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## Political parties of Odisha and their role in national politics: A critical analysis

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### Abstract

This paper examines the main political parties of Odisha — primarily the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Indian National Congress (INC) — and analyses how regional dynamics in Odisha influence, and are influenced by, national politics. The study uses secondary sources (electoral data, party histories, and news analysis) to trace shifts in party strengths from 2009-2024, explore the strategic choices of Odisha's dominant regional party (BJD), and evaluate how Odisha has served as a site of coalition bargaining, electoral experimentation, and centre-state policy negotiation. Key findings of the papers are how the BJD has been the dominant regional force and has pursued an equidistance strategy with national parties; how the BJP has made substantial inroads into Odisha's electoral map over the 2010s-2020s and how Odisha's parties exert influence on national politics through parliamentary seats, regional issue framing, and occasional coalition arithmetic.

**Keywords:** Odisha, Biju Janata Dal, BJP, Congress, regional party, coalition politics, Lok Sabha, state-centre relations

### Introduction

Regional parties shape India's federal politics by articulating state-specific interests, commanding sizeable vote shares in their home states, and participating in coalitions at the centre. Odisha, a state with 21 Lok Sabha seats, provides a useful case to examine this dynamic: it hosts a strong regional party (BJD) that has dominated state politics for more than two decades, while national parties (notably the BJP and INC) have repeatedly tried to expand their footprints. This paper maps party evolution in Odisha and analyses how these parties influence national politics from coalition formation to the framing of national policy priorities. Odisha's political landscape has undergone significant transformation since the formation of the state in 1936. In the early decades after Independence, the Indian National Congress dominated the political scene, benefiting from its national stature and strong grassroots networks. However, from the late 20th century onwards, Odisha experienced the rise of regional political consciousness shaped by factors such as linguistic identity, tribal representation, developmental disparities, and disaster vulnerability. These factors gradually weakened Congress's monopoly and paved the way for regional alternatives. The most defining shift occurred in 1997 with the formation of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) under the leadership of Naveen Patnaik, drawing ideological inspiration from the legacy of Biju Patnaik. The BJD emerged as a strong regional force by projecting state-centric policies and building a reputation for clean governance, efficient disaster management, and welfare-oriented development. Its long partnership with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the late 1990s and early 2000s brought Odisha into the sphere of national coalition politics. The BJD's decision to break away from the BJP-led alliance in 2009 and pursue a stance of political equidistance marked a major shift in both state and national alignments. Alongside this, the BJP began expanding its organizational structure in Odisha, identifying the state as a strategic frontier for national growth. Through increased cadre mobilization, focused leadership initiatives, and alignment with national development narratives, the BJP gradually strengthened its position, especially in parliamentary elections. By the late 2010s and early 2020s, the BJP had transitioned from being a junior coalition partner to becoming the primary national challenger to the BJD in the state. The Congress, despite being historically significant, witnessed a steady decline due to organizational weakening, leadership vacuums,

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and an inability to counter evolving regional aspirations. Other smaller parties—Left parties, local tribal outfits, and issue-specific regional groups—have played marginal but occasionally influential roles in shaping regional debates. Odisha's electoral behaviour is unique in that voters have often differentiated between state-level and national-level preferences. While the BJD dominated successive state assembly elections, national elections saw growing competition from the BJP. This dual preference shows that Odisha's voters critically evaluate governance at both levels and respond differently to regional and national appeals. Given Odisha's 21 Lok Sabha seats, the state has strategic relevance in India's parliamentary arithmetic. Regional parties such as the BJD have frequently held the balance of power in closely contested Lok Sabha formations, while national parties like the BJP and Congress consider Odisha an important base in eastern India for expanding influence. Thus, the political evolution of Odisha—from Congress dominance to BJD regional supremacy, and later to a competitive BJD-BJP dynamic—provides important context for understanding how the state's political parties interact with national politics. Political parties in India play a critical role in shaping the country's federal structure, electoral behaviour, and democratic processes. In a nation characterised by immense regional diversity, state-based political actors significantly influence national outcomes through coalition politics, parliamentary representation, and agenda setting. Odisha, a key state in eastern India with a distinctive socio-political history, offers an important case for studying the interaction between regional political dynamics and national politics. Since the late 1990s, Odisha has been shaped predominantly by the rise of a strong regional party—the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which transformed the state's political landscape through its governance model, welfare policies, and emphasis on regional identity. The BJD's long tenure in Odisha and its unique strategy of maintaining equidistance from both major national parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), has influenced the calculus of national coalitions and contributed to the reconfiguration of centre-state relations. At the same time, the BJP has expanded rapidly in Odisha, especially in the 2014-2024 period, turning the state into a competitive political arena. The Congress, once dominant, has seen a steady decline but remains relevant as part of the national opposition. Odisha's political significance extends beyond its 21 Lok Sabha seats. The state has often been a testing ground for welfare models, disaster management approaches, tribal policies, and developmental narratives that later influence national discourses. Its political parties, through their parliamentary performance and strategic alignments, play an important role in national legislative negotiations, federal policy implementation, and coalition formations, especially during closely contested national elections. This research paper examines the evolution, strategies, and national impact of Odisha's major political parties. It analyses how regional political actors shape national debates, influence coalition politics, and participate in the broader democratic processes of the country. By exploring electoral trends, historical developments, and party behaviour, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Odisha's regional politics intersects with and contributes to national political dynamics.

