

# INDIAN FEDERALISM PERSPECTIVES

We are pleased to present this issue of the Indian Federalism Perspective, which focuses on the 14th Nagaland Assembly election. Held on 27th February 2023, the results for which were declared on 2nd March 2023, this election can be considered as one of the historic elections in the State for three reasons: firstly, it marks the first in Naga's electoral history where a woman (in this case two) has ever got elected into the State's Assembly. Secondly, this election not only marks the drastic fall of the Naga People's Front (NPF) from 22 seats it won in 2018 to barely two seats in 2023, but it also registers NPF's reincarnation as a regional(ist) party under the label, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). NDPP won 25 seats, an improvement of 7 seats and 7 per cent electoral votes over the 2018 Assembly election. Thirdly, although this election sustains a fluid multiparty system, it casts doubts on the future of the bipolar system in the State as the Congress was routed entirely for the second time in a row, having failed to win a seat and with an electoral vote of barely around 3 per cent.

Interestingly, the Congress came as a distant second in seven constituencies. The failure of the Congress to foster a popular leader after SC Jamir left active politics suggests that the electoral space vacated by it is now occupied by a motley of parties, all of which have either regional or national-level coalitional alliance with the BJP. Not surprisingly, the 14th Nagaland Assembly becomes opposition-less as these parties extend their support to the NDPP-BJP coalition government. Notably, this is the second consecutive Assembly where all the legislative parties extend support to the NDPP-BJP coalition, rendering the Assembly opposition-less. In this sense, the 14th Nagaland Assembly elections mark a distinctive turn in the State's fluid multiparty system where hitherto the State witnessed a bipolar contest between two parties espousing different ideologies, namely the Congress (or its earlier avatar, Nagaland Nationalist Organisation (NNO) and the 'Cock' party (the latest avatar of which is NPF).

What explains this turn? In our feature article, Chiangmong Khamnungngan examines the nature of electoral politics in Nagaland by focusing on the 13th (2018) and 14th State Assembly elections to explain this. Unlike national or State Assembly elections, ideology has been ‘irrelevant’ in Nagaland electoral politics. For him, electoral politics in Nagaland is primarily a function of intra-constituency dynamics where the role of ‘traditional authorities’ (tribe or village councils) are far more consequential in determining electoral outcomes than general issues like education, corruption, and development.

Given that there is a determinate overlap of tribe(s) and electoral constituencies across the State except Dimapur, which, for instance, is marked by inter-mixed population, this is a plausible explanation. Under this condition, the selection of candidates, electoral dynamics and the eventual election of candidates are determined by the tribe/village councils on the one hand and by the ability of individual candidates to effectively navigate the fluid terrain of electoral dynamics on the other hand.

The asymmetrical role and influence of large village(s) vis-à-vis small village(s) in determining electoral dynamics and outcomes could not have come out in sharper relief. This point is critical given the extensive practice of ‘proxy’ or ‘bogus’ voting, where it is socially and culturally acceptable that some entrusted voters would vote for the whole village while the rest of the villagers did their daily chores. This practice is particularly amenable to the hold of local notables and traditional authorities in determining electoral outcomes.

While the political traction of parties, their winnability and power equation with the centre (as a major source of developmental funds) are essential considerations in determining when candidates may switch parties, the ability of individual candidates to win over local notables and traditional authorities in each constituency is more critical in deciding when individual candidates switch

parties. Pragmatism and winnability become paramount in the electoral calculation. Not surprisingly, party-switching or defection is seldom punished. This explains why TR Zeliang, the former Chief Minister and leader of NPF, unabashedly justified his defection to NDPP along with 20 NPF members in early 2022: “The target is to sit in the ruling bench and not merely as an MLA”.

Chiangmong’s article is an invitation to rethink macro-level theory and analysis of elections and election outcomes, which tend to give premium to, among others, the role of ideology, leadership, and electoral planks/issues. We hope this feature article will force us to pause to rethink many of our assumptions and expectations of the ‘logic and rhythm’ of democracy and electoral politics in Nagaland and beyond.

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# Electoral Politics in Nagaland: An Overview

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## 1. Introduction

This essay seeks to outline (i) a few salient features of electoral politics in Nagaland today, (ii) the factors that influence electoral outcomes, using select illustrations from the last two Assembly Elections (2018 and 2023), and (iii) the broader cultural and intellectual rejection about the propriety of electoral and party politics in Nagaland which looms large over and partly explains these features and factors.

