

## **Electoral Competition in a One-Party Dominant System: A Case from Odisha**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary Odisha presents many interesting facets for the researchers. A credible growth rate, good track record as far as good governance strategy is concerned, successful strategy in tackling disasters are some of its biggest achievements. The famous ‘congress system’ has never worked in Odisha. In November 26th 2017 Biju Janata Dal (BJD) celebrated its remarkable success of twenty-year at Puri, which is known as Shree Khetra a holy place for lord Jagannath. Since last four consecutive terms BJD is capturing the electoral office in the state of Odisha. It has performed outstanding performance both in assembly as well as Lok Sabha election. The victory of BJD in Odisha politics is narrated differently by different people. There are different explanations regarding the victory of BJD. Some says it’s nothing but the pro-poor policy and charismatic leadership of Naveen Patnaik. Other set of scholars narrate the lack of strong opposition in Odisha politics. The present paper will narrate the evolution and electoral performance of BJD in the last four consecutive elections. But the paper not only limits at the electoral performance level, it also deals with the party competition level. The paper revolves around the main question, whether BJD’s victory is with the presence of strong competitor and what is the pattern of party competition in Odisha.

***Key Words: Party Competition, Biju Janata Dal, Odisha Politics, Electoral Performance***

**Introduction**

A Political party can be easily recognized as a regional party when it broadcasts the elements of political party i.e. regionalism, ideology or regional pride. There are several regional parties emerged in Indian politics which can be soon recognized as a regional party i.e. Assam Gana Parisada (AGP), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Telugu Desam Party (TDP). The main reason behind citing this regional party is because of its regional aspiration. There are other parties like Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) Samat Party and Samajwadi Party call them as Indian parties though their electoral support is determined in a particular region. These parties are also enjoying considerable support in the respective states and can be considered as a regional party with the self-proclaimed regionalist parties (Kailash 2007). Therefore, these parties can be called as state-based parties (Chibber and Irfan Nooruddin 1998).

The BJD in Odisha was not resulting from political development but rather a regrouping of old Janata Dal fragments on December 15, 1997, with as 29 out of the 43 Janata Dal MLAs framing a different unit called the Janata Dal (BIJU) of BJD headed by Naveen Patnaik (Mishra 2012). The BJD has formed based on three considerations first to take the psychological advantage of the people of Odisha towards Biju Patnaik by naming the party in his name. The second was to create an alternative anti-congress government in Odisha. The third was to fulfill the aim and objective of Biju Patnaik as an alternative image in state politics.

The development of national and state politics has an impact on Odisha politics during Biju Patnaik phase. The development of an unmistakable state party, i.e. BJD was firmly connected with improvement at the National and the state political condition in the 1990s, particularly amid post-1996 General Election. However, BJD is not the product of the era of regional development of political party though there are several regional parties formed in the post-independent period. There are several reason behind their the development of regional parties in different region of the country i.e., endeavors to safeguard the various characters of a minority religion using political party (e.g. Akali Dal in Punjab), negligence of state or union government towards the regional need ((e.g. AGP in Assam, Gantantra Parishad (GP) in Orissa), to organize the social group for the shared interest (e.g. DMK in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena (SS) in Maharashtra) and unnecessary interference of central government in the state affairs (e.g. TDP in Andhra Pradesh) is the best example of the post-independent development of regional party (Ray 2001). The evolution of BJD in Odisha politics is a unique or exceptional instance in the field of political parties in India.

The main aim of the metamorphosis of BJD is to get legitimacy in the state by uttering the

regional sentiment. The BJD is not the product of the emergence of a regional party in the post-independent period where many regional parties emerged in the country or not emerged out of any mass movement or protest. There are two factors we can explain which has given space for the development of regional party during 1980 post phase. The first factor can be analyzed the decline of Congress as a single largest and the dominant party in India. The drop of Congress has given space to the emergence of various new regional or state level party, i.e., Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Biju Janata Dal (BJD), etc. The second factor can be analyzed on the ground of regionalist politics, the coalition government during the post-1990 phase and the tremendous importance of regional party or state-based parties.

