



ELECTORAL POLITICS IN BODOLAND TERRITORIAL REGION OF ASSAM WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO 18TH LOKSABHA ELECTION OF 2024

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 Parliamentary Election which was conducted in Assam (inclusive of BTR) in three phases (19th, 26th April & 7th May) witnessed certain twists and turns in the behaviours of the voters of Bodoland Territorial Region with regard to their choice of parties and the candidates. Unlike the previous Lok Sabha Elections of 2014 and 2019, many non-Bodo voters of 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC remained away from the non-Bodo politics perpetrated by a section of leaders and voted for UPPL-BJP alliance candidate. In 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC, majority of the voters showed their allegiance to BJP and helped the concerned party and the candidate to win for the second consecutive time.

Keywords: BPF, BTR, GSP, INC, NDA, UPPL

INTRODUCTION

In Assam, the parliamentary election (2024) for fourteen seats was conducted in three phases on 19th April, 26th April and 7th May without any untoward incidents. The results of the concerned elections were declared on 4th June amidst delights of some and disappointments for others. Notably, 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC includes 9 Assembly segments falling within Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). On the other hand, 6 Assembly segments of Tamulpur and Udalguri districts of BTR fall under the 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC. The voters of the BTR decide not only the destinies of the contestants, but also influence the politics of the concerned Council, the state of Assam and the country to some extent. The changes in the voting trend of the electors pertaining to their choice and support for the parties and the candidates differ the concerned election from the previous ones. In this election, quite a good number of voters altered their loyalties towards the parties and the candidates despite their lofty promises and assurances. In fact, the political scenario in the region has undergone some changes after the historic Bodo accord of 27th January 2020. Many voters of the region belonging to different communities have already altered their party affiliations and actual support bases. Such

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alterations in the voting behaviour of the electors are expected to influence the BTR election of 2025 and the State Legislative Assembly of 2026 as well.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper examines the behavior of the electors of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with particular reference to the Lok Sabha Election of 2024 and its impact on the future course of politics of the concerned Council and the state of Assam. The paper focuses on how the changes in the behaviours of the electors in the region will be influential factors for the ensuing Council election of 2025 and thereafter in the Assembly election of 2026. Moreover, this paper intends to assist the electors, leaders, candidates, political analysts, observers and decision makers of the region in the process of building constructive and harmonious society.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is analytical in nature and the relevant data are drawn both from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of data include Government Documents and Records, Census Reports, Reports of the Election Commission of India and the Election Commission of Assam, Statistical Handbooks of BTR, and discussions with the voters of the region and personal observations by the author. The secondary sources of data are confined to Books, Journals, Newspapers and the Internet resources.

STUDY AREA

The present study is confined to the electoral activities and results pertaining to the Lok Sabha election of 2024 in BTR and its adjacent areas, mainly the 1-Kokrajhar (ST) and Darrang-Udalguri (Gen) constituencies. BTR comprises five districts of Assam: Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur, and Udalguri. The Council's total area consists of 9,688 square kilometers. As per the Census of 2011, BTR has a total population of 31, 51,047, out of which 1,75, 632 are Scheduled Castes and 10, 55,732 are Scheduled Tribes.

The 1-Kokrajhar (ST) constituency has altogether 9 Assembly segments: 1-Gossaigaon, 2-Dotma (ST), 3-Kokrajhar (ST), 4-Baokhungri, 5-Parbatjhora, 19-Sidli Chirring (ST), 20-Bijni, 41-Manas, and 422-Baksa (ST), spread over the Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Baksa districts. As per the electoral roll of 2024, the total number of voters in the constituency comprises 14, 70,271, out of which 7, 35, 270 are males, 7, 34,996 females, and 5 third gender.



On the other hand, the 4-Darrang-Udalguri constituency is composed of eleven Assembly segments: 43-Tamulpur (ST), 44-Goreswar, 45-Bhergaon, 46-Udalguri (ST), 47-Majbat, 48-Tangla, 50-Mangaldoi, 51-Dalgaon, 31-Rangia, 32-Kamalpur, and 49-Sipajhar, spread over the Tamulpur, Udalguri, Darrang, and Kamrup districts. The total number of voters in the constituency comprises 21, 87,160, consisting of 10, 99,294 males, 10, 87,847 females, and 19 third gender.

Since all the 20 Assembly segments in the study area do not fall within the jurisdiction of BTR, the paper has emphasized the behavior of the electors in the 9 LACs of the 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC and 6 LACs of the 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC, without neglecting the remaining 5 Assembly segments outside the jurisdiction of the said council. Hence, the main voters of the 15 Assembly segments falling within BTR include the Bodos, Asomiya Hindus, Koch-Rajbanshis, Muslims, Bengali Hindus, Adivasis, Santhals, Nepalis, Biharis, among others.

