

DIGITAL VS DOOR-TO-DOOR: EVOLUTION OF BJP'S CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUES FROM ASSAM ASSEMBLY ELECTION 2016 TO 2021

Santana Saikia
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
Department of Political Science
Assam University, Diphu Campus
[Email-santanasaikia1995@gmail.com](mailto:santanasaikia1995@gmail.com)

Dr. Niranjan Mohapatra
Associate Professor, HOD,
Department of Political Science
Assam University, Diphu Campus
Email- niranjanmohapatra@rediffmail.com

Abstract:

The Bharatiya Janata Party's rise in Assam between 2014 and 2021 represents one of the most significant political realignments in North-East India. In the 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly Election, BJP won 60 seats and ended 15 years of Congress rule through a campaign heavily reliant on ground mobilization: door-to-door contact, panna pramukh booth management, massive physical rallies, and identity-based slogans like "Jati-Mati-Bheti". By 2021, the party not only retained power with 75 seats but did so under radically altered conditions - post-CAA protests, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and increased competition from a united opposition. This period witnessed a visible evolution in BJP's electioneering: from labor-intensive door-to-door outreach in 2016 to a hybrid model combining digital targeting, WhatsApp groups, virtual rallies, and data-driven micro-management in 2021. Despite the significance of this shift, systematic comparative studies on BJP's campaign technique evolution in Assam remain limited. The transformation of political campaigning in India over the last decade has been significantly influenced by the rapid expansion of digital communication technologies, social media platforms, and data-driven voter outreach mechanisms. This study examines the evolution of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign techniques in Assam by comparing the Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021. The findings reveal that the BJP's 2016 campaign relied heavily on extensive grassroots outreach, strategic alliances, local leadership engagement, and the mobilization of voters through themes centered on Assamese identity and regional aspirations. Although social media was present, it functioned primarily as a supplementary communication channel. By contrast, the 2021 campaign demonstrated a significant expansion of digital tools, including virtual rallies,

targeted social media messaging, WhatsApp-based booth-level coordination, and leader-centric online branding. Digital platforms were increasingly utilized not merely for information dissemination but also for voter engagement, narrative building, and real-time campaign management. The pandemic-induced restrictions on physical gatherings further reinforced the importance of digital outreach, leading to a more sophisticated and professionalized communication strategy. Nevertheless, the study finds that digital campaigning did not replace traditional methods; instead, it complemented and enhanced the BJP's established door-to-door organizational network, creating a synergistic campaign model. The research concludes that the BJP's electoral success in Assam between 2016 and 2021 can be partly attributed to its ability to adapt campaign techniques to changing technological and socio-political environments while retaining strong grassroots connections.

Keywords: BJP, Assam Assembly Election, Electioneering, Digital Campaign, Door-to-Door, Campaign Professionalization, Panna Pramukh, WhatsApp, Political Communication, 2016, 2021

Introduction:

The transformation of electoral campaigns in India over the last decade has been marked by two parallel developments: the persistence of labor-intensive grassroots mobilization and the rapid adoption of digital communication technologies. Assam, a state characterized by ethnic diversity, porous international borders, and a history of identity-based movements, provides a critical case to examine this duality. The Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral trajectory in Assam between 2016 and 2021 offers a distinctive lens to understand how a national party adapts its campaign techniques in response to shifting political contexts, technological affordances, and regional specificities. In the 2016 Assam Legislative Assembly Election, the BJP secured 60 out of 126 seats and displaced the Indian National Congress after 15 years of continuous rule. This electoral breakthrough was achieved primarily through a campaign model rooted in traditional door-to-door outreach. The party deployed an extensive network of panna pramukh booth-level workers responsible for managing voter lists and ensuring contact with every household. Campaign activities were dominated by large-scale physical rallies addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other national leaders, combined with identity-centric slogans such as "Jati-Mati-Bheti" and "Congress-Mukt Assam". The 2016 campaign thus exemplified what political scientists term "ground mobilization" — a strategy dependent on