## 2. Salient Features of Electoral Politics in Nagaland

### 2.1 Proxy Voting, Bogus Voters, and High Turnouts

Assembly Elections in Nagaland have recorded fairly high turnout rates (Figure 1)<sup>1</sup>. Such rates are to be explained by the pervasiveness of endemic and multiple forms of proxy voting. Consider, for instance, the practice of "household voting" reported by Moamenla Amer and Jelle Wouters, where the head of the family votes for the entire family<sup>2</sup>. Party workers are known to exercise the franchise on behalf of numerous voters. During the recently concluded election in a remote village in Noklak district, 20 party workers peacefully polled for the entire village even as the rest of the villagers continued their daily lives. This happened with the "understanding" of the Village Council<sup>3</sup>, the agents of the contesting candidates and the election personnel. Such "arrangements" for proxy voting, which can vary, are pretty common. As Amer notes, this is possible only because proxy voting is "respected by both polling agents and election staffs"<sup>4</sup>. The following consideration should dispel any doubt about the force of this explanation for electoral turnout. In 2016, the Chief Electoral Officer Nagaland reported that of the 11.2 lakh voters in the state, four lakhs were "bogus"<sup>5</sup>. Astonishingly, while there were only around 7.2 lakh "real" voters in 2016, in the 2013 election, nearly 11 lakh voters had exercised their franchise! The appeal to such factors as high education, small electoral size of constituencies, election as a social event, intimidation by insurgents, and even multiple voting, even taken together, cannot explain these impossible turnout figures.

This has important consequences for electoral analysis and commentary: no meaningful inference can be about the "health" or "deepening" of democracy from turnout figures.

Figure 1. Voter Turnout, 1964–2023



Source: Election Commission of India

For instance, Rekha Ohja’s conclusion that women “are moving ahead in terms of participation in electoral process” which she infers based on an “increase in the turnout of women voters”, is deeply misinformed<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.2 A Non-Ideological Party System

Nagaland has been described as having a bipolar but multi-party system. Bipolar because, until the 2013 assembly election, this multi-party system was dominated by two ideologically opposed parties: the party of the “Cock” and the Congress (Figure 2). The party of the “Cock” — so called after its symbol which, along with the motto: *fide non armis*, is the constant behind its plethora of incarnations<sup>7</sup> — was established by “middle ground” intellectuals sympathetic to the legitimacy of the Naga “underground”. The Congress, initially the Nagaland Nationalist Organisation (NNO), was formed by “overground” leaders<sup>8</sup>, viewed the plight and struggles of the Naga “underground” and its impact on the prevailing situation in the state with great concern but was not convinced of the legitimacy of the “underground” cause.

However, such ideology that parties might possess is irrelevant to electoral mobilisation. Ideologies and general issues (such as education and employment) are acceptable to the average Naga voter (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2). Moreover,

party ideology is, on the whole, irrelevant in post-election political formations. This is suggested by the fact that beneath the veneer of stability indicated by the above table, post-electoral political configurations have been anything but stable. By 1975, the Nagas had already, Nirmal Nibedon sarcastically remarked, “graduated from the Indian school of opportunism with flying colours”<sup>9</sup>. Between 1964 and 1960, the state witnessed, along with two instances of President's Rule, as many as 13 different Chief Ministers, of whom seven lost power because of floor-crossing (Figure 3).

The party system is marked by extreme fluidity where victorious MLAs cross party lines, not only after elections but also between elections, without compunction and any damage to reputation or electoral fortunes. The remarkable victory of the NDPP–BJP alliance in 2018 was fuelled by the success of turncoats. Of the 30 seats won by the coalition, 14 (10 for the NDPP and 4 for the BJP) were sitting NPF MLAs. Consider also the careers, to take two prominent examples, of arguably the two most influential politicians in Nagaland today: Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and one of the Deputy Chief Ministers, T. R. Zeliang. Both have been elected for the eighth consecutive time, and both, now with NDPP, have previously been elected on both Congress and NPF tickets. We can also point to the unique and recent “achievement” that is the idea of “opposition-less” governments where

parties defy all ideological commitments to get a share of power. In 2015, to the horror of observers, not to mention the AICC, all eight Congress MLAs joined the NPF-led government, which was then in alliance with the BJP to form the first "opposition-less" government. This would not be the last: there have been two (including the current) "opposition-less" governments since.