After 1996 election Biju Patnaik died in 1997. After the death of Biju Patnaik, 15 legislators of Janata Dal out of 46 in the state Legislative Assembly had been showing a pro-BJP line for the party. Sarata Kar, Vedprakash Agrawal, Biswa Bhusan Harichandan joined BJP those are previously Cabinet minister in Janata Dal Government (Bhuyan and Muni 2010). However, another group opposing these pro BJP leaders led by Bijaya Mahapatra. So, in this connection, there were two separate blocks has been made. One group of people from Janata Dal showed pro-BJP line, and another group was trying to form the regional party against the Congress dominance in Odisha. Naveen Patnaik is the son of was ready to take the leadership of the dissatisfied group of Janata Dal. Several senior leaders came to the front to oppose the leadership of Naveen Patnaik, but many another leader of Janata Dal openly supported the leadership of Naveen Patnaik Dilip Ray, Union Minister, Bijay Mahapatra and several MLAs of Western Odisha along with A.U Singh Deo and Prasanna Acharya (Bhuyan and Muni 2010).

When Biju Patnaik was alive, most of the MLAs from western Odisha suggested a grand alliance with BJP by creating a new regional party or joining BJP as an anti- Congress force. And they have tried to convince Naveen Patnaik to form a regional party on the line of Haryana Vikas Party or Shiv Sena (Bhuyan 2010). The state unit of Janata Dal called an urgent meeting to discuss the party strategy for the ensuing Lok Sabha Polls. The meeting assumes that there was one group of members are supporting an alliance with BJP in the Lok Sabha elections of March 1998. But the majority of the Janata Dal leaders opposing the idea of joining hand with BJP and they want one to one contest with Congress. So the dissatisfied group in the state Janata Dal were getting ready to launch a regional political party around mid-December 1997. And the Janata Dal dissidents had taken the decision to form a new regional party at the residence of Bijaya Mahapatra. There were several names has been suggested by the leaders to keep the name of the party like Kalinga Janata Dal or Janata Dal Biju (Bhuyan 2010).

In the Mid-December 1997 Naveen Patnaik at his father's residence Naveen Niwas in

Bhubaneswar announced that he and a significant number of the legislature were breaking away from the Janata Dal to form a new regional party that is Biju Janata Dal. And Naveen said “my father had a lot of dreams for Odisha. To realize these dreams is our goal”. He also promptly declared that the new party would have an alliance with the BJP (Bhuyan 2015). Immediately after the announcement of Naveen Patnaik to form the Biju Janata Dal, Ashok Das, state chief of the truncated Janata Dal said we are the real party which will strive to fulfill Biju Babu’s dreams.

### **The pattern of Party Competition in Odisha**

Competition, between political parties is one of the most distinguishing features of the Indian party system today. It would be difficult for anyone to disagree with the proposition that the level and scale of competition today is many notches higher than that was prevailing in the early years after independence. However, what is competition and how can it be measured? What do we mean, when we say that today the party system or political system is characterized by more competition than before? In political science, different meanings and measures of competition have been used in the area of governments and political parties.

The word competition derived from the Latin word “competere”, which means to ‘strive after or contend for (something)’.<sup>20</sup> It is the striving for supremacy or superiority for a particular thing. That particular thing is desired by others and is also limited in its supply. For if that particular desired good were abundant and limitless in its supply and freely available there would not be any need to compete as such. Competition takes place, as everyone who wants that particular good can neither have it at the same time nor has enough of it. Hence, they have to compete with similarly desiring people to win that desired thing. According to the classical economic law of demand and supply if the supply cannot keep pace with the growing demand the price or value of goods is likely to go up. Greater the demand for a good, the more valuable it becomes and the greater the competition. Lesser the demand for a particular good, lower the level of competition. It is possible to use the same logic in matters relating to politics.