face-to-face contact, organizational density, and cultural-symbolic appeals tailored to Assamese sub-nationalism. However, the political landscape of Assam underwent significant changes between 2016 and 2021. The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 triggered widespread protests across the Brahmaputra Valley, posing a direct challenge to BJP's electoral base among indigenous Assamese communities. Simultaneously, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 imposed unprecedented restrictions on mass gatherings and physical campaigning. In response to these dual challenges, the 2021 Assembly Election witnessed a notable evolution in BJP's campaign techniques. While door-to-door contact was not abandoned, it was substantially supplemented and in several contexts replaced by digital and technology-driven methods. The party increased expenditure on social media platforms, institutionalised WhatsApp groups at the booth level for targeted messaging, conducted virtual rallies through platforms like the NaMo App, and deployed data analytics to segment voters based on welfare beneficiary status. Campaign expenditure on digital media rose from 8.3% in 2016 to 31.7% in 2021 according to Association for Democratic Reforms data, indicating a structural shift in resource allocation. Studies on political communication in India have documented the rise of digital campaigning at the national level, yet micro-level, state-specific analyses of the transition from traditional to digital methods remain underdeveloped, particularly for North-East India. This gap is critical because Assam's linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity means that campaign strategies cannot be understood through a uniform "national template" alone. This article addresses this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of BJP's campaign techniques in the Assam Legislative Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of campaign professionalization and strategic framing, the study examines the continuity and change in BJP's outreach methods, organizational structure, messaging strategies, and resource allocation. By integrating quantitative data on expenditure and turnout with qualitative content analysis of manifestos, speeches, and social media content, alongside primary survey data from voters and party workers in three distinct regions of Assam, the article seeks to explain not only what changed in BJP's electioneering, but why and with what consequences. The central argument advanced is that BJP's campaign in Assam evolved from a "ground mobilization plus cultural nationalism" model in 2016 to a "techno-traditional hybrid" model in 2021. In this hybrid model, digital tools enabled targeted, personalised communication on welfare delivery and governance, while door-to-door networks ensured penetration in rural and tribal constituencies where digital access remained limited. This adaptation allowed the party to mitigate anti-incumbency and counter anti-CAA sentiment

by shifting public discourse from identity conflicts to direct benefit delivery. The Assam experience thus suggests that digitalization in Indian elections does not signify the demise of door-to-door politics, but rather its reconfiguration into a more segmented, data-informed, and multi-channel outreach strategy. Between 2016 and 2021, however, the political communication landscape underwent substantial transformation. The rapid penetration of smartphones, affordable internet services, and social media platforms significantly altered the way political information was produced, circulated, and consumed. Digital platforms became crucial arenas for political persuasion, voter engagement, and narrative construction. Political parties increasingly relied on targeted messaging, online advertisements, WhatsApp groups, live interactions, and social media influencers to communicate with voters. Studies examining the 2021 Assam Assembly Election indicate a growing professionalization of campaign management, with platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp becoming central tools for agenda-setting, image-building, and voter mobilization.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this transition. Restrictions on large gatherings and concerns over public health compelled political parties to innovate their campaign methods. In the 2021 Assam Assembly Election, the BJP adopted a more sophisticated hybrid campaign model that combined traditional door-to-door contact with an extensive digital outreach strategy. Virtual rallies, social media campaigns, targeted video content, online volunteer networks, and coordinated messaging systems supplemented conventional methods such as booth-level management, household visits, and local organizational engagement. Rather than replacing physical campaigning, digital tools enhanced the party's ability to maintain continuous communication with voters while expanding its reach across demographic and geographic boundaries. The BJP's 2021 campaign also reflected a shift in political messaging. While the 2016 campaign focused heavily on identity, indigenous rights, and political change, the 2021 campaign emphasized governance, development, security, prosperity, and cultural preservation. This transition was accompanied by more sophisticated digital storytelling techniques that highlighted government achievements, welfare initiatives, and leadership branding. Social media platforms enabled the party to disseminate these narratives rapidly, respond to opposition criticism, and engage voters in real time. The integration of digital communication with the BJP's established grassroots machinery contributed significantly to its ability to retain power in Assam, making it the first non-Congress alliance to secure consecutive terms in the state's political history. Therefore, the

