

Local Political Culture Of Assam: An Analytical Study Of Panchayat Elections Of 2025

Prem Kumar Chetry
K.V Reddy

Abstract

This paper analyzes the 2025 Panchayat Elections in Assam to understand evolving trends in rural political behavior and participation. Employing Almond and Verba's orientation-based framework, the study examines the influence of knowledge, attitudes, and evaluations on participation within the Panchayati Raj system. The historical and constitutional evolution of local governance provides the basis for assessing electoral rules, reservation policies, and candidate eligibility. Data from the Assam State Election Commission show strong dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Asom Gana Parishad, which together won nearly 60 per cent of Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat seats. High voter turnout, along with substantial representation of women and marginalized groups, reflects growing democratic participation.

Keywords: Political Culture, Assam State Election Commission, Anchalik Panchayat, Zila Parishad

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I. Introduction

The concept of political culture comes from Gabriel Almond's observation that every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political actions (Pye & Verba, 1965, p.7). This is to say that in any operating political system, there is an ordered subjective arena of politics which gives meaning to the polity, discipline to institutions, and social relevance to individual acts (Ibid). The concept of political culture thus suggests that the traditions of a society, the spirit of public institutions, the passions, the collective reasoning of its citizenry, and the style and operating codes of its leaders, not just random products of historical experiences, but fit together as a part of a meaningful whole, and constitute an intelligible web of relations (Ibid). In short, political culture indicates the set of behaviours of individuals towards the political system or social system, as humans are inherently social and political animals. '

There has been a significant shift in the political culture of the Panchayat Elections in Assam over the last decade, particularly since the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gained a majority in the Assam Legislative Assembly from 2014 to 2019. People are more inclined towards the ruling party even at the grassroots level, which is evident from the results of the panchayat elections 2025.

Historical evidence suggests that forms of village-level governance existed in Vedic times, where local people managed administrative functions rooted in the concept of dharma (Mishra, 2014, p. 359). The life of the people was fruitful and peaceful, as there were limited desires and needs of the people.

In medieval times, Panchayati Raj lost its importance as feudal lords managed local affairs through dictatorship. They never bothered about the people and only exploited people to their advantage (Garg, 2017, p.47).

During the British period, there were efforts made to set up local governments. Lord Rippon is regarded as the first person who came out with a Resolution of 1882 to provide the framework for local government, and because of this step, he is still considered the father of the Local Self-Government of India.

The village panchayat was a unit of local administration since the early British days, but they were controlled by the then British Government in India. When Indian leaders pressed for local autonomy at the national level, the British Government sought to meet this demand by offering concessions at the lowest level, at the initial stage, by giving powers of self-government to panchayats in rural areas and municipalities in urban areas, under various names under different enactments, e.g. the Bengal Local Self-Government Act, 1885; the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, the Bengal Municipal Act, 1884 (Basu, 2011, p.281).

In the Government of India Act, 1935, the power to enact legislation was specifically given to the provincial legislature by entry 12 in the Provincial Legislative List. By virtue of this power, new acts were enacted by many other states, vesting powers of administration, including criminal justice, in the hands of the Panchayats (Ibid).

After Independence, the Government of India, under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, was committed to establishing Panchayati Raj to provide the actual swaraj to the people living in villages or rural areas. The Government of India appointed many committees and commissions from time to time to suggest the structure and functioning of the Panchayati Raj System, which can help the people to get out of abject poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, squalor, disease, etc. The most important of them included the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, Singhvi Committee, Ashok Mehta Committee.ⁱ All these committees suggested “democratic decentralisation” through a two or three-tier Panchayati Raj System.

