

Study of Voting Behaviour in Manipur With Reference to State Legislative Assembly Election Held in 2022

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Abstract: Voting behaviour observed in the 12th Manipur state assembly election was shaped by several rational and irrational factors. Generally, voters were influenced by political parties, from which intending candidates were going to face the election and the personality of the intending candidate. In this election, people looked at and preferred political parties that were ruling at the centre. On the other hand, people's voting behaviour was shaped by the candidate's educational qualification, level of humility and financial position. Financial position of the intending candidate largely influenced the voters as it was witnessed the increasing number of crorepatris elected representatives in state assembly election held in 2022 from state assembly election held in 2017. Despite the above facts, there were instances where, even a destitute or a widow could independently discard the voting request or influence from an influential candidate if the candidate didn't beg for vote. In another dimension, because of the increasing influence of social media, there was an observed changing pattern of voting behaviour of youth as a larger number of voters defied direction from head of family members to vote for a particular candidate, by and large, they resorted to liberty of choosing candidates. As far as the voting behaviour of hill and valley was concerned, people of hill districts were more concerned about the political parties, whereas the people of the valley gave more emphasis on individual candidature. It was also observed that the voting behaviour of hill people was influenced by political issues based on ethnicity, which was the main deviation from voting behaviour observed in the valley of the state.

Keywords: Voting behaviour, political parties, money power, muscle power, ethnicity



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INTRODUCTION;

Manipur, a princely independent kingdom with historical accounts of more than 2000 years, became a part of the Indian union, giving it PART C status, which got union territory status in 1956 and ultimately statehood status in 1972. State legislative election was held since 1972.

Several political parties, viz., national political parties and regional political parties, have formed governments. National political parties such as INC, BJP and Janata party formed the government and the regional political parties such as MPP, MSCP have formed the government. From 2022 onwards, national political parties have dominated state politics.

In fact, Democracy would hold no meaning if the very element of elections that uphold the sanctity and meaning of democracy are not taken with the required seriousness by politicians. An election is a means through which democratic electoral politics is performed, and it ensures both change and sustenance of the political system. It is a mammoth opportunity of the people through which the wills of the people are expressed. Thus, in Manipur as in other states, through election people's political aspirations and wills are expressed.

In this regard, there is a close relationship between result of the election and voting behaviour. The result of the election is determined by the voting behaviour of the voters. Thus, voting behaviour is defined as the voter's attitude and predisposition towards the political system and political players. Generally, voting behaviour is determined by personal beliefs, orientation and social and political factors. Thus, voting behaviour, even though it may be uneven, observed political behaviours determined the results of elections in Manipur.

OBJECTIVE:

The study will aim at the observation and analysis of the voting behaviour of the voters with reference to the state legislative assembly held in 2022. The study will present the comparison between the voting behaviour of the people in the hill and the valley areas. The study will also focus on the changing pattern of voting behaviour of voters in the state. Also, the difference in political behaviour between the hill and valley of Manipur will also be included. The study finally aims at the study of the ever increasing influence of social media on the voting behaviour of Manipur.

WHAT DOES VOTING BEHAVIOUR MEAN?

According to *Plano* and *Riggs*, voting behaviour is the field of study concerned with the ways in which people tend to vote in public elections and the reasons why they vote as they do. Thus, it is the response and action of an individual in response to the political phenomenon and activities. It deals with the analysis of facts, statistics, accounts and examining electoral shifts and swings. It involves the study of human political behaviour which directly or indirectly affects his electoral choice. It is primarily a psychological domain, but it is also largely influenced and conditioned by socio-economic factors. Notably, even though man is rational, there are lots of irrational factors that influence the voting behaviour of people. In short, in a political system, voting behaviour plays a crucial role in bringing about changes and its sustenance.

12TH MANIPUR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTION: A GLANCE

The 12th Manipur legislative assembly was held in 2022, in which Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the dominant political party, winning 32 seats out of 60 seats. This shows the continued good performance of BJP in the state legislative assembly after the 2017 state assembly election. Despite the substantial efforts, INC could not secure more than five seats. It was the National People Party (NPP) that stood at the second position, securing 7 seats in the election. Thus, Janata Dal United (JDU) secured 6 seats, Naga People Front (NPF) secured 5 seats, Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) secured 2 seats, and 2 seats were secured by an independent candidate. The election was marked by the formation of a coalition government led by the BJP with N. Biren from BJP as the Chief Minister of the state, paving the way for succeeding his second term.

PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON POLITICAL PARTIES

VIEWS ON BJP

As the BJP had already led the coalition government after the 11th state legislative assembly, acquaintance and familiarity with the party were already found among the people. In the 12th state legislative assembly election, some sections of the people had a sceptical view of the Hindutva ideology of the BJP. However, the BJP'S election manifesto of the 2022 election alleviated the resentments among the people. And the ongoing BJP-led government developmental projects and welfare schemes such as “*School Fagathansi Mission*”, which basically aimed at the revitalisation of government school and “*Chief Ministergi Hakshelgi Tengbang*”, which ensures health schemes to the people, etc. In 2018, the BJP announced “*Go To Village Mission*”, which aimed to ensure governmental welfare service at the doorstep of the people and to reach governance at the hill. Besides, as the BJP was ruling at the centre, people thought that there was a high chance of the BJP to return in power as other political parties could not match the BJP in terms of money and muscle power. Thus, a major chunk of voters tended to give their votes to the BJP. Besides, the BJP manifesto, which promised of protecting territorial integrity of Manipur, preserving the rights of the indigenous people of Manipur, cultures and the developmental projections such as the establishment of Manipur Skill University, All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), also attracted a large number of voters. (Source; <https://aninews.in> Updated: Feb 17, 2022, accessed on 19th January, 2026). Thus, the launching of developmental schemes, welfare programmes and its commitment to territorial integrity and preservation of indigenous rights enabled it to corner the largest share of voters in the election.

VIEWS ON INC

In the post-colonial period of Manipur, the Indian National Congress (INC), carried the political commands and political aspirations of the people significantly. After the statehood of the state, Several congress governments were formed. But, because of 15 years tract record of the party starting from 2002 to 2017 and its association with infamous acts such as fake encounters that happened during its prolonged period and corruption hampered the opportunity to raise the party. And people of the state were having an antagonistic view on the dynastic element found in the INC at both the state and the centre level. And in the state congress party to some extend People' view on the Indian National Congress became fed up, tiresome, lethargic. This led to the downfall of the INC in the state. And the additional reason was the inability to form a government at the centre. Besides, lesser strength of money and muscle power of the Indian National Congress as compared to other political parties also further diminished the prospect of the INC. Thus, INC candidates could be elected mainly from the area of the Thoubal district.

VIEWS ON NPP

Most importantly, people, especially from the valley region, considered NPP as an emerging political party. Addressing the party leader and workers, NPP party national leader Conrad Sangma at an electoral rally, said that NPP is getting its right place and people of Manipur are accepting it(source: <https://www.ndtv.com> published on 3rd February,2022, accessed on 19th January,2026). The party also projected NPP as the sole national political party that stands for the regional political aspirations of the people of north east. This political persuasion also brought some changes to the behaviour of the people of Manipur. Earlier, NPP's good performance, i.e. its 45% striking rate in the 2017 state assembly election, winning 4 out of nine assembly seats it had contested (source: <https://www.thehindu.com> published on February 05, 2022 and accessed on 19th January,2026). Additionally, its participation in the coalition government gave NPP a place for further appeal to the people for support to the party, resulting in the larger participation of its candidate in the election. As a consequence, seven candidates from the party got elected in the 12th state legislative election.

Views on JDU

The discussion on the JDU did not happen intensely as it happened on account of the INC and BJP. In fact, people were not bothered about the merits and demerits of the JDU intensely. But, people had sceptical on the party, considering that the new arrival of a national political party is a token of political mileage, as these political parties were superior in terms of muscle and money power, which generally people consider as deliberate implanting into the state politician took up this political party in the 2022 election. Despite the fact that JDU managed to get elected six candidates and securing 10.77% of the popular votes (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com> published on 11 March 2022 and accessed on 20th January, 2026). However, latter five MLAs merged into the BJP. But it was merely the performance and calibre of the candidates which influenced and managed to get elected, as most of them were having interest in other national political parties such as the BJP and INC. Secondly, the people of Manipur and particularly the people of the legislative assembly constituency, where JDU MLAs were elected, did not have much acquaintance and familiarity with JDU. However, its manifestos espousing 28 points, which included the solution for insurgency, issues of low capital formation, inadequate infrastructure facility and industrialisation, managed to persuade the people to vote for the party.