period between the Assam Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021 represents a crucial phase in the modernization of electoral campaigning. It illustrates how the BJP successfully transitioned from a campaign model heavily dependent on physical mobilization and personal voter contact to one that strategically combined digital innovation with traditional grassroots engagement. Examining this evolution provides valuable insights into the changing nature of political communication, voter outreach, and electioneering in contemporary India. It also highlights how digital technologies are reshaping democratic processes while continuing to coexist with the enduring importance of face-to-face political interaction. This study seeks to analyze the transformation of the BJP's campaign techniques in Assam during this period, focusing on the interplay between digital campaigning and door-to-door mobilization and assessing their impact on electoral outcomes and voter engagement.

Historical Context of Assam's Politics

Since independence, Assam's politics was largely dominated by the Indian National Congress (INC). The Congress enjoyed widespread support due to its role in the freedom movement and its ability to accommodate various ethnic and linguistic groups within a broad political framework. For several decades, Congress governments controlled the state's political machinery and maintained a significant electoral presence. However, Assam's political trajectory underwent a major transformation during the late 1970s and early 1980s with the emergence of the Assam Movement. Led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), the movement demanded the detection, deletion, and deportation of illegal immigrants, particularly from Bangladesh. The agitation reflected growing concerns over demographic changes, cultural preservation, economic competition, and political representation. The culmination of the movement was the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 between the Government of India and the movement leaders. Following the accord, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was formed as a regional political party and achieved electoral success by channeling Assamese nationalist sentiments. The rise of AGP significantly altered Assam's political landscape and challenged Congress dominance. The BJP entered Assam's political arena during the 1990s but remained a relatively minor player for several years. Unlike northern and western India, where the party's ideological appeal had gained significant traction, Assam presented unique challenges due to its complex ethnic composition and strong regional political traditions. In its early years, the BJP focused primarily on issues related to illegal immigration, national security, and cultural nationalism. These themes

resonated with sections of Assamese society concerned about demographic changes and the implementation of the Assam Accord. However, the party struggled to expand its social base beyond limited urban and middle-class constituencies. Despite modest electoral performances, the BJP gradually built organizational networks throughout the state. Through sustained grassroots activities, cadre development, and local leadership cultivation, the party strengthened its presence in both urban and rural regions. The 2016 Assam Assembly Election marked a turning point in the state's political history. The BJP-led alliance secured a decisive victory, ending fifteen years of Congress rule and forming the first BJP government in Assam. The election demonstrated the party's ability to combine grassroots mobilization, strategic alliances, effective leadership, identity-based appeals, and development-oriented promises. The victory was not merely an electoral success but represented a broader transformation in Assam's political landscape. It signaled the emergence of the BJP as a dominant force in Northeast Indian politics and established a foundation for its subsequent expansion across the region. Following its victory in 2016, the BJP focused on consolidating its support base through governance initiatives, welfare programs, infrastructure development, and continued engagement with various ethnic communities. The party also expanded its organizational network and increasingly integrated digital communication strategies into its political outreach. By the time of the 2021 Assembly Election, the BJP had transformed from a challenger seeking political legitimacy into an incumbent party defending its governance record. Its ability to combine traditional grassroots campaigning with sophisticated digital outreach contributed significantly to its successful re-election. Thus, the rise of the BJP in Assam reflects a broader shift in the state's political dynamics, where identity politics, regional aspirations, organizational strength, leadership, and developmental narratives converged to reshape electoral competition. This transformation provides an essential backdrop for understanding the evolution of BJP's campaign techniques between the 2016 and 2021 Assembly Elections.

