

Democratic Participatory Orientation in Nagaland Amidst Insurgency: An Overview

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Abstract

The notion of democracy is widely used and debated in social science. The literature on democratization is complicated by disagreements over its definition, measurement, and various approaches. The study of democracies usually focuses on their democratic institutions and structures. Institutions and structures within society are essential for democratic survival and development. However, the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientation that people have to the political process – upon the political culture. Public support for democracy is a complex orientation to measure; it is a powerful indicator of a society's level of democracy. These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. Citizen Participatory orientation is at the heart of democracy; indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process. In Nagaland the situation is quite different because of the fact that Naga insurgent groups demand postponement of elections, boycotting of the polls, solution-not-election, and issuing threats. All these negate the values and principles of democratic participation. The study becomes a matter of interest in a state that has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people's right to self-determination. Despite the complex interplay of insurgency, identity politics and traditional social practices in Nagaland, there remains a notable paucity of scholarly research examining democratic participatory orientations in this unique context. This gap in literature limits our understanding of how democratic ideals are negotiated, adapted, or challenged amidst ongoing conflict and deeply rooted customary structures. By addressing this underexplored area, this paper aims to provide valuable insights for scholars, policy makers, and practitioners seeking to understand the nuanced dynamics of participatory democracy in conflict-affected, culturally distinct regions like Nagaland.

Keywords: Democracy, concept, models, citizen, orientation, insurgency, values, principles, Nagaland

Introduction

and contested concepts in social science". (Baviskar, Siddhartha, & "Democracy is one of the most used

Malone, p. 4, 2004)

“Indeed, one of the complications of the democratisation literature is the disagreement on the definition and measurement of this concept and the debate on the different models” (Dalton & Shin, p. 3, 2003). When examining democratic orientation, it is crucial to first grasp the fundamental principles of democracy and identify the specific democratic model being implemented. Another important aspect is that public support for democracy is a complex orientation to measure; it is a powerful indicator of a society’s level of democracy. These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. Citizen participation lies at the core of democracy; in fact, democratic governance loses its essence if individuals lack the freedom to engage in political processes. In Nagaland the situation is quite different because of the fact that Naga insurgent groups who demand postponement of elections, boycott of the polls, solution-not-election, and issue threats. All these negate the values and principles of democratic participation. The study becomes a matter of interest in a state that has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people’s right

to self-determination and constitutional special provisions protecting the social practices of the Naga people.

This paper tries to define democracy as it is practised among popular democratic countries and identify different models of democracy and the concept of democratic orientation with an in-depth literature review. The study will focus on a core dimensions; participatory orientation amidst insurgency. It would be an interest to examine how deeply democracy has taken root among the people and also examine the extent to which people emphasize an attitude of support or rejection for democratic principles and values.

Defining Democracy

There is widespread disagreement on the definition and measurement of concept of democracy, in spite, various definitions and understandings are to be found in the discourses that for centuries, from Aristotle until today, have dealt with the subject (Lauth, Hans-Joachim, & Schlenkrich, 2020).

Joseph Schumpeter characterizes democracy as being fundamentally rooted in an institutionalized system designed to facilitate political decision-making, whereby individuals attain governing

authority through a process of vigorous competition aimed at securing electoral support from the citizenry (1942). Building upon earlier democratic theories, Dahl subsequently identified eight institutional prerequisites for democracy: (1) universal adult franchise, (2) eligibility of all citizens for public office, (3) unimpeded political competition among office-seekers, (4) regularly conducted elections meeting international standards of fairness, (5) constitutional protections for political organization, (6) legal safeguards for free speech, (7) pluralistic media environment, and (8) government structures responsive to electoral outcomes and citizen preferences (Dahl & Robert A, 1971). The conceptualization of democracy remains contested in political theory. Gordon Graham observes the term's popular appropriation as a synonym for ideal governance, noting its evolution into "the most desirable form of government" in public discourse—a normative rather than descriptive designation (Graham, p. 91, 1992). This colloquial understanding contrasts with procedural definitions advanced by scholars like Michael Saward who operationalizes democracy as "responsive rule" predicated on institutional mechanisms including free/fair elections and universal

suffrage rights (Saward, p. 468, 1996). Saward's framework emphasizes the structural prerequisites for governmental accountability, positioning electoral processes as essential transmission belts between public will and policy outcomes (1996).