VIEWS ON MANIPUR PEOPLE'S PARTY, A REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTY

It was an undeniable fact that there were lots of attachments and memories attached to the Manipur Peoples Party. Many educated people did not forget the contribution of MPP, such as establishing the then Regional Medical College, now turned into RIMS, establishing Manipur University, and inclusion of the Manipuri language under eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, people had hesitations and suspicions about the capacity and credibility of MPP as there were problems of frequent defections, organisational problems and distractions from regional political aspirations. Further, its poor performance in the 2012 and 2017 state legislative assembly elections further reduced its image. In order to regain its position and come to power, MPP should have reoriented its focus and priorities. For instance, finding out the relevant regional political aspirations and refocusing on it by sticking to regional political ideology in stronger terms should have been ensured. Thus, indeed, dedicated and devoted politicians were needed who did not indulge in defection and factionalism.

VIEWS ON INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATE

At the individual level, candidates were being looked at from many perspectives, viz., money, power and muscle power, etc. Generally, voters were having tendency to choose the candidates who were having greater chance to win the election. On this account, people considered candidates having greater muscle and money power and were preferred more. It did not mean that other factors, such as education qualification, personality, humility, and public-spiritedness, were not taken into account. Educational qualifications were also assessed by the people; the higher the educational qualification the candidate possessed, the more voters were influenced.

Surprisingly, Surname also influenced the voters in choosing their representatives. For instance, an intending candidate from Yumnam surname was largely supported by people belonging to Yumnam surname. Thus, candidates with larger surname were having bigger influence in securing seats at the state legislative assembly.

In another perspective, People living in the same village or residential areas and belonging to the same polling booth as the electoral candidates, also influenced the voters, greatly, and they were tempted to cast their votes in favour of him or her. For instance, people from Mayang Imphal Municipal council were tended to give their franchise to the intending candidate from the same area. This was also a prominent voting behaviour observed in the 2022 state assembly election.

And, this was quite true that candidates with larger polling station were generally had a bigger opportunity to win in the election. This further urged voters to give their votes to those who was having larger home polling booth and having larger number of voters.

While choosing their candidate, generally and notably, people looked into the financial status; people considered that a bankrupt intending candidate could not take on public responsibility when he got elected. People also looked into the financial status so that they could know that the intending candidate was in a position to finance the required expenditure in the election. In some constituency assemblies, intending candidates had borne the expenditure related to family medical health issues, marriage ceremonies, and other financial problems. This activity could be vividly found in Wangoi Assembly constituency and Mayang Imphal constituency. Such activity largely reduced the chances of commanding the elected representatives by people in post election period.

Personality of the candidate was also assessed and given due importance, for instance, even if the candidate was having an impressive net worth, i.e. wealthy and influential, he had to project himself the way he wanted in front of the people, to vote for him. Thus, the greater the oratory skill the candidate had, the higher the chances for him to get a larger share of voters. Thus, voting behaviour was largely influenced by higher oratory skills.

Vowing down to the people, begging for their votes, from the people was conspicuously observed. On this line account, even if a candidate had a background of a larger surname, a larger home polling station and significant financial backgrounds, if he did not bow down to the people, generally he was not voted. Instances were found where the weakest and poorest man could freely decide their fates through choosing their votes, rejecting insistence from wealthy and influential candidates. In fine, there was an influence of muscle and money power and due importance was given to the intending candidates. However, the hero worship culture was not found in the state assembly election, which was a unique dimension found regarding the voting behaviour observed in the 12th state legislative assembly election, especially in the valley area.

