



THE RISE OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY (BJP) AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

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Introduction:

The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Karbi Anglong represents a significant transformation in the contemporary political history of the district. Traditionally, the politics of Karbi Anglong was shaped by ethnic identity, regional aspirations, demands for autonomy, and the protection of indigenous land, culture, and political rights. Regional political organisations, along with the Indian National Congress, played important roles in shaping the political developments of the district during different historical periods.

The emergence and consolidation of the BJP introduced a new phase in Karbi Anglong politics. The party gradually expanded its political and organisational base by combining its broader national influence with local concerns relating to development, infrastructure, peace, welfare, and political stability. The weakening and fragmentation of regional and opposition parties, changes in political leadership, and shifting political alliances also created favourable conditions for the BJP's growth. The entry of influential local leaders and political groups into the party further strengthened its position in the district.

The rise of the BJP cannot be understood solely as an electoral phenomenon. It reflects broader changes in the nature of regional and ethnic politics in Karbi Anglong and the increasing influence of national political parties in the hill areas of Assam. Although issues relating to autonomy, identity, land rights, and political representation continue to remain important, electoral politics has increasingly incorporated concerns relating to development, governance, employment, welfare, and peace.

The growing dominance of the BJP has significantly altered the pattern of political competition in Karbi Anglong. The political space that was once strongly influenced by regional parties and autonomy-based movements has increasingly come under the influence of a national political party. However, this transformation does not imply the disappearance of regional aspirations. Rather, many of the issues historically associated with the autonomy movement continue to shape political discourse in new forms.

Therefore, the study of the BJP's rise in Karbi Anglong is important for understanding the changing nature of party politics, regionalism, ethnic mobilisation, and democratic representation in the district. It provides an opportunity to examine how leadership, political realignments, organisational expansion, development-oriented politics, and changing electoral preferences contributed to the emergence of the BJP as a dominant political force in Karbi Anglong.

By and large, the rise of the BJP in Karbi Anglong constitutes an important example of the changing nature of political mobilisation and party competition in Northeast India. It demonstrates how the weakening of traditional regional political formations, combined with organisational consolidation, developmental politics, strategic leadership and changing popular expectations, can facilitate the expansion of a national political party into a region historically characterised by strong ethnic and regional political movements. At the same time, the experience of Karbi Anglong shows that electoral dominance must continuously engage with questions of identity, autonomy, representation, development and social justice. The future political trajectory of the district will consequently depend not only on the strength of political organisations but also on their ability to reconcile the aspirations for development and political stability with the enduring demands for ethnic identity, constitutional protection and meaningful autonomy.



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Keywords: BJP, Karbi Anglong, autonomy, movement, Article 244(A), Sixth Schedule, KAAC, tribal politics, development, electoral politics, Assam.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the political, social and economic factors contributing to the rise of the BJP in Karbi Anglong.
- To examine the decline and changing influence of regional and opposition forces, particularly the ASDC, INC, CPI(M) and other political formations.
- To examine how a national political party has accommodated local ethnic, linguistic, cultural and political aspirations.
- To examine what BJP dominance signifies for tribal politics, autonomy and Centre–State relations in Northeast India.
- To examine the relationship between BJP politics and the continuing demand associated with Article 244A.
- To identify the major challenges and future prospects of BJP political dominance in Karbi Anglong.

Methodology

The present study adopts a mixed-method research design, follows both qualitative and quantitative research approaches to examine the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and transformation of Karbi Anglong Autonomy Movement in Karbi Anglong district, Assam. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods enables the study both the perception of the people with their political experiences and broader political trends and electoral associated with the emergence of the BJP in Karbi Anglong.

Purposive sampling is used to select key informants for the selection of respondents possessing knowledge and experience of political developments and autonomy movements in Karbi Anglong. These include political leaders, party workers, communality leaders, civil society representatives, individuals who substantial or direct involvement in the autonomy movement. In addition, stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation of Karbis, other communities residing in the district. The approach helped captured diverse political perception and experience of the respondents.