Milbrath's participatory democratic theory posits that genuine popular sovereignty – governance of, by, and for the people – fundamentally requires an engaged and politically active citizenry. His argument rests on the normative democratic principle that collective decision-making produces superior outcomes to elite-driven processes. When political participation becomes restricted to certain segments of society, Milbrath warns, policymaking inevitably skews toward serving the interests of the politically active at the expense of marginalized non-participants (Milbrath & Lester, 1965). Milbrath's participatory theory makes two interrelated claims about democratic governance: first, that the classical ideal of popular rule remains unattainable without sustained citizen involvement in political processes. Second, that restricted participation generates representational distortions, as policy decisions made by active subgroups cannot adequately

incorporate the interests of politically disengaged citizens. This analysis suggests that unequal participation patterns inherently produce unequal policy outcomes (Milbrath & Lester, 1965).

While acknowledging the conceptual challenges in formulating an exhaustive definition of democracy, Sorabjee maintains that democratic systems can be empirically identified through their operational characteristics. His analysis particularly emphasizes institutionalized electoral processes – characterized by regularity, fairness, and freedom – as the primary diagnostic features of democratic governance. At the core of this framework lies the principle of unfettered suffrage, where citizens exercise voting rights without coercion or intimidation (Sorabjee, 2006).

Heyne demonstrates that citizens' normative conceptions of democracy are not formed in a vacuum, but rather emerge through direct engagement with their political system's institutions. The author identifies two key formative mechanisms: (1) the gradual internalization of regime-specific democratic norms through political socialization, and (2) the experiential learning that occurs

through active participation in democratic processes. Together, these factors condition popular expectations regarding democratic governance (Heyne & Lea, 2016). A democracy that is ineffective in ensuring equal voice may also generate discontent in the populace, which can erode the social contract that democracy is based upon. Research suggests that participation and democratic rights are strongly related (Welzel, 2014). Even more striking, other research demonstrates that the quality of democratic governance is positively related to the level of citizen participation and the equality of participation by social status (Dalton, 2017).

Models of Democracy

Contemporary democratic systems exhibit significant variation in their institutional architectures. Among the most influential analytical frameworks is Lijphart's paradigmatic distinction between majoritarian and consensus models of democracy, systematically developed in his landmark study "Patterns of Democracy." This typology has generated substantial scholarly discourse regarding the relative merits and consequences of these competing democratic formulations (Lijphart, 2012). Some other distinct models like participatory versus spectator or

active versus passive democracy are identified (Andersen, Goul, & Torpe, 2000). Each of these models has its own proponents and opponents. No conclusive empirical evidence, however, has shown the consistent outperformance of one particular model by another.

Lijphart examined the relation between “structure” and “performance” of democracy and concluded that the consensus model is a “kinder and gentler” model of democracy. He argues that in a fragmented society, the majoritarian model of democracy is conflict-prone and hence the consensual model should be practiced (Lijphart, p. 2012). Norris also assessed the relation between democratic institutions and quality of democracy, and mainly supports the Lijphartian approach (Norris, 2008). Linder and Bachtiger assert that the consensus model (power-sharing) is crucial for democratization in developing countries in Asia and Africa. Moreover, they examined the influence of the cultural trait of familism on the level of democracy and conclude that this cultural factor would play a more pivotal role (negatively) than economic factors for these societies (Linder & Bachtiger, 2005).

To Heyne, in a participatory

conception of democracy, to the contrary, participation is valued for its own sake and is considered the core of a democracy. Involvement in politics is assumed to foster political efficacy and democratic skills and to generate concern with collective problems, and citizens are thus supposed to have opportunities to deal more profoundly with political issues in deliberative ways (2016). Based on the classical Athenian democracy, this type of democracy was brought forward by Rousseau, and later on picked up by modern proponents of participatory and deliberative democracy such as Barber (1984). Further, a social democratic approach to democracy also considers political outcomes like social equality as essential for fair and meaningful democratic participation. A government thus has the duty to guarantee the resources that are necessary for the use of these rights as well as an equal allocation amongst the citizens (Held, 1987, as cited in Heyne, 2016, p. 3).