For this exercise, the detailed electoral results classified based on constituency from 2000 were taken into consideration. This also helps us take into account the competition pattern of Odisha. The following simple equation was constructed to ascertain the competition structure in the party system.

**Competition Equation**

$$\frac{\text{First winning party} - \text{Second Best Party}}{\text{Valid vote casted}} \times 100$$

F= Votes received by the candidate with the highest number of votes in a particular constituency

S= Second best party

V= Valid votes cast in that particular constituency

Using this equation, the competition structure in each and every constituency for each of the four assembly elections was mapped. The difference was calculated as a percentage of the valid votes cast so as to standardize the base measure. In case the same calculation was carried out on the basis of the first party vote, it would have been inconsistent with the logic of the argument and the resultant figure is not likely to have captured the competitiveness of the election as is seen in the below example. Take two constituencies S and T, having a total of 100 votes; assume there was 100% turnout and valid votes and there are three contestants. In constituency S, the first candidate gets 50 votes, the second gets 40 and the third 10. In constituency T, the first candidate gets 40 votes, the second gets 30 and the third 20. Though the difference between the first and the second candidates is same if we divide this by the first candidates votes we would get values of 20% and 25% respectively, which would, tell us that constituency T is more competitive than S. However, in reality the intensity of competition in reality is greater in constituency S rather than T. This discrepancy is the result of basing our figure on the value of votes received by the first candidate. This figure is likely to fluctuate widely. Hence the percentage of the difference over valid votes would give us a better opportunity to map the competition. It is likely that it is a more stable figure. This too has its own problems, but is not likely to skew our figures as the above example

In the First and Second general elections, in constituencies where there was more than one winner, the difference between the lowest winner and the highest loser was also taken into account. This ensured that all seats were counted. Uncontested seats were put in the non-competitive category straight away. The constituencies were 147 then classified into four levels of competition on the basis of the difference between the two constituencies as a percentage of the valid votes cast in that particular constituency.

**Table 1: Levels of Competition****Table 1: Levels of Competition**

Level of competition	Stages	Differences
Level 1	Close competition	0-10%
Level 2	Competitive I	10-20%
Level 3	Competitive II	20-30%
Level 4	Non-Competitive	30%+

The above-mentioned level of competition table explains the different level of competition. If the differences are below 10% then we consider it as a highly competitive. If the closeness is more than 30% then we can consider it as non-competitive. The reason behind taking this measure is to understand the differences between two parties, the winning party and the second-best party. We have not considered other parties those are contested in the particular constituency, because the competition is always between first and second party. If the closeness is high then the competition is high, if the closeness is less than the particular constituency is less competitive. The competition is measured constituency-wise not based on seat share of government formation. This competition measure can telescope the competition among the different constituency.

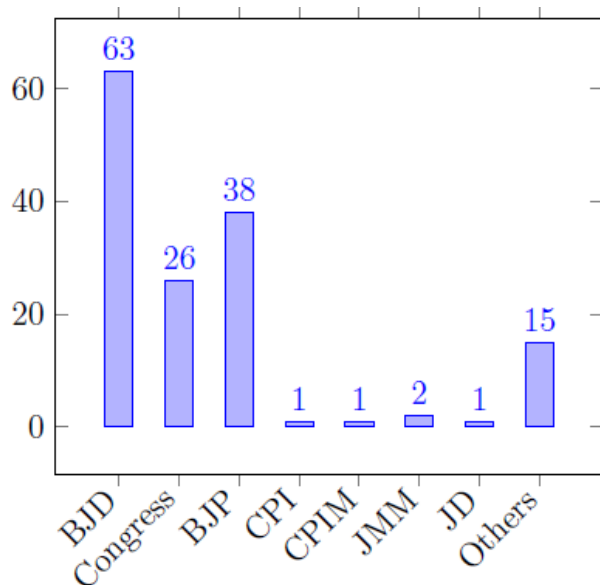
The competition chart no.5 reveals the pattern of party competition in the entire constituency of Odisha in all four general assembly election from 2000 to 2014. The data explains the close competition is always high in all assembly election after BJD participated in the election. No matter the alliance or breakdown of alliance. In the assembly election of 2004, the competition was very high, still BJD captured the electoral office. Though the alliance with BJP was breakdown before 2009 assembly election but the close competition was decreased but the differences was very less.