Primary data collection collected through field visits to selected areas of Karbi Anglong, during the fieldwork, interview and focus group discussion were conducted with the selected respondents. The interview was conducted local languages, Hindi and English languages deepening on the convenience of the respondents, translator were provide when necessary to facilitates communication for ensuring the understanding of the responses to collect accurate data.

The primary sources of data include interviews mainly of semi- structures interviews with political leaders, part workers, members of civil society organisations, and local community leaders. Focus on group discussions were conduct with selected youth, women and village headmen to understand political perceptions and voting behavior. Its help qualitative interaction provided insights into changing nature of Karbi Anglong Autonomy Movement and their factors contributing to the growing influences of the BJP in the district of Karbi Anglong.

Secondary data also makes extensive of use of secondary sources to supplement and contextualize the primary data. These includes election commission reports and electoral statistics, government publication and policy documents, books, journal articles, dissertations and research reports, news archives and online news portal, party manifesto and official statement and notification. Electoral data were useful for examining changes in voting patterns and the electoral performance of the BJP over different election periods. The qualitative data obtained through interviews and discussions were analysed thematically by identifying recurring themes perceptions, experiences and explanations relating to the transformation of the autonomy movement and the rise of the BJP qualitative data particularly electoral statistics were analysed comparatively to identify trends in voting behavior, electoral support and the changing political landscape of Karbi Anglong. The findings from both sets of data were subsequently compared and interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the rise of the BJP and the transformation of the Karbi Anglong autonomy movement.



Historical Background: Autonomy and Political Competition

The institutional history of autonomous governance in Karbi Anglong predates the present KAAC. The Mikir Hills District Council was constituted in 1951, and the district council subsequently operated under the Sixth Schedule framework. The constitutional and administrative structure was later strengthened through amendments and agreements, including the 1995 arrangements that contributed to the reconstitution of the council as the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

Yet institutional autonomy did not end the wider political demand for self-government. Regional political organisations mobilised around the argument that the existing autonomous council did not adequately satisfy aspirations for political and economic self-determination. The ASDC became especially influential during the late 1980s and 1990s and associated itself with the demand for an autonomous state under Article 244A. The regionalization of politics therefore reflected both a desire for protection of indigenous interests and dissatisfaction with the limitations of existing institutions.

Congress remained a major political force for long periods. Its strength rested on an extensive organizational network, relationships with local elites and its position within state and national government. However, regional political mobilisation and Congress politics were repeatedly affected by factionalism, leadership competition, and dissatisfaction over governance and the unresolved autonomy question. These conditions created opportunities for political realignment.

Decline and transformation of regional and opposition politics in Karbi Anglong:

The political landscape of Karbi Anglong has undergone a significant transformation with the gradual decline of regional and opposition forces, particularly the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) political forces around the demand for greater autonomy, played a major role in mobilizing popular support around issues of self governance, indigenous rights and regional development. However, its influence gradually weakened due to organizational fragmentation, leadership differences, electoral competition and the changing alignment of local political actors. Thus, the emergence of alternative political platforms and the increasing electoral strength of national parties further reduced the ASDC's ability to retain its earlier political dominance.

The Indian National Congress (INC), historically an important political party in Karbi Anglong, also experienced a decline in its organizational and electoral influence as political preferences and alliances changed. Its inability to maintain a sustained regional political base, combined with the growing appeal of competing parties, contributed to the erosion of its earlier position

Similarly, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation CPI (ML) and other smaller left and opposition formations remained relatively limited in their electoral reach, although they contributed to political debated concerning land, class, indigenous rights, inequality and democratic participation.

The decline of regional and opposition forces in Karbi Anglong does not signify their complete political disappearance but rather a reconfiguration of their influence. Issues such as autonomy, indigenous land rights, cultural identity, representation and development continues to shape political discourse.