Institutional democracy is built on the foundations of civic democracy, which is older. The two are interdependent, but they have become detached. That happens when institutions have lost confidence in the citizenry. As Elinor Ostrom demonstrated in her Nobel prize-winning research,

there are things that citizens working together must do to empower institutions and their skilled professionals. That is because there are some things that can only be done by citizens or that are best done by them (Mathews, 2021).

Min-hua Huang, et al., says a great debate about the meaning of democracy quickly rises between two different models of democracy: “procedure vs. substance” (2013). Procedural democracy refers to the idea of Western liberal democracy that democracy is about establishing a political system in which the change of government is carried out through free and fair elections and the principle of rule of law is deeply rooted. Substantial democracy refers to a shared belief that democracy is not just about the procedure but should be about the government outputs that satisfy peoples need. This point of view prioritizes the importance of the substance of democracy and believes that each country has the right to apply its own procedural arrangements that could be equally democratic as those being applied in western (Huang, et al., 2013). “In line with the theoretical framework, we expect that the exposure to a definition of democracy increases respondents’ democratic understanding, and subsequently,

their democratic support.” (Ananda & Bol, 2020).

Rudebeck identifies a core theoretical tension in democratic scholarship between two competing conceptual approaches. The first, termed the minimalist model, predominates in contemporary political science and narrowly defines democracy through its basic institutional and procedural requirements, e.g., constitutional rules and electoral processes. The second, characterized as substantialist, adopts a broader, multidimensional framework that encompasses both procedural and substantive democratic qualities (Rudebeck, 2016). Contemporary democratic theory exhibits a clear epistemological divide between competing conceptual approaches. While minimalist conceptions – exemplified by Huntington’s (1991) procedural emphasis – dominate mainstream political science, substantialist alternatives like those advanced by Held (1996) and Sen (1981) advocate for more expansive criteria incorporating social and economic dimensions. Dahl’s work (1982, 1989) occupies a unique theoretical position, engaging dialogically with both paradigms to develop his polyarchal model.

Democratic theory offers plenty of different and often opposed

conceptions of what government by the people are supposed to mean and how it is to function. For proponents of the minimalist perspective, democracy is merely a means of protecting citizens against arbitrary rule. The main aim of this type of democracy is to elect skilled representative elites capable of making public decisions, and protecting individual liberties, and elections serve to express and aggregate people's interest. Having its roots in classical republicanism and the liberal model of democracy established by Mill or Tocqueville, modern versions of a minimalist democracy can for instance be found in Schumpeter's economic model of democracy (Schumpeter 1942) and in pluralist models, i.e. from Dahl (1971, 2).

The holding of competitive, free and fair elections is essential to the meaning of democracy. But electoral democracy represents a minimal threshold for defining democracy. Thus freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of association are essential elements of democracy (Huntington, 1991).

The Concept of Democratic Orientation

The concept of democratic orientation encompasses adherence to the values and institutional

principles that define democratic governance (Sianko, 2012). A nation's democratic foundation can be gauged by how deeply its citizens believe in democratic principles (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). A functioning democracy relies on a politically engaged and democratically minded populace (Dalton & Shin, 2003). Successful democratization depends not only on commitment of government authorities to carry out democratic reforms but also on "the normative and behavioral predispositions of ordinary citizens" (Tessler and Gao, p. 2009). These democratic principles and values are ethos that regulates the extent, level and involvement of participants in a democracy. They are values that facilitate democratic development. The study of democracies usually focuses on their democratic institutions and structures. Institutions and structures within society are essential for democratic survival and development. However, "...the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientation that people have to the political process – upon the political culture" (Almond and Verba, p. 1963).

As Patrick emphasized, democracy

is not an autonomous system that runs independently. Its effective operation, he asserted, depends on two critical societal factors: a baseline of public literacy regarding democratic theory and a collective dedication to upholding its fundamental doctrines (1996). Thus there is almost unanimous agreement on the importance of democratic orientation among people for democratic viability.