## Review of Literature

The study of political parties in India has generated extensive scholarship, particularly in areas of regionalism, federalism, electoral behaviour, and coalition politics. Within this broader field, research on Odisha's political landscape highlights the emergence of strong regional identity, the evolution of state-level leadership, and the changing relationship between regional and national parties. Scholars such as Yogendra Yadav (1999), have emphasized the growing significance of regional parties in India's parliamentary system. They argue that regional parties act as mediators of local aspirations and often play pivotal roles in national coalition governments. This framework is useful for understanding Odisha's political trajectory, particularly the rise of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and its influence in Lok Sabha coalition politics. Research on Odisha's politics—such as works by Biswaranjan Mohanty, Manoranjan Mohanty, and Chitta Baral—highlights the state's transition from Congress dominance to regional-party ascendancy. These studies underline factors such as: the appeal of Biju Patnaik's legacy, the administrative style of Naveen Patnaik, socio-economic disparities across regions, and Odisha's exposure to frequent natural disasters. These works collectively argue that governance performance and welfare delivery have been crucial in shaping voter behaviour in the state.

A considerable body of literature analyses the BJD's long-term political success. Studies by Panda (2020) <sup>[7]</sup> point to the party's emphasis on clean and stable governance, disaster management effectiveness, and targeted welfare programmes. The BJD's strategy of maintaining equidistance from both the BJP and the Congress is widely discussed as a unique model of regional autonomy in India's federal framework. Scholars such as Gilles Verniers, Rahul Verma, and Nalin Mehta document the BJP's organisational growth across eastern India, including Odisha. Their works discuss how the BJP: strengthened its cadre base, capitalised on national-level popularity, targeted tribal and rural constituencies, and used central welfare schemes to expand influence. These analyses explain the BJP's gradual rise in Odisha, especially in national elections from 2014 to 2024.

Political analyses by Behera (2013), Dash (2017), and various journalistic assessments highlight the Congress's weakening organisational structure, leadership crises, and inability to adapt to changing regional political aspirations. These works position the Congress's decline as part of a broader national trend but also tied to Odisha-specific dynamics. Literature on centre-state relations (e.g., by Louise Tillin, M.P. Singh, and Rekha Saxena) notes that states like Odisha often influence national policy through issue-based parliamentary negotiations. Odisha's role in areas such as disaster management, tribal rights, mineral resource governance, and federal welfare schemes is discussed as significant for national legislative priorities.

Studies from CSDS-Lokniti, Election Commission data analyses, and works by political psephologists show that Odisha voters frequently differentiate between state-level and national-level electoral choices. This split-voting behaviour helps explain the BJD's dominance in state elections and the increasing success of the BJP in national elections.

While existing literature provides valuable insights into regional politics, certain gaps remain:

- Few studies systematically analyse Odisha's political parties in relation to *contemporary* national politics (post-2014 era).
- More research is needed on BJD's issue-based support to national governments and its implications for federal policymaking.
- Limited comparative analysis exists between Odisha and other eastern states experiencing similar political transitions.

This research paper attempts to fill some of these gaps by integrating electoral data, political history, and strategic behaviour of Odisha's major political parties to understand their evolving role in national politics.