The BJP's emergence in the political landscape of Karbi Anglong district:

The BJP's expansion became possible within a broader context of political dissatisfaction and changing voter expectations. The autonomy movement had generated substantial political consciousness, but successive agreements and institutional reforms did not completely resolve the demand for greater self-government. The BJP benefited from this convergence of expectations. Its national and state governments could present themselves as capable of coordinating resources across levels of government. This enabled the party to frame development, connectivity, public services, welfare and political stability as complementary to rather than necessarily opposed to local aspirations.



An important feature of the BJP's strategy was the incorporation of local political leadership. The movement from regional or Congress-linked political networks toward the BJP allowed the party to inherit existing social and organizational connections rather than build an entirely new political structure. The political prominence of Dr. Tuliram Ronghang became particularly important in this process, as his leadership linked the autonomous council with the BJP's state and national political networks.

Major Factors behind the BJP's Rise

• Development-Oriented Politics

Development became an important component of the BJP's political appeal. Roads, connectivity, educational institutions, health infrastructure, electrification and welfare programmes were presented as visible indicators of governmental performance. The political significance of such initiatives lies not merely in their material effects but also in the way they altered the relationship between voters and government. Development could be interpreted as evidence that participation in mainstream national politics could generate tangible benefits.

• Welfare Politics

Central and state welfare schemes contributed to the BJP's political consolidation by creating direct relationships between government programmes and beneficiaries. Programmes such as housing assistance, food support and income-support measures became part of a wider politics of welfare delivery. The importance of these schemes should not be interpreted as proof that voters were motivated by a single factor; rather, welfare reinforced broader perceptions of governmental accessibility and performance.

• Peace Agreements and the Decline of Armed Mobilisation

Peace-building was another important dimension of the BJP's political narrative. The 2021 Karbi Anglong Agreement involved the Government of India, the Government of Assam and representatives of several Karbi armed organisations. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, more than 1,000 armed cadres renounced violence and the agreement included a special development package of Rs. 1,000 crore over five years.⁵ The agreement also envisaged strengthening the autonomy of the KAAC while maintaining Assam's territorial and administrative integrity.⁶

These developments helped the BJP and its governments present themselves as facilitators of peace, rehabilitation and development. At the same time, the political meaning of the agreement must be distinguished from the broader Article 244A demand: a peace agreement and development package do not automatically amount to the creation of an autonomous state.

• Cross-Community Political Coalition

Karbi Anglong is socially diverse, with Karbis forming a major indigenous community alongside other tribal and non-tribal populations. The BJP's electoral strategy has sought to combine appeals concerning indigenous identity and constitutional protections with a broader promise of political representation and development. Such coalition-building is significant because a successful national party in a heterogeneous tribal region must negotiate multiple, sometimes competing, identities rather than rely upon a single ethnic constituency.

• Electoral Consolidation of the BJP

The electoral record provides a clear indication of the scale of political transformation. In 2017, the BJP won 24 of the 26 elected KAAC seats, while the Congress failed to win a seat.² In 2022, the BJP won all 26 elected KAAC seats, confirming the consolidation of its control over the autonomous council.³

The 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly election further demonstrated the party's strength in the region. Election Commission of India results show BJP victories in Bokajan, Howraghat, Diphu, Rongkhang and Amri.⁴ This five-seat sweep



is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the BJP's dominance is not confined to the autonomous council but extends across the principal Assembly constituencies of the Karbi Anglong region.

ELECTORAL BREAKDOWN: A DECADE OF DOMINATION

The rapid shift in power is visible in the region's local and state election data:

ELECTION YEAR	GOVERNING BODY/PLATFORM	BJP PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT
2015 & Prior	KAAC/Assembly Seats	Marginal presence; Congress and regional factions held structural control.
2017	KAAC Elections	BJP won 24 out of 26 seats, completely decimating Congress and the ASDC.
2021	Assam Assembly Elections	Hills Consolidation: Assembly segments across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong District.
2022	KAAC Elections	Absolute Hegemony: BJP completed a historic clean sweep, winning all 26 elected seats.
2026	Assam Assembly Elections	Total Retention: The party repeated its landslide victory, maintaining maximum margins across all hill constituencies.