Table: 01

HPCs&LACs of BTR

HPC No. & Name	LAC No. & Names	District	HPC No. &Name	LAC No. & Names	District
1-Kokrajhar (ST)	1- Gossaigaon	Kokrajhar	4-Darrang- Udalguri (Open)	43- Tamulpur (ST)	Tamulpur
Within BTR	2-Dotma (ST)	-do-	Within BTR	44- Goreswar	-do-
	3-Kokrajhar (ST)	-do-		45- Bhergaon	Udalguri
	4- Baokhungri	-do-		46- Udalguri (ST)	-do-



	5- Parbatjhora	-do-		47-Majbat	-do-
	19- Sidli Chirang (ST)	Chirang		48-Tangla	-do
	20-Bijni	-do-	Outside BTR	50- Mangaldoi	Darrang
	41-Manas	Baksa		51-Dalgaon	-do-
	42-Baksa (ST)	-do-		31-Rangia	Kamrup (R)
				32- Kamalpur	-do-
				49-Sipajhar	-do-

Source: Election Commission of India, 2024

BRIEF RECAP OF PREVIOUS HPC ELECTIONS (2014 & 2019)

The voters of the BTR have been playing a significant role in the politics of the concerned region and the state of Assam. Changes in the voting behaviours of the said region have been noticeable from the Lok Sabha Election of 2014 to that of 2019 and the recently concluded election of 2024.

In the 16th Lok Sabha Election, independent candidate Naba Kumar Sarania, representing non-Bodos, had won in the 5-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC due to various internal and external factors. In that election, he had defeated the independent candidate Urkhao Gwra Brahma with a huge margin of 3,55,779 votes. Divisive politics, occurrences of ethnic conflicts, and misunderstandings developed over the years in the region were reflected in the form of dislike and distrust towards the Bodo community in general and their candidates in particular. Such grievances and dislike towards the Bodo community were exploited by Naba Kumar Sarania and a few other leaders to win the hearts of many non-Bodo voters such as Muslims, Santhal-Adivasis, Koch-Rajbongshis, Asomiya Hindus, among others.



Internal division among the Bodos also split the votes of the concerned community to such an extent that the winning candidate managed to make an all-time record of securing 6, 34, 428 votes. Notably, the total votes secured by different Bodo candidates in the constituency combined would still not have been enough to defeat Naba Kumar Sarania.

On the other hand, in the 8-Mangaldoi HPC, BJP candidate Ramen Deka secured 4,86, 357 votes and defeated his nearest rival Kirip Chaliha of the INC with a margin of 22,884 votes. Ramen Deka of the BJP was supported by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), National Democratic Front of Boroland-Progressive (NDFB-P), and People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) with a view to resolving their long-standing demands and carrying forward the peace talks to a logical conclusion.

The Lok Sabha election of 2019 also witnessed several changes in the approach of the electors of BTAD regarding their choice of parties and representatives. The election witnessed several allegations and counter-allegations among the BPF, UPPL, and the independent candidate Naba Kumar Sarania. For the BPF, many large-scale campaigns were carried out to win the hearts of voters in order to retain power and position in the ensuing Council election of 2020 and the Assembly election of 2021. The UPPL, in collaboration with ABSU, NDFB (P), NDFB, PJACBM, and other allied organizations, used slogans about placing the long-pending Bodo issue before the Parliament, unity, and the all-round development of people of all communities in the region. For them, electoral success was essential for advancing the peace talks and bringing about a logical conclusion between the government and both NDFB-P and NDFB-R factions.

The independent candidate Naba Kumar Sarania's election slogan comprised promises of securing the rights of non-Bodos in BTAD at any cost. He repeatedly warned the non-Bodo voters that they would be marginalized in their own land if he was not voted to power again. The Indian National Congress also took a keen interest in both the 8-Mangaldoi and 5-Kokrajhar (ST) HPCs with a view to winning and keeping the party workers organized. For the State and Central governments, victory in the concerned seats would ensure the continuance of their allied rule in the coming days under the banner of the NDA. In the 5-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC, to the surprise of many, the last laugh was had by sitting Member of Parliament Naba Kumar Sarania, who defeated his nearest rival Pramila Rani Brahma of the BPF with a margin of just 37,786 votes. In the 8-Mangaldoi HPC, many believed that Congress candidate Bhubaneshwar Kalita would defeat BJP candidate Dilip Saikia by a significant margin. Contrarily, BJP candidate Dilip Saikia managed to secure as many as 7, 35,469 votes and defeated his nearest INC rival by a margin of 1, 38, 545 votes.



