



Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)

Volume-XIV, Issue-IV, July 2026, Page No. 166-174

Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi, Assam, India

Website: <http://www.thecho.in>

DOI: 10.64031/pratidhwanitheecho.vol.14.issue.04W.129



The Transformation of Regional Political Identity in Assam: The Case of AGP (1985–2026)

Mondeep Kuli, *Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya, India*

Received: 06.06.2026; Accepted: 09.07.2026; Available online: 31.07.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Sribhumi. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

Since the late twentieth century, the politics of Assam has become increasingly influenced by regional political identity. In 1985, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was formed as one of the outcomes of the Assam Movement (Assam Agitation) against illegal migration into Assam and for the protection of Assamese identity, culture and political rights. The AGP evolved as a powerful regional political party and formed the government in Assam in its early years. Nevertheless, the state's political scenario was modified over the years because of shifting political leaderships, internal rifts, national political trends and rise of the BJP. The AGP's regional political identity has changed over time between 1985 and 2026. The study undertakes a qualitative research method based on books, journal articles, government reports, election data, newspaper reports, and official documents.

The study traces the historical evolution of AGP, its journey in elections and leadership, and covers its responses to changing political issues such as citizenship, development, and regionalism. Although AGP effectively shielded Assamese regional identity in the initial years, it lost its political clout. This happened due to organizational incapability along with leadership disputes and the evolving concerns of the voters. The regional identity has not vanished. Rather, it has been expressed through a different political actor in public debate. The study states that the evolution of regional political identity in Assam captures the changing dynamics of Indian federal politics, voting behavior and the regional and national political forces.

Keywords: Assam Politics, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Regional Political Identity, Assam Movement, Electoral Politics, Regionalism

Introduction:

Assam is an important state of the North-East region of India. Being a land of great historical significance, cultural plurality, and ethnic diversity, Assam has witnessed various political inclinations towards regionalism, ethnicity, immigration, language, and culture. The political parties, public opinion, and election results are all influenced by the various factors mentioned above. The regional political identity can be explained as the set of political beliefs and interests that emerge from the historical and contemporary context, cultural, and linguistic features, and social relations. The regional political identity of

Assam appeared at the end of the 70s and at the beginning of the 80s. The students' groups and public representatives were the driving force behind it. Illegal immigrants were a threat to the political, economic and cultural integrity of the Assamese people. Hence, it was difficult to remove them from Assam (Baruah, 1999).

Situated from 1979 until 1985, The Assam Movement was an uprising by inhabitants of Assam to determine and displace illegal immigrants as well as to protect the Assamese identity of its population. Through negotiations between movement leaders and the Government of India in 1985, The Assam Accord was signed to begin the process of resolving the three main issues raised during the Assam Movement: illegal immigration, border security and the development of different regions within the state of Assam while protecting the Assamese identity.

The political party led by the movement leaders contested in the state elections and eventually came to power. Thus, the Assam Gana Parishad, a regional party that arose from the anti-foreigner movement, became the first successful regional political party in Assam's history. Moreover, in the election which was held later that year, AGP gained more than 60% of votes. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the first Chief Minister of Assam as he advocated for his region and culture (Baruah, 1999).

For the first time, the party's manifesto included not only the appeal to a wide range of Assamese people but also provided the assurance of economic development, territorial integrity, and democratic principles. In addition, the regional political party has recognized the need to protect the regional identity and interests and to ensure their consideration in the federal system of the Indian Union (Saikia, 2011). However, it was not enough for the leaders of the newly established government, as they had great challenges to meet the expectations of the people. Insurgency, ethnic violence, scams, and internal dissent badly affected the young regional party and the whole country.

On the other hand, the national political parties, such as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), gained popularity among Assamese people for their ability to cope with not only local but also global political issues. National Register of Citizens and Citizenship Amendment Act, economic problems, and election issues are some of the political questions affecting the regional political identity in Assam. Today, it can be noticed that the voters' attention is being diverted from the regional parties to the national ones. People are now interested in economic growth and employment. In addition, the younger generation is now more concerned with education, career opportunities, and social issues. Therefore, the changes in the attitude of Assamese towards socio-economic development affected the regional political identity to a significant extent.