Another aspect of voting behaviour reflected while choosing candidates was that people also preferred candidates having a higher possibility of becoming a cabinet minister in the state government. Thus, it was canvassed people for a candidate, citing the possibility of becoming a cabinet minister, which ultimately gives a wider opportunity to serve their constituent assembly. It became an astounding factor that influenced voters largely.

Generally, people were upset on the irresponsible manner and lackadaisical attitude on the part of elected MLAs for taking steps for ensuring welfare of the people in post electoral period. Thus, on this account, instances were there, where People used to take money and cornered other personnel assistance from the candidates in the time of election, leading to the loss of huge exchequer to the candidates. This led to vicious circularity, reducing the sense of responsibility and accountability of the elected representatives, which in turn breeds opportunistic voting behaviour among the people, yielding a vicious circularity of distrust and irresponsibility.

According to the Association of Democratic Reform (ADR) report published in 2022, increasing criminalisation of politics was found as 23% of the elected candidates are found with criminal records and 18% of elected members of 2022 legislative assembly election was found with serious criminal case in 12th state assembly election held in 2022, which was only 3% in case of both criminal and serious criminal cases. On another account, the percentage of elected crorepati MLAs has also been increasing. It was a fact that 53% of elected MLAs were crorepatis in the state legislative assembly held in 2017, which increased to 80% in the state assembly election held in 2022. From the above point, it could be deduced that there was increasing criminalisation of politics, and the influence of money power in the election could be deduced. This trend is indeed a serious concern for the state; if the trend is not arrested, then the objective and the substance of the democracy may be hindered. This also reduces to the free exercise of democratic rights of the

people, which leads to political dismay and frustrations, which brings extremisms and secessionist movements in another form.

VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF VALLEY CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLIES OF MANIPUR.

The ascendancy of the national political party at the cost of the regional political party could be correlated to the changes in voting behaviour of the people. People of the state, most importantly of the valley areas, normally thought and considered that it would be better to opt for political parties that were ruling at the centre. This could be exemplified from the instance of the BJP coming to power in Delhi in 2014 and the drastic improvement of the BJP in the 11th state assembly election held in 2017, resulting in the formation of a coalition government led by the BJP. This particularity outlined the thought that the same party ruling in the state would get better grants in aid and greater developmental assistance from the centre. This instance of voting behaviour had been observed in the state election held in 2007 and 2012, when the INC was leading a coalition government in Delhi. This type of voting behaviour was not generally significantly found in Nagaland and Mizoram, where the emphasis on regional political parties such as the Naga People Front (NPF), Mizo National Front (MNF), and Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) was found in that period.

So, in the 12th state legislative assembly election, people gave preference to national political parties over the regional political parties. As a result, the majority of members are elected from the National Political Parties such as the BJP, NPP, Janata party etc. In fact, People while choosing their candidates, studied and examined the political party to which the candidate belonged. Thus, independent candidate were having lesser opportunity to get elected.

VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF VALLEY AND HILL: A COMPARISON

Although there are certain similarities in voting behaviours, for instance influence by clan, surname and groupism, there are marked differences between the voting behaviour of the valley and the hill area. From the result of the state assembly election of 2022, it is observed that ethnic-based political parties such as the Naga People Front (NPF) and Kuki People Alliance (KPA) got elected 5 candidates and 2 candidates respectively. Thus, hill people were largely politicised ethnically and a large number of people tended to give their franchise based on the ethnic based political aspirations. In the 2022 state assembly election, NPF promised to ensure the welfare of the Naga people and the election campaign pushed for a Naga political solution. (@NortheastLiveYt) and the party contested the election only from ten assembly constituencies; it did not contest the election in the Imphal valley. In the same note, the KPA also promised to ensure the strengthening of the Autonomous District Council (ADC), and the effective implementation of Article 371C. However, the party did not contest the election in the valley areas of Manipur. The voting behaviour of hill people was largely guided by Naga political aspirations and the autonomous status of Kuki-inhabited areas for Kuki communities. Protection of territorial integrity was lacking in the election campaign of both the NPF and KPA.

Times of India, published on 27th February, 2022, has brought the news that Kuki National Organisation (KNO), an umbrella body of Kuki militant groups, was asking the Kuki community to vote in favour of the BJP, Amit Shah's promise to settle the Kuki insurgency issue, which mainly revolves around separate administration from Manipur. Thus, from the above instance, it can be drawn that armed groups in the hills significantly strived to influence the voting behaviour of the hill people, which was considerably absent on account of voters in the valley areas.

