

Analysis of Odisha Politics

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History of Odisha

From ancient times till 1936

Odisha, or (Orissa) earlier known as 'Utkal and Kalinga' has a long and rich history as a geographic and cultural region. It was a part of several great empires of ancient India, including that of the Mauryas, the Guptas and the Nandas of Magadh. Odisha has withstood a lot of historical conquests including the likes of Samrat Ashok's Kalinga War, Harsha's conquest of Utkal. Odisha was also ruled by other dynasties such as Bhaumakar in the 8th century A.D. , followed by the Somas and Kesharis and the Somavamsis.¹

By the end of the 12th Century A.D., Ganga dynasty emerged on the Odishan soil, which ruled till 1435 AD. The iconic Konark Sun Temple and the Jagannath Temple at Puri was created during this time period. In the medieval ages, the Mughals, Afghans and Marathas ruled over Odisha. Ultimately, it was the British who ruled over Odisha for more than 200 years after taking the Odisha province from the Marathas by defeating them in 1803. In British rule, Odisha was confined to three coastal districts; Puri, Cuttack and Balasore besides few other princely states.

Post independence history of Odisha can be characterized by emergence of various political parties and politicians. The Government of India (Constitution of Odisha) order 1936 created a new polity of Odisha. The new province was carved out of the provinces of Bihar and Odisha, Madras and Madhya Pradesh, consisting of six districts, viz, Cuttack, Puri, Baleswar, Sambalpur, Ganjam and Koraput. The neighboring Garajats or the Princely States remained independent.²

Post-independence electoral history

Regional parties like the Ganatantra Parishad (GP), Utkal Congress, Jana Congress emerged and influenced the political will of the people of Odisha up until the decade of 1990. However, after 1990 and from 1997 onwards Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has been the most dominant political party in the coastal state who has managed to retain power in the state with the incumbent CM Shri Naveen Patnaik being sworn in as the CM for 5 consecutive terms.

Shri Janaki Ballav Patnaik - a luminous star who appeared in the political sky of Odisha. He rose like a new sun in the political sky of Odisha after a prolonged darkness.³ For this reason, he gave political stability and at a time became a revered leader of Odisha. He expressed his concern for the Odia

¹ Information & Public Relations Department, Government of Odisha

² Umesh Chandra Sahoo, "Political History of Odisha and the Regional Vibrant"

³ Dasrathi Bhuiyan, Odisha Review "Political History of Odisha"

nationalist and was one of the main architects of modern Odisha. His achievements are identified with the half century of Odishan history and has contributed to revamp the social culture of Odisha. A man of high ambition and dreams, boldness and courage, dignity and self respect, sharp intellect and ready wit, he devoted his life for the development of Odisha.

But, perhaps no other leader occupied the imagination of the people of Orissa like Shri Biju Patnaik : freedom fighter, pilot, industrialist, politician and philanthropist. His ability to create confidence among people and inspire them was phenomenal. Shri Biju Patnaik strode Orissa's political arena for more than four decades. Whether in power or in the opposition, he was one of the most influential politicians of the country. His illustrious political career culminated in his party's resounding victory in the 1990 Assembly polls and he returned as Chief Minister for the second time on March 5, 1990. For the first time he completed the full term (1990-95).⁴

The first phase of the early post-independence era in Odisha can be categorized by the domination of the Congress party. The first general elections in 1952 saw the Congress party winning a majority of seats in both the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) and the state legislative assembly. During this phase, the state witnessed leadership under Shri Nabakrushna Choudhary and Shri Harekrushna Mehtab of the Congress party. From 1961 to 1975, a period of fifteen years saw 3 Chief Ministers from Congress Party and 1 Chief Minister from Swatantra Party. Post 1975, Odisha saw two popular figures that are credited with establishing the foundations of modern day Odisha: Shri Janaki Ballav Patnaik and Shri Biju (Bijayananda) Patnaik, both of the Congress Party.⁵

With the former being the Chief Minister of the state for a total of 12 years and the latter being for a total of 7 years respectively. The state also witnessed a non-Congress Chief Minister, Shri Nilamani Routray of the Janata Party and a woman Chief Minister in the form of Smt Nandini Satpathy of the Congress party who was Chief Minister for a total of 4 years. The state has also witnessed 6 instances of President's Rule in the past. However, post 1999, the politics of Odisha has been dominated only and only by one party and one man: Shri Naveen Patnaik of Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and being the Chief Minister for 23 years now.

Some important trends in Odisha's political history

Like the Indian politics in the 1967 period the state politics in Odisha is also plagued by political defections. During the pre-independence era and till the inauguration of the constitution of India, cases of defection in Odisha were rare. In 1952 Assembly and 1957 Assembly there took place 14 and

⁴ Dasrathi Bhuiyan, Odisha Review "Political History of Odisha"

⁵ Odisha Legislative Assembly, Bhubaneswar "A brief history of Odisha Legislative Assembly"

19 defections while in the 1961 Assembly there were 26 defections. However, from 1952 to 1965 there were no large scale defections. Odisha also practically became the citadel of political instability and no government had completed a full term of five years till 1980. Groupism in Congress and infighting among the coalition partners have been the principal causes of the downfall of different governments.⁶

In Odisha, political corruption has seemingly taken place several times. There has been no ministry in the state which has not been accused of having indulged in corruption. Most important political leaders who have prominently figured included Shri H.K. Mahtab, Shri Biju Patnaik and Shri Biren Mitra were accused of political corruption. Even the present chief minister Naveen Patnaik is under attack by opponents on the ground of his government's involvement in the mining scam. Odisha is a caste based society in which the dominant castes are Brahmins, Karans The third group, OBCs, in spite of their numerical superiority, has rarely challenged as a group the political predominance of other two caste groups, although of late, some members of Khandayat group have started making inroads into the power structure of the state which Brahmins and Karans appeared to consider as their exclusive preserves.⁷ The society as well as politics of the state is determined by the elites of dominant castes is as wide as the same between dominant castes and other castes, especially the down-trodden-harijans and adivasis.

Important political trends can be witnessed throughout the emergence and establishment of the state of Odisha such as dominance of Congress Party in the initial years post-independence. This could be attributive of the fact that the party held sway over the state for several decades, controlling the government both at the state and central levels. The legacy of Biju Patnaik, a charismatic leader and former Chief Minister, continues to influence Odisha's politics. His pro-people initiatives, commitment to development, and his image as a dynamic leader have contributed to the enduring popularity of his family and their political party, the BJD. Political parties, especially the BJD, have focused on welfare schemes, development initiatives, and pro-poor policies to address the state's socio-economic challenges. This focus on grassroots-level governance has been a significant trend in recent years. Alongside these new trends, the state has also witnessed other changes such as anti-incumbency and shifts in the voting patterns. These trends reflect the evolving nature of Odisha's political landscape, characterized by a mix of regional aspirations, changing alliances, and a constant pursuit of addressing local issues. Understanding these trends is crucial in comprehending the state's electoral dynamics and governance patterns.⁸

⁶ Balbhadra Ghadai, Odisha Review "Formation of the province of Odisha"

⁷ Pratapa Chandra Nayak, "Electoral Competition in a One-Party Dominant System: A Case from Odisha"

⁸ Mahendra Kumar Nayak, Odisha Review "Biju Patnaik: Architect and Builder of Modern Odisha."

Zonal Level Details

The state of Odisha, forming a part of the eastern coast of India, is spread across an area of 1,55,707 sq.km. The population of the state is roughly three crores out of which, 22% of people are tribal population in the northern districts of the state. Odisha is divided into 30 administrative units called districts. For better administration, these 30 districts have been placed under 3 different revenue divisions. The three different revenue divisions are Central, North and South divisions and their headquarters are at Cuttack(Central Division), Sambalpur(Northern Division) and Berhampur(Southern Division) respectively. Odisha has 3 Divisions, 30 Districts, 58 Sub-Divisions, 317 Tehsils and 314 Blocks. Each division has 10 districts and a senior rank officer of Indian Administrative Service as its Revenue Divisional Commissioner.

Division (no. of districts)	Districts	Vidhan Sabha Seats	Major Tribes and Castes	Remarks
Central Division (Headquarters at Cuttack)	Balasore Bhadrak Cuttack Jagatsinghpur Jajpur Kendrapada Khorda Mayurbhanj Nayagarh Puri	66	Brahmins Khandayat Santal Ho tribe Saura Bagata Kharia Rajuar	1. Mayurbhanj district has the most tribal population in this division. 2. Approximately 8.23% of people in Cuttack are Muslims majorly found in Bhadrak district. 3. Brahmins are mainly found in Puri district and administer the Jagannath Temple.
Northern Division (Headquarters at Sambalpur)	Angul Balangir Bargarh Deogarh Dhenkanal Jharsuguda Keonjhar Sambalpur Sonepur Sundargarh	42	Gopal/Gauda Kondha Ho tribe Kisan/Nagesia Munda Oraon/Kurukh Gadaba	1. After Khandayats, the other most dominant caste in the villages - The Gopals are found in this division 2. The oldest tribe of Odisha- The Gadaba are found in Sambalpur and Sundargarh. 3. Kondha tribe accounts to almost 1/5th of the state are

				found in this division.
Southern Division (Headquarters at Berhampur)	Boudh Gajapati Ganjam Kalahandi Kandhamal Koraput Malkangiri Nabarangpur Nuapada Rayagada	39	Brahmins Gopal/Gauda Kondha Ho tribe Saura Bonda Bagata Chenchu Gond	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Saura and Chenchu - two rare tribes are found in this division. 2. GI tagged Kotpad fabrics are manufactured in Koraput district by Mirgan community 3. Rayagada and Nuapada is a stronghold for Kondha and Kharia tribes. 4. The most legislative assembly seats in a single district (Ganjam) are found in this division - 13 including Shri Naveen Patnaik's seat.

Table 1: Details of Zones/Divisions in Odisha

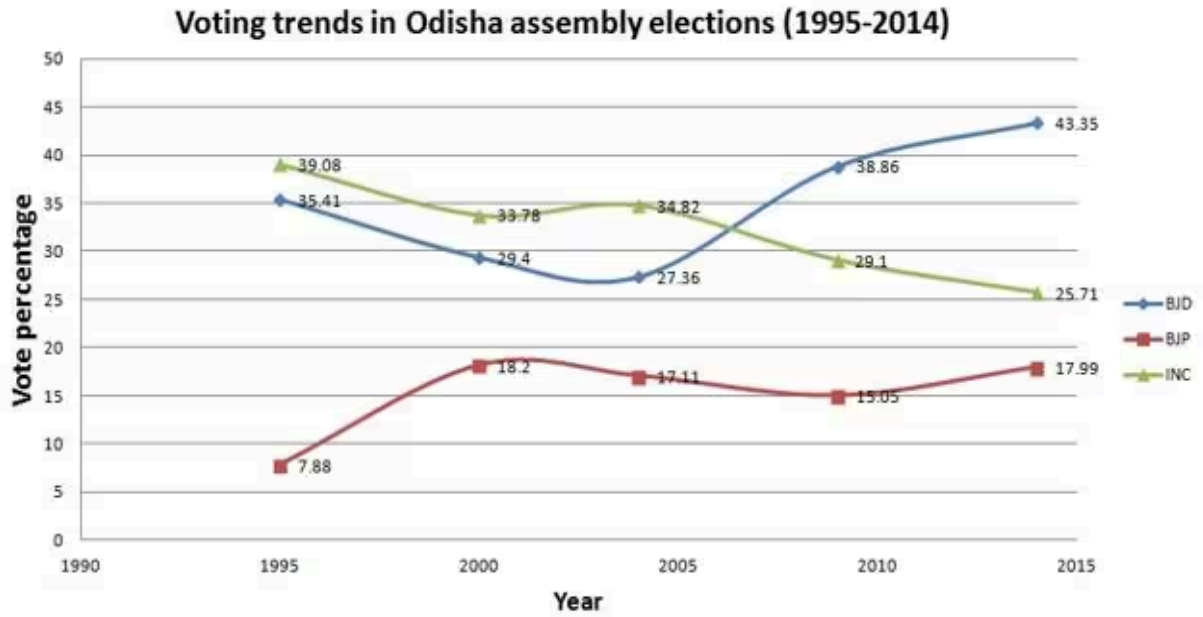
Past electoral performance

The following table summarizes the performance of major political parties in Odisha in Vidhan Sabha election (VS) since the year 2000. Seats won by each party have been indicated in brackets next to vote percentage in seats contested for the Vidhan Sabha elections. For the Lok Sabha elections the percentage of total seats won by a party is put before the actual seats won, which are put inside the bracket.

