

Odisha State Legislative Election and the Rise of BJP

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Abstract

The 2024 Odisha Legislative Assembly election, held from May 13 to June 1, 2024, marked a significant political shift in the state. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) achieved a historic victory, securing 78 out of 147 seats, thereby ending the Biju Janata Dal's (BJD) 24-year tenure under Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The BJD, which had been a dominant force in Odisha politics since 2000, experienced a substantial decline, winning only 51 seats—a significant drop from the 112 seats it held prior to the election. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik contested from two constituencies: he retained his seat in Hinjili but faced an unexpected defeat in Kantabanji. The Indian National Congress (INC) improved its standing slightly, increasing its seat count from 9 to 14. Despite this modest gain, the party remained a minor player in the state's political landscape. The BJP's victory can be attributed to several factors, including effective campaigning that resonated with the electorate's desire for change, strategic targeting of key constituencies, and capitalizing on anti-incumbency sentiments against the long-standing BJD government.

Key Words: BJP , BJD ,2024 Odisha Legislative Assembly,

Introduction

The 2024 Odisha Legislative Assembly election marked a pivotal moment in Odisha's political history, as the BJP's ascent ended the BJD's long-standing dominance. The results underscored the electorate's desire for change and set the stage for a new era in the state's governance. The Odisha state Assembly Election, 17th Legislative Election, held in 2024, declared its result on 4 June, 2024. The strength of Odisha Legislative Assembly is 147. The meteoric rise of the BJP as a national political party won Odisha Legislative Election is worthy of analysis because of the fact that for the first time, in the history of state legislative elections it own election with majority of seats and percentage of votes

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in Odisha. It also won 20 out of 21 seats of Lok Sabha election and this also historic achievement. Odisha is one of the eastern states of India where the electoral victory of BJP added a new feather in the history of democratic politics in India. The rise of BJP in Odisha politics over the decades is systematic design of electoral success after 2014 general elections.

The profile of 17th Odisha Legislative Assembly in which BJP wins majority with 53% seats; BJD's share reduces from 77% to 35%. The below given table suggests a comparative number of seats in 2014, 2019 and 2024 that BJP as a strong national party achieved in Odisha.

Table 1: Comparative number of seats in 2014, 2019 and 2024

Party	2014	2019	2024
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	10	23	78
Biju Janata Dal (BJD)	117	113	51
Indian National Congress (INC)	16	9	14
Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M)	1	1	1
Samata Kranti Dal (SKD)	1	-	-
Independent	2	1	3
Total	147	147	147

Source: <https://prsindia.org>

BJP seat share in Odisha Assembly shows that it increased seat share from 16% to 53% in 2024 while BJD's seat share has fallen from 77% in 2019 to 35% in 2024. The below given tables highlight the popular votes, percentage of votes, seats contested and winning of seats of different political parties contested in Odisha in Lok Sabha election, 2024.

Table 2: Detailed split of voting pattern

Alliance/Party	Popular Votes	Percentage	Seats Contested	Won + -
NDA/BJP	1,13,35,549	45.34	21	12
BJD	93,82,711	37.53	21	-12
INDIA/INC	31,30,056	12.52	20	0
JMM	1,34,713	0.54	1	0
Others	6,50,336	2.6		
NOTA	3,24,588	1.3		
Total		100%		

Source: Compiled from Various sources

This is also one of the BJP's strongest victory in 2024 general election. The party won 20 out of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, while the Congress won one. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP had won only eight, while BJD had won 12 seats and the Congress had won one seat.

Table 3: Results by region

Region	Seats	NDA	BJD	India	Others
Northern Odisha	5	5	0	0	0
Central Odisha	10	10	0	0	0
Southern Odisha	6	5	0	1	0
Total	21	20	0	1	1

Source: Compiled from Various sources

Major factors of BJP's rise in Odisha

In an agrarian society like India, no political party can win elections going against the interests of farmers. The BJP's policy of three farm laws faced many oppositions from farmers and their unions from all over India. The impeccable farmers protest in northern India especially in Haryana and Punjab made the BJP government to withdraw these three farm laws before Lok Sabha elections¹. After the repeal of farm laws to win the hearts of farmers, in Uttar Pradesh state Legislative Assembly election, BJP experimented with cash handouts to farmers just before few days of election and as a result a remarkable change occurred in people's mind from anti-incumbency to incumbency. The same strategy BJP went on implementing in every subsequent election and got the desired result. Odisha is one such example where no party can win election without favouring farmers.