### Methodology

This is a qualitative-descriptive study based on secondary sources: election results (Lok Sabha and Assembly), party profiles (encyclopedic accounts and party websites), and credible news reporting. The analysis focuses on electoral outcomes (2014, 2019, 2024), alliance behaviour (e.g., BJD-BJP relations), and public posturing in national debates. The paper cites major primary web sources and major media coverage for load-bearing factual claims. This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine the evolution of political parties in Odisha and their influence on national politics. The methodology has been structured to integrate historical analysis, electoral data interpretation, and thematic assessment of party strategies. The research follows a qualitative descriptive approach, which is suitable for understanding political processes, party behaviour, and the evolving relationship between regional and national politics. The study does not rely on primary fieldwork but uses secondary sources to generate analytical insights. The study is based entirely on secondary data, collected from the following sources: a. Government and institutional reports (Election Commission of India (ECI) reports, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha Secretariat documents and State Election Commission reports), b. Academic and scholarly sources (Books, journal articles, and edited volumes on Indian politics, regional parties, and Odisha's political history and Studies by CSDS-Lokniti, IDSA, and political science scholars) c. Media and digital sources (Reputed newspapers and magazines (The Hindu, Indian Express, Times of India, etc.). Party manifestos, official party documents and Political analyses from credible research organisations c. Statistical data (Electoral outcomes for Lok Sabha and Odisha Vidhan Sabha elections (2000-2024) and Vote share trends and seat distribution patterns). These sources ensure varied perspectives and allow triangulation across textual, numerical, and historical evidence.

A qualitative content analysis was applied to party documents, media reports, and academic writing. This helped identify themes such as: party ideology, leadership patterns, coalition behaviour, welfare strategies, regional-national political linkages, and electoral messaging. This method helped trace the evolution of political parties in Odisha from the dominance of the Congress to the rise of the BJD and the recent expansion of the BJP. It contextualized political developments within socio-economic and cultural changes.

Election results (2000-2024) were examined to analyse: vote share changes, seat distribution trends, region-wise shifts, state vs. national election differences, BJP's growing penetration and Congress's decline. This comparative approach helps assess how Odisha's political parties gain or lose influence at the national level. Themes such as "regional identity politics," "coalition dynamics," "welfare governance," "federal relations," and "issue-based national support" were identified and coded as analytical categories. The scope of the papers focuses on major political parties in Odisha (BJD, BJP, INC), with brief references to minor parties. Covers political developments from the 1990s to 2024. Analyses the link between Odisha's regional politics and India's national political structure.

### Party Profiles and Historical Background

**Biju Janata Dal (BJD):** Founded in 1997 in the legacy of Biju Patnaik and led by Naveen Patnaik, the BJD is a regional, centre-left-to-centrist party that emphasizes Odia identity, welfare governance, and regional development. It became the dominant political organization in Odisha by building a strong welfare and disaster-response reputation and by cultivating a non-confrontational style of politics vis-à-vis the Centre. The BJD governed Odisha for multiple terms under Naveen Patnaik's leadership, achieving repeated electoral success in state assembly elections and commanding a strong organizational presence across the state. Historically, the BJD was allied to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the late 1990s and 2000s, but the partnership ended before the 2009 general election — the split was driven by factors including disagreements over seat-sharing and communal tensions (notably the Kandhamal riots), after which BJD pursued electoral independence. Since then the party has often practiced equidistance from both national blocs, asserting Odisha-specific priorities. **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):** The BJP historically was a weaker player in Odisha, but it stepped up organisational efforts across the 2010s and 2020s. National leadership invested in the state (leading faces such as Dharmendra Pradhan and others emerged), and the BJP targeted tribal and rural constituencies while leveraging national themes of governance and development. By 2019 the BJP had increased its Lok Sabha tally in Odisha; by 2024 the party made further gains (as discussed below).

**Indian National Congress (INC) and Other Parties:** The Congress, once a significant force in Odisha, saw a long-term decline as the BJD consolidated regional votes and the BJP made gains. Smaller left parties and local actors (CPI, CPI(M), local splinter groups) have maintained niche roles, but their national influence is limited. The Congress's reduced strength in Odisha has implications for national opposition arithmetic.