It means that there is more to democratic institutions and structures. Equally critical are the informal norms and daily political behaviours of citizens, which serve as essential catalysts for democratic maturation and institutional strengthening. It is hard to imagine democratic institutions will survive without a serious lack of support for democratic principles and values. It is crucial that the public support and endorse these values and principles. The foundation of the democratic process is a public commitment to democratic values and principles, and the extent of such orientations is essential for judging the potential for democratization (Dalton & Shin, 2003).

Almond and Verba's seminal comparative study first empirically demonstrated the critical relationship between civic culture

and democratic development, establishing that public attitudes and participatory behaviors significantly influence democratization processes (1963). Easton further analysed how a nation's democratic stability depends on its citizens' commitment to democratic ideals. In his foundational research on how public attitudes shape democracy, he demonstrated that the key factor in preserving democracy through economic, political, or social challenges is the public's intrinsic belief in democracy as a core value (1965).

But what are the democratic principles and values of the general population that are essential for the survival and consolidation of democracy? Different authors have placed emphasis on different principles, values and behaviour patterns. Some researchers focused on public support for a democratic form of government (Dalton & Shin, 2003). Others have identified two key factors crucial for the stability and growth of democratic systems: (a) interpersonal trust and (b) enduring dedication to democratic institutions (Inglehart, 1988). Others have identified five key democratic pillars: minority acceptance, interpersonal trust, public welfare perceptions, active political involvement, and post materialist

value orientations (Inglehart & Wezel, 2005).

Tessler and Gao identified six interconnected dimensions of democratic culture: (1) endorsement of gender equity, (2) social tolerance, (3) interpersonal trust networks, (4) engagement in civic activities, (5) political awareness, and (6) institutional knowledge; their research demonstrated how these mutually reinforcing factors collectively foster pro-democratic attitudes within populations (2009). The other dimensions identify several additional components constituting democratic values, including (a) engagement with political affairs, (b) acceptance of opposing viewpoints, (c) prioritization of individual freedoms, (d) awareness of constitutional rights, (e) conditional approval of protest actions, (f) endorsement of press autonomy, and (g) active involvement in political processes (Dalton & Shin, 2003). For a democracy to thrive, ordinary citizens must actively embrace and uphold fundamental democratic values. The long-term stability of democratic systems relies heavily on public commitment to these principles.

Democratic Citizens' Participatory Orientation

An important dimension of

democratic values is popular participation (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1971). They claimed that citizen's participation in political life is an essential component of democratic society. Indeed, the idea of citizen participation in political and social domains is at the heart of democracy. "Citizen Participation is at the heart of democracy, indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process" (Verba et. al., p. 1995). In a similar vein, some viewed participation as "one of the pillars of a democracy whose functioning relies to a great extent on contributions of its citizens to the democratic process" (Schulz, et al., p. 2, 2010). Some analysts suggest that this is a precondition for a democratic transition (Huntington, 1993). In a similar line, Diamond wrote, "As a system of government that requires the consent of the governed, democracy stands or falls with citizen commitment to its norms and structures" (p. 2008).

People's political participation is an essential democratic value. It constitutes a crucial principle in democracy since it promotes a sense of civic equality among citizens. Theoretically, through political participation, each citizen has an equal opportunity to secure their interests by influencing

governmental policies (Bentwich, 2009). Participation is a constitutive element of democratic politics; enhancing the opportunities for and quality of citizen participation is widely perceived as the hallmark of democratization; and for democratic systems, participation is the most important source of legitimacy (Blühdorn & Butzlaff, 2020).

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic set-up. It signifies such proceedings like: voting, seeking information, discussing and proselytizing, attending meetings, contributing financially and communicating with representatives (IESS, 1968). Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in the democratic process (Saikia & Baruah, 2012). McClosky posits that in democratic systems, citizen engagement serves as the primary mechanism through which collective approval or disapproval of governance is expressed, and governmental accountability to the populace is enforced (1968).