### 2.3 Absence of Sectional Mobilisation

There is no scope for sectional, sectarian/religious, or class mobilisation in Nagaland. For one, owing to the overwhelming demographic preponderance of the tribals and Baptist Christians, the familiar categories of caste and religion crucial elsewhere for electoral mobilisation in India are irrelevant in this state. The considerable regional divide between the highly underdeveloped Eastern Nagaland and the rest of Nagaland, which has propelled the demand for a separate state called "Frontier Nagaland", has not led to any regional mobilisation (see Section 3.2). Tribal

mobilisation is unnecessary as the number of MLAs a given tribe can send is effectively, although not formally, fixed and guaranteed. Constituencies, except for a few mixed constituencies in Dimapur, are tied to a single demographically dominant tribe (Figure 4) so that all parties must field candidates from that tribe to have any hopes of winning.

### 2.4 Traditional Authorities

Traditional authorities, such as the Village Councils, have inserted themselves into the procedures of democratic elections. In addition to specifying the modalities of voting in the village (as noted above), such authorities can, even more significantly, also decide the candidate for whom villagers must vote or, indeed, not vote. Such practices forced a commentator to remark that "sometimes 'adult franchise' becomes a town's/ward's or village council's franchise"<sup>10</sup>. In the run-up to the 2013 election:

*Merangkong, an Ao Naga village, declared, "Merangkong Senso Mungdang in a general meeting... unanimously resolved to extend full*

Figure 2: The "Cock" Party and the "Congress" at the Assembly Elections, 1964–2013

Year	"Cock" Party		"Congress"		Combined Seats	Government	
	Name	Seats	Name	Seats		Chief Minister	Party
1964	DP	12	NNO	26	38 (40) *	Shilu Ao	NNO
1969	UFN	10	NNO	22	32 (40) *	Hokishe Sema	NNO
1974	UDF	25	NNO	23	48 (60)	Vizol Angami	UDF
1977	UDF	35	INC	15	50 (60)	Vizol Angami	UDF
1982	NNDP	24	INC	24	48 (60)	S. C. Jamir	INC
1987	NNDP	18	INC	34	52 (60)	Hokishe Sema	INC
1989	NPC	24	INC	36	60 (60)	S. C. Jamir	INC
1993	NPC	17	INC	35	52 (60)	S. C. Jamir	INC
1998	NPC	0**	INC	53	53 (60)	S. C. Jamir	INC
2003	NPF	19	INC	21	40 (60)	Neiphui Rio	NPF
2008	NPF	26	INC	23	49 (60)	Neiphui Rio	NPF
2013	NPF	38	INC	8	44 (60)	Neiphui Rio	NPF

**Note:**

\* In 1964 and 1969, elections were held only for 40 seats as the erstwhile Tuensang district was not included in the electoral framework. Instead, Tuensang sent members (6 in 1964 and 12 in 1969) chosen by its Regional Council.

\*\* The NPC, like all other parties except the Congress, boycotted the 1998 election, heeding the Naga Hoho-led popular resolution for "solution, not election".

Source: *Election Commission of India and Nagaland: Basic Facts 2022*

**Figure 3: The Unmaking of Governments by Floor-Crossing, 1964–1990**

Chief Minister	Party	Year	NLA
Vizol Angami	UDF	10-03-1975	3
John Bosco Jasokie	NNO	20-03-1975	3
Vizol Angami	UDF	18-04-1980	4
S. C. Jamir	UDF (P)	04-06-1980	4
Hokishe Sema	INC	06-08-1988	6
S. C. Jamir	INC	15-05-1990	7
K. L. Chishi	INC	15-05-1990	7

Source: Adapted from Chandrika Singh, *Naga Politics* (2004)

support to the Independent Candidate for the forthcoming legislative assembly election". It was further resolved that "Heavy penalty and strict action will be imposed against any citizen of Merangkong who acts against the aforesaid resolution"<sup>11</sup>.