**Electoral Trends (2014-2024) and Implications:** In 2014 the BJD performed strongly in Odisha state politics and dominated the Assembly; in the Lok Sabha elections that year the BJD had previously won 20 out of 21 seats (2014 being strong for BJD at the state level). In 2019, the BJD retained dominance in the state assembly (winning 112 of 147 assembly seats) but lost ground in the Lok Sabha: BJD won 12 Lok Sabha seats while BJP increased to 8 seats and Congress to 1 seat. These results signalled that while regional incumbency (BJD) remained strong at the state level, the BJP was making inroads in national-level contests



in Odisha. The 2024 general/assembly cycle showed a larger shift in Odisha's national representation. The BJP improved substantially, converting its ground organization and centre's popularity into a larger number of Lok Sabha and assembly seats in Odisha (reports indicate the BJP won a decisive share of seats in 2024, marking a major change in the state's national representation). This shift means Odisha's parliamentary delegation is more closely aligned with the national ruling coalition, increasing the state's leverage in centre-led programs but also reducing the autonomy of a strong regional bloc in national bargaining.

The political landscape of Odisha in the 2024-2029 period is expected to reflect both continuity and change. The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has historically maintained strong dominance in state-level politics due to its welfare-oriented policies, regional identity consolidation, and administrative credibility. However, the rising presence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a competitive national force introduces a new dynamic, particularly in parliamentary elections. The Indian National Congress (INC) continues to struggle with organisational weakness and leadership crises, limiting its ability to regain lost ground.

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) likely to retain a significant share of the state assembly if it continues its governance-focused approach, though margins may narrow due to BJP's increasing presence. The BJP is expected to continue expanding in urban, coastal, and tribal constituencies, potentially challenging BJD dominance in strategically important districts. The Indian National Congress (INC) will marginally influence unless it undertakes substantial organisational reform and leadership renewal.

Several demographic factors will shape electoral outcomes such as youth voters i.e the 18-30 age group increasingly values employment opportunities, digital access, and national narratives, which may favour the BJP and issue-based campaigns. Welfare and empowerment schemes remain a decisive factor, potentially consolidating BJD's state-level support. These constituencies will remain pivotal; regional parties that address localized concerns (land rights, resource allocation) will retain an edge. This demographic segmentation suggests that parties will need to adopt hybrid strategies, balancing regional governance promises with alignment to national political narratives.

Odisha's electoral trends from 2024-2029 carry broader implications for national politics: The BJD's continued presence in the Lok Sabha allows it to maintain influence over issue-based national legislation, especially in sectors like disaster management, tribal welfare, and federal financial distribution. Any significant BJP gains in Odisha strengthen its national parliamentary position and reduce reliance on northern and western states for majority formation. Unless restructured, the Congress's inability to regain Odisha seats diminishes its potential role in national coalition negotiations and reduces its strategic footprint in eastern India. To remain in Odisha governance, the BJD must innovate governance models and enhance communication to appeal to younger and urban voters without compromising regional autonomy. The BJP needs to strengthen grassroots organisational networks and address regional aspirations to convert vote share into sustainable state-level influence. The INC requires leadership renewal,

alliance-building, and issue-oriented campaigns to regain relevance in both state and national elections. The 2024-2029 period in Odisha is likely to be characterised by intensified competition between regional and national parties. While the BJD retains its stronghold in state politics, the BJP's growing influence in national elections signals a potential shift in the balance of power. Demographic changes, voter expectations, and governance performance will play decisive roles, not only in shaping Odisha's electoral outcomes but also in influencing the composition and policy priorities of future national governments.

Regional parties matter in hung parliaments or tight majorities. BJD's history of alliance-making in the late 1990s-2000s and its decision to exit the NDA before 2009 illustrate how state-level parties can alter national coalition calculations. While BJD largely stayed out of national coalitions after 2009, its independent bloc of MPs still mattered for issue-based support in Parliament and for signalling eastern India political sentiment. Even a modest bloc of MPs (Odisha's 21 seats) can matter in closely contested bills, debates, and parliamentary committees. MPs from Odisha have used their platform to push issues like disaster relief, coastal development, tribal welfare, and coal/industry concerns. A party that controls a majority of these MPs (BJD earlier, BJP later) can influence national policy emphasis, especially when the central government seeks regional buy-in for large infrastructure, resource, or welfare programs. Odisha's management of cyclones, tribal development programs, and industrialization debates (e.g., mining and environment) become national debates when Odisha's MPs raise them in Parliament or when state-centre negotiation is required. The BJD, by prioritizing welfare and disaster management, has often shaped national narratives on state resilience and governance models. Similarly, the BJP's recent advances meant national-level priorities (such as central welfare schemes, infrastructure pledges) became more strongly anchored to central channels in Odisha. After exiting the NDA in 2009, the BJD has often pursued an equidistant approach — avoiding full-throated alignment with either the BJP or Congress at the national level while collaborating issue-wise. This strategy allowed Naveen Patnaik and the BJD to claim sovereign stewardship of Odisha's interests, bargaining with the Centre irrespective of party in power. Such positioning reduces the risk of being overshadowed by a national alliance and helps maintain a distinct identity. The BJP employed national leadership, messaging, and resource mobilization to transform its Odisha prospects. By promoting local leaders and linking national themes (development, governance, national security) to local campaigns, the BJP translated centre popularity into local gains — culminating in stronger Lok Sabha performances by the late 2010s-2020s. This nationalization of electoral politics in Odisha is part of a larger BJP strategy seen in multiple states.

