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## Assam's Panchayat Polls 2025: The battle for local power begins

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### Abstract

The Assam Panchayat Election 2025 marked a significant event in the state's democratic process. This election was conducted to elect representatives at three levels of the Panchayati Raj system- Gaon Panchayat (GP), Anchalik Panchayat (AP), and Zilla Parishad (ZP). In this paper analyses the 2025 Assam's Panchayat polls which were held in two phases across 27 districts of Assam on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025. The elections witnessed active participation from over 1.8 crore rural voters. According to state election data cited during vote counting, a total of 78,571 candidates contested for 26,808 Panchayat seats, distributed across four levels (All Phases). Phase 2 alone featured 29,608 candidates, with 1289 declared winners uncontested. The total numbers of voters were 18,014,913 including 9,060,640 males, 8,953,865 females and 408 others.

**Keywords:** Assam, Panchayati Raj, panchayat polls, local elections

### Introduction

The 2025 Assam Panchayat Election marked a pivotal moment in the state's grassroots democratic landscape. Under the latest Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 2023 candidates at the district (Zilla Parishad) and block (Anchalik Panchayat) levels were permitted to use party symbols, while those at the village (Gaon Panchayat) level remained symbol neutral. With an electorate surpassing 1.8 crore, the polls saw intense competition for 397 Zilla Parishad seats, 2188 Anchalik Panchayat seats, and 21,920 Gaon Panchayat seats. This election was held in two phases. The polling for the first phase was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2025, while that for the second phase took place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

The first phase began in 14 districts these were Sonitpur, Biswanath, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivsagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Majuli, Golaghat, Cachar, Hailakandi, and Sribhumi. Voting ran from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM covering 216 Zilla Parishad (ZP), 94 Anchalik Panchayat (AP), 1139 Gaon Panchayat (GP). Over 12,900 polling stations were setup statewide. By 3:30 PM, overall turnout was around 56.41%. According to the Election commission final turnout reached approximately 70.19%. Re-polling was ordered at 43 stations across Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Majuli, Hailakandi and Sribhumi. There were 348 ZP/AP seats filled via uncontested nominations, with the ruling NDA partners securing 325 seats.

In the second phase, covering 13 districts in Dhubri, South Salmora Mankachar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Bajali, Nalbari, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro), Hojai, Nagaon, Morigaon and Darrang. A total 29,608 candidates contested across 181 ZP seats, 87 AP seats and 10,530 GP wards. Total registered voters 91.31 lakh out of this 46.3 lakh male; 44.99 lakh Female. Total polling stations were 12,130. Overall turnout was around 79.23%. Highest turnout districts Dhubri (88.63%) and South Salmora Mankachar(87.56%) and the Lowest was Kamrup Metro (71%). Voting was largely peaceful and orderly with no re-polls required in any district. A total 1289 candidates were elected unopposed in this phase covering 21 ZP seats, 151 AP seats and 1117 GP Wards. The Assam State Election Commission has made elaborate arrangements to ensure free and fair elections. The counting of votes started on 11<sup>th</sup> May and results were declared on 14<sup>th</sup> May.

### Objectives of the study

- To analyze the political landscape of Assam in the context of the 2025 Panchayat election.
- To understand the history of Panchayati raj system in Assam.

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- To highlight the impact of election results local governance, power dynamics and policy making at the grassroots level.

### Methodology

The study follows descriptive method. In this study data have been collected by using secondary sources. Data have been collected through internet, books, published research papers and articles, newspapers and Election commission reports.

### History of Panchayati raj system in Assam

In Pre-Independence period Assam had informal traditional village councils like the Gaonburas in tribal areas. The British introduced local self-government acts, but these were limited in scope and largely urban focused. After Independence, Assam had adopted the idea of decentralized governance which was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj. In 1959 Assam passed its first Panchayati Raj Act named as The Assam Panchayat Act, 1959. It introduced a two tier structure, Gaon Panchayat at the village level and Mahkuma Parishad at the sub-divisional level. The year 1994 was major milestone for Assam Panchayat system which was alignment with 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment act. It established a three tier system.

### Assam Panchayati Raj Act of 1994

The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 is the key legislation that governs the structure, composition, powers, and functions of the Panchayati Raj system in Assam, replacing the earlier 1986 Act. It was enacted in accordance with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 which gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions across India.