In the Karbi Anglong District, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) currently navigates a complex landscape defined by the paradox of its electoral dominance and persistent local socio-political tensions. While the BJP holds significant power through the Karbi Anglong Autonomous council (KAAC) episodes of instability and matters to look after at some under highlighting points:

- **The unresolved Statehood question article 244(A):** Peace accord has brought incremental economic development packages, but they have failed to address the ultimate political demand of the region that is autonomous state. The movement for a separate state under article 244(A) of the constitution remains a deeply rooted aspiration. Educated Karbi elites and student bodies argue that a financial package cannot replace genuine legislative self-determination. Some organisations continue to demand stronger constitutional safeguard and greater autonomy under Article 244(A).¹
- **Governance and Development Gaps:** Despite improvement in roads, education and infrastructure, many remote areas still face challenges related to healthcare, employment opportunities, connectivity, and quality public service. Meeting development expectation remains a key task.
- **Law and Social Order:** Violent Clashes in late 2025 led to deaths, injuries, arson, internet shutdowns, and deployment of additional security forces. The unrest exposed weaknesses in conflict management and governance, creating pressure on the BJP administration to restore public confidence.²
- **Ethnic Polarisation and Demographics:** in Karbi Anglong District, though the dominant tribe is Karbi but it is a mosaic of Karbis, Dimasas, Kukis, Garos, Bodos and non-tribal populations. The biggest challenge is the growing concern among Karbi communities regarding alleged encroachment of tribal lands by non-tribal settlers. The land and eviction drives have inadvertently fuelled ethnic polarization. Outbreaks of provocative, exclusionary rhetoric between tribal and non-tribal elements have created an atmosphere of mutual mistrust.³ Recent unrest (notably in the late 2025) highlighted a fragile balance between indigenous demands and the broader demographic mix of the district. The party

¹ "Extremist Group DNL becomes active in Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong; Security alert ahead of Assam Poll" Published in India Today NE, Feb 22/2026. 2:13 pm IST.

² "Army remains deployed, mobile net ban continues in West Karbi Anglong", Published in THE TIMES OF INDIA, Mukut Das/TNN/ Dec 25, 2025, 23:54 IST.

³ "Unrest in West Karbi Anglong" published in Peoples Democracy, January 4, 2026



faces the challenges of managing “insider-outsider” narratives, where opposition and civil society groups occasionally accuse the administration of fostering ethnic divisions of favouring certain communities over others to consolidate its vote bank.

- **The protection of indigenous land rights:** the protection of indigenous land rights, particularly in relation to Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) and village Grazing Reserve (VGR) lands, remained a significant and contentious issue in Karbi Anglong. The political challenges for the BJP lies in reconciling its emphasis on economic development, infrastructure expansion, and investment-oriented projects with the deep seated concerns of the local population regarding the protection of ancestral land, traditional resource rights, and community interests. The tension between developmental priorities and the preservation of indigenous land rights has consequently remained an important issue in the political discourse of Karbi Anglong.
- **Accountability for the KAAC:** The administration under Chief Executive Members (CEM) Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, while electorally successful, has faced intense criticism regarding transparency. Allegations of corruption and the perceived accumulation of wealth by political figure provided ammunition for opposition parties to frame the current leadership as disconnected from grass root needs.⁴
- **Land Encroachment and Indigenous Rights:** The biggest challenge is the growing concern among Karbi communities regarding alleged encroachment on tribal lands by non-tribal settlers. Many local organisations argue that the constitutional protections under the Sixth Schedule are not being effectively enforced. Recent protests and unrest in West Karbi Anglong were largely linked to these concerns.⁵

While the BJP has successfully balanced development and identity politics, demands for greater autonomy and protection of tribal rights remain important. Any perception that tribal interests are being neglected could create opportunities for regional parties to regain support.