The Manifesto of BJP apart of other crucial factors focussed on *Samrudh Krusak Niti*² that would provide Rs.3100 per quintal of paddy crop and *Subhadra Yojana* that would help women empowerment by cash handout of Rs.50000. The state of Odisha is not industrialized like many other states of India. It is an agrarian society where farmers constitute a majority of its population. The policy like Krushak Niti had a wider impact on farmers before the election. Although the previous BJD government led by Naveen Pattnayak had many policies for farmers but the impact of BJP's aggressive campaign with other very crucial factors clicked. The other programmes of BJP were focus on fishing

industry, increased road connectivity, giving 3.5 lakhs job by 2029, development of tourism and many other infrastructural and developmental programmes.

The *Subhadra Yojna* for women is another success story³. Fifty percent of electorates roughly constitute women voters in any constituency. Regional parties were experimenting with lucrative cash hand out policies to women before the elections had huge success in terms of women participation and casting in favour of those political parties who are giving more benefits to them. The women voters in Odisha got lured by the promise of fifty thousand cash would be given to them provided BJP wins the election. However, it was not made clear at election campaigning time that fifty thousand rupees would be given in five-year period having ten thousand with two instalments in one year. Post election scenarios are opening up with many such tricks of BJP for which many women feel that they were cheated.

The crucial narrative of BJP that really turned the table in its favour was the issues of V.K. Pandian, a Tamil IAS officer of Odisha cadre, who became close during Covid-19 with Naveen Pattnayak and was later made his personal secretary. Mr. Pandian saw an opportunity in ruling BJD and decided to quit his job and joined the BJD. This was really a fertile ground for BJP to show the seed of identity issue by raising Pandian as an outsider is going to be the next Chief Minister of Odisha. Another narrative was that Mr. Pandian was secretly siphoning off money from the treasury of Puri's Jagannath Temple, a charge Pandian vehemently denied. Even though Naveen Pattnayak refuted this rumour of Pandian being his successor it did not work.

A PTI report suggested that the BJD insiders pointed out that Party's campaign was too weak against the high-profile electioneering of BJP. The Naveen Pattnayak's inability to recognize the strong and indomitable election strategy of the opponent become too harsh for the former's failure. It is very common now a days in post-truth era the manipulation of facts and damn lies can make havoc in a crucial time like election to mobilize people. One such issue is the "missing Key" of Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar (treasury). The BJP highlighted the issue by claiming that Naveen Pattnayak was outsourcing the government and the party.

Baijayant Panda, BJP national Vice-President propagated that casting a vote for BJD would effectively empower Mr. Pandian, a bureaucrat-tuned politician, as reported by PTI. BJP accused that the ill health of Mr. Naveen Pattnayak who is unable to carry the burden of administration would hand over power to a non-Odia person. This would

be against the glory of Odia identity and would be shame on Odias. During the high-profile campaigns of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it was highlighted again and again that 77-year-old Pattnayak's health is not allowing him to carry the responsibility of administration.

The decision of Naveen Pattnayak to dissolve Odisha Legislative Assembly before one year of its tenure in 2019 to hold simultaneous election for both Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly though at that point of time proved advantageous to the Party. However, 2024 simultaneous elections for state and centre brought a disaster to BJD which could not even win a single Lok Sabha seat out of 21 seats. Out of nowhere, against all hopes, BJP won 20 and Congress won 1 seat respectively. The winning of state election in 2024, BJP made history and celebrated winning a major eastern state like Odisha.