The unique experience of 2014 general election is where entire country was under Modi wave and domination of BJP. But Odisha showed a unique result. The Modi wave was doing not work in Odisha politics, though there was the close competition level was very high, still BJD and Naveen Patnaik break the record and for the fourth time captured the office and formed the government.

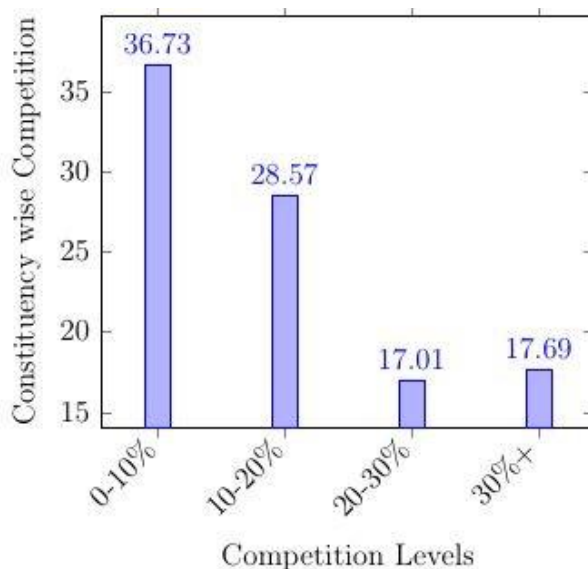
**First Alliance of BJD-BJP in Odisha (2000-2004)**

The origin of BJD was to defeat Congress in the state by creating anti-congressism agenda. In the year of 2000 assembly election of Odisha, BJD entered into an alliance with the BJP to defeat the Congress. The unexpected killer cyclone in October 1999, that has brought a remarkable change in the political scenario of Odisha. Because the people of Odisha were faced the serious death and destruction. And then it was in the grip of a worsening political crisis no less depilating in its effect. The political crisis brought out many disagreements within the ruling congress. The party supremo Sonia Gandhi was in February chooses Giridhar Gamngo as a chief minister candidate instead of J.B Patnaik. But the tenure of Giridhar Gamngo was ineffective ever in the history of Odisha. He was not able to provide the significant relief operation to the cyclone affected area. Soon after Gamngo was removed from the post and Hemananda Biswal succeed the post. The general election in 2000 came off at the peak of anti-Congress wave in the state. In Odisha the image of the Congress was tarnished by corruption charges against the chief minister of Congress. The congress was practically routed in the Lok Sabha poll just before the assembly election.

The alliance proved most successful as they together bagged as many as 111 (the BJD 63, BJP 48). The BJD as a new entrant in the electoral field made a brilliant debut with seats. The BJD SUPREMO, Naveen Patnaik was elected from Hinjili Constituency and was unanimously elected the leader of the BJD-BJP alliance and on March 5, 2000 took the oath of office of the Chief Minister of Odisha. Though Naveen Patnaik headed a 25-member ministry, the onus to deliver was directly on him since the popular mandate was essentially for him. Unlike cricket, where a captain only as good as the team, Naveen Patnaik has had to be much better. He was the bottom line. Despite his relative freshness and inexperienced, Naveen Patnaik emerged as a shrewd politician. He realized that the people voted for him and he would have to cop the blame if the government fails. By winning only 38 of the 64 seats it contested, the BJP had fortified much of its bargaining power in the new dispensation and was denied a deputy Chief Ministership. With his ally faltering Naveen Patnaik's chances had only brightened. Not long ago,