Such decisions can also determine who can contest and who cannot. Just before the 2023 election, the Kohima Bench of the Gauhati HC had to quash several resolutions passed by the Mongsenyimti Rionsanger Putu Menden and Mongsenyimti Senso Mungdang during 2021 and 2022, which declared the support of the village to one candidate and debarred other citizens from the village from contesting. The court could intervene only because another prospective candidate from the same village filed for relief<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. Explaining Electoral Outcomes

#### 3.1 The Irrelevance of Electoral “Planks”

Analyses of electoral outcomes often emphasise the many perennial issues or “planks such as the resolution of the “vexed Naga problem”, the rhetoric around bringing all-round development and, especially for those in opposition, the rooting out of corruption. More recently, with the rise of the BJP, the ideological politics of Hindutva has also been a talking point. There was also a time when the restoration of “peace” and “normalcy” were urgent objectives. However, it would be naïve to draw any connection between these “planks” and the

parties' electoral fortunes. Although these words are uttered on the campaign trail and plastered on the pages of local dailies, they have little impact on the electoral choices of Naga voters.

The dismal performance of four relatively young and fresh faces — Joel Naga (Rising People’s Party, 12 Tseminyu), Kahuto Chishi (Independent, 3 Dimapur–III), Akavi Zhimomi (Congress, 4 Ghaspani–I), and Er. Meshenlo Kath (Congress, 9 Kohima Town) — during the 2023 elections, is telling. They all campaigned on the plank of bringing about “revolution” and expressed passionate and energetic take on "corruption" and the need for "change", which received the views and applause of tens of thousands of Nagas who viewed their speeches and interviews on YouTube and Facebook. If there is anything that could have demonstrated the viability of issue-based electoral mobilisation, it would have been the performance of these candidates. After all, they had little else to offer apart from their commitment to remove the scourge of corruption. "I have no money", declared Er. Meshenlo candidly. It is not just that they did not succeed; three could not manage to poll even 8% of votes. Kahuto managed only 5.24%. Joel performed slightly better with 16%.

#### 3.2 Constituency-Centred Electoral Mobilisation

Electoral mobilisation and participation in Nagaland is determined by incurable and incredibly parochial concerns, i.e., limited to the constituency. Henshet Phom, writing about the

**Figure 4: Distribution of Assembly Constituencies by Tribe**

Tribe	Population of Tribe	ACs of Tribe	District 1	Pop. 1	AC	District 2	Pop. 2	AC
Angami	1,41,732	7	Kohima	1,14,397	6	Dimapur	25,861	1
Ao	2,26,625	11	Mokokchung	1,66,714	10	Dimapur	40,979	1
Chakhesang	1,54,874	4	Phek	1,33,593	4			
Chang	64,226	3	Tuensang	58,988	3			
Khiamniungan	61,647	2	Tuensang	57,683	2			
Konyak	2,37,568	9	Mon	2,30,522	9			
Lotha	1,73,111	4	Wokha	1,47,065	4			
Phom	52,682	2	Longleng	46,693	2			
Rengma	62,951	1	Kohima	58,585	1			
Sangtam	74,994	2	Tuensang	31,990	1	Kiphire	34,072	1
Sumi	2,36,313	10	Zunheboto	1,34,110	7	Dimapur	80,358	3
Yimkhiung	66,972	2	Tuensang	37,448	1	Kiphire	22,614	1
Zeliang	74,877	2	Peren	68,635	2			
Pochury	21,948	1	Phek	20,421	1			

Source: 2011 Census of India

“experiences” of the Phom tribe, concluded that “electors attach more importance to the candidate than to the party they represented”<sup>13</sup>. A revealing CSDS pre-poll survey in 11 constituencies in 2018 showed that electors overwhelmingly vote for the local candidate and not for the party or party leaders (Figure 6).

Now, what the electorate of any particular Naga constituency sees as crucial in a prospective candidate could be any number of things, such as, but not limited to, financial position, education, track record and/or future potential (understood as the capacity to bring development to the constituency, to secure employment for his supporters); party affiliation (i.e. whether the party is or can be in power); clan, family, and village connections; and, of course, other candidates. One or any number or permutation of these factors, or other factors, may sway the “conscience” of the electorate in any given election.

The obduracy of constituency-centric electoral politics is obvious from a closer examination of the performance of the NDPP–BJP alliance (more below) in eastern Nagaland during the

2023 election. In this part of Nagaland, the Eastern Nagaland People’s Organisation (ENPO) has been demanding a separate “Frontier Nagaland” state since 2011, citing significant developmental deficits. If larger issues, like the future of eastern Nagaland or its development, had any weight, the NDPP–BJP alliance, especially the BJP, should have performed well. After all, the BJP leadership at the centre had treated the grievances aired by the ENPO with seriousness. That the alliance would retain power was all but certain, and given the outstanding demand, it would have seemed logical to vote for the alliance.