Congress's weaker electoral performance in Odisha reduced

the party's leverage to influence national politics from the state. With fewer MPs, Congress lost bargaining power on state-specific projects and in national debates focused on eastern India. The party's recovery would require rebuilding local institutions and reconnecting with state-specific grievances and identities.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses electoral data, party strategies, and political developments in Odisha to understand how major political parties influence national politics. The analysis covers trends from the early 2000s to 2024, focusing on the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Indian National Congress (INC). The discussion integrates election results, leadership patterns, coalition behaviour, and policy priorities.

- a. **Decline of the Congress and Rise of Regional Dominance (2000-2009)** Electoral data from the 2000s shows a steady and sharp decline in the Congress's influence.
  - In the 2000 and 2004 Assembly elections, Congress lost significant ground, paving the way for the BJD-BJP coalition.
  - By 2009, the Congress failed to present a cohesive leadership or alternative narrative, losing both vote share and seats.

This decline aligns with national trends of weakening Congress presence across several states, but in Odisha, the fall was more pronounced due to strong regional leadership and organisational weaknesses.

**Consolidation of BJD as a Regional Power (2000-2019):** Under Naveen Patnaik, the BJD became the most dominant force in Odisha politics:

- It consistently won three to four consecutive Assembly elections (2000, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019).
- It maintained high vote shares, often above 40%.
- BJD's clean-governance image, welfare schemes (like Mission Shakti, Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana), and disaster management earned voter trust.

Electoral data shows that the BJD cultivated a stable voter base, with strong support from women, rural households, and tribal communities. This long-term dominance gave the party substantial bargaining power in national politics.

- b. **The BJP's Gradual Rise (2014-2024):** The BJP's emergence as a primary challenger is one of the most significant political shifts:
  - The party increased its vote share dramatically in 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

By 2019, the BJP became the main national-level competitor, making inroads into coastal and northern districts

- In 2024, the BJP's organisational expansion and national leadership pushed it closer to replacing the BJD as the national voice of Odisha.

This growth reflects the BJP's pan-India strategy of expanding in eastern and southern states to compensate for saturation in northern India.

**Split Voting Behaviour:** Different Choices for State and National Elections: One of the most important findings is Odisha's unique split voting pattern:

- In *state elections*, voters overwhelmingly supported the BJD, relying on its welfare model and local leadership.
- In *national elections*, the BJP achieved stronger performance, reflecting the appeal of national leadership, central welfare schemes, and identity-based politics. This split indicates that voters evaluate governance differently at state and national levels. It highlights the political maturity of Odisha's electorate and complicates the national ambitions of both the BJD and BJP.

### c. BJD's Role in National Politics

The BJD's long neutral stance ('equidistance') has shaped national coalition politics: The BJD avoided formal alliances but provided:

- parliamentary support for key national bills,
- collaboration on federal policies,
- support on defence, finance, and infrastructure reforms when they benefitted Odisha. BJD's selective cooperation allowed it to maintain regional autonomy while influencing national decisions.

### d. Federal Negotiations and Odisha's Interests

BJD has used its influence to negotiate

- special category status demands,
- disaster-relief funds from the Centre,
- mineral royalty revisions,
- tribal protection laws.

This reflects how a strong regional party can use national-level representation to pursue state-specific developmental goals.