VOTING BEHAVIOR IN THE 18TH HPC ELECTION (2024)

BJP, INC, UPPL, BPF, and GSP remained active in the entire BTR and continued to work towards strengthening their bases much before the delimitation and announcement of the 2024 General Election. Amidst allegations and counter-allegations, the two regional parties of BTR (UPPL and BPF) regularly clashed over their respective achievements and failures. BJP and INC also continued to organize and solidify their support bases in the region. For this purpose, district and primary-level workers were given significant responsibilities to carry forward their missions. In the process, the frequency of party leaders and members joining new parties and leaving their old ones increased, often citing mismanagement and deviation from ideology. Each time new leaders and members were inducted into a party through joining ceremonies; the opposition parties dismissed these events as mere dramas, claiming the individuals were already party members.

In the meantime, the final publication of the delimitation process simply renamed the Darrang constituency as Darrang-Udalguri, without making any alterations to the already proposed areas comprising both Sixth Schedule and non-Sixth Schedule constituencies. BPF workers and certain Bodo civil society organizations expressed dissatisfaction over the issue, despite the retention of reservation of 1-Kokrajhar HPC for ST (P). Certain ABSU and UPPL leaders, on the other hand, expressed satisfaction over the retention of 1-Kokrajhar HPC for ST (P) and the renaming of Darrang-Udalguri from Darrang constituency. The increase in Assembly seats in BTR from 11 to 15 was welcomed by UPPL and ABSU, but was disliked by BPF supporters and other concerned citizens on the grounds that a mere increase in seats without an increase in reservation for ST (P) was meaningless. Hagrama Mohilary-led BPF and its supporters continued to blame the Pramod Boro-led UPPL government and ABSU leadership for their failure to create two separate parliamentary seats within BTR, which was promised in the BTC Accord of 2003. Amidst such allegations and counter-allegations, the announcement of the General Election (2024) across the country was made by the Election Commission of India on 16th March 2024. Due to differences over partisan interests, Gana Suraksha Party's MCLA Ghanashyam Das was removed from his post as Executive Member of BTR on 6th April 2024. This incident was significant, as the founder of GSP was under trial regarding his ST status and was simultaneously not supporting the NDA alliance. In a dramatic turn of events, former Cabinet Minister of the Hagrama Mohilary-led BPF, Chandan Brahma, joined UPPL along with 3,000 supporters on 12th April 2024.



Finally, the 18th HPC election was conducted in Assam (including BTR) in three phases without any untoward incidents. The actual day of counting took place on 4th June 2024, resulting in celebrations for some and disappointments for others. As expected, the result of the 18th Lok Sabha Election of 2024 in the 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC turned in favour of Joyanta Basumatary (UPPL), as he managed to defeat his nearest rival Kampa Borgoyari (BPF) with a margin of 51,583 votes. Garjon Mashahary of INC secured the third position with 1, 13, 736 votes.

The result of the 18th Lok Sabha Election did not meet the expectations of the Oboro-backed candidate Binita Deka (GSP), as she secured only the fourth position with 94,189 votes. Notably, the result of the concerned election helped neutralize the decade-long divisive feelings between Bodos and non-Bodos in BTR.

Table: 02

Result of the 18th Lok Sabha Election, 2024

1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC			4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC		
Candidate	Party	Votes secured	Candidate	Party	Votes secured
Joyanta Basumatary	UPPL	4,88,995	Dilip Saikia	BJP	8,68,387
Kampa Borgoyari	BPF	4,37,412	Madhab Rajbangshi	INC	5,39,375
Garjon Mashahary	INC	1,13,736	Durgadas Boro	BPF	3,10,574
Binita Deka	GSP	94,189	Daniel Mardi	Independent	14,291
Prithviraj Narayan Dev Mech	Independent	33,737	Aroon Barooa	BJKP	12,563
Gauri Sankar Sarania	AITC	23,519	Swarna Devi	GSP	11,112



Ranjay KR Brahma	Independent	8,830	Lalit Pegu	VPI	10,915
Lalit Pegu	VPI	7,932	Jitendra Chaliha	SUCI (Communist)	7,452
Jyotish Kumar Das	Independent	6,106	Abul Kasem	Republican Party of India (Athawale)	4,973
Pankaj Islary	Independent	4,508	Biren Basak	Bharatiya Gana Parishad	4,623
Triptina Rabha	Independent	4,540	Abdul Hamed	Rashtriya Ulama Council	3,731
Ajoy Narzary	Independent	4,080	---	---	---
NOTA	NOTA	13,662	NOTA	NOTA	23,204
Total	14	12,41,496	Total	13	18,11,200