When we think of citizen participation, we often think of the quality of democracy: the higher the

number of citizens who participate, the better the democratic institutions. Since Alexis de Tocqueville, democracy has been associated with participative attitudes and practices that would seem to reinforce its stability. Later, this association would become the core of Robert Putnam's (1993, 2000) studies on social capital. Aside from Putnam's arguments, the participation of individuals in politics in a wide sense of the term—be it through associations, through a positive predisposition towards politics and taking an interest in it (Deth and Elff, 2004), or through participating in non-conventional ways (Dalton, 1999; Norris, 1999) has been taken as an indicator of the democratic quality of political communities. “The rational is the individual joint participation, in pursuit of common interests, can counter the excess of power of representative institutions” (Ganuza and Francis, p. 479, 2008).

Robert Dahl stated the classic argument for why equality is essential for meaningful democracy: “in making collective decisions, the . . . interests of each person should be given equal consideration. Insuring that the interests of each are given equal consideration, in turn, requires that every adult member of an association be entitled to participate in making

binding and collective decisions affecting that person's good or interest. This principle, in turn, requires political equality, which can only be achieved in a democratic system." (Dahl, p. 639, 1996)

Involving all the public in politics also strengthens the democratic process. Jeffersonian logic argues that political participation produces better citizens. People who participate typically become more informed about political issues. This is why analysts often describe elections as a national civics lesson when the public hears and discusses current policies affecting their lives. Other research suggests that people increase their understanding of the complexity of the democratic process, with both positive and negative consequences (Parry & Moyser, 1992). "If there is a wide gap in who participates, and the loud voice of some drowns out the weaker voices of others, this is not beneficial for those who are not heard or the polity overall" (Dalton, p. 18, 2020).

Democratic Participatory Orientation in Nagaland: Amidst Insurgency

In the context of Nagaland, the study of the nature of democratic orientation among people becomes a matter of interest in a state that

has been besieged by decades of armed conflict and unrest over the Naga people's right to self-determination. A critical consideration involves Nagaland's unique participatory dynamics, where tensions emerge between modern democratic systems and indigenous governance structures. This intersection presents distinctive challenges for democratic consolidation in the region. The Northeast Indian context presents a unique case of institutional duality, where modern democratic structures operate concurrently with traditional tribal governance systems (Amer & Moamenla, 2012). As Amer observes, "In the Northeast, one finds two simultaneous democratic institutions at work – a modern democratic system vis-à-vis a traditional system among the Hill tribes" (p. 14). This institutional pluralism persists despite Nagaland's formal establishment as a state on December 1, 1963, demonstrating the remarkable resilience of indigenous political cultures alongside modern state structures (Amer & Moamenla 2012).

Popular participation in this context becomes culturally embedded, with democratic principles undergoing adaptive reinterpretation to align with existing traditional power

structures. This process creates a distinctive hybrid governance model where formal democratic values interface with indigenous political norms. Most prominently, the existence of numerous underground factions' operating within the state demanding sovereignty contradicts the Indian enforced election which hinders participatory orientation. It would be interesting to examine how deeply democratic principles and values have taken root among the people in the state and the extent to which people emphasize an attitude of support or rejection for democratic principles and values.

In Nagaland, realistically, the core democratic norms and ideas are not followed according to theory. Owing to the fact that peaceful means are rarely applied, Mao Tse-Tung's phrase, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" is popular among the political leaders (1966). The Naga insurgency marked a pivotal turning point in Northeast India's political evolution. Originally administered as the Naga Hills District within Assam, the region's trajectory shifted dramatically with the outbreak of armed rebellion. In response to escalating insurgent violence, the Indian government reconfigured the territory's administrative status, detaching Naga Hills from Assam and placing

it under direct central administration as a Union Territory (Anns & Jha, 2022).

A historical analysis of the Naga independence movement reveals critical junctures that shaped both the struggle for self-determination and democratic processes in the region. The movement's institutional foundations were established with the formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946, which emerged as the principal political organization representing Naga aspirations. The NNC declared independence on August 14, 1947, simultaneously notifying both the Government of India and the United Nations (UNO) of this decision. Historical accounts indicate the UN acknowledged receipt of this communication (Lhousa, 2004; Zahan, 2022). This was followed by a plebiscite on May 16, 1951, which reportedly demonstrated overwhelming (99.9%) popular support for sovereignty, though the Indian government refused to recognize its legitimacy.