### e. BJP's Increasing National Leverage Through Odisha

The BJP views Odisha as a strategic frontier in eastern India:

- Winning a substantial portion of Odisha's 21 Lok Sabha seats enhances the party's national tally.
- Organisational expansion (booth-level presence, RSS affiliate networks) has given the party deeper local roots.
- Through central schemes and national leadership appeal, the BJP has positioned itself as a strong competitor to the BJD.

The BJP's rise in Odisha enhances its national influence and reduces dependence on northern states for parliamentary majority.

### f. Congress: From Dominant Force to Marginal Actor

**Data indicates a persistent decline:**

- Loss of traditional tribal and Dalit vote banks.
- Weak organisational structure.
- Internal factionalism.
- Failure to present a modern political agenda.

The Congress's reduced presence in Odisha mirrors its declining relevance in several other Indian states, limiting

its ability to influence national politics through Odisha's seats. Odisha's Socio-Political Context and Policy Themes: Repeated natural disasters have shaped political narratives. BJD's successful disaster response and welfare delivery became decisive factors. Odisha's significant tribal population and mineral resources influence political agendas and centre-state negotiations. BJD's strong women-focused schemes bolstered its voter base, influencing national discourse on gender-centric development.

#### g. Contribution of Odisha's Parties to National Politics

Based on electoral and political analysis, Odisha's political parties contribute to national politics through: BJD's issue-based support has often helped national governments pass crucial legislation. Odisha MPs have engaged significantly on issues like mining, environment, federal finance, and tribal welfare. Odisha's welfare schemes and disaster management models have influenced national policy templates, e.g., self-help groups, food security. Odisha has shifted from Congress-dominated to BJD-led politics, and now to a competitive BJD-BJP landscape. Electoral data shows split voting: BJD in state polls, BJP in national polls. BJD maintains strong regional identity and negotiates effectively at the Centre. BJP's rising presence reshapes national parliamentary outcomes. Congress has become marginal, reducing its national impact through Odisha.

#### Analysis and Discussion: Odisha in the National Political Economy

The analysis of historical trends, electoral data, party documents, and scholarly literature reveals several important findings about the functioning of political parties in Odisha and their evolving role in the national political landscape. These findings highlight the state's unique political culture, the strength of regional identity, and the shifting balance of power between regional and national actors.

##### a. Dominance of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Its Strategic Autonomy

- For nearly 25 years (1997-2024), the BJD remained the most influential political force in Odisha.
- Its governance model—focused on welfare programmes, disaster management, and clean image politics—generated high public trust.
- The BJD maintained a deliberate political strategy of *equidistance* from both the BJP and the Congress at the national level, supporting governments issue-wise rather than through a formal alliance.

The BJD's long-standing dominance reflects the strength of Odisha's regional political identity and the electorate's preference for stability. Its strategy of flexible political support gave it bargaining power at the national level without compromising regional autonomy. This demonstrates how a strong regional party can influence national politics even without being part of a ruling coalition.

##### b. Rise of the BJP as a Major Challenger

- From 2014 onward, the BJP rapidly expanded its organisational presence, especially in tribal districts, coastal belts, and urban regions.
- The party's vote share and seat count showed

significant improvement in both Lok Sabha and Assembly elections (2014-2024).

- In 2024, the BJP formed the government in Odisha for the first time, indicating a shift in voter preferences.

The BJP's rise represents the nationalisation of Odisha's political arena and the declining dominance of purely regional political forces. This change is linked to broader national trends, including the popularity of central welfare schemes, strong cadre-based organisation, and the national leadership factor. Odisha is gradually moving from a historically regional-party-driven landscape toward a more competitive national-regional political bipolarity.

##### c. Decline of the Indian National Congress

- Once dominant in Odisha (especially in the 1980s), the Congress has suffered from weak leadership, organisational erosion, and factional politics.
- Its vote share steadily declined over the past two decades, reducing its influence in both state and national elections.

The decline of the Congress reflects a broader pattern seen in several Indian states, where national parties have struggled to compete with strong regional forces or highly organised national rivals. In Odisha, the Congress's inability to innovate organisationally or present strong leadership has weakened its role in influencing national political narratives.

##### d. Odisha's Electoral Behaviour is Strongly Influenced by Welfare Politics

- Welfare schemes (food security, women's empowerment, health insurance, disaster management) remain central to voter behaviour.
- Both regional and national parties have increasingly relied on welfare delivery as a political tool.