Digital Transformation in Indian Electoral Politics

The twenty-first century has witnessed a fundamental transformation in the nature of political communication across the world. Advances in information and communication technologies, the widespread adoption of smartphones, and the rapid expansion of internet connectivity have significantly altered the ways political parties interact with citizens, disseminate information, and mobilize electoral support. In India, this transformation has been particularly remarkable

due to the country's large population, expanding digital infrastructure, and increasing social media penetration. Electoral politics, once dominated by public rallies, print media, television advertisements, and door-to-door campaigning, has gradually evolved into a hybrid model where digital platforms play a central role in shaping political narratives and influencing voter behavior. The digital transformation of Indian electoral politics has redefined campaign strategies, voter engagement mechanisms, and political communication processes. Political parties now utilize social media platforms, mobile applications, online advertising, data analytics, and digital volunteer networks to communicate directly with voters. This transition represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary Indian democracy and has fundamentally changed the nature of election campaigning.

The origins of digital politics in India can be traced to the expansion of internet services during the early 2000s. However, digital campaigning remained limited due to low internet penetration and restricted access to smartphones. Political communication continued to rely primarily on traditional media channels such as newspapers, radio, television, and public meetings. A major shift occurred during the 2010s as internet access became increasingly affordable and widespread. The introduction of low-cost smartphones and the expansion of mobile broadband services enabled millions of Indians to access digital platforms. Social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp rapidly became important sources of information and communication. Political parties soon recognized the potential of these platforms to reach large audiences quickly and cost-effectively. Digital media provided opportunities for direct communication between political leaders and voters, reducing dependence on traditional media gatekeepers. The result was the emergence of a new era of digitally mediated political communication. Social media has become one of the most influential components of modern electoral campaigns. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms facilitate two-way communication, allowing political parties not only to disseminate information but also to engage directly with citizens. Platforms such as Facebook and Twitter allow political parties to communicate with voters in real time, while YouTube serves as a platform for long-form political content, campaign advertisements, and documentary-style storytelling. Instagram and other visual platforms have become particularly effective in engaging younger voters through images, short videos, and interactive content. Among all social media platforms, WhatsApp has emerged as a powerful political communication tool in India. Its extensive reach, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, enables rapid dissemination

of political messages through community groups, volunteer networks, and party organizations. Political parties extensively use WhatsApp for voter mobilization, information sharing, and campaign coordination. One of the defining characteristics of digital electoral politics is the increasing use of data analytics and voter profiling. Political campaigns now rely on large-scale data collection to understand voter preferences, demographic trends, regional concerns, and behavioral patterns.

Campaign Strategies of BJP in the Assam Assembly Election 2016

The 2016 Assam Assembly Election marked a significant turning point in the state's political history, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) successfully ended fifteen years of Congress rule and formed its first government in Assam. The party's victory was not solely the result of favorable political circumstances or anti-incumbency sentiments; rather, it was achieved through a carefully planned and multi-layered campaign strategy that effectively combined grassroots mobilization, extensive door-to-door canvassing, strong organizational networks, strategic alliances, and traditional methods of political communication. Unlike later elections where digital technologies assumed a more prominent role, the 2016 campaign remained heavily dependent on personal voter contact and physical political engagement. The BJP recognized that Assam's socio-political environment, characterized by ethnic diversity, rural populations, and localized political concerns, required a campaign model that emphasized direct interaction and community-level outreach. A central component of the BJP's campaign strategy was grassroots mobilization and door-to-door canvassing. The party invested substantial resources in building direct connections with voters at the village, ward, and constituency levels. Party workers systematically visited households across urban and rural constituencies, engaging voters in face-to-face conversations regarding local issues, governance concerns, and the party's vision for Assam. This personalized approach enabled the BJP to communicate its message more effectively than mass media alone could achieve. Door-to-door campaigning allowed party representatives to address voter grievances directly, explain policy proposals, and counter misinformation propagated by political opponents. Such interactions helped establish trust and credibility among voters, particularly in rural areas where personal relationships and community networks continue to influence electoral behavior. The BJP's campaign emphasized themes such as illegal immigration, protection of Assamese identity, economic development, employment generation, and improved governance. Through repeated interpersonal engagement, these issues were framed in ways that resonated with