Source: Election Commission of India, 2024

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study has revealed that politics in the region has been playing a significant role in BTR and State politics since past few years. Since 2014, the politics of the region took a new direction due to the emergence of non-Bodo politics. With the rise of non-Bodo political group, the voting behavior in the region took a new dimension and led to the victory of Naba Kumar Sarania with a huge margin in the 5-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC. The 17th Lok Sabha Election of 2019 presumed to have witnessed changes in their party affiliations and loyalty to candidates irrespective of caste, creed, community and the place of residence. However, the expectations of the BPF and UPPL were shattered when the actual counting of the same led to the victory of Naba Kumar Sarania with a margin of just 37,786 votes. However, new era of BTR politics started with the end of Oboro politics and winning of a new face and party in the parliamentary election of 2024.



Delimitation and changes in the area and voters (exclusion & exclusion), changes in the approach of the party leaders, alterations in the mindsets of the electors and loss of ST status of Naba Kumar Sarania led to the end of the Oboro politics that had prevailed in the region for a decade. Despite claims made by leaders and supporters that GSP candidate Binita Deka would become victorious, she could secure only 94,189 votes (fourth position). On the other hand, BPF candidate managed to win a large number of votes and secure second position thereby losing with a margin of just 51,581 votes. On the other hand, INC candidate just managed to get 1, 13, 736 votes thereby securing third position only. It is revealed that many Bodo voters of 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC cast their valuable votes for the BPF candidate instead of UPPL for reasons best known to them. Many Muslim votes of the constituency also went in favour of BPF candidate instead of NDA. If certain percentage of Muslim votes who voted in favour of INC were to go to BPF, the latter would have managed to have the last laugh. It is also revealed that many supporters of Chandan Brahma who had formerly belonged to BPF could have made big difference in the percentage of votes. It is also assumed by certain people that Chandan Brahma was inducted to UPPL with a view to giving him ticket for the vacant post of 19-Sidli Chirang (ST) if Joyanta Basumatary was to get elected as a Member of Parliament.

In 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC, sitting BJP parliamentarian Dilip Saikia managed to defeat his nearest rival Madhab Rajbangshi of INC, with a margin of 3,29,012 votes. Albeit high expectations, Durgadas Boro of BPF managed to secure the third position with 3,10,574 votes to his credit. In fact, total votes secured by the both INC and BPF also could not reach the total votes secured by the BJP candidate. It is revealed that expecting many developmental activities to take place and as an ally of NDA, the supporters of UPPL voted for BJP in 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC. ABSU leaders and activists supported BJP candidate with a view to getting help in implementing the remaining clauses of the peace accord in letter and spirit. Thus, with a sky-high hope that area extension in the eastern sector and enhancement of Council seats from 46 to 60 would be fulfilled, ABSU and other Bodo voters opted for NDA candidate Dilip Saikia.

Further, the study has also revealed the sympathies and sentiments that Bodo people have for the NDFB leaders and members jailed in different places of the country and outside. In their opinion, the imprisoned members inclusive of Ranjan Daimary should also be released at the earliest as per the memorandum of settlement and permanent peace be sustained for good. It is also worth mentioning that some former NDFB members considered the accord as betrayal, unfruitful and refused to vote for UPPL-BJP alliance and instead opted to vote for BPF candidates. It is also



revealed that certain Muslim and Christian voters cast their valuable votes for either BPF or INC in place of UPPL and BJP for reasons best known to them. However, the majority of the voters of the region chose NDA candidates over others mainly for the early implementation of the peace accord. In doing so, they hoped that area extension, increase of seats, direct central funding, and establishment of central and state institutions promised through the memorandum of settlement could get materialized sooner or later.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, the main contestants of 1-Kokrajhar (ST) HPC comprised Joyanta Basumatary (UPPL), Kampa Borgoyari (BPF), and Garjan Mashahary (INC). On the other hand, the prominent contestants of 4-Darrang-Udalguri HPC were Dilip Saikia (BJP), Madhav Rajbongshi (INC), and Durga Das Boro (BPF). Notably, both Bodo and non-Bodo voters strategically changed in their approaches towards the choice of candidates and party affiliations since the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha elections. Remarkably, the 18th Lok Sabha election brought about a new episode of electoral politics in BTR with the emergence of a new parliamentarian with fresh ideas and visions. Definitely, the result of the concerned parliamentary election will influence the BTR election of 2025 and thereafter the Assembly election of 2026. On the whole, what is pertinent is the need for sustainable peace and development for the betterment of all sections of people living in the region.

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