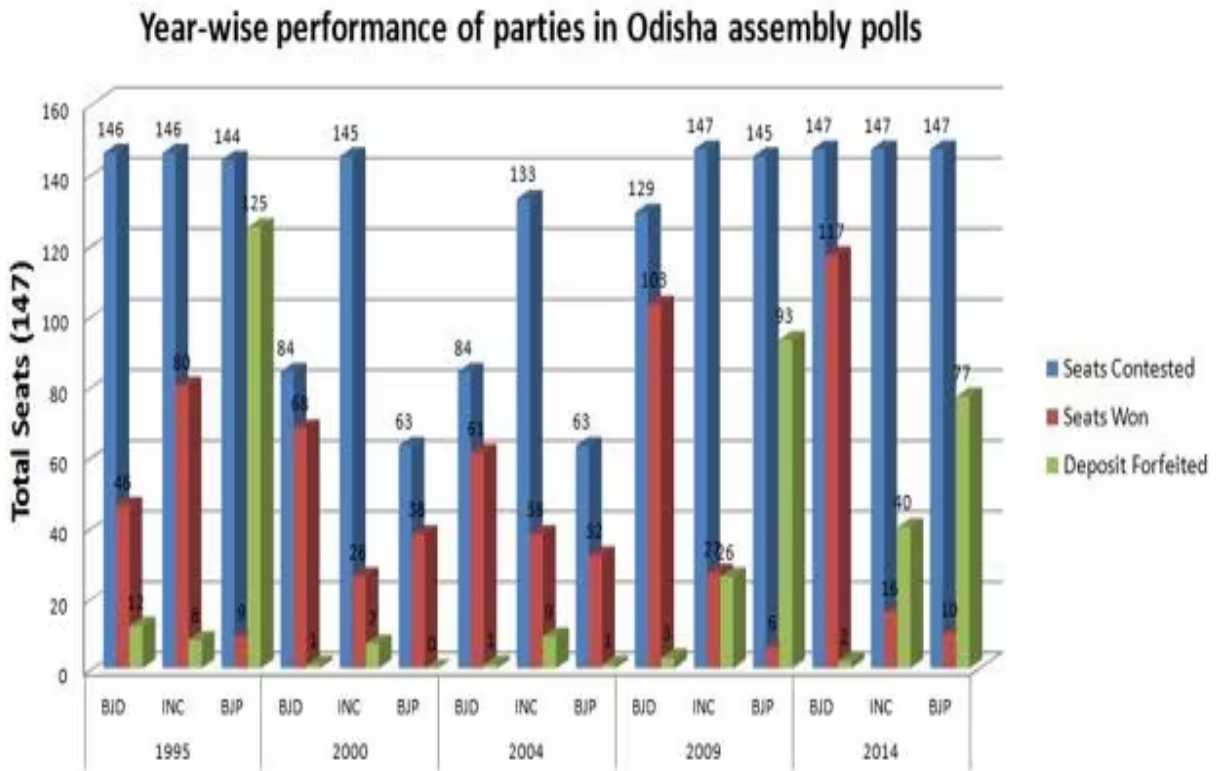
Party	2000 VS	2004 LS	2004 VS	2009 LS	2009 VS	2014 LS	2014 VS	2019 LS
BJP	42.88(38)	33.3(7)	40.43(32)	-	15.25(6)	4.76(1)	18.02(10)	38.09(8)
INC	34.25(26)	9.5(2)	34.82(38)	28.57(6)	29.11(27)	-	25.74(16)	4.76(1)
BJD	51.07(68)	52.3(11)	47.44(61)	66.67(14)	44.16(103)	95.23(20)	43.41(117)	57.14(12)
CPI(M)	7.07(1)	-	27.6(1)	4.76(1)	15.15(0)	-	4.70(1)	-
BSP	1.56(0)	-	3.25(0)	-	1.96(0)	-	1.10(1)	-
SP	1.47(0)	-	2.84(0)	-	2.0(0)	-	1.25(0)	-
IND	12.86(8)	-	14.62(8)	-	10.6(6)	-	6.35(2)	-

Table 2: Party-wise vote-share and seats won in Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections

Source: Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India



Graph 1: Voting trends in Odisha Assembly elections over the years (Vote %age of three most dominant parties)



Graph 2: Year wise performance of parties in Odisha Assembly Elections.

Analysis of past election results

2004 Vidhan Sabha Elections

The thirteenth legislative assembly election in Odisha was conducted in April 2004 for all the 147 constituencies. The BJD-BJP alliance won the elections to the 147 member Odisha legislative assembly by securing a combined majority of 93 seats with BJD winning 61 seats and BJP winning 32 seats each. The victory was attributed mainly to the rising popularity of Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik who along with the BJP's Shri Manmohan Samal had campaigned primarily along the lines of creating job opportunities for youth, assuring irrigation facility to more than 25% farm land, setting up of one hospital for 20,000 people and a commission for the disabled and also promising electrification of all villages while stating that no power tariff hike would be imposed while laying stress on reducing transmission and distribution losses.⁹

Even though the Congress increased its seat tally as compared to the previous election in 2000 from 26 to 38 seats in 2004 election, the overall defeat of Congress and its allies in the elections can be attributed to the failure of not capitalizing on the issues of Paradip Oil Refinery Project, the foundation of which was laid down by the Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Congress did not succeed in the Assembly elections because it was not able to campaign upon the matter of 'Tribal Rights and Economic Development' of the people in Kalahandi-Balangir-Koraput region of central Odisha.¹⁰

The Congress also provided electoral tickets to candidates from Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), failing to realize the lack of popularity of the candidates from these parties. The rebel group of BJD i.e. Shri Dilip Ray, Shri Ram Shri Krushan Patnaik, Shri Nalinikant Mahanty and Shri Sarata Kar were given tickets from Congress. A key factor that worked successfully in the victory of the coalition government of BJP-BJD is the influential figure and image of Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik working in tandem with the Vajpayee factor. Meanwhile, Congress stalwart Shri Janaki Ballabh Patnaik was expecting to deliver on anti-incumbency even when the BJP-BJD alliance won all the by-elections, Panchayats and Urban Body elections thus securing an edge over the Congress.

The votes of Scheduled Castes and Tribes were of utmost importance in determining the outcome of the election as Odisha is predominantly tribal state with 62 Tribal groups and 13 Particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs).

⁹ [BJD-BJP releases manifesto | Latest News India - Hindustan Times](#)

¹⁰ Pratapa Chandra Nayak, "Electoral Competition in a One-Party Dominant System: A Case from Odisha"

2009 Vidhan Sabha Elections

The 2009 Odisha Legislative Assembly Elections took place in April 2009 intersecting with the Lok Sabha elections. The elections were held in two phases. BJD party chief Shri Naveen Patnaik was re-elected as the Chief Minister despite the BJP-BJD split after a decade-long coalition. The election in each Assembly constituency was held in the same phase as the election to the corresponding Parliamentary constituency that the assembly constituency fell under.

The BJD snapped its ties with the BJP by blaming the BJP for the 2008 violence against the Christians happening in the Kandhamal region of the state thus ending a decade-long coalition government. The BJP after facing such allegations, withdrew their support from the government thus leading to a floor test in the Assembly. The then Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik retained power by controversial means. Many of the opposition BJP MLAs and Congress MLAs staged a walk-out expressing dissent over the way voting was being conducted in the Assembly. Following which, the elections took place where the BJD again declared that they would contest the elections on their own without taking the help of Congress or BJP. Instead, BJD formed an alliance and contested the elections by tying up with the Left Front and the Nationalist Congress Party.

In the aftermath of the coalition breakdown, the Central BJP leadership sent Rajya Sabha MP Shri Chandan Mitra to discuss the possibilities of a coalition with the BJD leadership of Shri Naveen Patnaik. Mitra was a special emissary of BJP stalwart Shri L.K. Advani. One of the primary reasons why the BJD snapped its ties with the BJP is that they recognized the flow of the wind and saw the defeat of the BJP in two civic body polls and understood the waning strength of the BJP thus resulting in hesitancy on the part of BJD to continue with the present seat sharing formula. BJD expected the BJP candidates to lose their seats at many places from within the 63 Assembly seats and the nine Lok Sabha seats that they were going to contest. BJD also did not want the Congress to grab the seats on which they expected the BJP to lose due to their waning popularity.¹¹

The Congress party became the main opposition party in the 2009 Assembly by securing a total of 27 seats against the BJD's and the Left's total of a staggering 103 seats while the BJP managed to secure only 6 seats. Out of a total of 1288 candidates that contested the elections across 13 different parties 24 Scheduled Caste and 33 Scheduled Tribe legislators became members of the assembly. A close analysis of the situation tells us that almost 40% of the assembly seats were filled by members belonging to the SC and ST community which underscores the importance of caste and tribe politics in Odisha. BJD's Shri Naveen Patnaik retained power in the state.

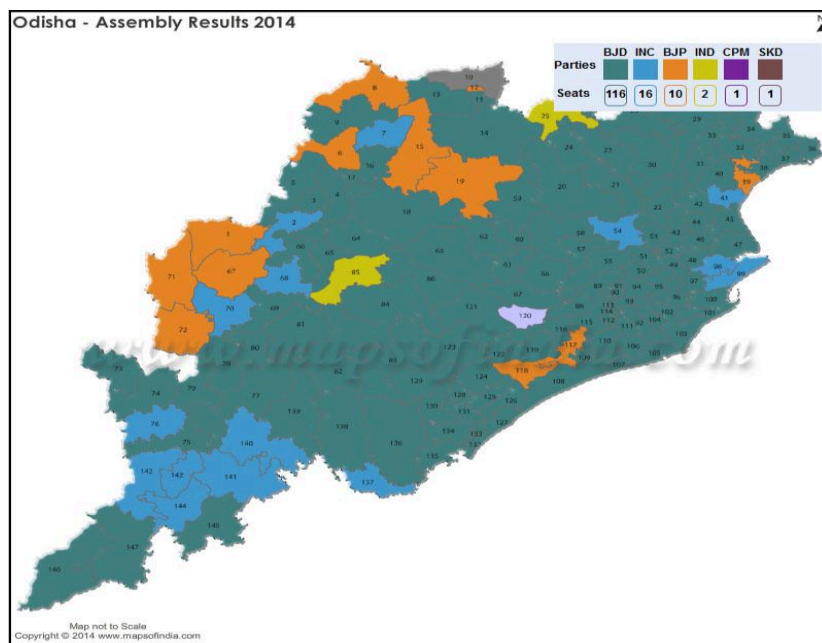
¹¹ Bhuyan and Muni, "Dynamics of Coalition Politics."