(a) Assembly Election Result-2000



(b) Constituency wise Competition-2000

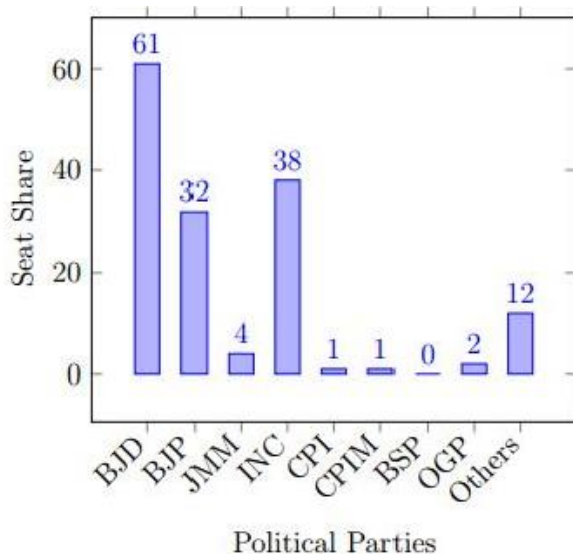
genuine fears were being expressed that the BJP would eat up the BJD sooner or later. However, the Election established the BJD as the senior partner.

**Second BJD-BJP Alliance in Odisha (2004-2009)**

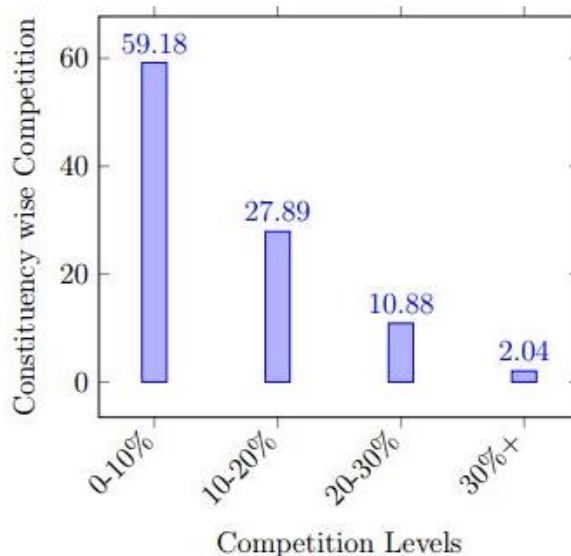
The second coalition government of BJD-BJP was formed on June 4th May 2004. The second explicit coalition government was headed by Naveen Patnaik assumed office on 16th.05.2004. His party put common programmes of action with the BJP before the electorate. Electoral verdict in favor of the second BJD-BJP coalition means the approval of the programmes by the electorate. Since the programme of the coalition was approved by the electorate, it would be reasonable to say that this coalition was not a marriage of convenience.

This poll was conducted from March 25th to 1st April, 2004. The BJD-BJP combine emerged a clear winner though there was a marginal negative swing. The government was credited for the rehabilitation measure in cyclone-affected areas. Naveen Patnaik performance as chief minister was rated good by many. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the center headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee had not announced any special package for Odisha. The oil refinery project at Paradeep, the foundation stone for which was laid by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2000 had not taken off. The Kalahandi-Balangir-Koraput (KBK) region did not receive any special attention from the center. In sum there was nothing to feel good about the

NDA government’s performance in Odisha except the four lining of National Highway No. 5, which passes through the state. Yet the people of the state gave a fresh mandate to the BJD-BJP alliance in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. Nonetheless, voters back the BJD-BJP coalition as the