Key features of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994

- Three tier structure- The act establishes a three tier Panchayati Raj system:

Gaon Panchayat (GP) at the village level.

Anchalik Panchayat (AP) at the intermediate/block level.

Zilla Parishad (ZP) at the district level.

- Democratic Elections- Direct elections are held for member at all three levels. Elections are conducted by the State Election commission. Tenure is 5 years.
- Reservation of seats- Seats are reserved for SCs, STs and Women. Not less than one third of the total seats are reserved for women, including SC/ST, Women.
- Gram Sabha- A Gram Sabha is formed for every village or group of villages. It serves as a forum for direct participation of villagers in local governance.
- Standing committees- Each Panchayat tier forms Standing committees to handle specific subjects like education, health, social justice, and finance.
- Financial powers- Panchayats can levy and collect local taxes, tolls, and fees. It can grant in aid from the State Government and also prepare and manage own budget.

### Important amendments and provisions

- The Act has undergone several amendments to strengthen devolution of powers and improve transparency.
- Act includes provisions for Standing committees, social audits, and gaon sabhas to ensure participatory governance.

- It encourages planning from below starting from the Gaon sabha to the Zilla parishad.

### Result and discussion of the study

Here's a detailed breakdown of the Assam Panchayat Election 2025 results based on official data from the Assam State Election Commission:

First Phase of Assam Panchayat poll- The first phase encompassed Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sivasagar, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Cachar, Hailakandi and Sribhumi districts covering 216 Zilla parishads, 94 Anchalik panchayats and 1,139 gaon panchayats. It saw a voter turnout of 56.41% as of 3:30pm with officials reporting sporadic incidents of violence disrupting polling in certain areas. Polling began at 7:30 am across 14 districts, with over 89.59 lakh eligible voters- 44.66 lakh males and 44.93 lakh females casting their votes at 12,916 polling stations. While final figures were awaited, Lakhimpur registered the highest turnout at 66.5%, while Dibrugarh recorded the lowest at 45%, according to the State Election commission. Fresh poll (Re-poll) were held in 43 polling stations of the following districts:

Hailakandi: 31 nos.

Sribhumi: 8 nos.

Lakhimpur: 2 nos.

Golaghat: 1 no

Majuli: 1 no

The following table shows the candidates contested in polls in the first phase:

Name of seats	Zilla parishad members	Anchalik panchayat members	Gaon panchayat members
Total number of seats	216	94	1,139
Candidates contested against the seats	639	2,608	2,500-3,000

A total of 3,247 candidates contested across 310 seats (216 ZP+ 94 AP). Uncontested seats (348) were already filled and not included in these contested figures. The most reliable estimate for GP contested candidates falls in the 2,500-3,000 range across 1,139 seats. In places like Sribhumi alone, about 950 seats were contested with 2,545 candidates indicating an average of 2.7 candidates per seat. For the second phase (May 7, 2025) of the Assam Panchayat elections, following table shows the contest statistics:

Panchayat level	Constituencies	Total candidates	Uncontested	Contested candidates
Zilla Parishad	181	495	21	474
Anchalik Panchayat	87	2,388	151	2,237
Gaon Panchayat	10,530 (wards)	26,725	1,117	25,608

### Result of Assam Panchayat poll of 2025

The election was held for 397 ZP, 2188 AP, 21920 GP seats. The following table shows the party wise results of election

Name of seats	Zilla parishad members	Anchalik panchayat members
Total number of seats	397	2,188
BJP	274	1,261

AGP	27	184
INC	72	481
AIUDF	8	64
Raijor Dal	3	17
Independents	13	173

Additionally, in Anchalik Panchayat Trinamool Congress got 4 seats, Assam Jatiya Parishad got 3 seats and Aam Aadmi party got 1 seat only. For GP wards (Total seats: 21,920) which was held apolitically- no party affiliation allowed, candidates used free symbols.

#### Other Key Insights

- **Unopposed victories:** 348 seats across tiers were uncontested; NDA won 325 of them.
- **Coin- toss decisions:** In two Gaon Panchayat wards (Nagaon & Golaghat), ties were resolved by coin toss.
- **Minority wins:** NDA saw growing support even in Muslim- majority areas, securing wins in constituencies with over 90% Muslim population.