2014 Vidhan Sabha Elections

The year 2014 was a very decisive year for the political parties in Odisha because elections to state legislative assembly and the Lok Sabha were coinciding. Even though the entire country was experiencing the effects of the Modi wave, the picture in Odisha was very different. The BJD government led by Shri Naveen Patnaik captured power in the assembly elections and also established a strong presence in the Lok Sabha. The BJD managed to capture 20 Lok Sabha seats out of 21 and 117 Assembly seats out of 147 in Odisha thus leading to an unprecedented 4th term for Shri Naveen Patnaik.

The BJD campaigned mainly along the lines of ‘Svarn Odisha’ a golden Odisha - the vision of Naveen Patnaik and all inclusive development for the poor and underprivileged. Perhaps the most decisive strategy of BJD in guaranteeing their win was – Construction of Pucca houses for all besides agriculture loan interest for the farmers.¹² He also promised the implementation of several policies such as Biju Krushak Vikas Yojana (BKVY) which was aimed at providing financial support to the farmers along with subsidies. Other policies included Rs.2 kg per kilo of rice to the poorest of the poor people, declaring health insurance to all. Make in Odisha initiative, gathering the attention of investors

worldwide thus bringing significant revenue in the state.



On the contrary, BJP managed to score only 10 seats out of 147 seat assembly and the Congress managed to win over 16 seats. From about 38.86% in 2009 legislative assembly polls, the ruling BJD secured 43.4% of the votes in the 2014 election thus increasing its vote share. The BJP too improved its vote share from 15.05% in 2009 to 25.7% in 2014.¹³ However, one of the

drawbacks of the Odisha legislative assembly election of 2014 is the dismal representation of women in the assembly at a rate with less than 8% of the candidates winning both; the Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections. Also, with the introduction of the option of NOTA (None of the above) a lot of

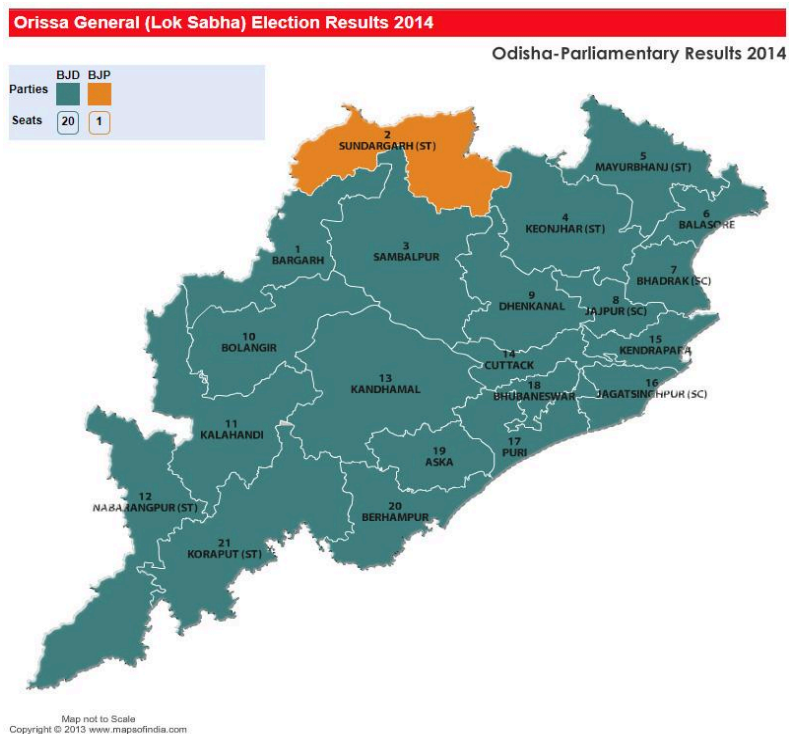
¹² [Naveen Patnaik announces Rs 3,000 crore Biju Pucca Ghar scheme - The Economic Times](#)

¹³ Johani Xaxa, Indian Journal for Political Science- “Election 2014: Analysis of Odisha Legislative Assembly.” -

negative votes were exercised. This was observed even within the Chief Minister's constituency of Hinjili.

2014 Lok Sabha Elections

While the clean sweep of BJD was not a surprise in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014, the election was a significant one in terms of stunning defeat of the Congress. By winning almost all the 21 seats in the state, the BJD handed over the worst defeat to the Congress by winning 20 of the 21 parliamentary



seats in the state and the BJP winning one seat.

BJD's vote share in Lok Sabha polls witnessed a steep rise to touch 44.1% this time as compared to 37.23% in 2009 elections raising its tally by 6 seats.¹⁴ A drop of about 6.7 per cent in Congress' vote share led to complete rout of the national party which failed to open its account in parliamentary elections in Odisha. However, some special benchmarks were set in the elections. Fights within the family and family members being anointed to secure the seat were

striking features of the twin elections in the State. The Bolangir extended royal family had five members in the fray. Two pairs of royal family members fought against each other. But only two members emerged victorious. NOTA option became available for the first time in general elections, showing voter's disillusionment with the candidates. It was proved decisive in three Lok Sabha Constituencies, Nabarangpur, Koraput And Bargarh. In these three constituencies, NOTA voters were significantly higher than victory margins.¹⁵

Another noteworthy aspect of the Lok Sabha election was tribal dominated areas casting their vote for NOTA – which underlines the fact that the electorate is not satisfied with the governance related aspects of the tribal areas. However, unification of all the tribal groups and castes in Odisha is what

¹⁴ [Election Results 2014: Six per cent swing in favour of BJD in Odisha - The Economic Times](#)

¹⁵ Johani Xaxa, Indian Journal for Political Science - "Election 2014: Analysis of Odisha Legislative Assembly."

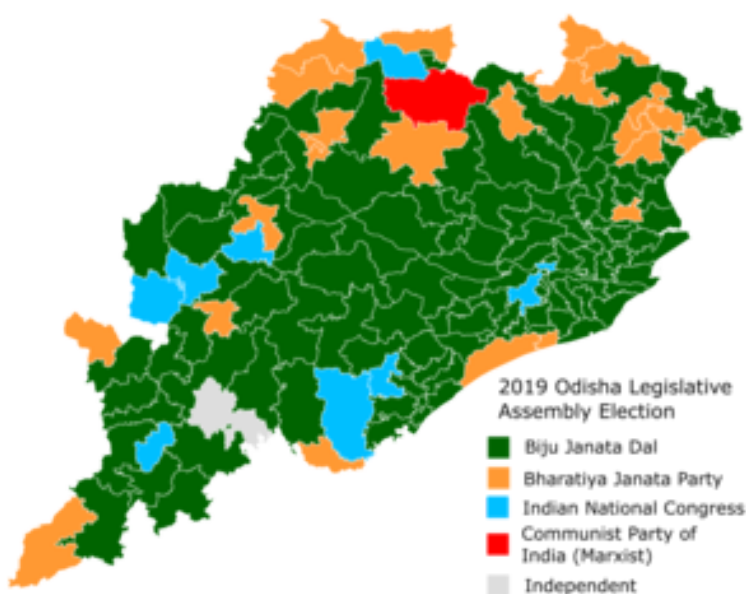
decisively determined BJD's victory. Left-Wing Extremism (Naxalism) is still prominent among rural and tribal parts of Odisha. Naxals and Maoists from time to time raid the forests and fields of the farmers and tribals. As a result of this, it is a natural outcome of the tribal people to cast vote for the BJD, given Shri Naveen Patnaik's assurances against Left-Wing Extremism is what ultimately appealed to the voters to cast their vote for BJD.

The overall mandate in the state concretely reflected the faith of the people into BJD and Shri Naveen Patnaik and his public welfare approach compiled with an incorruptible image. According to a statistical survey conducted by Odisha Election Watch Report, a watchdog for elections revealed that 35% of the entrants have criminal records. BJD politicians have 37.44% whereas BJP and INC politicians have 80% and 56% criminal cases. Having lesser politicians with tainted image compared to other political parties has also delivered for BJD as expected.

Another important feature of the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 is the perspective of the voter to keep BJP at power in the center and regional parties in power in the states - A trend witnessed across a majority of the states. The anti incumbency against the UPA government in 2014 is what brought about this change.

2019 Vidhan Sabha Elections

The 2019 legislative assembly elections in Odisha were conducted from April 11 to April 29. The polls coincided with the Lok Sabha polls. BJD led by the incumbent Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik was sworn in as the Chief Minister for the fifth consecutive time.



The election also witnessed an improved performance from the former BJD ally BJP, who increased their seat tally from 16 seats in 2014 assembly elections to 23 seats in the 2019 election. On the other hand the performance of the Congress party deteriorated further from scoring 16 seats in the previous assembly elections to scoring only 9 seats in the 2019 elections. The performance of the BJD was more or less the same. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) also managed to score a seat

from Bonai constituency which is primarily a tribal dominated area. The election results in Odisha underscored two important features of two highly popular politicians: Shri Narendra Modi - as powerful and decisive Prime Minister and Shri Naveen Patnaik - as the politician who stood the test of time with his simple and incorruptible image. Also, the electoral competition turned out to be a clear tussle between the rural Odisha region – which depends on welfare and affirmative action – and the aspirational urban Odisha region, whose power elite strives to emerge as a politically relevant middle class.

Even though the BJP won 23 seats in the election, its vote share increased significantly and went up by around 32% which is in turn 15% higher than that of 2014 elections. This remarkable performance has transformed the BJP into the principal opposition in Odisha. CSDS-NES Survey data suggested that young voters and middle-aged voters had a very clear preference for the BJP especially in the Lok Sabha elections.¹⁶ BJP's strategy to use social media to their advantage effectively mobilized young voters into their camp and they also used young voter's dissatisfaction with the BJD government over issues of unemployment.

The victory of BJD in the elections and solidifying BJP as the primary opposition in the state is mainly attributed to the political decline of the Congress party in the state. Once a dominant party in the state who produced charismatic leaders such as Janaki Ballabh Patnaik, was not even able to win seats in double digits. The primary cause of failure of Congress in the state is lack of a solid face of leadership and constant subjugation of local voices by the party high command.

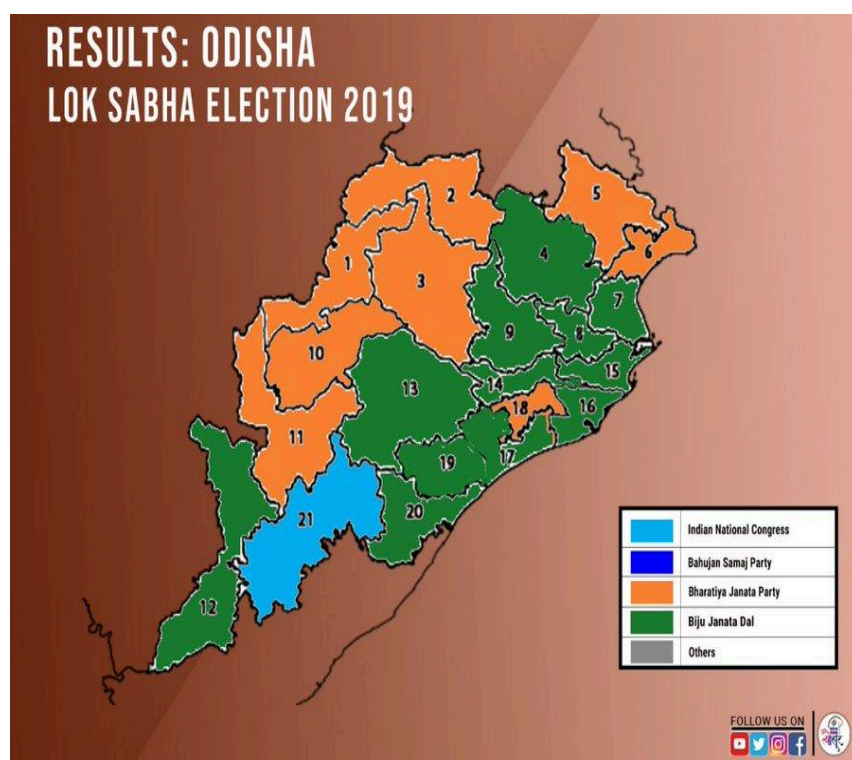
The BJD campaigned mainly on the points of solidifying farmers' income through the KALIA (Krushak Assistance for livelihood and income augmentation scheme) whereby they promised to provide an yearly assistance to farmers of 10000 rupees. Also on the point of women empowerment by providing businesses worth rupees 5000 crore to women. And reservation of 75% of jobs for the youth in upcoming industrial initiatives in Odisha.¹⁷ The said schemes ultimately attracted the targeted voter base which got the BJD government led by Shri Naveen Patnaik into power, thus winning him another term of five years for running the post of Chief Minister. The BJP on the other hand, was extremely focused on getting their affairs fluently planned for the Lok Sabha election and in doing so neglected the state a little bit in terms of legislative assembly elections. Significant visits to the state by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi came only after cyclone Fani hit the coastal state in 2019.