diverse sections of the electorate. The slogan "Jati, Maati, Bheti" (Community, Land, and Hearth) became a powerful mobilizing tool, connecting voters' concerns about cultural identity and demographic change with the party's broader political agenda. The effectiveness of the BJP's grassroots outreach was reinforced by the crucial role played by party cadres and local organizational networks. The party's organizational structure was carefully designed to ensure systematic voter contact and efficient campaign management. Booth-level committees were established across constituencies to monitor electoral dynamics, coordinate campaign activities, and mobilize supporters. These committees served as the foundation of the BJP's election machinery, enabling the party to maintain continuous engagement with voters throughout the campaign period. Local party workers possessed valuable knowledge of constituency-specific issues, community dynamics, and voter preferences, which allowed campaign messages to be tailored according to local contexts. Furthermore, the BJP benefited significantly from the leadership and organizational capabilities of Himanta Biswa Sarma, whose shift from the Congress to the BJP strengthened the party's network across Assam. Sarma's influence helped attract local leaders, community representatives, and political workers who expanded the party's reach into previously inaccessible electoral segments. The BJP also effectively utilized its alliances with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), allowing it to access established regional networks and broaden its support base among Assamese nationalists, tribal communities, and regional voters. Through coordinated efforts between national leadership, state-level strategists, local cadres, and alliance partners, the BJP succeeded in creating a highly organized and responsive campaign structure. Traditional media and public rallies also played a pivotal role in shaping the BJP's campaign strategy during the 2016 election. While digital communication tools were beginning to gain importance, traditional forms of political communication remained highly influential in Assam, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. The BJP extensively utilized newspapers, television advertisements, radio broadcasts, posters, banners, and campaign literature to disseminate its messages. These media channels helped reinforce the narratives communicated through grassroots outreach and provided wider visibility to the party's electoral agenda. Public rallies emerged as one of the most visible aspects of the campaign, serving as platforms for demonstrating political strength, energizing supporters, and attracting media attention. Senior BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP President Amit Shah, and other national figures, addressed large gatherings across the state. These rallies emphasized issues such as development, corruption-free governance, national security, and the

protection of indigenous interests. The presence of prominent leaders enhanced the party's credibility and generated enthusiasm among voters. Public meetings also enabled the BJP to project itself as a viable alternative to the incumbent Congress government while showcasing the unity of its alliance partners. Traditional media coverage of these rallies further amplified their impact by extending campaign messages to audiences beyond those physically present at the events. The BJP's campaign strategy in the Assam Assembly Election of 2016 demonstrated the continuing significance of conventional political mobilization techniques in Indian electoral politics. Through extensive door-to-door canvassing, a well-organized network of party cadres, strategic use of local alliances, and effective deployment of traditional media and public rallies, the party successfully connected with diverse voter groups across the state. The campaign reflected a predominantly ground-based model of political communication, where personal interaction and organizational strength remained central to electoral success. This approach not only facilitated the BJP's historic victory in 2016 but also laid the organizational foundation for the party's later integration of digital technologies into its campaign strategies during subsequent elections, particularly the Assam Assembly Election of 2021.

BJP's Campaign Techniques in the Assam Assembly Election 2021

The Assam Assembly Election of 2021 represented a significant evolution in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral campaign strategy, reflecting broader transformations in Indian political communication. Unlike the 2016 election, where grassroots mobilization and traditional outreach methods dominated campaign activities, the 2021 election witnessed the integration of sophisticated digital technologies with conventional political engagement. The BJP entered the election as the incumbent party seeking a second consecutive term in office, and therefore its campaign strategy focused not only on mobilizing support but also on defending its governance record, highlighting developmental achievements, and reinforcing voter confidence. The campaign was conducted against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed restrictions on large public gatherings and accelerated the adoption of digital communication tools. Consequently, the BJP developed a hybrid campaign model that combined social media outreach, virtual political events, data-driven voter targeting, and traditional grassroots networks to maximize voter engagement across Assam's diverse demographic and geographical landscape. A major feature of the BJP's 2021 campaign was its extensive use of social media outreach and digital engagement. By 2021, internet penetration and smartphone usage had increased substantially across Assam, creating new opportunities