What's more, unlike the NPF, which had a stray line about eastern Nagaland in their 2018 manifesto but still won 10 seats, the NDPP and BJP offered an array of developmental packages to the region in their 2023 manifestos. Finally, the NPF drew a blank in 2023, leaving many seats for the taking. Despite all these, the NDPP, which had consolidated its overall position by as many as seven seats in 2023, failed to improve its 2018 regional performance: it won 5 seats. The same with the BJP, which again won 4 seats (Figure 7).

### 3.3 The Politics of “Winnable” Candidates

**Figure 6: Vote Matters**

What "mattered" most in deciding for whom to vote?	Respondents	Percent
Party	153	18.3
Candidate	517	62.1
Both	120	14.4
Leader/CM	8	0.9
Caste/Tribe	6	0.7
Any other answer	2	0.2
No response	28	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>833</b>	<b>100</b>

Question: While deciding whom to vote for in the recent assembly election, what mattered to you more — Party or Candidate?

Source: CSDS pre-poll survey 2018.

Given the paramount importance of the “candidate”, the key to explaining the electoral fortunes of political parties lies in their ability to attract and induct promising candidates as well as retain popular leaders who have strong appeal at the constituency level. In short, for a party to succeed, it must field “winnable” candidates. The ability of parties to pull this off is partly a function of the strength of their party organisation, which must remain alive and be responsive to the ever-shifting sands of constituency-level electoral allegiances across the state. This is crucial because “winnability” is an uncertain quality that must be determined in the parochial context of the constituency, something that can render a candidate winnable in one election or constituency and a liability in another.

But the party must also be attractive to prospective candidates who, with little thought for matters of ideology or policy, will flock to the party most likely to be in power. As T. R. Zeliang, the former NPF Chief Minister who defected with 20 other NPF MLAs to the ruling NDPP in 2022, explained his defection nonchalantly to his constituency: “The target is to sit in the ruling bench and not merely as an MLA”<sup>14</sup>. This likelihood, and thus a party’s attractiveness to “winnable” candidates, is increased if a party (a) has already been in power for some time; (b) is in power at the centre or otherwise aligned with the party at the centre; and (c) has a tall leader who possesses the wherewithal to command or force the loyalty or

deference of the candidates.

#### 4. Nagas and Electoral Politics

A partial explanation of these features might lie in the peculiar pragmatism (or perhaps cynicism) that has grounded the perception and practice of electoral competition in Nagaland. There is a general intellectual rejection of the propriety and suitability of electoral competition. This stance unites hard-line Naga nationalists like A. Z. Phizo with more “moderate” intellectuals like T. Sakhrie to career politicians such as S. C. Jamir, Hokishe

**Figure 7: Results in Eastern Nagaland in 2018 and 2023**

PARTY	2018		2023	
	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON	SEATS CONTESTED	SEATS WON
BJP	8	4	8	4
NDPP	12	5	12	5
NPF	20	10	7	0
INC	7	0	8	0
NCP	3	0	6	3
NPP	12	1	5	3
LJP (RV)	NA	NA	4	1
RPI (A)	NA	NA	6	2
JD (U)	5	0	1	0
CPI	NA	NA	1	0
AAP	1	0	NA	NA
IND	2	0	5	2

Source: Election Commission of India



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Sema and J. B. Jasokie. This even as they construct and circulate, following the writings of colonial administrators, the fiction of a “pure democracy” as having existed among the Nagas “since time immemorial”. Sakhrie had waxed philosophical about the “pure democracy” of the Nagas, which he described as “that form of government which permits the rule not of the majority but of the people as a whole”<sup>15</sup>. Phizo argued that elections were an alien practice imposed on and unsuited to the Nagas<sup>16</sup>. S. C. Jamir recalls how, during the meeting discussing the formation of the Naga Nationalist Organisation (NNO), there was a debate about using the term “party”, which the attendees thought “would divide Naga society”<sup>17</sup>. When the Democratic Party (DP), the NNO’s opponent in 1964, was dissolved in 1965, the following statement was issued: “It was never the intention of the sponsors to encourage party politics in Nagaland. The Party is satisfied with the improvement in the situation in Nagaland and considers its aim and object fulfilled”<sup>18</sup>. In 1980, India Today reported the “curious views” of Chief Minister J. B. Jasokie, who is reported as saying:

Ultimately, we want to have only one party — perhaps one national and one regional party. This would be going back to roughly the traditional Naga system. The multiplicity of political parties only damages our society by creating bitter dissensions<sup>19</sup>.