¹⁶ <https://www.lokniti.org/national-election-studies> (National Election Studies - Lokniti)

¹⁷ <https://www.bjdodisha.org.in/>

2019 Lok Sabha Elections

The BJD emerged victorious in the Lok Sabha elections of the state although with a smaller victory as compared to Lok Sabha elections 2014 where it managed to win 20 out of 21 seats thus displaying a clean sweep, in the 2019 election the BJD won 12 seats in this election. The BJP on the other hand significantly increased its seat tally by winning a total of 8 seats in the state and the Congress winning only one seat. The BJD's and BJP's success was inextricably linked to the political decline of the INC. Despite the fact that the INC won the Koraput Lok Sabha seat, its vote share came down drastically this time. The once dominant party in the state has been steadily losing its hold in the absence of any known face in the state. The trust of the marginalized communities in the state is taken by the BJD while the trust of the youth has been won over by the BJP. It is pertinent to note the transfer of the INC votes to the BJD in many constituencies like in Kendrapara where Jay Panda, an import from the BJD, was the defeated BJP candidate. The INC could not do well in the assembly election as well. It won only nine seats with a virtually insignificant vote share of around 16%.



The reason why BJP wasn't able to outsmart BJD in both the polls was because of its state level leadership. Odisha BJP leader Shri Dharmendra Pradhan tried to carve out an image of Odia identity outside Odisha but the BJD leaders swiftly acted and did not allow him to carve a space for himself in the media as an alternative discourse.

On factors related to governance, the survey conducted by the Lokniti survey revealed that the majority of the voters were

satisfied by the performance of the parties on both, state and national levels. This underlines the political maturity of the voters who are not easily wooed by the fancy promises thrown by both the parties during elections. However, BJD has an upper hand here mainly due to the KALIA scheme.

Gender representation too played a crucial role in the elections as Shri Naveen Patnaik gave tickets to contest elections to seven women in Odisha and five of them emerged victorious. Since the 2014

general elections, the participation of women in voting has significantly increased, and it has crossed the male percentage. This however, is not just the case with BJP. If one looks at the manifestos of all the parties, one can easily understand that women representation and welfare are given utmost importance.

When it comes to the caste factor, survey data suggested that upper caste and OBC voters were favorable to the BJP. 43% of voters among OBCs preferred the BJP, compared to 35% of OBC voters favoring the BJD. Other minority voters have preferred the BJD as their choice along with Dalits and Christians. It suggests that BJP's social base is mainly from upper castes and OBC whereas the remaining social groups are overwhelmingly represented by the BJD as of now. Other than the caste dynamics, it is interesting to know that in three constituencies of Sambalpur, Koraput and Nabarangpur, the NOTA votes exceeded the winning margin. This happened because it reflected a genuine discontent among residents of western Odisha towards ruling parties and the candidates. In addition to this, these areas are those where the left leaning forces are active.

Nationally significant political issues in electoral competition are carefully placed and it remains a noteworthy aspect of the 2019 elections in the state. To conclude, it can be said that the pragmatic voters preferred Shri Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister but did not vote overwhelmingly for the BJP; they preferred Naveen Patnaik as the CM but remained apprehensive about his party's potential role in national politics.

Zonal Level Political Analysis

Central Division

Party/Year	2009 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Lok Sabha	2019 Vidhan Sabha	2019 Lok Sabha
BJD	44.82 %	45.15 %	50.17 %	49.5 %	47.65 %
INC	28.68 %	24.93 %	25.17 %	15.08 %	11.22 %
BJP	11.16 %	15 %	18.06 %	32.79 %	39.4 %

Table 3: *Votes share of BJP, INC and BJD in Central Division*

Source: *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

The Central Division is a relatively smaller area as compared to the Northern and Southern Divisions. This division comprises of 10 districts, i.e., one third of the total districts in the state. The population is largely concentrated in the districts of Cuttack, Mayurbhanj, Puri and Jagatsinghpur. Prominent BJD leaders from this division include Shri Pratap Jena who is a Khandayat by caste and also has held the portfolios of Health Minister and Law Minister in the Odisha Government and Shri Umakanta Samantray who is an MLA from Puri (Satyabadi) constituency who plays a crucial role in keeping BJD in power in Puri.

Prominent BJP leaders in the division include Shri Manmohan Samal, the state BJP party president who hails from Bhadrak and also Shri Lalitendu Mohapatra, Brahmin by caste who hails from Puri. Both of these men are important leaders of the central division belonging to the BJP. It can be observed from the above tables that historically the BJD has emerged as the dominant force across both, the legislative assembly and Lok Sabha elections. With the Congress having an initial hold of the central division in the form of an opposition party. However, it can also be observed that the rise and fall of the BJP and Congress respectively, have occurred simultaneously from 2009 to 2019.

The strategy for the BJP to achieve victory in this division is that it should focus on consolidating the Brahmin votes in the Puri constituency as well as the votes of the tribal dominated Mayurbhanj district. The candidates fielded by BJD in Puri belong to the Khandayat caste. However, with Puri being the most sacred city in the state, with the Temple of Lord Jagannatha situated here, this policy coupled with the anti-incumbency for the BJD can be expected to work wonders for the BJP as there would be a natural feeling of affinity among the Brahmin electorate of Puri for their own representatives.

Northern Division

Party/Year	2009 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Lok Sabha	2019 Vidhan Sabha	2019 Lok Sabha
BJD	32.66 %	38.26 %	37.29 %	43.92 %	44.13 %
INC	31.81 %	22.84 %	22.28 %	14.26 %	12.2 %
BJP	20.21 %	27.06 %	32.71 %	36.37 %	43.45 %

Table 4: *Votes share of BJP, INC and BJD in Northern Division*

Source: *Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India*

The Northern Division comprises ten districts of the state. The largest ones being Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Sambalpur and Bargarh. The Northern Division of Odisha is a tribal dominated area of Odisha with the Santhal and Kondha tribes mostly found in these areas. The prominent BJD leaders from this area include Shri Rohit Pujari and Shri Kishore Chandra Naik, both of them belonging to the Khandayat caste. The prominent BJP leaders from this division include Shri Nitesh Ganga Deb, MP (Sambalpur) and Shri Jayanarayan Mishra, MLA (Sambalpur).

Sambalpur carries a special weightage in this division as it is the most populated district of this division. The BJD here faces stiff competition from the BJP as one can observe from the above table, BJP's growth in this division was almost as good as that of BJD in Lok Sabha election 2019. As observed in the Central Division, the Congress here too in the Northern Division continues to lose its dominance and vote share. Congress was the prime opposition party of the state in the years of 2004-2009. However, it has now been reduced to just a mere political party who is seeking to regain its long lost ground in the state.

The key for the BJP to achieve victory in this division of the state lies in consolidating the votes belonging to the scheduled tribes and the PVTGs. The BJP stalwart in this division, Shri Jual Oram, MP (Sundargarh) belongs to the Oraon tribe, a tribe dominant in the northern region of the state. The Tribal Morcha of the BJP led by Shri Shankar Oraon has campaigned across this region spreading awareness and information among the people of this region. Another way in which the BJP can seek to win this division is by giving maximum representation to women voters. This was a technique implemented by the Madhya Pradesh government as well in the form of 'Saheli Scheme' which ultimately led to women voting for the BJP in their assembly elections. Thus, consolidating the votes of tribal voters coupled with women voters can work wonders for the BJP in order to secure ground in the Northern Division of the state.

Southern Division

Party/Year	2009 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Vidhan Sabha	2014 Lok Sabha	2019 Vidhan Sabha	2019 Lok Sabha
BJD	36.12 %	39.48 %	39.65 %	36.89 %	37.96 %
INC	27.18 %	31.25 %	32.05 %	23.68 %	25.62 %
BJP	19.28 %	16.17 %	17.48 %	27.2 %	31.73 %

Table 5: Voteshare of BJP, INC and BJD in Southern Division

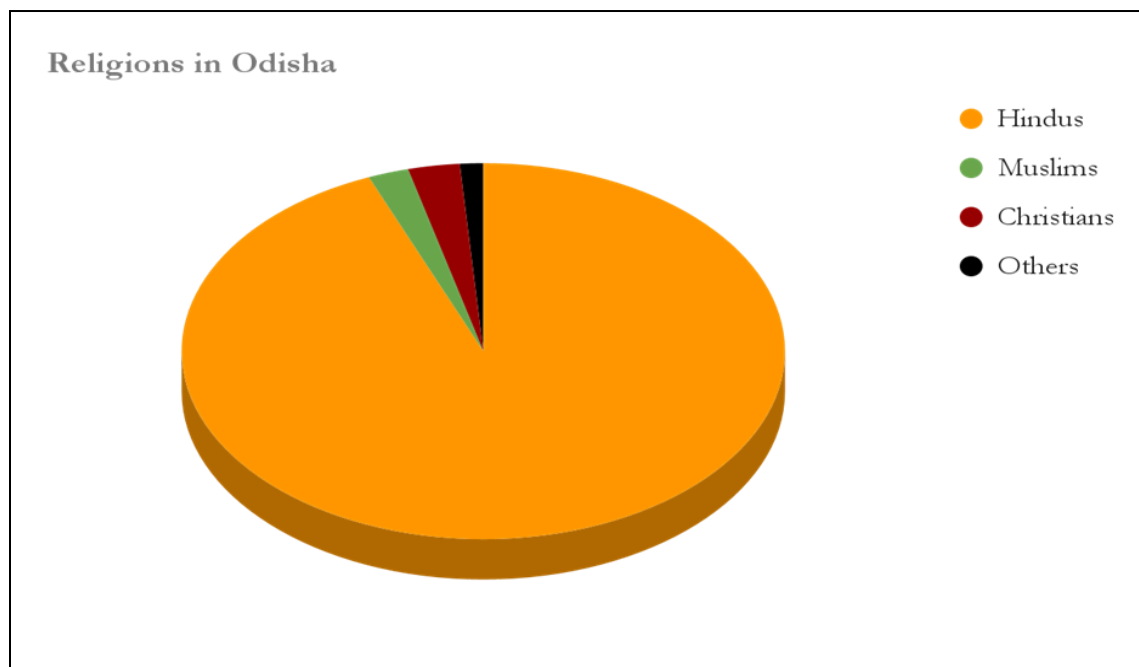
Source: Statistical Reports, Election Commission of India

The Southern Division of the state comprises ten districts thus, all the thirty districts are equally divided among three divisions with each division having ten each. The most populated districts include Ganjam, Koraput, Malkangiri. The Southern Division is arguably the most active as it has seen many visits from the BJP juggernauts Shri Narendra Modi and Shri Amit Shah from the centre to campaign against the BJD.