Irrespective of such existing legislation, the makers of the Constitution of Independent India were not satisfied with the working of these local bodies as institutions of popular government and, therefore, a Directive was included in the Constitution of 1949 in Article 40 as follows:

“The state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”

Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages ever since the inception of recorded history. Gandhiji’s dream of every village being a republic has been translated into reality by introducing the three-tier Panchayati Raj System to encourage people’s participation in rural development. Part IX of the Constitution envisages a three-tier system of Panchayats, namely, (a) the Village Level, (b) the District Panchayat at the district level, and (c) the Intermediate Panchayat that stands between the village and district panchayats in the states where the population is above 20 lakhs (Basu, op. cit., p 283).

On 24th April 1993, it was a landmark as on this day the Panchayati Raj Institutions were given constitutional status by the Seventy-Third Amendment Act of 1992 (Goel & Rajneesh, 2003, p.1). The salient features of the Act are (Ibid).

1. To provide a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all states having a population of over 20 lakhs;
2. To hold Panchayati elections regularly every five years;
3. To provide reservation of seats for scheduled tribes and women, not less than one-third of the total seats;
4. To appoint State Finance Commissions to make recommendations regarding the financial powers of the panchayats; and
5. To constitute the District Planning Committee to prepare a draft development plan for the district.

Theoretical Framework

The classic study of political culture and democracy is Almond and Verba’s “*The Civic Culture* (1963). Based on surveys conducted in the United States of America, Britain, West Germany, Italy, and Mexico between 1959 and 1960, the landmark investigation sought to identify the political culture within which a liberal democracy is most likely to develop and consolidate. Their study provides a helpful introduction to the topic (Hague & Harrop, 2004). The political culture is the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among the members of a political system. It is the subjective realm that underlies and gives meaning to political actions (Almond and Powell, 1966, p. 50). Such individual orientations involve several components, including (a) cognitive orientations, which mean knowledge, accurate or otherwise, of political objects and beliefs; (b) affective orientations refer to feelings or attachments, involvement, rejection and the like about political objects; and (c) evaluative orientations refer to judgements and opinions about political objects, which usually involve applying value standards to political objects and events (Ibid, Shils, 1951). According to Almond and Verba, there are three types of political culture (Almond and Verba 1963 cited in Wiarda, 2014):

1. A parochial political culture is one in which the individual is little aware of the central government, plays no part in political decisions, and has no specialized political roles. However, politics, economies and religion all merge into one. This is the most conventional or underdeveloped type of political system (Ibid).
2. A subject political culture is one in which the individual is aware that his government is oriented toward the outputs of the political system, and they may take pride in the country, but has no inputs or influence. The relationship is passive or one of authoritarian repression. These signs are usually found in transitional societies (Ibid).
3. A civic culture is one in which the individual is oriented toward both outputs and inputs, is aware of political issues and their effects, and takes a more active role in the political process, either by voting or other means (ibid).

Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994ⁱⁱ

The Assam Panchayat Act of 1994 received the assent of the governor of Assam on 5th May, 1994. This is an Act to amend and consolidate laws relating to Panchayats in Assam. This Act shall extend to the whole of Assam in the rural areas except the Autonomous Districts under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It shall also exclude any area included in a Municipality, Town Committee, Cantonment, or Municipal Corporation. The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994, came into force immediately. The Assam Panchayat Act of 1994 has related the three-tier local Self-Government institution in the rural areas. These institutions are Gaon

Panchayat at the Village level, Anchalik Panchayat at the Block level, and the Zilla Parishad at the District level. This Act has been amended from time to time as required. Features of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 are given in the following (Brahma, 2019, p.13).

1. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, has been passed under the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. Thus, the Panchayats under this Act enjoy Constitutional Status.
2. This Act has abolished the Mukhuma Parishad. In this place, provisions have been made for the creation of the Zilla Parishad in each district of Assam.
3. The term of office of the Panchayats has been extended from 4 years to 5 years.
4. The Act has made provision for the reservation of 1/3 seats in the Panchayat for women.
5. Although the State Government can take over the administration of the Panchayat, elections must be held within six months from the date of takeover.
6. A Finance Commission shall be constituted by the State Government to advise the government for the distribution of money among the Panchayats.
7. The Panchayat Act of 1994 has given more powers to the Panchayats.
8. The Act has taken steps to make the Panchayats financially strong and independent.
9. The Act has provided that Panchayat elections shall be conducted under the supervision of the State Election Commission. ⁱⁱⁱ

Identification of Voters^{iv}

Identification of voters was done based on the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) as the main document of identification of a voter. However, any of the mentioned identification documents can be shown at the polling stations. ^v

1. Aadhar Card
2. MNREGA Job Card
3. Passbooks with a photograph issued by the Bank or the Post Office
4. Health insurance Smart Card issued under the scheme of the Ministry of Labour
5. Driving License
6. PAN (card)
7. Smart Card issued by RGI under NPR
8. Indian Passport
9. Pension Document with photograph.
10. Service Identity Cards with a photograph issued to employee by the Central/State Govt./PSUs/ Public Limited Companies, and
11. Official identity cards issued to MPs/MLAs/MLCs
12. Unique Disability Identity (UDID) card, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India.

Model Code of Conduct

The Model Code of Conduct shall come into force with immediate effect in the respective areas covered by the Panchayat Election, 2025. The Assam State Election Commission has been following the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) issued by the Election Commission (ECI) along with related guidelines in the document titled Manual on Model Code of Conduct (Document 21). As the Model Code of Conduct relates to free and fair conduct of elections, which forms the spirit of the democratic set-up, which has been held as part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the Model Code of Conduct of ECI is equally applicable in the Local Body Elections.

The Model Code of Conduct consists of eight parts for the guidance of Political parties and Candidates and is summarised as below. ^{vi}

1. Part (I) of MCC lays stress on certain minimum standards of good behaviour and conduct of political parties and candidates, and their workers and supporters during the election campaign;
2. Part (II) and Part (III) deal with the holding of a public meeting and taking out procession by political party and Candidates.
3. Part (IV) and Part (V) describe as to how Political Parties and Candidates should conduct themselves on the Polling Day and at the Polling Booths;
4. Part (VI) exhorts Political Parties and Candidates to bring their complaints to the notice of the Observers appointed by the Election Commission for the remedy.
5. Part (VII) deals with parties in power. This part is, in essence, the flesh and blood of Model Code, which deals with several issues relating to the Government and its ministers, such as visits of Ministers, use of Government transport, Government accommodation, and announcements of various Schemes and Schemes and projects, etc;

6. The newly added part (VIII) says that Election Manifestos shall not contain anything repugnant to the ideals and principles enshrined in the Constitution, and further that it shall be consistent with the letter and spirit of other provisions Model Code.

Eligibility Conditions of a Candidate

The eligibility conditions of a candidate for contesting the Panchayati elections in Assam are given below.^{vii}

1. Candidate should have attained the age of 21 years.
2. Candidate should have a functional sanitary toilet in his/her residence.
3. Candidate himself or his/her spouse should not have violated the legal age of marriage under the provision of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
4. Candidates should not have more than two (2) living children from a single or multiple partners at the time of filing nomination, provided this will not apply to more than two children who were born before 19.03.2018.
5. Candidates should comply with Rule 22A by filing affidavit at the time of filing nomination and criminal conviction or discharge about being accused of any pending offence punishable for two years. The affidavit should also contain his assets, movable as well as immovable, and liabilities.
6. Candidates for Gaon Panchayat Member should have passed the HSLC (Matriculation) examination or equivalent examination under any Council or Board recognised by the State or Central Government. However, candidates belonging to the STs, SCs, OBCs, and More OBCs (MOBCs) should have studied up to class X. Similarly, candidates for Zilla Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat should have passed HSSLC (Class XII) examination or equivalent examination under any Council or Board recognised by the State or Central Government. However, candidates belonging to STs, SCs, OBCs, and MOBCs, the minimum qualification is HSLC(Matric) passed or equivalent examination passed under any Council or Board recognised by the State or Central Government.
7. No person shall be elected as Presidents, Vice Presidents, or Member of Zilla Parishad, Anchalik Panchayat, and Gaon Panchayat if she/she is disqualified under the section of the Assam Panchayati Act, 1994, as amended (The Assam Panchayat Act, 1994).