Of course, the Nagas fight their elections with vigour and fervour, not to mention the vitriol and violence. They catch the election fever just as elsewhere. However, this reflects not so much the acceptance, let alone the internalisation, of the assumptions and morals of universal democratic ideals but the pragmatic exercise of an inexorable constitutional mandate. This will be clear from the many ways in which, as I have outlined, such assumptions and morals — such as the cardinal principle of one person, one vote, or indeed the very idea of individuals exercising their franchise freely — are routinely, unproblematically, and pervasively subverted in practice. I note the intellectual and cultural milieu, which

is critical of electoral politics, because absent an understanding of this milieu, the unique flavour and texture of electoral politics in Nagaland is bound to be misapprehended. For instance, such features as proxy voting, the notion of consensus candidates, or endemic factionalism and defection, would be easily explained, as some commentators have done, as “democratic deficits” and “perversions”<sup>20</sup>. The point is not so much that these are not “deficits” or “perversions” but that such commentary, which can often turn into moralising, does nothing to illuminate and help understand the peculiar “rhythm and logic”, to slightly misuse a phrase used by Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, of electoral politics in the state<sup>21</sup>.

There is, it would be remiss if I did not mention, a principled acceptance of democracy as well, which argues that what is problematic is the subversion of democratic principles. The hope and effort here is that elections be conducted as they ideally should: freely and fairly and without fear or favour. I am thinking here of the campaigns for Clean Election that civil society organisations, educational institutions, and the church, in collaboration with various agencies of the government undertake. These can take many forms: public marches, street plays, prayer meetings, common platforms, opinion pieces, essay competitions, and, more recently, educational videos on YouTube<sup>22</sup>. Considerable space is devoted to reporting such campaigns and opinions in local dailies. Given the significance of religious faith in this Christian state, theologians have even begun to talk of voting not as the mere exercise of franchise, a political right, but as the exercise of faith, a divine right. After all, the ability to make a “rational choice” to follow one’s own “conscience” is given by God<sup>23</sup>. The effects — ideological at one level but practical at another — of these efforts, if any, remain difficult to determine.

## 5. Conclusion

This brief analysis has outlined the features of electoral politics and the factors that play a role in determining electoral outcomes in Nagaland.

Given the repudiation, in principle and in practice, of basic democratic assumptions and expectations, the key takeaway is the difficulty of inferring anything satisfying about the health or nature of democratic politics in the state. At one level, this is a theoretical problem concerning the very meaning of democracy, about which a closer analysis and some consensus seem necessary. At another level, it is a methodological problem. Given the general inapplicability of familiar concepts — for instance, the idea of an electoral base — and indicators — such as turnout rates — in explaining the electoral outcomes of political parties, there is a need not just to be careful while using existing concepts and indicators but also to innovate better and more relevant ones.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This is a feature of the Northeast in general. The Hindu reported in 2016 that the region recorded 31 of the 42 elections in India in which voter turnout was greater than 80%. See Samarth Bansal, 'North-Eastern Flourish at the Ballot', *The Hindu*, 14 April 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/north-eastern-flourish-at-the-ballot/article14237041.ece>.

<sup>2</sup>See Moamenla Amer, 'Electoral Dynamics in India: A Study of Nagaland', *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research* 3, no. 4 (2014): 9; Jelle J.P. Wouters, *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency: Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 239. Wouters reports that when the Commandant in uniform, miffed by the open repudiation of democratic protocols, snapped at a voter, someone in the line responded sharply: "Don't tell us how to play democracy!".

<sup>3</sup>Village Councils, the functional equivalent of Gram Panchayats elsewhere in India, are powerful statutory bodies tasked with developmental, judicial, and administrative functions.

<sup>4</sup>Amer, 'Electoral Dynamics in India: A Study of Nagaland', 9.

<sup>5</sup>'4 Lakh Bogus Voters in Nagaland', *The Morung Express*, 27 September 2016. <https://morungexpress.com/4-lakh-bogus-voters-nagaland>

<sup>6</sup>Rekha Ohja, 'Women in Electoral Politics in Nagaland, India', *International Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 11 (2014): 48.