The prominent leaders from this region belonging to the BJD are Shri Naveen Patnaik, five time Chief Minister belonging to the Hinjili constituency in Ganjam district and Shri Jagannath Saraka who became the minister of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Development in the cabinet of Shri Naveen Patnaik in 2019. The prominent BJP leaders in the state include Shri Basanta Kumar Panda, MP (Kalahandi) constituency and Shri Nityananda Gond, who belongs to the Gond tribe MLA (Umarkote) Nabarangpur constituency.

Approximately 21 seats in this division are reserved for candidates belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes which signifies the importance of this division in being a caste and tribe dominated region. One can observe from the above table the gradual rise of the BJP in legislative assembly and Lok Sabha elections. However, the vote share of the other two parties indicate lesser difference as compared to the other two divisions. Thus, for the BJP to increase its vote share in this division and secure political ground, it is suggested that it take the advantage of the anti-incumbency factor in the state and try and break the Congress and the BJD party, instigating defection. This would be a natural step as someone like Naveen Patnaik who has been Chief Minister from twenty five years obviously would have inspired jealousy among his comrades who, in order to further their political career must be looking for other viable options. Plus, if the BJP successfully manages to break the Congress and BJD loyalists, their pride and a display of strength would significantly increase among the people of Odisha.

Major Voter Groups



Graph3: Religious groups in Odisha

Source: Census of India, 2011

Caste and Tribe	Percentage of Population
Khandayat	18%
Chasa	9%
Brahmin	9%
Gopal/Gauda	8%
Karana	4%
Teli	4%
Chamar/Mochi	3.5%
Santal	2%
Kondha	3.8%

Table 6: Important caste groups among Hindus

As pointed out earlier, Odisha's caste composition is complex. However, it can be seen that the Khandayat caste is clearly a dominant caste just as the Marathas are in Maharashtra or the Jats in Haryana and the Lingayats of Karnataka. The Khandayats are the largest caste group but they too constitute 18% of the Hindu population. The agrarian Chasa community is nearly half the size of the Khandayat community. The Chasas, Brahmins and Khandayats—traditionally viewed as the upper/privileged castes - are spread out across Odisha and so are the Chamars (SCs). Along with the castes, Odisha is also a tribal state with more than 22% of its population being tribal with more than 13 PVTGs. The Kondha tribe and the Santal tribe are the highest occurring tribes with a combined population of 5.8%

Brahmins

Brahmins in Odisha are also known as Utkala Brahmins or Odia Brahmins. They are the historical caretakers and priests of the historic Jagannath Temple in Odisha. It is believed that Brahmins in Odisha migrated from the Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to perform Yajnas in the Jagannath Temple of Puri. There also exist a lot of sub-castes within the Utkal Brahmins but three major sub-castes are Shrauta Brahmins (they have the right to teach and interpret the vedas), Sevayat Brahmins (they give importance to priesthood and temple welfare along with social help), Halua Brahmins (they are similar to the Bhumihars of Bihar and were historically engaged in administration of Brahmin ancestry and later got merged into the Brahmin caste.)

Brahmins account for about 9% of the total Hindu population in Odisha. They are divided into various clans such as Kulina, Vaidika, Badapanda, Pujapanda, Naik, Thakur, Samantray, Sahu and many others. The voting pattern of Brahmins in Odisha has generally favored the BJP but at times leaning towards the BJD. However, the pre 2019 Lok Sabha polls decision of the NDA government led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to provide reservations to candidates belonging to the Economically Weaker Sections is said to have caught the attention of Brahmin community and shifted their sentiments in the favor of the BJP.

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Prasanna Acharya	BJD	Member of Rajya Sabha
Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw	BJP	Union Minister of Railways
Shri Adhiraj Mohan Panigrahi	INC	MLA, Khariar constituency
Shri Tara Prasad Bahinipati	INC	MLA, Korput (Jeypore) constituency

Shri Dr.Bikram Kumar Panda	BJD	MLA, Berhampur constituency
Shri Jayanta Kumar Sarangi	BJP	MLA, Puri constituency

Table 7: Major leaders from the Brahmin community

Chasa/Oda

The word Chasa is derived from the word in the Odia language with the same spelling. The word ‘Chasa’ means ‘Cultivation’ and historically speaking the people who were engaged in agriculture and allied occupations came to be associated with this caste. Earlier pre-independence, Chasa was considered to be a derogatory term for the cultivators. In modern day Odisha, Chasas are one of the dominant castes that is found in most villages. They are economically very powerful because they own land and contribute to the village economy by means of agriculture.

Chasas constitute about 9% of the total population of Odisha. The Chasa caste is further divided into a few sub-castes such as Benatya, Odra, Chukuliya and Sukuliya. Chasas are classified under OBC list in Odisha hence they avail the benefit of reservation. In today’s time however, we find that people of the Chasa caste tend to identify themselves with the Khandayat caste.¹⁸ Historically, the OBCs in the state have favored the INC – this is mainly attributed to the fact that they had dominated Odisha’s political landscape since independence. However, with the rising of BJD and BJP as main opposition, the winds have turned in the favor of BJD and BJP.

Name	Party	Responsibilities held
Shri Pradip Kumar Amat	BJD	State Minister of Finance
Smt Pramila Bisoyi	BJD	MP, Aska Constituency
Shri Mukesh Mahaling	BJP	MLA, Loisingha Constituency
Shri Bishnu Sethi	BJP	MLA, Dhamnagar Constituency
Shri Ram Chandra Kadam	INC	MLA, Pottangi Constituency
Shri Surjya Narayan Patro	BJD	Former Speaker, Odisha Legislative Assembly

Table 8: Major leaders from the Chasa community

¹⁸ Sanjay Kumar, “Electoral Politics in Bihar and Orissa: A Comparative Perspective.”

Khandayat

The Khandayats are the most dominant caste in Odisha. They are mainly the descendants of old rural militia or warrior class. Some scholars say that the term Khandayat is the combination of two Odia words: Khanda(sword) and Ayat(Control). Another saying is that in Odia “Khand” means land. Thus, those who possess land are called Khandayats. This caste is often equated with the Kshatriya caste as the functions they used to perform historically are pretty much the same. The Khandayats are supposed to have ruled Odisha and several adjoining parts in the 16th Century but with the death of last Gajapati ruler Mukunda Deva their dominance started waning away.

Khandayats are divided into 3 main sub-castes of Suryanshi, Nagavanshi and Chandravanshi on the basis of their Gotras. They constitute the upper section of Odisha’s OBCs. The most common Khandayat surnames which clearly demarcate the caste one belongs to are Swain, Samal, Rautray, Gadhanaik, Pradhan, Patasani, Raj and others. The Khandayats of Odisha remain quite influential in the politics of Odisha given that they are the largest caste group of Odisha. Initially, the Khandayat community favored the Congress but withdrew their support in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections and switched over to the BJD¹⁹. They kept shifting loyalty from one party to another and voted for the party that promised them entry on the OBC list after they were excluded from the Mandal Commission List.²⁰ Odisha has witnessed Chief Ministers such as Shri Hareskrushna Mahtab and Shri Nilamani Rautray both of whom belong to the Khandayat community.

Name	Party	Responsibility held
Shri Shrikant Jena	INC	Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers
Shri Ranendra Pratap Swain	BJD	State Minister of Agriculture
Shri Dharmendra Pradhan	BJP	Union Minister of Education
Shri Arun Sahu	BJD	State Minister of Higher Education
Shri Manmohan Samal	BJP	State Party President, Odisha
Shri Jayadev Jena	INC	State Party President, Odisha

Table 9: Major leaders from the Khandayat community

¹⁹ Sanjay Kumar, “Electoral Politics in Bihar and Orissa: A Comparative Perspective.”

²⁰[Religion, caste don-t count in odisha polls - The Deccan Herald](#)

Gopal/Gauda

Gopals are the famous pastoral castes of the state. This caste is similar to the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They are usually engaged in dairy farming and possess cattle for the purpose of milking cows. As per the 1931 caste census, they are the second largest caste of the state with an 8% population. Gopals are divided majorly into 3 sub-castes Mathurapuria, Gopapuria, Magadhaa. Most prominent titles and surnames used to distinguish people belonging to the Gopal caste are: Behera, Pandab, Das, Samantray, Pratihari, Khuntia and others. This community is included in the Socially and Educationally Backward classes list of the state.

Gopals constitute approximately 8% of the population of the state. Traditionally the Gopals who belong to the backward class in the state tend to show their political inclinations towards the Congress party. Voter surveys indicate that OBCs do not overwhelmingly prefer one political party; that different subgroups among them have been voting for different political parties from one election to the next. Surveys also indicate the rising preference of the OBCs (Gopals) in Odisha especially favoring the BJP in the state.²¹

Name	Party	Responsibility held
Shri Subhash Chandra Behera	BJD	MLA, Chhatrapur Constituency
Shri Suresh Kumar Routray	INC	MLA, Jatani Constituency
Shri Susant Kumar Rout	BJD	MLA, Bhubaneswar North Constituency
Shri Sukanta Nayak	BJP	MLA, Nilagiri
Shri Pradipta Kumar Naik	BJP	MLA, Bhawanipatna Constituency
Shri Shashi Bhusan Behera	BJD	MLA, Kendrapara Constituency

Table 10: Major leaders from the Gopal/Gauda community

Karan

The Karans are the writer caste of the state. The Karana caste is prevalent in Odisha and constitutes roughly 5% of the total population among Hindus. This caste is equivalent to the Kayastha caste in other states. The Karanas are identified with the surnames as Mohanty, Das, Parija, Pattnaik, Mahapatra, Nayak, Kanungo, etc.²² They are divided into primarily 3 sub-castes such as Shreshtha

²¹ Lokniti CSDS, "Dalit voting pattern in 2014 Lok Sabha Elections."

²² Gopabandhu Academy of Administration, "Khordha district assessment report"

Karana, Shrishthi Karana Nauli Karana. Originally they were the record keepers of the royal courts of Odisha belonging to the literate caste. Today they are a politically dominant community and have reigned over the politics of Odisha for 40 years. They fall in the unreserved category in the state. The literacy level of this community is highest among all other communities in the state.

Since they are included among the upper castes of the state, their vote share primarily goes to the Congress party and the BJD. However, this trend was basically observed before the 2000s. Post that period, the Karanas majorly voted for the BJD and a small portion of them voted for the BJP and Congress. The Karanas have been the ruling caste of the state since the past 20 years with the incumbent CM Shri Naveen Patnaik belonging to this caste. Alongside Shri Naveen Patnaik, the Congress heavyweight and a former Chief Minister Shri Janaki Ballabh Patnaik also belonged to the Karan caste.

Name	Party	Responsibility held
Shri Naveen Patnaik	BJD	Chief Minister, Odisha
Shri Niranjana Patnaik	INC	State Party President, Odisha
Shri Samir Mohanty	BJP	State Party President, Odisha
Smt Dipali Das	BJD	MLA, Jharsuguda constituency
Shri Ali Kishor Patnaik	CPM	State Party President
Shri Rajkishore Das	BJD	MLA, Morada constituency

Table 11: Major leaders from the Karan community

Other castes and tribes

Odisha is a rich state in terms of inhabiting different castes and tribes. Odisha has the third highest tribal population in India with 62 Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities, including 13 designated Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) that are predominantly rural.²³ These groups have a varied group of political preferences. According to a survey conducted by National Election Studies 1996, Adivasi and tribal groups vote for the Congress party. Alongside their fellow tribal people, Dalits and other backward classes too have voted particularly in the favor of the Congress party. However, this study was conducted in the year 1995 and since then the socio-political dynamics have surely changed, the Congress party has lost its dominance in the state and also the trust of the indigenous people.