Ceiling of Expenditure

The Assam State Election Commission had set the limit or ceiling expenditure for candidates contesting the Panchayat Election 2025. Candidate for the Zilla Parishad Member was allowed to spend rupees ten lakh (₹10.00 Lakh). Candidate for the Anchalik Panchayat Member was fixed at rupees two lakh fifty thousand (₹2.5 Lakh). Lastly, candidate for the Gaon Panchayat Member was fixed at rupees twenty-five thousand (₹25000.00).^{viii}

The Panchayat Election of Assam of 2025

The Panchayat elections for Zila Parishad, Anchalik Panchayats, and Goan Panchayats were conducted in two phases on 2 May 2 and 7 May 7 2025 (Purkayastha, 2025). The elections were conducted in 27 districts across the State. The first phase covered Cachar, Hailakandi, Sribhumi, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sivasagar, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, and Sonitpur. The second phase covered Dhubri, South Salmara Mankachar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Bajali, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro), Hojai, Nagaon, Morigaon, and Darrang (Ibid). The vote counting took place on 11 May 2025. The last date of filing nominations for both Phases was on 11th April 2025 from 11.00 A.M to 3 P.M. The nomination papers were scrutinised on 12 April, and on the same day, the valid nominated candidates' list was published by the Assam State Election Commission. The date for the withdrawal of candidates was fixed on 17 April and on the same day, the list of contesting candidates was published. The counting of votes began on 11 May, and the final results were declared on 14th May. More than 18 million were eligible voters, and the voter turnout was over 79 per cent.^{ix} The following table includes the voters' strength of this Panchayat Election (Assam State Election Commission, 2025).

Table. 1.1 Total Number of voters

Total Number of Voters = 18036682	
Male Voters	9071264
Female Voters	8965010
Others	408

Source: Assam State Election Commission (2025)

<https://www.bodopedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Assam-panchayat-election-2025-schedule.pdf>

There were 25007 polling stations as compared to the last election of 2018, where 23505 polling stations were used (ASEC, 2025).^x The Assam State Election Commission provided a summary of the reservation of Panchayati Raj Institutions for the Panchayat election 2025. The summary is given in the following

Table 1.2: Summary of Category-wise Seat Distributions

SL No	Particulars of the Seats and Posts	Total Seats	Open	SC reserved		ST reserved		UR	Total
				Open	Women	Open	Women	Women	Women
1	GPM	21920	9270	733	849	1034	983	9047	10883
2	GPP	2192	934	70	91	91	94	914	1097
3	GPVP	2192	936	67	93	81	99	916	1108
4	APM	2192	914	63	98	91	98	932	1124
5	APP	181	69	5	5	9	7	85	98
6	APVP	181	71	5	6	9	5	85	96
7	ZPM	397	167	17	14	14	20	166	199

Source: Assam State Election Commission (2025)<https://sec.assam.gov.in/assets/user/img/reservation-summary.png>

*GPM=Gaon Panchayat Member, * GPP=Gaon Panchayat President, * GPVP= Gaon Panchayat Vice President, * APM= Anchalik Panchayat Members, * APP=Anchalik Panchayat Presidents *APVP=Anchalik Panchayat Vice President, * ZPM=Zila Parishad Member * SC=Scheduled Tribe, * ST= Scheduled Caste, * UR=Unreserved