Therefore, it is essential to understand the changes in political identity, particularly the characteristics of the regional party, to identify the transformation process. The present research will demonstrate the evolution of Assam's regional political identity through the features of the political party AGP from 1985 to 2026. The study will concentrate on the development of the party's establishment and leadership, election results, coalition politics, and other aspects that determined and facilitated the changes in political identity.

Literature Review:

There has been a significant amount of research conducted on Assam, Assam Movement, and Assam's regional political identity. The scholars focus primarily on historical,

migratory, linguistic, ethnic, and leadership aspects of the region's political development. At the same time, there is a need for more research on the development of Assam's regional identity, as demonstrated by the Asom Gana Parishad from 1985 to 2026.

Baruah (1999) assessed the political and historical aspects of the Assam Movement, arguing that this was not only the movement against illegal infiltration but also a quest to safeguard the Assamese identity and its political rights. The author stressed that the Assam Movement resulted in the emergence of several regional political parties, including the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Assam People's Council (APC). In a similar manner, Misra (2014) evaluated the political and historical trajectories of Assamese nationalism and identity, highlighting their continuous evolution in response to different historical conditions, including political and social ones.

Guha (1980) also pointed out the relevance of the socio-economic and political factors in the evolution of Assamese nationalism and regional identity. In general, the reviewed articles demonstrate that the Assam Movement and Assamese identity have influenced the rise of regional political parties, including AGP. At the same time, the impact of regional political parties on the development of Assamese identity and its political manifestations is also significant. Indeed, the studies by Mahanta (2013) demonstrate the critical role of regional political parties for the regional identities of Assamese people, particularly in Northeast India. This article also underlines the limitations of such political parties, including organizational incapability, infighting, coalitional politics, and voter apathy, among others. These limitations are especially relevant in the case of AGP to explain its downfall.

The political and electoral performance of AGP has also been the subject of discussion by several researchers. Indeed, Das and Hazarika (2016) as well as Saikia (2019) conclude that AGP has initially been the most successful regional political party, which, however, had lost its popularity for several reasons, including discontent among party workers, organizational weaknesses, coalition politics, and the interference of national political parties in the region. In addition, the researchers identify a shift in voters' preferences from regional issues to development-related ones. Overall, the scholars agree that regional identity and related issues remain an important theme in Assam's politics, though it appears to be gradually losing its significance.

In turn, the more recent research deals with the National Register of Citizens and citizenship issues in general, as well as the rising influence of the ruling BJP in Assam. Indeed, Das and Hazarika (2016) and Dutta (2018) report on the prevalence of identity-based politics in Assam. However, the scholars also note that voters are increasingly concerned with developmental and welfare matters. The researchers suggest that political parties need to revise their strategies, approaches, and agendas in Assam in order to pursue a pro-development and pro-public good agenda, which would entail a turn to developmental issues and programmes during elections.

Research Gap:

In general, the reviewed articles offer numerous insights into Assam Movement, Assamese identity, and regional political parties, emphasizing their development and impact on different aspects of Assam's political processes and history. However, most of them concentrate on specific aspects of the topic, such as the impact of Assam Movement on Assamese identity, electoral politics of regional political parties, and the role of the

National Register of Citizens in the current political processes. Although the existing research covers the critical areas, it does not offer a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of regional political identity in Assam over the last 40 years. In fact, there are few studies that would demonstrate how exactly the regional political identity has been transformed between 1985 and 2026, and to what extent this process can be connected with the development of such a regional political party as Asom Gana Parishad.

Research Objectives:

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the development of the Asom Gana Parishad and its role as a regional political party;
2. To identify political, social, and electoral trends contributing to the changes in Assam's regional political party, Asom Gana Parishad;
3. To determine the current state and future prospects of the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam.

Research Questions:

The study will be focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. What role did the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) play in the development of Assam's regional political identity?
2. What factors influenced Assam's regional political identity transformation process?
3. What is the current and future prospects of Asom Gana Parishad?

Methodology:

This study adopts the qualitative research design. It is a descriptive and exploratory study that seeks to generate in-depth information and insights into the research problem addressed by the study. The descriptive component is necessitated by the fact that the study examines past occurrences and phenomena. The exploratory component will enable the study to achieve its objectives, including expounding on factors that led to the transformation of Assamese regional political identity and the current status and future prospects of the AGP.