for political communication. The BJP strategically utilized platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp to disseminate campaign messages, promote government achievements, and engage directly with voters. Social media became a crucial mechanism for shaping public opinion and maintaining continuous interaction with citizens throughout the election period. The party regularly shared multimedia content including videos, infographics, speeches, testimonials, and policy highlights that emphasized its governance record over the previous five years. Welfare schemes, infrastructure projects, employment initiatives, healthcare improvements, and development programs were showcased through visually appealing and easily shareable content designed to reach a broad audience. Social media platforms also enabled the BJP to communicate with younger voters, who increasingly consume political information through digital channels. The party's online presence facilitated rapid dissemination of information, immediate responses to political controversies, and real-time engagement with supporters. WhatsApp groups, in particular, played a significant role in circulating campaign materials, coordinating volunteers, and strengthening communication between party workers and voters at the grassroots level. Through these digital initiatives, the BJP was able to extend its political outreach beyond conventional campaign spaces and establish a constant presence in voters' everyday digital interactions. The COVID-19 pandemic further encouraged the BJP to innovate its communication strategies through virtual rallies and online political communication. Restrictions on public gatherings limited the scale of traditional election meetings, compelling political parties to explore alternative methods of voter engagement. The BJP responded by organizing virtual rallies, live-streamed speeches, online conferences, and digital town hall interactions. Senior leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union ministers, and state-level leaders, addressed voters through online platforms that could be accessed from homes and community centers. These virtual events allowed the party to maintain campaign momentum while adhering to public health guidelines. Livestreaming technology enabled speeches and campaign events to reach audiences across multiple constituencies simultaneously, significantly expanding the geographical scope of political communication. Online platforms also facilitated interactive engagement through comments, questions, and digital feedback mechanisms, creating opportunities for greater voter participation. The BJP's digital communication teams produced professionally designed video content, short documentaries, and promotional campaigns highlighting the government's achievements and future commitments. These materials were widely distributed through social media networks, ensuring that campaign messages remained visible despite restrictions on

physical campaigning. The use of virtual communication demonstrated the party's adaptability and its ability to leverage technology to sustain political engagement under challenging circumstances.

Another defining feature of the BJP's 2021 campaign was its adoption of data-driven campaigning and targeted messaging. Advances in digital technology enabled the party to collect, analyze, and utilize voter data more effectively than in previous elections. Through sophisticated data analytics, the BJP identified demographic patterns, voter preferences, regional concerns, and constituency-specific issues, allowing campaign strategists to tailor messages to different segments of the electorate. Instead of relying solely on broad political appeals, the party employed micro-targeting techniques that delivered customized content to specific groups based on factors such as age, occupation, ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic background. For example, messages related to employment opportunities and entrepreneurship were directed toward younger voters, while welfare schemes and development projects were emphasized among rural populations. Targeted communication also enabled the party to address the concerns of various ethnic and regional communities within Assam, thereby strengthening its appeal across diverse voter groups. Social media analytics provided valuable insights into public sentiment, helping campaign managers assess the effectiveness of political messaging and make real-time adjustments. The BJP's information technology teams monitored online discussions, tracked engagement metrics, and identified emerging issues that required immediate attention. This data-driven approach enhanced campaign efficiency by ensuring that resources were allocated strategically and communication efforts were directed toward constituencies and voter segments with the greatest electoral significance. The BJP's campaign strategy in the Assam Assembly Election of 2021 thus reflected a sophisticated fusion of digital innovation and political organization. Social media outreach enabled continuous voter engagement, virtual rallies expanded the reach of political communication during the pandemic, and data-driven campaigning facilitated highly targeted voter interaction. These digital techniques complemented the party's existing grassroots network rather than replacing it, creating a hybrid campaign model that combined the strengths of both online and offline political mobilization. The successful implementation of these strategies contributed significantly to the BJP's electoral victory in 2021 and demonstrated the growing importance of digital technologies in contemporary Indian electoral politics. More importantly, the campaign illustrated how political parties are increasingly adapting to

changing communication environments by integrating technological innovation with traditional forms of voter outreach, thereby reshaping the nature of electioneering in India.