²³[Odisha's tribal groups make remarkable progress during naveen patnaik tenure– Frontline, The Hindu](#)

The local parties, especially the Janata Dal, was less popular among OBC voters in the state. The BJD became the popular party in the state attracting the votes of the OBC voters. On the contrary, the BJP has never been a popular choice of the OBC voters in Odisha. The Congress party also garnered the votes of the Adivasis during the 1990s. Over the years there has been a movement of Adivasi voters away from the Congress and towards the BJP, though not exclusively. The BJD has no popularity among Adivasi voters in Odisha.

Name	Party	Responsibility held
Smt Droupadi Murmu (Santhal)	BJP	Hon'ble President of India
Shri Bishweshwar Tudu (Santhal)	BJP	Union Minister of Jal Shakti
Shri Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka (Jatapu)	INC	MP, Koraput Constituency
Shri Dasarathi Gomanga (Munda)	INC	MLA, Mohana Constituency
Shri Jagannath Saraka (Tanti)	BJD	State Minister of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development.
Smt Padmini Dian (Gond)	BJD	MLA, Kotpad Constituency

Table 12: Major leaders from other castes and tribes

Major Cohorts

There are a large number of non-governmental organizations and pressure groups in Odisha, representing different communities and classes. The important ones which have had a large following and a certain degree of influence on policy makers are the following:

Odisha Shramjibi Manch (OSM)

Founded in 2012, OSM is a state and a regional level people's collective. It is an amalgamation of 11 local cohorts (jan sangathans) from all parts of Odisha. Its main aim is working for the political, social, economical upliftment of underprivileged communities residing in both rural and urban areas. It is a people driven cohort which came into existence because of the poor living conditions of the adivasi and dalit communities who constitute 38% of the state population and are deprived of basic needs. This organization claims that it operates independently with minimum external influence.

OSM has campaigned constantly since 2012 for bringing about a social change. Initially, OSM started holding andolans and morchas against the government when the MGNREGA Scheme was poorly implemented in the state with the beneficiaries not getting wages and machines being used to do manual work. Another act on which the OSM worked was the National Food Security Act, 2013. Various rallies, dharnas and protests were organized to make the government set exclusion and inclusion criteria so that real beneficiaries are included under the Act.

With the active morchas against the MGNREGA scheme, OSM managed to bring the faults in the implementation to the knowledge of the government. With constant petitions and appeals, the local governments of the concerned districts addressed the issues of the protestors and also assured immediate action. Along with such local issues, OSM also vows to address the issues of women empowerment, water and sanitation and rights of the tribals over their produce.²⁴

National Alliance of Women Organizations (NAWO, Odisha)

Formally formed in August 1996 even though the inspiration behind the constitution of this cohort was in the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995. 15 women from Odisha participated in this conference. The Advisor from Odisha for this conference, Ms Pramila Swain contributed tremendously by organizing local women groups and voicing their concerns on the international stage. The uniqueness of NAWO is that it is an alliance of all women's organizations who work at the grass root level.

²⁴ <http://www.odishasramajeebeemancha.org/>

They decided to focus on 4 key issues related to women viz, poverty and livelihood issues of women, political empowerment of women, human rights violence against women and health issues of women and girls. NAWO has contributed to women development by: suggesting recommendations to the Verma Committee in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013 after the Delhi Gang Rape Case, creating resources to successfully tackle the cases of violence faced by women, indulging with central authorities and state authorities over rights of women.

NAWO has also campaigned actively in the state to raise awareness about issues of female foeticide and declining sex ratio, anti-trafficking campaigns, harassment of women at workplace, safe migration to other states in search of job opportunities. NAWO has taken up the responsibility of bringing to justice the perpetrators of violence against women in the state for which it has actively campaigned for 12 years and will continue to do so.²⁵

Pashchim Odisha Krushak Sangram Samanwaya Samiti (POKSSS)

Odisha Krushak Sangram Samanwaya Samiti is a farmers' cohort in Odisha engaged primarily in the western parts of Odisha in districts of Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Bolangir, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi and Jajpur. PoKSSS convener Shri Ashok Pradhan recently targeted the government over agrarian issues and farmers' demands.

Issues of appropriate price of crops (especially paddy), poor condition of the farmers despite high price allocation in the budget are some of the campaigning issues for PoKSSS. Despite a separate budget for agriculture from 2012-13 and around ₹9,000 crore cash assistance to millions of farmers under the KALIA scheme since January 2019, farmers in Odisha continue to be the poorest in the country.²⁶ The average value of assets per farmer household in Odisha was 5.71 lakh rupees which is the lowest in the entire country. PoKSSS swiftly targeted the BJD government over their inaction and false promises of irrigating 35% of farmland in all 315 blocks of state.

After Odisha received excess rainfall in 2021, kharif crops were impacted due to the flood like situation. The normal precipitation for September is 226.6 mm, and the state has received 401.7 mm and 483.2 mm. PoKSSS actively campaigned that the affected areas be provided appropriate compensation by the government and respite to the farmers.²⁷

²⁵ <https://nawoodisha.org/>

²⁶ [Farmers in Odisha continue to be the poorest: Govt surveys](#)

²⁷ [Odisha: Excess September rainfall bridges seasonal deficit, won't help Kharif yield](#)

Center for Integrated Rural and Tribal Development (CIRTD)

The Center for Integrated Rural and Tribal Development is a cohort operating mainly in tribal parts of Odisha and working in the interests of tribal people and rural development. By the end of 1990s a group of people of Sundargarh district hailing from different backgrounds spent their leisure hours in social works – This was the first development in the creation of CIRTD. They envision a society free from any sort of bias for the purpose of building authentic people’s organizations for good governance and democratic values. CIRTD is involved in works such as: chalking out a plan of action for the tribal communities to assess the basic means of survival, rejoicing the popular ideals of tribal literature so as to boost plural coexistence and to bring the tribal population into mainstream businesses and occupations. Food insecurity, natural resource management, gender discrimination and tribal inclusivity is where the CIRTD actively organizes campaigns, morchas to create awareness among the public about the issues of the people so as to bring about social change. CIRTD also closely works with various local bodies and state governments to foster economic development of tribal groups.²⁸

²⁸ [CIRTD](#)

BJP - Organization

The precursor to the BJP, the Janata Party initially had a stronghold in the state and enjoyed power from 1977 to 1980 in the seventh assembly. The Janata Party secured a total of 110 seats out of the 147 seat assembly with Shri Nilamani Routray being the Chief Minister. They had a significant presence in the state. Janata Party leaders also served as the leaders of opposition in the state from 1980 to 1985 after the arrival of Congress in 1980 primarily in the form of Shri Prahalad Mallick and Shri Anant Narayan Singh Deo.

Table 13: Key leaders and office-bearers

Name	Position	Caste
Shri Manmohan Samal	State President	Khandayat
Shri Samir Mohanty	Member of National Executive Panel	Khandayat
Shri Balabhadra Majhi	Vice President	Munda/Gond tribe
Shri Bhaskar Madhei	Vice President	Bathudi tribe
Smt. Sangita Singhdeo	Vice President	Khandayat
Smt. Aparajita Sarangi	Vice President	Utkal Brahmin
Smt. Sukesri Oram	Vice President	Dhangar tribe
Shri Nauri Nayak	Vice President	Khandayat
Shri Bhrigu Baxipatra	Vice President	Khandayat
Shri Lalatendu Bidyadhar Mohapatra	Vice President	Utkal Brahmin
Smt. Prabhati Parida	Vice President	Khandayat
Smt. Anita Pattanaik	Vice President	Karan
Shri Prithviraj Harichandan	General Secretary	Khandayat
Shri Golak Mohapatra	General Secretary	Utkal Brahmin
Shri Rabi Nayak	General Secretary	Khandayat

Dr. Lekhashree Samantasinghar	General Secretary	Khandayat
Shri Manas Kumar Mohanty	General Secretary (ORG)	Khandayat
Shri Sudarshan Goyal	State Treasurer	Baniya
Shri Jayanarayan Mishra	Leader of Opposition	Utkal Brahmin
Shri Vijaypal Singh Tomar	Election-in charge	Rajput/Khandayat

Given the less caste-ridden politics of Odisha, BJP's endeavor has been to satisfy different caste and tribe groups by appointing leaders to strategic positions, as can be clearly seen from Table 13. The State Presidents Shri Manmohan Samal and Shri Samir Mohanty are both Khandayats. Until March 2023, the State President was Shri Samir Mohanty who is also from the Khandayat community that has considerable political heft in Odisha. The leader of opposition is Shri Jayanarayan Mishra an Utkal Brahmin. Khandayats and Brahmins currently dominate the state party organization, as Table 13 shows. But the party has also sought to give representation to Karans, Baniyas, Chasas and and to a lesser extent, to other tribal groups among the office-bearers.

Morchas

Odisha BJP has a total of seven morchas representing different interest groups in the state. These morchas have been integrated in the 'Modi ka Parivar' campaign of the State BJP, with each raising pertinent issues related to Shri Naveen Patnaik's governance. Under this broad campaign, Morchas have begun conducting their respective outreach programmes through rallies, dharnas and gheraos in various parts of Odisha. Table 14 summarizes the issues brought to fore by the various morchas:

Table 14: Odisha BJP Morchas and their Presidents

Morchas	President	Activities/Issues raised
Kisan Morcha	Shri Rajkumar Chahar	Implementation of Pradhan Mantri Krushi Sinchai Yojana to solve irrigation problems
Mahila Morcha	Smt Vanathi Srinivasan	Criticizing BJD government on malnourishment issues women and children.
SC Morcha	Shri Lal Singh Arya	Mounting atrocities against Adivasis in Odisha

Yuva Morcha	Shri Tejasvi Surya	Distribution of free food and other essentials in times of COVID lockdown.
ST Morcha	Shri Samir Oraon	Raising awareness about the rights of tribal populations.
OBC Morcha	Dr.K.Laxman	Jana Jagran Yatra against the BJD government before the caste census.
Minority Morcha	Shri Jamal Siddiqui	Deficiencies of the Patnaik Government in addressing the challenges of the minorities.

Primary concerns for the BJP

So far, the BJP has adopted the policy of campaigning for the elections using the popular faces of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Shri Dharmendra Pradhan. PM Modi has made several visits to the state for the inauguration of various projects alongside CM Shri Naveen Patnaik.

The BJP has never formed its own government in the state but has previously supported the BJD government in the state from 1999 to 2009. Odisha as compared to the demography of other states, has ninety five percent Hindu population. Caste based politics have a low impact on the ordinary electorate here as compared to caste politics driven states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and others.²⁹ People vote not for affinity arising out of castes, but for developmental promises and liberal policies of the BJD government.

With that being said, it can be observed by one that the incumbent Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik holds the reins of the state for 20 years with ever-increasing popularity. This fact is attributed to the thumping victory of the BJD in 2019 legislative assembly elections where it secured 112 seats out of 147 member legislative assembly. Corruption free image of Shri Naveen Patnaik and lack of presenting a potent face from the state by the BJP paved the way for the BJD. BJP Odisha heavily relies on the popularity of Shri Narendra Modi for the electoral tides to shift in the favor of the BJP.³⁰ The BJP does provide formidable politicians such as Shri Dharmendra Pradhan but they fail to match the might of BJD and charm of Shri Naveen Patnaik.

²⁹ [Religion, caste don't count in Odisha polls](#)

³⁰ ['Not to win elections, but for ...': What Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik's close aide said on BJD's possible alliance with BJP | India News](#)

Two other allied organizations of the BJP - The RSS and ABVP also prove to be inefficient in securing the majority Hindu votes as there is a lack of strong connection between state BJP leadership and RSS which fails to mobilize the electorate in the favor of the BJP. Appointment of Shri Manmohan Samal as the state party president by removing the former president Shri Samir Mohanty also raised eyebrows as the popularity of Mohanty was much more among the party workers as compared to Samal.³¹ Although there is no direct tension between the two, matters related to infighting in the BJP constantly make headlines which ultimately impacts the election strategy of the party.