Other factors that helped BJP was the narrative of 'double engine sarkar'. Naveen Pattnayak's BJD was a coalition partner of NDA from 1998 onwards. It was also part of Vajpayee government from 1999 – 2004. From 2014 – 2024, since BJP had its own majority in Lok Sabha, no other coalition partner had an access to sharing of power. However, the BJD supported BJP to pass crucial laws like the abrogation of Article 370 and other such crucial bills, in the absence of BJP's majority in Rajya Sabha. Unlike Trinamool Congress Party of Mamta Banerjee, where the fierce competition between it and BJP cleared the vision of antagonistic politics in West Bengal, the Naveen Pattnayak's BJD was a mild supporter of BJP. The people of Odisha made up their mind that to support BJP in state and national elections would be an advantageous to the region. From the Congress regime of post independent India, West Bengal had been the beneficiaries of congress policies because of the few strong leaders like, for example, Pranab Mukherjee who were manipulating the development of West Bengal at the cost of Odisha. In contrast to this, the Odisha Congress leaders were not dynamic enough to bring benefits of double engine sarkar of Congress party then. The people of Odisha no doubt liked the good governance of Naveen Pattnayak for 24 long years, but uncertainty in politics is very important in developing judgements.

One further reason that when the dominant BJP at the centre ruling single handedly for a decade, the non-BJP governments at the state level are facing different challenges. The top command of BJP exercise strong control over party with all kinds of discipline, where as other regional parties or even the Congress party lacked such measures.

Conclusion

The directional shift of Odisha politics toward BJP ingrained with idea of the growing importance of it in terms of a coherent national political party. It not only won 2019 and 2024 national elections with staggering majority but broke away with the coalition politics before 2014 general elections. As a single largest majority party, it also won after another own state legislative assembly elections. Because of its domination at the centre, it manipulated its coercive power and strategic design added with new narrative like '*double engine sarkar*' to win elections in the name of development. The diversity of Indian politics and its multicultural structure with intense competition among multiple political parties helped BJP to take on the anti-incumbency factor of the ruling Congress party at the centre and most of the states before 2014 for its success. The narratives carried forward from 2014 till 2024 the story of *double engine sarkar*, development, corruption free and dynasty-free politics and so on helped it win elections in the centre as well as states. The idea of a strong and stable government (*majbut sarkar*) free from coalition government (*majbur sarkar*) helped influencing electoral politics in its favour. Another factor of polarization among electorates in the majority and minority also to a lot extent helped to advance its vote share apart from its consolidated voting percentage.

To sum up, the BJP's meteoric rise in Odisha as a national political party which controlled both the state and Lok Sabha election held in 2024 is a historical achievement. Odisha one of the eastern states of India was ruled by Naveen Pattnayak for last 24 years. People of Odisha definitely changed their minds before the election to give chance to BJP due the fact that more developmental policies would be implemented with the *double engine sarkar*⁴. People of Odisha also witnessed many developmental works were going on in different parts before election. Every regional state and its people do not want to stay behind each other in terms of gross development. Odisha election 2024 was historic for BJP because for the first time it not only won Legislative Assembly election with a majority but also own 20 out of 21 seats of Lok Sabha. The percentage of vote share also went up compared to 2014 and 2019 elections. The organizing structure of BJP as a national political party with strong central leadership and most importantly its social engineering and developmental and welfare policies made a historic achievement in the politics of Odisha.

References

- [1] <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/centre-to-roll-back-3-farm-laws-says-pm-modi-in-his-address/articleshow/87792540.cms?from=mdr>, accessed on 11-01-2025
- [2] The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) released a scheme in favor of Odisha assembly elections known as Odisha Samrudh Krushak Niti 2024. The manifesto pledges to guarantee the selling and buying of paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal, generating 3.5 lakh employment in five years.
- [3] Subhadra Yojana introduced 17 September 2024 is a women-centric welfare scheme launched by the Government of Odisha aiming on empowering women aged 21 to 60 years by providing direct financial assistance. The initiative, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, intends to benefit over 1 crore women across the state of Odisha
- [4] <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Oct/09/double-engine-sarkar-for-third-consecutive-time>, accessed on 24-12-2024