As tensions escalated, the movement transitioned to armed resistance with the establishment of the underground Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) and its military wing, the Naga Federal Army (NFA), under A.Z. Phizo's leadership. This period witnessed

significant conflict, with scholars documenting extensive military operations and civilian suffering in the region (Lhousa, 2004; Zahan, 2022). The Indian government's response to the Naga movement escalated significantly with the deployment of military forces and the implementation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in 1958. This legislation granted extraordinary powers to security forces operating in the region, marking a turning point in the conflict's intensity.

A temporary cessation of hostilities was achieved in September 1964 through the intervention of a Peace Mission composed of prominent figures including socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, Assam Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha, and British peace activist Rev. Michael Scott. However, the ceasefire ultimately proved unsustainable, leading to the Mission's dissolution in 1967 (Singh, 2007). Following the breakdown of peace efforts, military operations intensified and continued unabated until substantial troop reductions became necessary due to India's involvement in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. This period represents one of the most contentious chapters in Naga-Indian relations, with scholars noting significant humanitarian

consequences of the prolonged counter insurgency campaign (Singh, 2007).

The formal establishment of Nagaland as India's 16th state on December 1, 1963, marked a significant constitutional development following the 16-Point Agreement (1960) between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention. This agreement redefined the former Naga Hills-Tuensang Area (governed under the 1957 Act) as a full-fledged state under the Indian Union, initially administered through the Ministry of External Affairs before being transferred to the Home Ministry (Singh, 2007).

The post-1971 war period witnessed renewed counterinsurgency operations that ultimately compelled rebel groups to negotiate. This culminated in the landmark Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, where Naga National Council (NNC) representatives unconditionally accepted the Indian Constitution – a breakthrough in conflict resolution. However, the accord proved divisive, with a faction of NNC members rejecting its terms. This schism led to the formation of the more radical National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) on February 2, 1980, which would

subsequently become the primary insurgent group continuing the armed struggle (Singh, 2007).

As we can see from the table 1, page number 143, the period 1955-1964 was a period of hostilities even after the statehood 1964-1968, there were

NNC non-accordist who do not accept the 16 point agreement and have no or limited cooperation with the government opposed the Indian imposed state Election. During 1968-1997 Nagas were seen to be sandwiched under three corners of two warring factions of NSCN and

Dyad	1955-1975 entrenched threat	1975-1997 strong defection &rise of NSCNs	1997-present fragmented ceasefire
Govt-NNC	Hostilities 1955- 1964, 1968-1975. Limited cooperation 1964-1968	Limited corporation	Limited cooperation N/A
Govt-NSCN Formed 1980	N/A	Hostilities, collapse into NSCN-IM & NSCN-K (1988)	N/A
Govt-NSCN- IM		Hostilities,	Limited cooperation, (1997-till present)
Govt-NSCN- K		Hostilities,	Limited cooperation 2001-2015; return to Hostilities-2015- Present

Table 1: *The Evolution of armed order in the Naga conflict.* From "Ceasefires and State Order-Making in Naga Northeast India," by A. Waterman, 2021, *International Peacekeeping*, 28(3), p. 500. © 2021 by Taylor & Francis.

continued operation of the Indian Army. According to reports, from 1992 to 2000, Naga insurgency claimed over 1,600 lives, both of civilians and Indian Army.

There is always a fear psychosis in the minds of innocent citizens (Zahan, 2022). From the first Nagaland Legislative Assembly election 1964 to 2023 recent election, Naga insurgent groups see it as Indian imposed election and have been opposing it in one way or the other. At times the state political leaders play corrupted politics by involving the insurgent group, or at times the insurgent group itself

support a particular candidate of their choice or party and use threat on the contesting candidate even to withdraw from the candidature. Till today nobody have disprove their diktat know so well the consequences. One could feel the fear psychosis in the minds of electorates on the polling day.

Faced with depleting strength due to relentless counter insurgency operations, NSCN (IM) offered to negotiate for a truce with the government of India on July 31, 1996. We can clearly see the increasing casualties in the table 2, page number 144.