Current Strategies: CM-face, election campaign issues

The major problem that faces the BJP in Odisha is the lack of a formidable face to match the might of Chief Minister Shri Naveen Patnaik and hence they are constantly dependent upon the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's powerful image to woo the voters. The losses faced by the party in the bypolls indicated the inadequacy of strong local grassroots leaderships.

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan and Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw are two big names and central ministers that hail from Odisha and also have mass appeal among the people. However, in a situation where they are made the Chief Ministers of the state is a contingency in itself as the primary target of the BJP in the state is to win the required number of seats in the assembly to form its own government. Moreover, the BJP's defeat in Karnataka last year also offered a clear lesson that a strong leadership is essential and an overreliance on national leadership is unwise.³²

The BJP's election strategy so far in Odisha has been to highlight the misgovernance and nonfeasance in the government of Shri Naveen Patnaik. Alongside that, the BJP is also campaigning along the lines of women empowerment and the problems faced by minority caste and tribal groups. To gather the required number of voter base in their favor, the BJP has kickstarted the campaign with popular slogans such as '**Modi ki Guarantee and Modi ka Parivar**.'³³ The important thing would be to hold the party together by taking leaders from different communities along in the campaign and ticket distribution process.

Congress - Organization (Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee- OPCC)

As in most states, the Congress party dominated the electoral landscape of Odisha post independence and the initial years after the state formation. Shri Janaki Ballabh Patnaik and Shri Harekrushna Mahtab of the Congress are still considered to be one of the most popular Chief Ministers of the state.

³¹ [Why BJP picked Manmohan as Odisha unit president](#)

³² [India Today, 16 May 2023](#)

³³ [PM says every family living in Arunachal hills is 'Modi ka parivar'. 10 quotes | Mint](#)

However, the Congress Party is gradually losing all its ground in the state. The seat tally of the party in the state was 38 in the 2004 legislative assembly, followed by 27 in the 2009 assembly, 16 in the 2014 assembly and just 9 seats in the 2019 legislative assembly.

Major Leaders and Office-holders

The Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee is the political party arm of Indian National Congress that operates at the state level in Odisha. Congress party organization seems to rely only on numbers to provide extensive representation to not only people of different castes but also of different districts and regions. The important members of the OPCC are as under:

Table 15: Key Office-bearers of the OPCC

Name	Position	Caste
Shri Sarat Pattanayak	State President	Karan
Dr. Ajoy Kumar	AICC In-charge of Odisha	Kshatriya
Shri Ganeswar Behera	State Vice President	Utkal Brahmin
Shri Tara Prasad Bahinipati	State Vice President	Utkal Brahmin
Shri Debasish Pattanaik	State Vice President	Karan
Shri Sibananda Ray	State Vice President	Khandayat
Smt. Saraswati Hembram	State Vice President	Santhal tribe
Shri Adhiraj Mohan Panigrahi	State Vice President	Utkal
Shri Shuvendu Mohanty	State Vice President	Khandayat
Shri Rabindra Kumar Mallick	General Secretary	Karan
Dr. Lalatendu Mohapatra	General Secretary	Utkal Brahmin
Shri Biren Senapati	General Secretary	Khandayat
Shri Samrendra Mishra	General Secretary	Utkal Brahmin
Smt. Minakhi Bahinipati	General Secretary	Utkal Brahmin
Smt. Archana Nandi	General Secretary	Karan

Shri Tarun Majhi	General Secretary	Gond/Munda tribe
Shri Manoj Kumar Jena	General Secretary	Khandayat
Shri Santosh Singh Saluja	Treasurer	Khatri/Khandayat
Shri Panchanan Kanungo	Spokesperson	Karan

In the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee it can be observed that there is a well distributed set of responsibilities across all castes and tribes. Key portfolios and responsibilities such as Party President and Spokesperson are held by persons belonging to Karan caste. This is a significant development as the BJP had given representation to only people belonging to the Karan caste as shown in **Table 13**. Representation of Karans is markedly greater than in BJP and there exist few members from the Muslim community as well (*who have been mentioned in the official press release.*)

Election Committee

On 22nd March 2024, Shri Bhakta Charan Das, who was a former Union Minister and also the party's Chairman for West Bengal campaign in 2019 was appointed by the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee as the Chairman of Odisha Campaign Committee.³⁴ 18 other candidates too were named by the press release. The primary task of the election committee would be the distribution of tickets among the party candidates as the Lok Sabha polls as well as the Vidhan Sabha polls would take place in the same year.

Morchas

Odisha Congress has three main frontal organizations (Morchas) in Odisha. The SC, ST and OBC departments of the OPCC have remained dormant for some time. There is no broad umbrella campaign under which these morchas are carrying out their outreach programme. On the whole, they seek to highlight the inefficiency of both the ruling and the opposition and label them as 'two different sides of the same coin.' The three different morchas are: Odisha Youth Congress, Odisha Mahila Congress and Odisha Kisan Congress.

Morcha	President	Activity/Issue Raised
Odisha Youth Congress	Shri Ranjit Patra	Protest against unemployment in the regime of Shri Naveen

³⁴ [Congress appoints Bhakta Charan Das as campaign head for Odisha | India News](#)

		Patnaik
Odisha Mahila Congress	Smt. Minakshi Bahinipati	Awareness creation about the 'Mahalaxmi Guarantee' scheme - Rs 1 lakh per year to one woman each in poor families
Odisha Kisan Congress	Shri Amiya Pattanaik	Organization of 'Mandi Chalo Abhiyan' in all districts of Odisha against the anti-farmer policies of the governments.

Aam Aadmi Party - Party Organization

In the Gujarat Assembly Election of December 2022, Aam Aadmi Party made headlines across the country when it won 5 seats out of the 182 member assembly. Although it did not win the elections in the way they had claimed that they would win, they still made a significant impact on the political landscape and Prime Minister's home state of Gujarat. AAP's performance in garnering vote share is also no less impressive, In its very first shot at assembly election in Gujarat, the party bagged 12.92% of the total vote share of the state which in turn helped them to become a national party as they gained more than 6% vote share in the four states of Punjab, Delhi, Goa and Gujarat.³⁵

In January 2023, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Shri Ravinder Singh Kadian visited Odisha and inaugurated AAP office in Cuttack and also claimed that AAP will go solo and fight BJD, BJP and the Congress in the state in next year's Lok Sabha as well as Legislative Assembly Elections. The decision was formally announced later by Shri Sandip Pathak, National Secretary of AAP and AAP State Convener Shri Nishikant Mohapatra.³⁶ There have been reports stating that AAP has rapidly stepped up its infrastructure in the state to contest elections as it completed constituency-level meetings in 132 out of 147 seats and has set up organizational units in 271 blocks out of 314 blocks.

Amid the recent news of a possible seat sharing agreement between the BJP and BJD prior to the Lok Sabha Polls which went sour, as BJP state party president Shri Manmohan Samal claimed that BJP would contest the Lok Sabha Polls solo and without any support, AAP capitalized on the situation and asked the dissenting workers of both the parties to join its front.³⁷ The Aam Aadmi Party senior leader

³⁵ [How AAP got mixed results in Gujarat assembly election | India News](#)

³⁶ [AAP To Go Solo In Odisha In 2024 Polls | Pragativadi](#)

³⁷ [AAP jumps in to Odisha opposition fray amid BJP-BJD seat-sharing deals - Hindustan Times](#)

Shri Saurabh Bhardwaj while touring the state also said that they would implement the Delhi and Punjab people centric model if voted to power in the state.

An analysis of the politics of Aam Aadmi Party reveals that, in 2019 legislative assembly elections in the state, the party contested from 15 seats and failed to win even one. As of 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the party contested 35 seats and won only a single seat in Sangrur, Punjab. The primary reason for the defeat of AAP is the lack of good quality local leadership as it heavily depends upon party stalwart Shri Arvind Kejriwal. However, AAP very well understands and realizes that it is still at a nascent stage in Indian politics and cannot be expected to achieve the kind of grassroots level penetration that the two major parties can.

A minute observation of AAP's victories in states like Punjab and the Union Territory of Delhi reveal that before directly coming into power, AAP staunchly criticized the policies of the government and also stated what they would do instead had they been in power. Also, carrying out activism in the form of morchas, protests, speeches and street plays were some of the tactics implemented by AAP. All this ultimately led to a conception, among the people; of AAP being in power. This campaigning did have an impact upon the minds of the electorate as they voted the government out of power thus paving the way for AAP to consolidate its own government.

The point being, AAP understands that in order to get a clear political verdict in a state, it has to first develop a positive image of itself among the people of that state – even if that image leads them only to the post of opposition in the state, as being the opposition party in any state is the gateway to forming a solid government. This is observable in Punjab, as in the 2017 assembly election Congress had secured 77 seats in the assembly and had a clear majority and AAP had 20 seats. Similar things were observed in Delhi as in the 2013 assembly election BJP was the single largest party at 32 seats in 70 member assembly and AAP was at 28 seats. However, in the 2015 assembly election AAP scored 67 seats thus leaving no room for opposition.

This is AAP's game plan for other states as well as it looks to enhance its political base across India. First becoming the opposition party in the state and then clinching power and forming the government. However, the road to becoming the primary opposition party in Odisha by replacing the BJP is first by taking Congress out of the picture as it has been performing very poorly in the state since 2009 but in doing so a major setback for the AAP could be its near total lack of local leadership. While AAP is not expected to sweep the coming polls, it can dent the vote share of the BJP and Congress provided the party aggressively pursues its organization and campaign efforts. The Aam Aadmi Party has to capitalize upon the 'Kejriwal arrested' situation if it seeks political ground in Odisha.

Major Opportunities for the BJP

While Shri Naveen Patnaik still remains one of the popular leaders in the state, BJD can still be cornered by the BJP. Some of these are already being leveraged in BJP's campaign in the state.

BJD Infighting

Infighting in the BJD is not new and there have been many such instances where members and representatives of the BJD have engaged in ugly spats thus ultimately maligning the image of the party and its senior leaders. A testimony to this internal tussle among the BJD was witnessed in the Puri district of the state in September 2023 where the party's two factions engaged in a heated argument. One faction led by president of BJD's youth wing Shri Subhashish Khuntia and another faction led by district BJD president Shri Maheshwar Mohanty. A meeting of Puri town's ward no-21 was held at a city hotel where the supporters of district BJD president Maheshwar Mohanty created a ruckus in the meeting while opposing the participation of the party workers of the other ward led by Shri Khuntia and they also objected to convening the meeting without inviting district president Mohanty. Both the sides engaged into an ugly tussle.³⁸

Another recent political development of infighting within the BJD in the aftermath of distribution of tickets for the assembly elections is the fight for the Bhubaneswar Assembly seat. Shri Anant Narayan Jena is the sitting MLA from the constituency whose chances of recontesting are being threatened due to two aspirants Shri Amaresh Jena, a senior corporator with grassroots connect and Shri Biranchi Mahasupakar, a four time corporator of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation reaching Naveen Niwas in separate rallies along with their supporters. While Shri Amaresh Jena appears keen to contest from the Bhubaneswar Central constituency in place of the sitting MLA Shri Anant Narayan Jena, Shri Biranchi Mahasupakar wants a ticket from the Ekamra constituency represented by senior BJD leader and Science and Technology Minister Shri Ashok Chandra Panda.³⁹

However, there has been no significant amount of infighting to the extent of threatening the party's leadership itself as it reins are being held by a publicly popular Chief Minister and BJD stalwart Shri Naveen Patnaik, nevertheless, these instances of infighting provide a significant window of opportunity to the BJP to initiate defections. If BJD doesn't give ticket to a sitting MLA to recontest or in another case where the BJD doesn't give a ticket to corporators to contest, BJP can present either of them, whose hopes have been crashed by the BJD, with lucrative offers, probably even with a

³⁸ [Odisha: Problem of plenty for BJD, rebellion surfaces in BJP](#)

³⁹ [Fight for ticket intensifies in Bhubaneswar Assembly seats](#)

possible ticket to contest election from the same constituency where their former party denied them the chance. Thus, it's a win-win opportunity for the BJP.