• Transformation of the Autonomy Movement

The BJP’s rise has not brought the autonomy question to an end rather, it has changed the political context in which the question is articulated. During the height of regional mobilisation, autonomy was often expressed through agitation, regional parties and demands for an autonomous state. Under BJP dominance, many of the same concerns have increasingly been negotiated through elections, government institutions, peace agreements, development programs and constitutional mechanisms.

This transformation can be understood as a movement from predominantly oppositional autonomy politics towards negotiated autonomy politics. The distinction is important. The demand for political self-government remains relevant, but political actors increasingly pursue it through institutional bargaining with the state and Union governments.

Article 244A remains central to this discussion because it provides the constitutional mechanism for Parliament to create an autonomous state within Assam.¹ The continued reference to Article 244A therefore indicates that the autonomy question retains a constitutional and political dimension that cannot be reduced to development expenditure or administrative devolution.

Challenges to BJP Dominance

• The Unresolved Autonomy Question

The most important long-term challenge is the continuing gap between the demand for an autonomous state and the reforms achieved through the Sixth Schedule, peace agreements and administrative devolution. Developmental packages can

⁴ The following statement has been issued by CPI(M) Assam State Committee on December 24, 2025, on the violence in West Karbi Anglong District of Assam, “Unrest in West Karbi Anglong”, Published in Peoples Democracy, January 04, 2026.

⁵ “Land, Law, and the Challenges of Governance in Karbi Anglong”, by Dipak Lurmi Published in The Meghalayan Express, December 27, 2025.



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improve material conditions, but they do not by themselves resolve questions concerning the constitutional status and political structure of self-government.

- **Land and Indigenous Rights**

Land remains a sensitive political issue. Concerns regarding protection of tribal land, encroachment, settlement and the management of reserved or community lands can quickly acquire an ethnic dimension. Any government seeking long-term legitimacy must therefore combine development with credible protection of constitutional safeguards and transparent land governance.

- **Governance and Accountability**

Electoral dominance does not eliminate the need for institutional accountability. The effectiveness of the KAAC depends on the quality of administration, transparency, implementation of development programmes and responsiveness to local communities. If perceptions of corruption, favouritism or exclusion become widespread, they can generate political space for regional or opposition forces.

- **Employment and Youth Aspirations**

Young people increasingly evaluate politics in terms of education, employment, entrepreneurship, digital connectivity and opportunities for upward mobility. A political organisation that relies primarily on electoral success without responding to these aspirations may eventually face dissatisfaction even when its organisational structure remains strong.

- **Ethnic and Inter-Community Relations**

The region's social diversity creates both an opportunity and a challenge. A durable political coalition requires balancing indigenous protections with equal political citizenship and peaceful relations among communities. Any perception that development, land policy or political representation systematically favors one group over another may intensify ethnic polarization.

Discussion

The emergence of the BJP as a dominant political force in Karbi Anglong district can be attributed to the interaction between significant structural developments and effective political strategies. Structurally, the decline of older regional organizations and dissatisfaction with established political arrangements created an electoral opening and strategically, the BJP exploited that opening through local leadership, organizational expansion, development politics, welfare delivery and peace initiatives.

The study further indicates that political dominance should not be regarded as an irreversible condition. The BJP's future position in Karbi Anglong will depend substantially on its ability to address the changing expectations of the population. Issues such as employment, livelihood security, economic opportunities, land-related concerns, environmental protection, youth aspirations, ethnic representation, administrative effectiveness and the implementation of commitments arising from peace agreements are likely to influence future political behavior. In particular, the ability to combine development-oriented governance with sensitivity towards the ethnic, cultural and constitutional concerns of the local population will remain crucial to maintaining political legitimacy and public support.