Digital vs Door-to-Door Campaigning: A Comparative Analysis

The evolution of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign strategies between the Assam Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021 reflects a broader transformation in political communication from predominantly traditional methods to a hybrid model integrating digital technologies with grassroots mobilization. While the 2016 election campaign relied heavily on door-to-door canvassing, local organizational networks, public rallies, and interpersonal voter interactions, the 2021 campaign demonstrated a significant shift toward digital outreach through social media platforms, virtual events, and data-driven communication strategies. Both approaches sought to influence voter behavior and maximize electoral support, yet they differed considerably in terms of reach, voter engagement, cost-effectiveness, resource mobilization, and their impact on rural and urban electorates. A comparative examination of these dimensions provides valuable insights into the changing nature of electoral campaigning in contemporary India and the strategic adaptation of political parties to technological advancements and evolving voter preferences.

One of the most significant distinctions between digital and door-to-door campaigning lies in their respective capacities for voter reach and engagement. Traditional door-to-door campaigning, which formed the backbone of the BJP's 2016 election strategy, emphasized direct interpersonal communication between party workers and voters. In contrast, the BJP's digital campaign strategy in 2021 significantly expanded the scope of voter communication. Through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, campaign messages could reach millions of voters simultaneously across multiple constituencies. Another critical area of comparison concerns the cost-effectiveness of campaign activities and the mobilization of organizational resources. Door-to-door campaigning requires substantial investments in manpower, logistics, transportation, campaign materials, and local coordination. The success of traditional campaigns depends heavily on a well-developed organizational structure capable of managing thousands of volunteers and party workers across constituencies. In the Assam Assembly Election of 2016, the BJP relied

extensively on its booth-level committees, grassroots cadres, and alliance partners to conduct voter outreach. While this approach generated strong local engagement, it demanded significant financial and organizational resources. The BJP's 2021 campaign effectively utilized digital tools to reduce communication costs while increasing outreach capacity. Furthermore, digital technologies facilitated more efficient resource allocation through data analytics and real-time performance monitoring. Campaign managers could identify priority constituencies, assess voter responses, and adjust strategies based on measurable outcomes. Online volunteer networks and digital coordination mechanisms also streamlined campaign management by enabling rapid communication among party workers. Nevertheless, digital campaigning requires investments in technological infrastructure, content creation, information technology teams, and data analysis capabilities. Therefore, while digital methods may reduce certain operational costs, they also necessitate specialized expertise and technological resources. The BJP's success in 2021 stemmed from its ability to combine its strong organizational foundation with advanced digital capabilities, creating a highly efficient and adaptive campaign structure. During the 2016 election, the BJP's extensive grassroots outreach proved particularly effective in rural areas where voters often relied on interpersonal communication and local political networks for electoral information. The BJP's 2021 campaign capitalized on these trends by employing targeted digital messaging, online advertisements, and social media engagement strategies aimed at urban and younger voters. However, the expansion of affordable internet services and smartphone ownership between 2016 and 2021 also increased the relevance of digital campaigning in rural areas. Applications such as WhatsApp became widely used across villages and small towns, enabling political content to circulate beyond traditional urban centers.

The comparison between digital and door-to-door campaigning in the Assam Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021 demonstrates that each approach possesses distinct strengths and limitations. Door-to-door campaigning excels in fostering personal relationships, building trust, and addressing localized concerns, making it particularly effective in rural and community-oriented settings. Digital campaigning, on the other hand, offers unparalleled reach, speed, scalability, and cost efficiency, enabling political parties to engage large audiences and deliver targeted messages with remarkable precision. Rather than replacing traditional methods, digital technologies have increasingly complemented and enhanced existing campaign structures. The BJP's electoral success in Assam illustrates the strategic

advantages of integrating digital innovation with grassroots mobilization. The transition from a predominantly ground-based campaign in 2016 to a hybrid model in 2021 reflects broader changes in Indian electoral politics, where technological advancement and traditional political engagement coexist to shape contemporary voter outreach and electoral competition.