(a) Assembly Election Result-2004



(b) Constituency wise Competition-2004

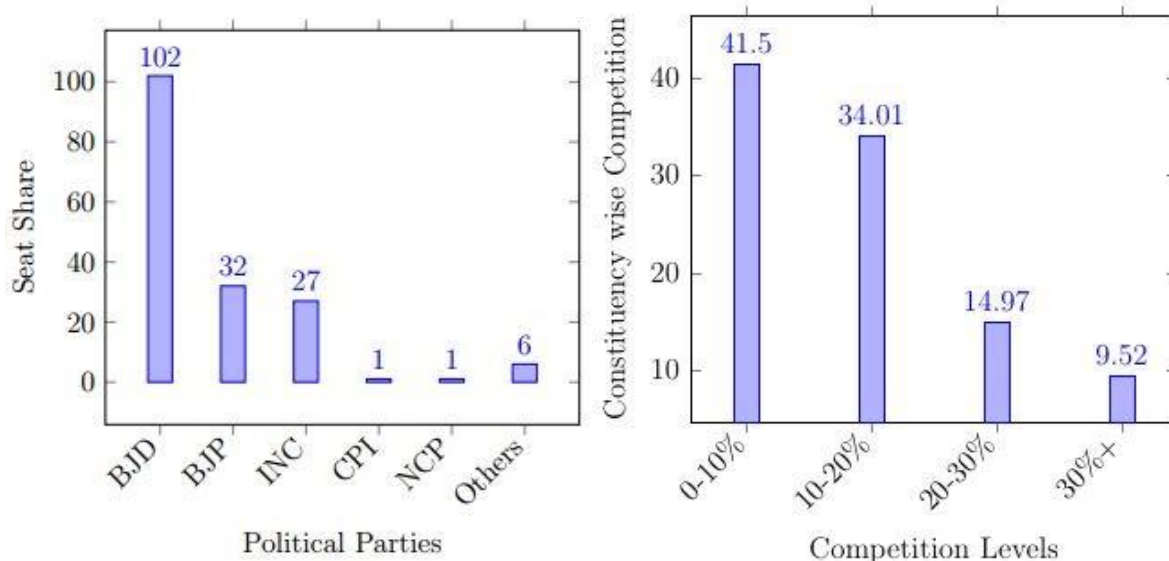
best to solve the problem.

The clean image of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, working with the Vajpayee factor won another term for the BJD-BJP alliance. In 2004. On the other hand, J.B Patnaik leader of congress was expecting the anti-incumbency. However, during the last four years of its rule the BJD-BJP alliance won all by-election and secured an edge over the Congress in the Panchayat and Urban body election.

The Congress had made election deals with small parties, like the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the CPI, CPI(M) and Janata Dal (S) and the Odisha Gana Parishad. The rebel group of BJD i.e. Dilip Ray, Ram Krushan Patnaik, Nalinikant Mahanty and Sarata Kar were given tickets from Congress. In the 2000 election the BJD contested 84 seats and won in 68 with a vote share of 29.4 percent while the BJP contested 63 but could win 38 and got 18.2 percent votes. On the other hand, the Congress contested 145 out of 147 seats but could win only 26. Yet the vote percentage of the Congress was 33.78 (Election Commission of India). However, for the BJP it had been a big jump in the company of Naveen Patnaik.

**Breakdown of the BJD-BJP Coalition**

The long-awaited rumors days came to an end, the BJD on 7th March 2009 cut off its ties with the BJP. The last round of negotiation between BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik and BJP MP Chandan Mitra ended in futile. Soon after the failure of discussion, Naveen Patnaik Declared that Biju Janata Dal would fight the polls separately. This remark was sufficient for the end of the decade long alliance between two parties. The central leadership had sent Rajya Sabha member Chandana Mitra to discuss with the state



(a) Assembly Election Result-2009

(b) Constituency wise Competition-2009

party leaders. Mitra, as a special emissary of the BJP stalwart L.K Advani, held at least two rounds of talks with his party men ever since his arrival in Bhubaneswar on March 6th 2009.