Year	Civilians	Security forces	Insurgents	Total
1992	34	33	29	96
1993	62	43	68	173
1994	110	26	56	192
1995	80	25	108	213
1996	144	48	112	304
1997	104	38	218	306

Table 2: *Insurgency related casualties: 1992-1997.* Reproduced from "A Decade of Ceasefire in Nagaland," by G. Singh, 2007, *Strategic Analysis*, 31(5), p. 820. © 2007 by Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

In 1998, on the eve of the polls, the “principal secretary” of the Government of People’s Republic of Nagaland (GPRN), the underground “government” of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah faction), issued letters which asked candidates of all political parties in Nagaland to sign a proclamation “failing which they will be treated as anti-national” (India Today, 1998). The format of the proclamation was as follows: “The Naga people through their various organisations strongly oppose holding of elections in Naga-inhabited areas. As such I... candidate of... party will not file my nomination paper in the ensuing Lok Sabha/state assembly elections in view of the ongoing political dialogue between the Government of India and the NSCN (I-M)” (India Today, 1998). Failure to comply, the proclamation implied, would mean capital punishment (India Today, 16 Feb. 1998). They asked candidates of all political parties in Nagaland to

sign a proclamation “failing which they will be treated as anti-national” (India Today, 1998).

As shown in the Figure 1, page number 145 we can see that Electors who did not vote in the 1998 General Election to the Nagaland Legislative Assembly was as high as 53.3 per cent as against 44.3 per cent who voted. During this election regional parties like the Naga People’s Front did not contest these elections and responded to the boycott call of the NSCN. Out of the 60 constituencies 43 constituencies were filed by the INC candidates and hence were declared elected unopposed without a poll. In the other 17 constituencies, the INC candidate had to compete with one or more Independent Candidate. The Independent candidates managed to win 7 of these seats. The Nagaland total voters were 926569 out of which 420714 voted and Rejected votes were 23706, valid votes were 397008, thus 505855 electorates did not vote.

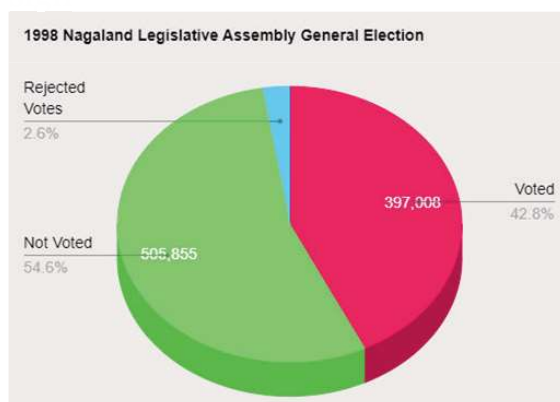


Figure 1: Voter turnout during NLA General Elections 1998.

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., Government of Nagaland.

<https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

Table 3 and Table 4 in page number 146 and 147 are the statistics of elections from 1964 to 2023 data available on the CEO Nagaland. The percentage of electors voted may not be authentic data due to the fact

that the boycott call is expressed by the Naga insurgents in every election. While this state of affairs is taken as advantage by the shrewd political leaders and use coup tactics in all the polling stations.

Particulars	1st election 1964	2nd election 1969	3rd election 1974	4th election 1977	5th election 1982	6th election 1987	7th election 1989	8th election 1993
Total electors	124166	176931	395070	398035	596453	582301	582426	812850
Total voters who voted	62659	138673	279573	331461	443972	491924	498822	734942
Total voters rejected	482	265	7674	6267	6267	6982	5526	5198
Total valid votes polled	62177	138408	289899	324994	437705	484942	493296	729744
% of votes polled	50.46%	78.38%	70.77%	83.27%	74.44%	84.48%	85.65%	90.41%

Table 3: *Electors from 1964 to 1993.*

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., *Government of Nagaland*. <https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Election year	Male ER/VT	Female ER/VT	Total ER/VT	%	Polling station
1	NL Gen Election 1998	486953	438878	927007 439280	47.38%	444
2	NL Gen Election 2003	529517 474181	485363 417316	1014880 891497	87%	1583
3	NL Gen Election 2008	666391 573021	635875 549362	130266 1122383	86.19%	1692+88 1780
4	NL Gen Election 2013	608299 541919	590150 538968	1198449 1080887	90.57%	1904+120 2024
5	NL Gen Election 2018	591440 487836	579108 498560	1170548 986396	84.27%	2194+2 2196
6	NL GEN Election 2023	660812 554485	655252 570972	1316064 1125457	86.75%	2157

Table 4: Electors from 1998 to 2023.