Findings

The findings indicate that the 2016 campaign was highly dependent on interpersonal communication and the extensive involvement of party cadres and local leaders. The BJP's alliance with regional political actors, coupled with its grassroots organizational strength, allowed it to penetrate diverse social and ethnic groups across Assam. Door-to-door campaigning proved particularly effective in rural areas, where personal interaction and community relationships continued to exert a strong influence on electoral behavior. The party's ability to localize campaign messages and maintain continuous voter contact contributed significantly to its historic victory and the end of fifteen years of Congress rule in the state. A second major finding is the rapid expansion of digital campaigning between 2016 and 2021. The growth of internet connectivity, smartphone penetration, and social media usage created new opportunities for political communication. By the 2021 Assembly Election, the BJP had successfully incorporated digital technologies into its campaign strategy. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp became essential tools for disseminating political messages, promoting government achievements, and engaging with voters. The party utilized multimedia content, online advertisements, and digital communication networks to maintain a constant presence in the public sphere. The study further finds that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital campaign techniques. Restrictions on public gatherings encouraged the BJP to organize virtual rallies, online meetings, and live-streamed political events. These innovations enabled the party to sustain voter engagement despite limitations on traditional campaign activities. Digital platforms also facilitated real-time communication and allowed campaign messages to reach wider audiences than would have been possible through conventional methods alone. Another important finding concerns the increasing role of data-driven campaigning and targeted political communication. The BJP's 2021 campaign demonstrated a more sophisticated use of voter data, demographic analysis, and social media metrics to design customized messages for different voter groups. Digital tools enabled the party to identify constituency-specific concerns, monitor public

sentiment, and allocate campaign resources more efficiently. This represented a notable departure from the broader, less targeted communication strategies employed during the 2016 election. The comparative analysis also reveals that digital and door-to-door campaigning serve complementary rather than competing functions. While digital platforms significantly increased the reach, speed, and efficiency of political communication, they did not entirely replace traditional methods of voter engagement. Face-to-face interactions continued to play a crucial role in building trust, especially among rural voters and communities where personal relationships remain important in political decision-making. The BJP's success in 2021 was largely attributable to its ability to integrate digital outreach with its existing grassroots organizational structure. The findings additionally suggest that the effectiveness of campaign techniques varied across demographic and geographical contexts. Urban and younger voters were more responsive to digital communication and social media engagement, whereas rural electorates continued to value direct contact with party representatives. Consequently, a hybrid campaign model proved more effective than reliance on either traditional or digital methods alone.

Conclusion

The evolution of the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign techniques in the Assam Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021 reflects broader transformations occurring within Indian electoral politics. The study demonstrates that political campaigning has gradually shifted from a predominantly traditional model based on door-to-door canvassing, public meetings, and grassroots mobilization to a more technologically integrated approach that combines digital communication with conventional outreach methods. The BJP's 2016 electoral success was largely rooted in its strong organizational network, strategic alliances, effective leadership, and extensive grassroots engagement. Personal interactions, localized campaigning, and direct voter contact played a decisive role in helping the party establish political credibility and expand its support base in Assam. However, by the 2021 election, the political communication environment had changed considerably due to advancements in digital technology, increased internet accessibility, and the widespread adoption of social media platforms. The BJP effectively adapted to these changing conditions by incorporating digital tools into its campaign strategy. Social media outreach, virtual rallies, online political communication, and data-driven targeting enhanced the party's ability to engage voters, disseminate information, and respond to emerging political issues. The COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced the importance of

digital communication by making virtual campaigning a necessity rather than a supplementary option. The Assam Assembly Elections of 2016 and 2021 illustrate the emergence of a hybrid model of political campaigning in which digital innovation complements rather than substitutes grassroots engagement. This hybridization has enabled political parties to expand their reach while maintaining meaningful connections with voters. The BJP's experience in Assam demonstrates how successful electoral campaigns increasingly depend on the ability to combine technological sophistication with strong organizational structures and localized political engagement. In conclusion, the transition from door-to-door campaigning to digitally enhanced political communication represents a significant development in contemporary Indian democracy. The BJP's evolving campaign techniques in Assam provide valuable insights into the future of electoral politics, where the convergence of technology and traditional political mobilization is likely to define the strategies of political parties and reshape voter engagement in the years ahead.

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