The transformation also illustrates an important feature of contemporary Northeast Indian politics: national parties can become successful in regions historically characterised by strong sub-national identities when they demonstrate institutional flexibility and recruit credible local leadership. The BJP's experience in Karbi Anglong shows that nationalisation of politics does not necessarily mean the disappearance of regional identity. Instead, regional identity may be incorporated into a broader political coalition.



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The study further demonstrates that the BJP's political expansion was closely associated with its ability to combine national political narratives with local aspirations and concerns. Under the leadership of Dr. Tuliram Ronghang and other local political actors, the party strengthened its grassroots organisational network and established itself beyond its earlier position as a peripheral political force in the hill districts. Developmental politics became an important component of this transformation. Emphasis on roads, infrastructure, education, welfare programmes, connectivity and other development initiatives contributed to the party's appeal among different sections of the population. At the same time, the BJP's association with peace-building initiatives and the implementation of provisions emerging from peace agreements helped the party project an image of political stability and development.

Conclusion:

The emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a major political force in Karbi Anglong reflects a substantial change in the political configuration of the district. The findings of the present study indicate that this transformation cannot be explained by the influence of any single political or social factor. Instead, the BJP's growing political presence has resulted from the interaction of several factors, including the weakening of established regional political organisations, expansion of the party's grassroots network, effective local leadership, political alliances, emphasis on development and welfare, peace-building measures, and the increasing integration of local politics with the wider political framework of the state and national BJP leadership.

Thus, the political transformation witnessed in Karbi Anglong cannot be reduced to a conventional transfer of electoral support from one political party to another. It represents a broader restructuring of the relationship between ethnic identity, autonomy politics, developmental expectations and national party politics. The BJP has succeeded in adapting its wider political framework to the specific socio-political circumstances of Karbi Anglong. Through organisational consolidation, local leadership, development-oriented programmes and engagement with the changing political aspirations of the population, the party has transformed itself from a relatively marginal political actor into a central force in the district's political system.

Overall, the rise of the BJP in Karbi Anglong constitutes an important example of the changing nature of political mobilization and party competition in Northeast India. It demonstrates how the weakening of traditional regional political formations, combined with organizational consolidation, developmental politics, strategic leadership and changing popular expectations, can facilitate the expansion of a national political party into a region historically characterized by strong ethnic and regional political movements. At the same time, the experience of Karbi Anglong shows that electoral dominance must continuously engage with questions of identity, autonomy, representation, development and social justice. The future political trajectory of the district will consequently depend not only on the strength of political organizations but also on their ability to reconcile the aspirations for development and political stability with the enduring demands for ethnic identity, constitutional protection and meaningful autonomy.

Footnotes:

1. Constitution of India, Article 244A, which authorizes Parliament to form an autonomous State within Assam comprising specified tribal areas and to create a legislature, a Council of Ministers, or both. See Government of India, Constitution of India, Part X.
2. Times of India, "BJP sweeps Karbi Anglong council polls," 25 June 2017. The report records that the BJP won 24 of 26 KAAC seats.
3. Times of India, "Assam: BJP clean sweeps Karbi Anglong council election; Congress nil for second time," 12 June 2022. The report records that the BJP won all 26 KAAC seats.



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4. Election Commission of India, General Election to Assembly Constituencies, Assam, May 2026. Official constituency results record BJP victories in Bokajan, Howraghat, Diphu, Rongkhang and Amri.
5. Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, “Karbi Agreement – another milestone in PM’s vision of ‘Insurgency free prosperous North East’,” 4 September 2021. The release records that more than 1,000 armed cadres renounced violence and that a Rs. 1,000-crore special development package was announced.
6. Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, “Karbi Agreement – another milestone...” 4 September 2021. The official summary states that the agreement sought to transfer as much autonomy as possible to the KAAC while preserving Assam’s territorial and administrative integrity.

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