Strengthening connection with women voters

Women in Odisha make half the population of the state. Women in Odisha are believed to be BJD loyalists. BJD's campaign finds its sound among the women of the state. Shri Naveen Patnaik's slogan in the form of 'Aapan Mane Khushita?' touched a chord with women, youth and first-time voters. The choice of Smt. Pramila Bisoyi, a leading self-help group (SHG) leader, as the BJD candidate for Aska Lok Sabha seat had a reverberating effect on women in general and SHG members in particular across the state. BJD started projecting her as a leader who came up from the grassroots and drew electoral dividends for the BJD. It so happened that all the women Self Help Groups mobilized in the favor of BJD and ensured that all women voted compulsorily in the elections. They clearly played a major role in the BJD getting a landslide win in the assembly elections.

Even though the voting turned out to be against BJP, nonetheless, it is a significant learning opportunity for the BJP as it should campaign much more and garner the attention of women in the state. It is suggested that the Mahila Morcha of BJP in Odisha take up the problems of women and children related to right to proper sanitation facilities in rural areas and nourishment in the state and make it a mass movement by including women especially of the remote areas as the electoral base of BJD government is situated primarily in urban areas and use this force to collectively organize a protest against the the BJD government – a move by which it can gain stronghold among the women voters of the state. Among other things, the BJP should also consider providing its top responsibilities in the state to more women as it would ultimately strike a chord among the women community of Odisha.

Capitalizing on less infrastructural development

The BJP could successfully, while campaigning for the upcoming legislative assembly and Lok Sabha elections, campaign along the lines of '20 years of BJD government and yet the state constantly remains one of the poorest states in India.' The lack of infrastructural development in the state even after 20 years of rule of the BJD government is a significant opportunity that is presented in front of the BJP. Odisha got only its second airport and that too had to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi before Lok Sabha Elections, 2019.

In 2004-05, the Tendulkar Committee put Odisha as the poorest state in the country with the maximum proportion of poor at 57.2%. In May 2014, a committee headed by former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan proposed an index of backwardness of a region based on per capita consumption expenditure, education, health, household amenities, poverty rate, female literacy, percentage of the

Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe population, urbanization rate, financial inclusion and physical connectivity. Odisha still stayed in the top as the most backward state in the country. Shri Naveen Patnaik had been the Chief Minister of the state for 14 years at the time. Majority of the funds that come to the state come from the center for the implementation of Ujjwala Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana among others. This is a great opportunity for the BJP to portray itself as the progressive party and also if possible tarnish the image of BJD as a 'corruption-free' by stressing upon the above mentioned points and statistics.

Using the 'caste factor' to its advantage

Odisha is one such state in India where the caste factor does not play much of an important role mainly because people judge the politicians by their promises and work and also another reason being that 95% population of Odisha is Hindu. Had there been a population of any other religion, caste politics would have assumed an important role. However, the BJP can still use this unique situation to its advantage.

The three most dominant castes in the state are that of Brahmins, Khandayats and Karans. Among these castes, Khandayat caste is the largest, numerically speaking. However, the irony here is that, Khandayats have been the Chief Minister of the state only twice as compared to Brahmins and Karans. So how the BJP can use this situation to their advantage is that, firstly gaining the confidence of the Khandayat community by giving important posts of the party at both central and state levels to members from Khandayat community. However, the BJP can not just appoint members from the Khandayat community for the sake of appointing them. Odisha is a state where caste politics' influence is less hence it is recommended that the BJP appoints qualified candidates from the caste. Followed by this, to further strengthen the votes of Khandayat community in their favor, it is suggested that BJP should promise to name a Chief Minister from the Khandayat caste as in the history of Odisha since 1950, a Khandayat CM has been elected only twice.

However, to avoid the anger of the other castes in the state, the BJP should also give adequate numbers of tickets and other responsibilities to members of other castes. For instance, to consolidate the vote of the Brahmin community, it is recommended that the BJP campaign along the lines of increasing the salary of temple priests at the Lord Jagannatha Temple, Puri. Hence, even though Odisha doesn't have a caste influence surrounding it, the BJP can still play the caste card to its advantage. Even though the state leadership has been named from the Khandayat caste, BJP still needs to address the other concerns raised not just by the Khandayat caste but all other majority and minority castes in the state.

Major threats for the BJP

Formation of factions within BJP Odisha

After Shri Dharmendra Pradhan was appointed as Chief Election Planner for Odisha in 2019 for the elections, rumors started emerging that infighting has started between Shri Dharmendra Pradhan's factions and the earlier faction whom he replaced. Among those who have worked closely with Shri Dharmendra Pradhan comment about him negatively saying there is a lot of resentment against him as he is arrogant and intolerant. A senior BJP leader from Odisha claimed that many of the state unit leaders who had contested in 2014 were either denied tickets or replaced from their old constituencies. Among the leaders who left the BJP after falling out with Shri Dharmendra Pradhan and being denied tickets were Shri Rajkishore Das and Shri Subhas Chouhan, both of whom were from the RSS and other allied organizations. Due to this disruption within BJP's internal management, BJP lost its support within the shakhas of the RSS as well.

Shri Rajkishore Das who was denied a ticket said that he was a BJP loyalist for more than 25 years and criticized the new party leadership's way of planning strategies for elections in the said case. Shri Rajkishore Das then later on went on to join the BJD. In this case, the BJD was successful in orchestrating a defection from the BJP to its side solely due to the infighting of the BJP. In another unsavory incident BJP office in Bhubaneswar witnessed a scuffle. The BJP had nominated Shri Arabinda Dhali from the Jayadev assembly seat but the supporters of another aspirant of the seat Shri Basant Yadav desecrated the party office saying that their leader should have been preferred over Shri Arabinda Dhali who defected to the BJP from BJD and is also facing staunch opposition from the people as well.⁴⁰ These internal conflicts are a serious threat to the ambitions of BJP in Odisha.

Minimal focus on development of western Odisha

BJP moved away from core issues like development of western Odisha in its election promise of 2019. It was this promise, which made it a force to reckon with because eight of the party's ten MLAs were from the state's western belt. The party had once built up popular movements to highlight the poverty and under-development of western Odisha, an area known for droughts and starvation deaths. However, it was seen as compromising on these issues when it shared power in the state with the BJD from 2000 to 2009. Despite sharing power for almost a decade, the party failed to ensure fiscal autonomy for the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC), an independent body formed to boost infrastructure in the western parts of the state.⁴¹

⁴⁰ [Odisha: Problem of plenty for BJD, rebellion surfaces in BJP](#)

⁴¹ Dr.Priti Sriranjana and Bikram Kishori Jena , "Politics, Parties, People: Field Notes from Electoral Campaigns in Odisha, India"

BJD had been choosing issues carefully with an eye on the elections, which was likely to be a duel between the two parties. Shri Naveen Patnaik played the regional card deftly on the 21st foundation day of his party on December 26 in 2018 by raising the demand for fiscal autonomy to Odisha. He held the Centre squarely responsible for the state's failure to develop railways, national highway network and telephone connectivity. Western Odisha continues to remain a significant threat to the BJP as Shri Naveen Patnaik capitalized on the correct opportunity and delivered when required. It would be difficult for the BJP to now establish its presence in the western part of Odisha, once where it was dominant and also enjoyed the confidence of the people. It is suggested that, BJP should engage in confidence building rallies and other Janhit Yatras across the western part of Odisha.

Lack of strong local leadership

Perhaps the most worrisome problem before BJP in Odisha, the party lacks a pan-Odisha influential face to match the popularity of Shri Naveen Patnaik. The party is heavily dependent on the national popularity of Shri Narendra Modi for campaigning in the state. As per reports, the popularity of BJP and the Prime Minister has been increasing since 2019 when BJP central leadership paid their respects and condolences to the two Odia martyrs in the tragic Pulwama terror attack, to the inauguration of Odisha's second airport just prior to the Lok Sabha Election 2019 and to the recent Pran Pratishtha of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

It can be observed that while these instances throw light on the massively popular image of PM Shri Narendra Modi it also sheds light on the fact of how BJP is constantly dependent on PM Modi for campaigning and also highlights the lack of a formidable BJP face to contest the elections against BJD. While the BJP has a couple of options in the form of Shri Dharmendra Pradhan and Shri Ashwani Vaishnav and Shri Sambit Patra in the form of potent BJP faces in the state, they fail to capture relevance in the state as both of them are central ministers and also are not much popular among the electorate. When it comes to elections, the people of Odisha use tactical voting - 'Modi for PM, Naveen for CM' formula which hampers BJP's interests in the state as they have no solid face to capture the eastern state. The BJP's threat is that its leaders are mostly urban-centric and the party's connection with the grassroots is less. There is no programme for the village-level leaders which keeps them politically idle. This is a serious threat to the BJP in Odisha.

BJD's campaigning of 'Make in Odisha'

In November 2022, Shri Naveen Patnaik Odisha's popular business conclave of 'Make in Odisha.' eyeing funds worth Rs. 6 lakh.cr to various investors across the entire world. Some say that Shri Naveen Patnaik stole from the BJP its signature campaigning dialogue of 'Make in India' during 2014 Lok

Sabha elections but the ground reality one can observe is that it has only increased the reputation of Shri Naveen Patnaik's image as a people's leader in his state.

In addition to this, Odisha hosting the Men's Hockey World Cup 2023 has also struck a chord among not just Odia people but also the people of India as they look to revive the national sport of India and in pursuance of this aim, they have also sponsored the men's hockey team of India. All this emerges as a threat to the BJP as it comes at a time when the world's largest cricket stadium is inaugurated in Gujarat and has the Prime Minister's name attached to it. It is suggested that the BJP should emphasize and incentivize the youth to pursue all other sports that are coveted and competed at international stages such as the Olympics.

Conclusion

This primer has reviewed the state politics in Odisha keeping in view the upcoming State Assembly Elections in 2024. Broad trends which can be politically significant have been highlighted by summarizing the political and electoral history of the state. Odisha initially observed a coalition government since 1999 post the formation of the Biju Janata Dal in the state, who formed the government with the support of the BJP. As for the Congress, it was the primary opposition party in the state till 2009, post which it has been consistently underperforming in the state.

Caste does not amount to a dominant factor in the state as the issues related to governance and development drive the political winds of the state. All political parties observe well represented and distributed party responsibilities among members of various castes.

Quite recently, in March 2024, reports regarding a possible BJD-BJP alliance formation emerged which were later dismissed as the talks proved to be inconclusive following the lack of agreement on matters of seat sharing and portfolio distributions. BJD still continues to be a dominant party in the state and the BJP has stepped up in the role of the primary opposition to the government while the Congress is still struggling to gain its long lost momentum.

The BJP's primary areas of strength would be fostering a strong connection with the women voters of both rural and urban Odisha as women account for half of the voting population, targeting the BJD government on governance and infrastructure development issues so as to induce anti-incumbency in the state. Whereas the major areas of threat would be a lack of a strong local leadership, BJD government's promotion and sponsorship of hockey and kabaddi events – both of which have a strong connect with the people of India when the BJP government has its aides running BCCI and a stadium in the name of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.