This study employs secondary data. This study will leverage published and unpublished works, including books, peer-reviewed journals, government publications, election results, newspapers, research articles, and online resources, among other materials. In particular, this study will use secondary data to examine the electoral performance of AGP and other political parties in Assam. In particular, the study will use election data published by the Election Commission to ascertain the extent to which the AGP has captured Assam's regional political identity.

This study will adopt the historical and thematic analysis. In particular, the study will adopt a historical approach to illuminate the establishment and evolution of the AGP from Assam Movement. In addition, the study will use thematic analysis to highlight salient issues on Assam's regional political identity, including the role played by leadership, coalition politics, electoral performance, citizenship issues, and the influence of the younger generation on the evolution of Assamese regional political identity.

The study will cover a period from 1985, when AGP was formed, to 2026. The time frame was selected because it will enable the study to highlight the evolution of AGP and Assam's regional political identity, including the key factors that triggered Assam's

regional political identity transformation. The study will focus on Assam's political developments, with the AGP as the focal point. However, the study will also consider the developments in other political parties that influenced the evolution of Assam's regional political identity.

Analysis and Discussion:

Historical Background of Assam Movement:

It becomes pertinent to give a brief historical background of the Assam movement, which created conditions for the start of the formation of political parties of a regional character in Assam. The Assam Movement, fuelled by All Assam Students 'Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) was a popular movement lasting from 1979 to 1985. The Assam movement aimed to drive out foreigners who have been granted rights to work and settle down, and to vote. It becomes pertinent to provide a background of Assam movement which led to the formations of political parties. The Assam Movement, which was led by the All-Assam Students 'Union (AASU) and popularly known as the AASU-led Assam Movement, erupted between 1979-85.

The objectives of the Assam movement included throwing out aliens who had gained rights to jobs, land, and political power in the state. Although the Assam movement received massive student support and remained non-violent, there were sporadic violent incidents in various districts. The Assam Accord was concluded between movement leaders and the Government of India in August 1985 to restore peace and stability to the state and to protect Assamese culture and identity. The Assam Accord marked the resurgence of Assamese identity, as well as served to unite disparate social groups and political parties contending for power in the state.

Formation of AGP and Rise of Regional Politics:

After the Assam accord, political parties formed by the Assam movement leaders contest the election. Thus, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a regional political party was formed in Assam. AGP was formed in October 1985 with an aim to safeguard Assamese interests and the autonomy of Assam accord. The regional political parties gained tremendous popularity and emerged as strong regional parties. This regional party (AGP) enjoys great popularity among the youth and masses who want to safeguard Assamese autonomy. The regional political party (AGP) turned out to be popular and emerged as the biggest winner in the Assam assembly elections. AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) had turned out to be a huge winner in Assam assembly elections of 1985, because of the immense popularity it enjoyed among the Assamese people for safeguarding their interests and regional autonomy. The Assamese people looked upon AGP to bring development and prosperity to the state.

However, the task ahead for the new government led by regional party leaders was formidable. In addition to normal governance and development, the new government has to face many challenges. The regional political party also had to deal with insurgencies, ethnic violence, and law and order problems. Leaders of the regional political party realized that they could not gain popularity by shouting only about Assamese autonomy. The political leaders of the AGP had to confront issues like employment and development in the state to gain the trust and support of the people.

AGP in the Government (1985-2001):

The Government of Assam faced a lot of issues during the time when the government was run by the AGP. Some of the issues included rampant insurgency and ethnic violence. Along with this, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), also posed a great threat to the security of the state. Hence, the government had to take some repressive measures to deal with the insurgents which caused a lot of anger to the masses. On the other hand, the masses were also disappointed with the failure of the government to solve pressing issues such as unemployment and illegal immigration.

