

From Ethnic Cleavages to Performance: Party System Change and State Politics in Assam

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Abstract

The paper examines the evolution of the party system in Assam from Congress-dominant to a competitive bipolar structure. It analyses how ethnic cleavages, regional mobilization and leadership realignments have shaped electoral competition across four phases- Congress-dominant system to regional assertion under AGP followed by Congress resurgence and rise of BJP. The study suggests that identity politics has always played a defining role in the Assam state party system, while recent electoral outcomes indicate a shift towards an interaction between identity-based politics and performance-oriented voting. The paper contributes to the existing studies on state party system by sketching the electoral competition and politics of the Assam state party system. Besides highlighting the transformative and catalytic role of the newly emerging regional parties in realignment and reconfiguration with the state party system.

Keywords: Party System, Regionalism, Identity Politics, Militancy, Development