Note. Adapted from *Elector Statistics 1964-2023*, by Chief Electoral Office, Nagaland, n.d., *Government of Nagaland*. <https://ceo.nagaland.gov.in>

The 2018 Nagaland state assembly elections became a point of significant contention in the ongoing peace process. The National Socialist Council of Nagalim-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and allied groups issued formal statements opposing the electoral exercise, arguing it would: (1) undermine the integrity of protracted peace negotiations ongoing since 1997, and (2) create

structural impediments to achieving a comprehensive political settlement. The NSCN-IM's position reflected its longstanding role as primary negotiator with the Government of India's interlocutors, framing the elections as an external "imposition" incompatible with the Naga people's aspirations for self-determination through dialogue. "Therefore, those who advocate for the imposed election, does not stand for the interest of the Naga people. We are seriously critical of such people or group as they do not contribute towards finding lasting political solution," the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (The Hindu, 2018).

2023 General Election to Nagaland Legislative Assembly was taken by surprise when a leader of the NSCN Isak-Muivah faction allegedly ordered people not to vote for Nagaland's BJP president, Temjen Imna Along, a candidate from Alongtaki Assembly constituency of Nagaland Legislative Assembly. NSCN (I-M) leader of Ao region in a letter purportedly signed by him was circulated in villages under the Alongtaki constituency (The Hindu, 2023). Such orders are recent in all the constituencies during elections, but due to fear of threat people do not converse on such information.

Conclusion

The core values of democratic participation as provided in the constitution of India – the right to contest election and right to vote – is desirable to be enjoyed by all. Contrary to this, the scenario in Nagaland is unusual and this context leads to deficit in participation especially due to consistent interference by the underground factions during elections. Lately, the intellectuals of the society have distanced themselves from active participation and the citizens largely the youths are forming an attitude of indifference, opining that their vote does not make any difference – leading to very passive or no participation in electoral process.

A set of political conditions and civil liberties are necessary, according to Dalton and Shin first, to ensure the meaningfulness of elections, and second to ensure that democracy includes more than just elections. If an election is free, but the society is not, then the election is unlikely to have informed voters who openly cast their preferences for future government policy. Thus, a free election presumes a free press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and other political and civil liberties (2003).

Naga solution and existence of peace in this small state can only achieve democratic rights being enjoyed by the citizens. Neingulo Krome, General Secretary of the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), has emphasized dialogue as the singular viable path to conflict resolution. In his capacity as a prominent human rights advocate, Krome (2018) articulated, "Groups like the NSCN-IM must persist in peace negotiations as the only sustainable solution." He further cautioned against regression, stating, "A return to pre-ceasefire hostilities serves no party's interest. The imperative lies in continuing talks to achieve a mutually honourable settlement" (Interview, Kohima, 2018).

The people of Nagaland want peace. A new, rapidly growing middle class of Nagas with aspirations for a better future is determined to bring prosperity and is beginning to hold the state accountable while distancing themselves from the underground factions. There must be sincerity and commitment from the leaders in the underground set up, the leaders in the state and most importantly leaders at the centre. Naga solution must be accorded top most priority. In tandem, Nagaland's civil society organizations have emerged as critical actors in facilitating parallel

peace negotiations with the Indian government, seeking a holistic resolution to the insurgency. This grassroots diplomatic initiative complements formal talks while addressing local grievances often overlooked in high-level discussions.

The peace process intersects significantly with electoral politics, creating a complex dynamic where political solutions become contingent on democratic cycles. This phenomenon gained particular relevance during India's 2023 electoral season, where the ruling party's campaign rhetoric prominently featured "Elections for Solution" – framing ballot outcomes as instrumental to conflict resolution. Such politicization of insurgency management reflects what conflict theorists term the "electoralization of peace processes," where ceasefire timelines and negotiation breakthroughs become synchronized with electoral calendars.

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