Therefore, the government of Assam under the ruling party AGP lost the support of the masses due to their inability to take care of pertinent issues such as unemployment, development, and illegal immigration. This affected the stability of the government since it was not able to handle these issues and consequently led to the fall of the government. The President's Rule was imposed in Assam in 1990 when the AGP government was dismissed due to poor law and order situation and the Indian National Congress (INC) returned to power. However, the Indian National Congress (INC) was not an exception to the perennial electoral cycle of the state as it soon lost power when the AGP returned to power in 1996 with Prafulla Kumar Mahanta winning the Assembly election.

It is worth noting that even though the AGP continued to champion Assamese identity and regionalism, it was facing a lot of credibility and law and order challenges by the end of the 1990s. This weakness in the party's governance ultimately resulted in the second fall of the Government of Assam.

Challenges to Regional Political Identity:

From 2001 onwards, the AGP's fall from power triggered several challenges, including internal factionalism, the advent of national political parties, changes in the electoral behavior of the Assamese people, and so on. The political party faced a lot of internal divisions, which weakened its overall performance in the subsequent elections. In addition, BJP emerged as a prominent force in Assam, which significantly altered Assam's political landscape. The younger generation's voting behavior also changed, wherein they became more concerned with employment, development, and other social issues rather than regional identity.

AGP after 2001: Political Decline

The fall of the AGP government in 2001 was an adverse event for the Assam party. The party faded away from its once commanding position due to several reasons. It failed to deliver its promised goods to the masses and other political parties took advantage of the situation. The performance of the party at the polls after 2001 started to deteriorate at an alarming rate. The failure of AGP to fulfill its expectations led the people of Assam to shift their voting choices towards other political parties. Moreover, the party lost its appeal among the Assamese people as several prominent leaders left the party due to internal conflicts at different times.

Rise of BJP and Alliance Politics:

One of the reasons for the BJP's rise to power in Assam is that it is a single-party system that promotes development and growth as well as national integration while also addressing regional issues. As a result, BJP gained immense popularity and not only ruled Assam but also other states. The alliance of the AGP and the BJP was formed prior to the

2016 Assembly elections; it allowed the latter to finally defeat the INC and form an alliance government. The combination of the two political parties was seen by many as the optimal solution for the problems in Assam, as it would tackle not only the regional issues but also lead to the development of the state in general. However, some people felt that the alliance politics diminished the importance of the regional issues of Assam and made the regional political parties like AGP weak and ineffective.

NRC, CAA, and Regional Identity:

The issue of NRC and the CAA played a significant role in the evolution of Assam's regional political identity. The NRC was published with an aim to identify illegal immigrants in Assam based on the Assam Accord of 1985. However, the introduction of the CAA has become a contentious issue as people argue that the Assam Accord has been rendered meaningless by the CAA. The Citizenship Act of 2019, which amended the Indian constitution stirred up violence in Assam and other north-eastern states as people felt that their constitutional and republican values were being trampled upon. Thus, the CAA was opposed by many political parties and citizens of Assam. Initially, the AGP also opposed the CAA and decided to withdraw its support from the BJP in the Assam Assembly after CAA was passed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Later, the AGP decided to reconsider its decision of withdrawing from the BJP ahead of the 2021 election. Many people criticized the decision of the AGP's leadership, saying that the move was not in the best interest of the Assam people. On the other hand, some argued that it is necessary to stay with the BJP in order to continue to oppose the CAA and promote Assamese identity. Thus, the issues of NRC and the CAA are crucial to understanding the evolution of the regional political identity in Assam.

Electoral Performance and Changing Voter Behavior (1985-2026):

The electoral performance of the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) is a harbinger of not only changing voter behavior but also a harbinger of the future of this particular political party. The early success of the political party was absolutely spectacular and could be noted from the Assam Assembly election results of the year 1985. In fact, AGP ruled the state for the second time in 1996. Yet, it failed to gain much popularity with the people in the 2001 Assembly elections. The reasons for this failure include infighting, the appearance of a political rival, namely, the BJP, and a shift in socio-economic priorities. Moreover, youngsters nowadays are less interested in regional issues and more prone to careerist goals and socio-economic concerns. Nevertheless, AGP remains one of the strongest political parties in Assam, as demonstrated by its electoral successes.