#### Impact of election results on local governance, power dynamics and policy making at the grassroots level

The Assam Panchayat Election 2025 results have significantly reshaped the landscape of local governance, power dynamics, and policy making at the grassroots level in the state. Here's a structured analysis of the impact:

##### Impact on local governance

- **Stronger mandate for NDA-led governance:** With the BJP and its allies (NDA) winning a majority of the Gaon Panchayat (GP), Anchalik Panchayat (AP), and Zilla Parishad (ZP) seats, there is a consolidation of power at the grassroots level. This majority enables smoother implementation of state-sponsored schemes without resistance from opposition led local bodies. More alignment between the state government and local panchayats could improve efficiency in delivery of services like rural infrastructure, sanitation, and housing.
- **Potential risks of over centralization:** Too much dominance by a single coalition could marginalize opposition voices in village-level decision making, possibly reducing democratic checks and balances. Reports of unopposed wins and use of state machinery during elections have sparked concerns about transparency, which could affect governance credibility.

##### Power dynamics at the Grassroots level

- **Shift in voter behaviour:** BJP gained ground in Muslim-majority districts (e.g., Barpeta, Jaleswar), which historically favoured Congress or AIUDF. This reflects a re-alignment in minority voting patterns. The decline of AIUDF suggests fragmentation of Muslim vote banks, strengthening the BJP's presence even in regions previously considered hostile.
- **Weakening of Regional & opposition forces:** Congress managed to retain some strongholds (e.g., Dhubri), but its loss in traditionally safe areas has weakened its bargaining power at the local level. Regional parties like Asom Jatiya Parishad and Raijor Dal have limited influence, reducing diversity in policy inputs.

##### Policy making at the Panchayat level

Policy alignment with state government- Expect greater implementation of BJP's flagship rural programs, such as:

- Orunodoi scheme (direct cash transfers)
- Jal Jeevan Mission (rural drinking water)
- PMAY-G (rural housing)

With the state and local bodies under the same coalition, policy delays due to inter-party conflicts are less likely.

#### Reduced room for participatory governance

Opposition parties and civil society have expressed concern that one-party dominance may stifle community consultation and participatory planning. Critical programs may become more top-down, focusing on political visibility rather than local needs.

#### Major findings of the study

Here are the major findings from the Assam Panchayat Election 2025 based on the results and emerging political trends:

- **Massive victory for NDA (BJP+ AGP):** BJP alone won a clear majority in both Zilla Parishad and Anchalik Panchayat levels. Out of 397 Zilla parishad seats, NDA bagged over 75%. The BJP's strong grassroots network and welfare programs (like Orunodoi and PMAY) contributed heavily to their win.
- **Congress slips further:** Despite being the main opposition, the Congress lost significant ground. Managed only 72 Zilla Parishad seats out of 397, reflecting a weak rural presence. Infighting and lack of local alliances hurt their chances, especially in central and upper Assam.
- **Decline of AIUDF:** AIUDF's performance saw a sharp dip, with just 8 Zilla Parishad seats and 64 Anchalik Panchayat seats. This indicates a shrinking influence in Muslim- majority areas, many of which went to the BJP or independents.
- **Rise of independents:** Independents won 13 Zilla Parishad and 173 Anchalik Panchayat seats. Many were rebel candidates from BJP or INC, highlighting local leadership clout over party lines.
- **Smaller parties:** Minimal Impact: Raijor Dal, Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), AAP, and TMC had negligible impact. Together, they barely crossed 30 seats across all tiers, showing fragmented opposition without grassroots reach.
- **Gaon panchayat wards:** Non political but influential: Although contested without party symbols, many ward winners had informal backing from BJP or Congress. BJP backed independents reportedly dominated rural areas, further expanding the party's rural control.
- **Symbolic wins in minority & opposition strongholds:** BJP won several seats in Muslim-majority areas, including districts like Barpeta and Goalpara. This reflects a shifting voter base and possible fatigue with religious-based politics.
- **Unopposed Wins & Coin Tosses:** NDA won 325 seats unopposed, signalling strong confidence or lack of credible opposition. In rare cases, results were decided by coin toss, showing how tight some contests were.

#### Conclusion

The 2025 Assam Panchayat elections show that the BJP is not just dominant at the State level, but also has deep penetration in rural governance. The Congress and AIUDF continue to lose relevance, while regional outfits and independents have yet to find a consistent foothold. This

outcome may shape the political narrative heading into the 2026 Assembly elections.

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