The particulars in Table 1.6 show that the total posts across three tiers stand at 29225, out of which 21920 seats come from Gaon Panchayat members, accounting for around 75 per cent of all posts. Women have a strong presence across three categories, namely Gaon Panchayat, Anchalik Panchayat and Zila Parishad. GPM has 10883, nearly 49.7 per cent of total seats. In smaller categories like the Anchalik Panchayat President and the Anchalik Panchayat Vice President, about 50 to 55 per cent are women. The distribution of seats, especially reserved for women, indicates gender parity that is maintained through reservation. SC and St reservations are reflected in both open and women's sections. For SC open and SC women's seats reservation in GPM stands at 1582, and ST open and ST women's reservation stands at 2017. Thus, 16 per cent seats are reserved for SC and ST in GPM. Overall reservation of ST and SC stands at 16 per cent. The reservation for women, including the open category, ST and SC accounts for 50.1 per cent. Hence, the Panchayat Election seat distribution as per categories serves as empirical evidence of how constitutional mandates translate into institutional inclusivity within the rural political framework of Assam.

Results of the Panchayat Election of 2025

The counting of votes began on 11 May 2025 and the final results were declared on 14 May 2025. The results went in favour of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) with its ally Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), as we know they are part of the National Democratic Alliance in the Zilla Parishad Member. Even before the results were declared, 348 seats of the Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat were decided unopposed. The report also reveals that the National Democratic Alliance won 325 seats, including Anchalik Panchayat Members and Zila Parishad Members. Independents won 15 Anchalik Parishad seats uncontested, while the Indian National Congress secured 9 Anchalik Panchayat seats, and All India United Democratic Front won one Anchalik Panchayat seat (PTI, 2025). Of the 2,192 total AP seats, the NDA has secured 288-259 by the BJP and 29 by its ally, representing over 13 per cent of the total. In the ZP category, the alliance has already won 37 of 397 seats-35 for BJP and 2 for AGP, making up more than 9 per cent of the total (Singh, 2025). Election results were declared officially by the Assam State Election Commission on 14 May 2025. The party-wise results of the Panchayat Election, 2025, are given in

Table 1.3

Table. 1.3 Breakup of party-wise results in Panchayat elections, 2025

Political Party	ZPM Seats Total Seats= 397	APM Seats Total Seats= 2188	Total Seats
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	274	1261	1535
Indian National Congress (INC)	72	481	553
Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)	27	184	211
All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)	8	64	77
Rajor Dal (RD) ^{xi}	3	17	20
Independent	13	173	186
All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)	0	4	4
Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) ^{xii}	0	3	3
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	0	1	1

Source: Assam State Election Commission (2025). Press Release. No.SEC/2022/211. Dated 14/11/25
<https://sec.assam.gov.in/results/pe-result-2025>

The table presents the distribution of seats won by different political parties across the Zila Parishad and the Anchalik Panchayat declared by the Assam State Election Commission. The table provides a total of 397 seats of Zila Parishad Members and 2188 Anchalik Panchayat Members, thereby making 2585 seats in two strata of Panchayat election in Assam. As per the given seat distributions in the table, the Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as the dominant political force, obtaining the highest number of seats at Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat. BJP secured 274 out of 397 ZPM seats, which is 69 per cent, and 1261 out of 2188, which is 57.6 per cent. In short, 1535 seats, including ZPM and APM out of 2585, which is 59.4 per cent, indicate the BJP's persistent rural dominance and organizational strength at the grassroots level in Assam Panchayat elections, 2025. The Assam Gana Parishad, a regional ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party, obtained 211 seats, including ZPM and APM, reflecting moderate local support, particularly in pockets with strong regional identity politics. The Indian National Congress emerged as the second-largest party following the BJP. Indian National Congress could be able to secure 72 seats in ZPM out of 397 seats, which is 18.1 per cent and 481 APM seats out of 2188, which is 22 per cent. In short, INC secured 553 seats, including APM and ZPM, out of 2585, which is 21.4 per cent. Although the results indicate the presence of the Indian National Congress, its performance remained below the Bharatiya Janata Party, signalling a fragmented opposition base and weak rural mobilization capacity. Smaller parties such as AIUDF with 77 seats, Rajgor Dol with 20 seats and Aam Aadmi Party with 3 seats registered marginal outcomes, projecting their limited rural outreach. However, Independent candidates altogether secured 186 seats, which is 7.2 per cent of the total 2585 seats, highlighting persistent local-level political autonomy and the significance of non-party actors in grassroots governance. The results show emerging trends where the negligible performance of new entrants like the Aam Aadmi Party with 1 seat, and All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) with 4 seats, highlights the difficulty of penetrating the entrenched political nexus of Assam. The BJP's dominance across APM and ZPM highlights vertical consolidation of power flowing from the state government to the lowest local bodies.