Transformation of Regional Political Identity:

As discussed in the previous sections, the regional political identity that was once exercised by the AGP has undergone a noticeable transformation. The political identity has evolved from the Assamese pride as enshrined in the Assam Accord to a more comprehensive approach, which encompasses the development agenda. As a result, people are now more concerned with issues such as employment opportunities, education, welfare, and governance, among other things. In addition, the advent of coalition politics has also diluted the significance of regional political identity, wherein the issues of Assam are no longer the sole agenda of the AGP. Therefore, the transformation of Assamese regional political identity shows that although the Assamese people continue to hold strong regional belongingness, they are more concerned with development issues

Conclusion:

The political history of Assam is a classic example of the role of regional political identity in the democratic setup of the state. The formation of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) in 1985 was a direct outcome of the Assam Movement that sought to assert the regional identity of Assamese people in terms of their culture, language and political power. In its initial phase, the AGP enjoyed great popularity as it could deliver on the promises of restoring regional pride and power to the people of Assam. However, as per the study, it is also evident that political identity is a fluid concept and it transforms in response to the changing social, political and economic needs of the people. Thus, the rise and rise of regional political parties such as the AGP is often followed by a period of decline as a result of various internal and external factors. The study shows that after coming to power, the AGP failed to deal with insurgency, administrative corruption, mismanagement, factionalism, and the rising influence of national parties in the state. As a result, the party had to ally itself with the ruling BJP at the Centre to survive in power.

This also goes to show that the political identity of the people of Assam keeps on changing. The shift in the political identity of Assam has been further accentuated by the advent of the BJP in the state politics. The party has managed to garner great support by addressing the concerns of development, welfare and security of the people.

Thus, the study shows that the issues such as NRC, CAA, development, education, employment, health and social services among others have played a critical role in shaping the political identity of the Assamese people. As such, the political parties in Assam need to evolve in order to meet the changing needs of the people. The younger generation in particular demands a lot from the political parties in terms of development as well as protection of regional interests.

In conclusion, it can be said that the regional political identity of Assam has undergone a paradigm shift over the years. The changing political, social and economic needs of the people have contributed to the transformation. The AGP is no longer the sole custodian of the regional political identity of Assam but it continues to play a significant role in the state politics. The study further shows that the future of the party lies in its ability to transform itself in order to meet the rising expectations of the people in terms of development and good governance.

References:

1. Baruah, S. (1986). Immigration, ethnic conflict, and political turmoil in Assam, 1979–1985. *Asian Survey*, 26(11), 1184–1206.
2. Baruah, S. (1999). *India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
3. Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India*. Oxford University Press.
4. Baruah, S. (2021). *In the name of the nation: India and its Northeast*. HarperCollins India.
5. Gogoi, D. (2016). *Unheeded hinterland: Identity and sovereignty in Northeast India*. Routledge.
5. The Election Commission of India released a statistical report in 2021 about the

- general election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam. This report was published by the Election Commission of India and provides detailed information about the election.
6. Government of India. (1985). The Assam Accord. Ministry of Home Affairs.
 7. Guha, A. (1980). Little nationalism turned chauvinist: Assam's anti-foreigner upsurge, 1979–1980. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15(41/43), 1699–1709.
 8. Mahanta, N. G. (2013). *Confronting the state: ULFA's quest for sovereignty*. SAGE Publications.
 9. Misra, U. (2000). The periphery strikes back: Challenges to the nation-state in Assam and Nagaland. Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
 10. Misra, U. (2001). Assam elections: Setback for the Left. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(23), 2023–2025.
 11. Pisharoty, S. B. (2019). *Assam: The accord, the discord*. Penguin Random House India. Rajan, S. I. (Ed.). (2022). *The Routledge handbook of refugees in India*. Routledge.
 12. Sarma, P. (2022). Revisiting the Assam Movement. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 7(12), 4169–4186.
 13. Saikia, Y. (2011). *Fragmented memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India*. Duke University Press.
 14. Sharma, C. K. (2015). Federalism, identity and regional politics in India. *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 76(2), 245–258.
 15. Verney, D. V. (1995). Regionalism and regional political parties in India. *Asian Survey*, 35(2), 152–169.
 16. Weiner, M. (1983). The political demography of Assam's anti-immigrant movement. *Population and Development Review*, 9(2), 279–292.