Odisha's political culture is shaped more by governance performance than by ideology alone. Effective implementation of welfare policies boosts the credibility of political parties and strengthens their national-level image as "models of governance." This also pressures national parties to adapt their policy narratives when engaging with Odisha's electorate.

##### e. Odisha's Representation in National Politics is Increasing

- Odisha contributes significantly to national parliamentary debates on disaster management, tribal welfare, mining, federalism, and regional development.
- MPs from Odisha—particularly from the BJD and recently the BJP—have actively participated in legislative committees and national policy deliberations. Odisha's political leadership has gained visibility in national politics, especially through issue-based participation. This shows a shift from a formerly marginal role to a more assertive engagement in national policymaking, thereby reinforcing the importance of regional perspectives in a federal democracy.

##### f. Coalition Politics and Issue-Based Support Enhance Regional Influence

- Odisha's political parties, especially the BJD, have



played a balancing role in coalition-era national politics (1999-2019).

- Issue-based support from Odisha's MPs was crucial for passing certain national bills, including federal reforms and economic policies.

Regional parties in Odisha contribute to national politics not only through coalition participation but also through strategic parliamentary behaviour. Their ability to negotiate region-specific benefits—such as disaster relief funds, infrastructure projects, or mineral revenue reforms—shows how regional actors influence national decision-making.

#### **g. Shift Toward Youth and Women Voters**

- Young voters (18-29) increasingly lean toward national narratives, benefitting national parties like the BJP.
- Women voters have become a decisive bloc for welfare-focused parties.

The changing demographic composition of the electorate plays a major role in redefining Odisha's political landscape. Parties that align welfare delivery with aspirational narratives appeal more effectively to emerging voter blocs, thereby shaping their national relevance.

Odisha's political evolution reflects a dynamic interplay between regional identity, governance performance, welfare politics, and national-level political currents. The state no longer remains isolated from national shifts; instead, it actively shapes and is shaped by national political trends. Regional leadership, strategic autonomy, and welfare-driven governance continue to shape Odisha's influence in the national political arena. The shifting balance among BJD, BJP, and Congress in Odisha highlights two broader themes in Indian politics. First, strong regional parties like the BJD can play a dual role — defending regional interests while occasionally acting as kingmakers in national coalitions. Second, national parties with organizational reach and successful national narratives (BJP in this case) can erode regional party dominance — especially when national popularity is high and local organisational investments are sustained. Odisha's trajectory from a dominant regional block (BJD) to increased national party presence (BJP) exemplifies how electoral waves and party strategies interact.

#### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The political landscape of Odisha illustrates the dynamic interaction between regional political identities and the broader national political framework of India. Over the past three decades, Odisha has emerged as an important site for understanding how regional parties influence national politics through governance models, electoral performance, strategic autonomy, and issue-based engagement. The rise and long-standing dominance of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) demonstrate how regional parties can consolidate public trust through sustained welfare policies, administrative efficiency, and disaster management systems that later gain national recognition. The BJD's approach of strategic neutrality at the national level enabled it to retain regional autonomy while exerting considerable influence on national policy debates and legislative processes.

The recent ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in

Odisha marks a structural shift in the state's political balance, bringing national party dynamics into closer alignment with regional aspirations. This development underscores the increasing integration of Odisha into the national political arena and reflects broader trends of political centralisation and the appeal of national leadership narratives. The decline of the Indian National Congress highlights the challenges faced by national parties in states dominated by strong regional actors and organised political competitors. The study also reveals that Odisha's political behaviour is shaped significantly by welfare politics, tribal and regional identity, and socio-economic development needs. These factors shape voter behaviour and influence the strategies of both regional and national parties, thus contributing to a hybrid political culture where governance performance and regional pride coexist with national political currents. Furthermore, Odisha's representation in Parliament, its MPs' active participation in issue-based national debates, and the state's importance in coalition-era politics underscore its growing relevance in shaping national discourse.

Overall, the political parties of Odisha play a significant and evolving role in national politics. Their influence extends beyond electoral outcomes to shaping governance narratives, federal relations, and policy orientations at the national level. Odisha's political trajectory highlights how regional political actors can function as powerful brokers in India's democracy, balancing local priorities with national imperatives. As political competition intensifies with the rise of the BJP and the changing demographic profile of the electorate, Odisha is likely to continue serving as a critical arena where regional political strategies intersect with national political transformations.

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