<sup>7</sup>In 1964, the Democratic Party (DP); in 1969, United Front of Nagaland (UFN); in 1974 and 1977, United Democratic Front (UDF); in 1982 and 1987, Naga National Democratic Party (NNDP); in 1989, Nagaland Peoples Conference (NPC); in 1993, Nagaland Peoples Council (NPC); did not contest in 1998; in 2003 and 2008, Nagaland Peoples Front (NPF); and since 2013, Naga Peoples Front (NPF)

<sup>8</sup>Specifically, members of the Interim Body which functioned as the legislature of the state of Nagaland before its formal inauguration in 1963 and the first general elections in 1964.

<sup>9</sup>Nirmal Nibedon, *Nagaland: The Night of the Guerillas* (New Delhi: Lancers Publishers, 1978), 324.

<sup>10</sup>Amongla M. Jamir, 'Nagaland: Behind the Curtain', *Economic and Political Weekly* 54, no. 39 (2009): 171.

<sup>11</sup>Jelle J. P. Wouters, *Nagas as a Society Against Voting and Other Essays* (Kohima: The Highlander Books, 2019), 90–91. Wouters also discusses many other form

<sup>12</sup>'Mongsenyimti VC Asked to Withdraw Diktats for Consensus Candidate', *Nagaland Post*, 9 February 2023, <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/mongsenyimti-vc-asked-to-withdraw-diktats-for-consensus-candidate/>

<sup>13</sup>B. Henshet Phom, 'Exploring the Phom Naga Experience with Modern Electoral Democracy', in

Democracy in Nagaland: Tribes, Traditions and Tensions, ed. Jelle J.P. Wouters and Zhoto Tunyi (Kohima: The Highlander, 2018), 213–22. [https://www.india-seminar.com/2008/591/591\\_y\\_yadav\\_&\\_s\\_palshkar.htm](https://www.india-seminar.com/2008/591/591_y_yadav_&_s_palshkar.htm).

<sup>14</sup>TR Zeliang Says NDPP-BJP Alliance Will Win Two-Third Majority', The Morung Express, 13 February 2023, <https://morungexpress.com/tr-zeliang-says-ndpp-bjp-alliance-will-win-two-third-majority>.

<sup>15</sup>T. Sakhrie quoted in Ahu Sakhrie, *The Vision of T. Sakhrie for a Naga Nation* (Kohima: Dr Kepelhsie Terhüja, 2006), 13

<sup>16</sup>The NNC maintains that it does not "recognise Indian Elections". See 'NNC Says It Does Not Recognise Indian Elections', The Morung Express, 21 February 2023, <https://morungexpress.com/nnc-says-it-does-not-recognize-indian-elections>.

<sup>17</sup>S. C. Jamir, *A Naga's Quest for Fulfillment* (Bhubaneswar: Apurba, 2016), 238. Jamir also notes that Shilu Ao, Chief Executive Councillor of the Interim Body, had worked for a "partyless" government but as the Democratic Party had been formed at the initiative of A. Kevichusa, they were compelled to organise the NNO.

<sup>18</sup>Cited in M. Aram, *Peace in Nagaland: Eight Year Story 1964–72* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann Publishers, 1974), 70.

<sup>19</sup>See Arul B. Louis, 'Nagaland: Nobody's Bastion', *India Today*, 30 June 1980, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/indiascope/story/19800630-nagaland-nobodys-bastion-821223-2014-01-24>.

<sup>20</sup>Amer, 'Electoral Dynamics in India: A Study of Nagaland'; Prashant Jha, 'The Political Economy of a Nagaland Election', *Hindustan Times*, 9 February 2018, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/the-political-economy-of-a-nagaland-election/story-WjKnp0QmedGsF7gtK1qV0I.html>.

<sup>21</sup>Yogendra Yadav and Suhas Palshikar, 'Ten Theses on State Politics in India', *Seminar*, 2008,

<sup>22</sup>Dreamz Unlimited, a beloved and very popular YouTube channel known for sensitising the Nagas, their primary audience, on all manner of issues through their satirical skits, came out with as many as three videos on the theme of elections before the 2023 elections.

<sup>23</sup>Rev Rümatho Nyusou, 'Election: An Exercise of Faith', The Morung Express, 12 February 2023, <https://morungexpress.com/election-an-exercise-of-faith>.

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