Secondly, more awareness and acute considerations on the part of voters about political parties were observed in the hill areas. They are more concerned with the protection of land and the customary rights of the tribals. Generally, voters in hill areas confined their political aspirations mainly to their specific areas. Whereas voters of valley areas generally having broader and pan-Manipur outlook. Protection of the territorial integrity of Manipur and sustaining a common and

one administration of the valley and plain was also a deciding factors of voters of valley areas in choosing political parties.

Law level accessibility of communication and information technology, and a lower level of political socialisation among the tribal people of the hill areas, was observed. Besides, the level of education among the tribes of Manipur was lower as compared to the valley areas, which made a large number of tribal voters' inability to make rational decision, was observed, particularly in far-flung areas of the hill area, in the 2022 legislative assembly election. This group of people was easy prey to the political elites, who used them to realise political agendas of the hills.

More Consciousness about groupism and communal politics was manifested and clearly visible on the voters of the hills, as the idea of ethnic based communal politics was consistently pushed in the hill areas. But, in valley areas, community-based politics was not found conspicuously as elected representatives from Meitei communities were voted and elected by Meitei pangal and Meitei pangal elected representatives were also voted and elected by Meitei. In valley areas, political parties are not floated on ethnic or communal lines, which prevented voters of the valley areas from indulging in communal politics in the 12th state legislative assembly election.

In another dimension, it was indeed a fact that more democratisation of voters in the valley regions was found. The freedom of choosing and rejecting candidates was widely visible in the valley areas as compared to hills areas.

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the 21st century, the voting behaviour of an individual is significantly influenced by Information Technology and most importantly social media such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, twitter etc. Social media increasingly exceeded the role played by traditional media like TV, newspapers, radio, etc. Most of the adult possessed smart phone, a rapid and impactful democratising force, have impacted the people. Notably, in the 12th state assembly election, especially, youth have been influenced by social media in shaping public opinion. In this regard, politicians were also looking to augment their momentum of influence on social media. The increasing influence of social media brought drastic changes, as youth began to defy the orders of the family head, directing them to whom they should vote. This has also reduced the influence of surname and groupism in the electoral politics. The influence and the impact were more vividly seen in the valley area than in the hill areas. In the 12th state legislative assembly, Facebook and WhatsApp dominantly played the role in moulding public opinion.

CONCLUSION;

Voting behaviour means the trait of the people that influences an individual to vote in a particular way. In a democratic political system, changes and sustenance of a political system greatly depend upon the voting behaviour of the people. In the 12th state legislative assembly election, Voting behaviour was largely conditioned by the socioeconomic conditions of the people. Generally, the poorer the people, the more influenced by money and muscle power, and they become easy prey to the demagogue. In that legislative assembly election, the notable political concept of right and left-wing ideology was not prominent; people generally didn't debate actively about the leftist and rightist political ideology and its pros and cons in Manipur. In the hill districts of Manipur, in the 12th state legislative assembly election, the voting behaviour of people of hill was generally influenced by tribes, groups, clan and ethnicity. In the said election, people residing in hill districts were much attracted and influenced by manifestoes of political parties based on ethnic lines, and in the case of the valley, more emphasis had been given to the individual personality, such as education, financial position and possibility to become a Cabinet Minister in the government, etc. Indeed, a good political culture is quite indispensable for ensuring the right political voting behaviour. Voting behaviour that is immuned to the influence of money and muscle power should be nurtured. Acute consciousness of ethnicity, groupism on the part of the

voter, should be shunned. Rather, the voting behaviour must be based and refocused on social and political issues having pan-state characteristics. For this repeated and sustained political socialisation and awareness programme must be ensured. For this, equal and active participation from both People, NGO's and Governments at both the centre and state is required. Besides, the credibility on the part of the elected representatives must be enhanced and maintained. And the vicious circularity of distrust between voters and politicians should also be narrowed down, which will ultimately yield good and futuristic voting behaviour of the people.

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