies of the BJP-led NDA, and the other 15 present political parties of Assam are allies of Congress-led INDIA. Now the AJP, RD, AGM, and other parties of Assam are the partners of INDIA. The people watched the entire political drama (arrangement) of the parties i.e. who is to whom or who is with whom (which party is in alliance with what party) concept is evaluated by the voters at the time of voting. It is presumed that if the voter is satisfied with the coalition partners they support and vote.

3.1.16. Publicity with care

In 21st century publicity stunt is an important determining factor. Publicity through the newspaper, hoardings, television, radio, leaflets, public speaking, public meetings, press meets, road shows, and rallies are the indifferent medium of publicity commonly used by the political parties. But in doing so, the language should be polite and rational. If any political party speaks unruly, confusing, and unexpected words then the public does not absorb it. Further, it will also give space to the opposition parties to criticize. All the national and regional parties of Assam should take care of it.

3.1.17. Non-involvement in corruption by the party leaders

Corruption is an intolerable offense for society and every member of the society criticizes the corrupt practices conducted at either the political or administrative level. The corruption cases against the INC and BJP governments under Tarun Gogoi and Sarbananda Sonowal's leadership did not happen and therefore their image is high among the voters of Assam. The allegation against Dr. Prafulla Kr. Mahanta was raised but not proved but still, the support of the voters had lost. Thus, it is presumed that if any allegation is booked to a political party it will lose the confidence and support of the electors.

3.1.18. Financial soundness of the political party

Every party needs funds to run its organization. So the political party should generate the funds to operate the activities of the organization. As per observation and media reports, the financial position of INC, BJP, and AIUDF is quite good in comparison to AGP, AJP, RD, and other political parties of Assam. Hence, financially sound parties are in a convenient position rather than less financially strong parties like AJP, RD, AGM, and others. As per financial status, the party can make publicity, hold public meetings, and other arrangements for publicity in favour of the party. Thus it is seen that the BJP, INC, and AIUDF are in a more convenient position in Assam.

4. Conclusion

The political party that wishes to win the election needs to take care of the above credentials to get the opportunity to form the government. Numerous political parties in India volunteer to do public service for the betterment of the people. In doing so, the candidate of the political parties needs to elect and it is the responsibility of the electorates to elect the suitable candidate from amongst the different candidates of political parties. While selecting the suitable candidate the voters are considered many things. The things that are considered by the voters during the election are also equally important for the political parties. The political parties that are compatible with the different elements get the chance to rule the central as well as state government. Thus these elements are more important to attract the voters. If the political parties consider the above elements then the confidence of the voters for that party will be enhanced, otherwise, they will become a party of failure. Finally, organization, leadership, and publicity are the major traits to win the elections.

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