After having allied, both the partners fought election in 2000 and 2004 on a 4:3 ratio. However, with the rout of BJP in two recently held polls and based on a report of survey, BJD was reluctant to continue with the previous formula. As BJP candidates are expected to lose at many places from within 63 Assembly segments and nine Lok Sabha seats, the party contested there was no point in allowing the Congress to garb them; this was the opinion of the BJD why they were reluctant to give more seats in the coming election to the Odisha Legislative Assembly in 2009 (Bhuyan and Muni 2010).

**Odisha Assembly election 2009-14**

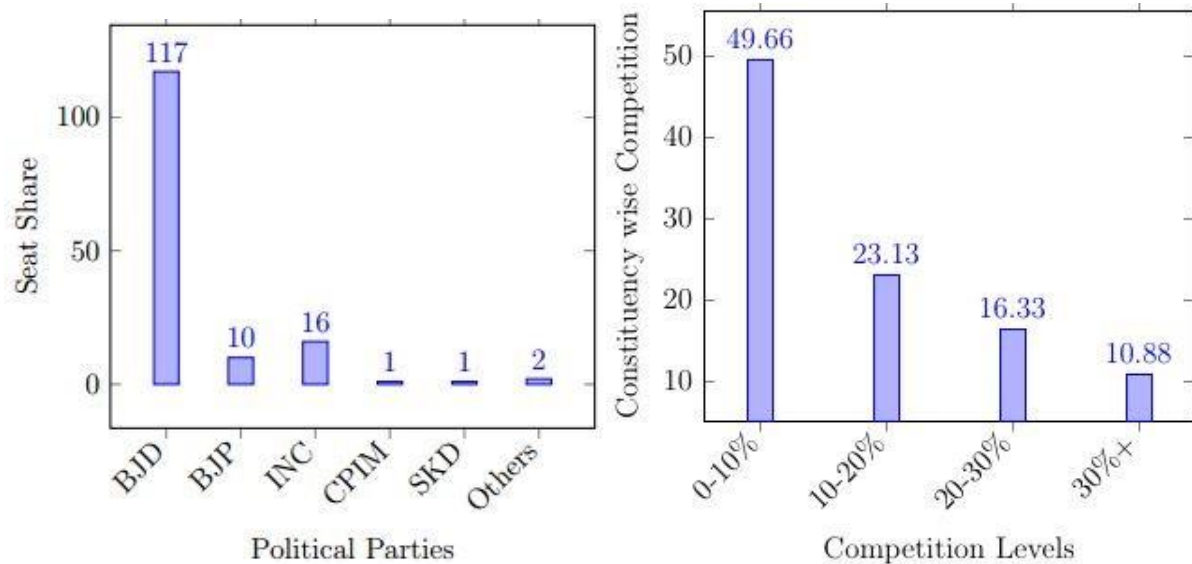
Naveen Patnaik proved an electoral tsunami to wash away the Congress and BJP by scoring a resounding hat-trick in the Assembly election and coming up with a fantastic performance in the Lok Sabha polls. The BJD was poised to win 103 assembly and 14 Lok Sabha seats. In 2000 and 2004 election Naveen Patnaik had two factors favoring him

i.e. being Biju Patnaik's son and pro-NDA-Vajpayee wind. However, in 2009 it was Naveen Patnaik's personality and charisma.

Riding high on the development plank and taking advantage of a divided opposition, the BJD recorded a landslide victory in the Assembly election. Naveen Patnaik has done the hat-trick and all by himself this time. Such had been the pro-Naveen Patnaik wave that his Biju Janata Dal has surged to a thumping majority inflicting one of the worst ever defeats on the Congress in the state and effecting a decimation of the BJP. Even as the Naveen Patnaik charisma continued to wave magic among the people, the results have brought to the fore his transformation into a deft politician with a complete grip on the pulse of the electorate. The aggression combined with his pro-people measure. Not only the clean and secular image of Naveen Patnaik but also taking pro-people welfare issues like the Rs. 2 a KG rice to the people, seems to have taken the wind out of the rivals' sails leaving them clueless and without an answer.