The unique thing about this election is that the election for the Gaon Panchayat Members (GPM) was held without any political sponsorship or party affiliation. That is why no analysis could be done party-wise for Gaon Panchayat Members. In a first-of-its-kind initiative, the Assam State Election Commission announced on Wednesday that candidates contesting in the rural polls cannot be sponsored by any political party at the gaon panchayat level. The commission stated that the decision was made to make the panchayati raj system at the grassroots unfettered from political influence (Kalita, 2025). Candidates had to contest as independents without the symbols of a recognised political party.

II. Findings And Conclusion

The results show Assam's rural political culture shows a mixed subject-participant political culture where people are increasingly aware of the political system, yet remain party dependent on the state-driven political structure for leadership and decision making.

The results indicate the continued grassroots dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ally, the Assam Gana Parishad (AJP). They together secured almost 60 per cent of Zila Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat seats, reflecting vertical consolidation of political power from the state to local governance.

The data show that women's representation reached 50.1 per cent across the Panchayati Raj Institutions due to constitutional and state-level reservation, reflecting gender inclusivity in local governance.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together accounted for 16 per cent, indicating adherence to constitutional mandates for social representation, even though the active participation in leadership roles remains negligible.

Independent candidates who secured 7.2 per cent of total seats show persistent local-level autonomy and non-party influence, particularly at the Gaon Panchayat level, reflecting the non-partisan nature of the 2025 elections.

A voter turnout of 79 per cent reflects strong civic engagement and growing awareness among rural voters, which aligns with the traits of a participatory political culture.

Notes

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- [1]. ⁱ <https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/101776/1/Unit-5.Pdf> Retrieved 10 October 2025
 - [2]. ⁱⁱ <https://pnrd.assam.gov.in/Documents-Detail/The-Assam-Panchayat-Amendment-Act-2025>
 - [3]. ⁱⁱⁱ <https://docslib.org/download/3292229/assam-panchayat-election-of-2018>
 - [4]. ^{iv} https://sec.assam.gov.in/Pdf/Panchayat-Election/Identification%20of%20voters_0001.Pdf
 - [5]. ^v Ibid, https://sec.assam.gov.in/Pdf/Panchayat-Election/Identification%20of%20voters_0001.Pdf
 - [6]. ^{vi} https://sec.assam.gov.in/Pdf/Panchayatelection/Model%20code%20of%20conduct%20for%20Panchayat%20Election_0001.Pdf
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- [11]. ^x <https://Sec.Assam.Gov.In/Press-Release/Press-Note---Panchayat-Election-2025> Retrieved 10th October, 2025.
- [12]. ^{xi} Rajjor Dal Was Founded On October 2, 2021, By Kishan Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS). This Party Is A Product Of The Anti-CAA Movement In Assam That Debuted In This Panchayat Elections.
- [13]. ^{xii} Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) Is A State Political Party In Assam, India. It Was Formed With The Merger Of Two Student Organisations Of Assam, All Assam Students Union (AASU) And Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) In September 2020. Former ASSU General Secretary, Lurinjoyoti Gogoi, Is The First President Of Assam Jatiya Parishad (Parashar, 2020; Kalita, 2020).

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