**Odisha Assembly Election 2014**

The Biju Janata Dal in 2014 Assembly and Lok Sabha election registered an emphatic victory under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The BJD is able to manage 20 Lok Sabha seats out of 21 and 117 Assembly seats out of 147 in Odisha. Naveen Patnaik who led the party to an unprecedented victory in the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls by challenging both Congress and BJP was set to become the Chief Minister for the fourth consecutive term.



(a) Assembly Election Result-2014

(b) Constituency wise Competition-2014

The unique experience of the 2014 general election is where the entire country was under Modi wave and domination of BJP. But Odisha showed a different result. The Modi wave did not work in Odisha politics, though there was the close competition level was very high. Still, BJD and Naveen Patnaik break the record and for the fourth time captured the office and formed the government. If we analyze the development agendas of Naveen Patnaik, he was born for the betterment of Odisha, and his dream is a golden Odisha. Several popular policies have been brought out for every section of the people. He was determined for the all-round development of Odisha.

Out of all economic instability and poverty, Naveen Patnaik has brought several outstanding policies as part of good governance for the people. The party has much focused-on agriculture sustainability and higher production. The aim is to double the income of the farmers. The most popular Biju Krushak Vikas Yojana (BKVY) which sought to enhance the financial support to the farmer, subsidies and giving high technology. There are other several policies which have brought by Naveen Patnaik government like Rs. 2 for rice per kilogram. In terms of the health sector, the central government provides health policy to the below poverty line people, but Odisha government has delivered health insurance to all. Recently Naveen took advantage of the natural assets what the state has. The make in Odisha program one of the most crucial steps by Naveen Patnaik who brought lots of investor into the state. He called the veterans of the industry to plan for long term strategy for the investment in Odisha. Most recently the government has organized a hockey world cup in their home state which brought international attention. In terms of governance and administration, the Government has always tried to weed out corruption. There

is no doubt for its credibility for making the better Odisha. Since the party wins with a huge majority but the competition level remains same in the state. The BJD faces same challenges with the opposition and remain in office for the fourth consecutive term.

**Conclusion:**

The present paper highlights the party competition in a one-party dominant system in Odisha politics. The main research question revolves around electoral success and party competition. Though BJD is showing its remarkable victory in Odisha politics and dominating the electoral office as a single dominant party with its strong competitor. The rumors about pro-poor policy or charismatic leadership of Naveen Patnaik may take into the consideration. The competition measure shows that the level of competition is always high. And the people of Odisha considered BJD is the best alternative party for the state rather than other national party. The party was formed in December 26th 1997 and for the first time taken part in the 2000 assembly election. From the year 2000 to 2014 assembly election BJD faces the good contender but still showing the remarkable victory. The main puzzle is BJD faces two mainstream national parties, that is INC and BJP. So, the paper can presume, if a regional party carries all the regional outfit and contesting the election, then there might be the possibility of success. No matter whether it is national party or close competition. The present paper limits its analysis with electoral performance and competition. One may look upon the party organizational activity or at the policy level, which can give hints about the success of BJD in Odisha politics.

If we analyze the recent five states like Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Telangana, and Rajasthan election along with the 2019 general election, it is clear that for one more consecutive term for Naveen in 2019 election is obvious. Because first its accessible policy and program win the heart of the people in the state. Second, it's a clean image and development policy agenda by taking his father's dream towards 'golden Odisha.' Third, the active party organization across the state may make him break the record of Jyoti Basu of West Bengal. The irony is the Chief Minister who speaks no Odia, never been in Odisha for a long time before entering into the electoral office, no much knowledge of the culture and tradition of the state, no much close friend in the state. After all, this Naveen can manage to win the election after election. It indicates that the government was doing a lot of things for the development of the state as well as for the people. He is the most unusual politician of the country, unlike other chief minister and priminister he maintains a low profile and speaks less. He further says "I think it is more important that my work speaks for itself." It is not possible for Naveen to reach

each and everywhere, but the effective governance and party organization is playing an essential role in winning the heart of the people.

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