

Explaining Differential levels of Political Awareness among Youth in Nagaland

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**This article is the outcome of a research project sponsored by ICSSR, New Delhi*

Abstract

The paper examines the level of political awareness of youth. Such an examination is made to know how knowledgeable the youth are about politics and related issues. A knowledge scale placed the youth in one of the three levels of political awareness scale- high, moderate and low political awareness. The study reveals that the majority of youth have high level of political awareness. The study found that differences in level of political awareness are explained by differences in political dispositions like attention to news or exposure to media and having an interest in politics. The study also report a positive connection between having political awareness and participation in specific electoral activities

Introduction

Democratic citizens should have a minimum understanding of the political system in which they express preferences and elect representatives.ⁱ It is not necessary for people to have encyclopaedic knowledge about what is going on in the political realm. But certain level of political awareness is indispensable for a voter activity. A minimal degree of interest in politics coupled with possession of political information is a basic requirement for a citizen's involvement and participation in politics. The health of a democracy is enhanced by an informed, engaged and participatory citizenry. Since people in a democracy are given the opportunity to exercise influence over public policy and those who formulate it, it stands to reason that people who are unfamiliar with politics or related issues will be less inclined to participate

The concept of political awareness is a broad term in political science literature. John R. Zaller defined political awareness as the extent to which an individual pays

attention to politics and understands what he or she has encountered.ⁱⁱ Other writers have also given a similar conceptualisation of the term. Robert C. Luskin defined political awareness as a function of three elements:

- Level of exposure to political information.
- Intellectual ability to retain and organise the encountered information
- Motivation to obtain and comprehend the political information.ⁱⁱⁱ

Political awareness has also been defined as the interlocking set of knowledge, interest and participation.^{iv} Further, the term political awareness covers at least three dimensions. Firstly, information can pertain to the individual's level of the political system. Secondly, information can relate to individuals knowledge of everyday politics. Thirdly and partly intertwined with the second dimension, a voter can possess knowledge of the political actors, persons or parties, and their differences ideologically or in relation to politics.^v Political awareness

also means access to political information, political participation, media exposure, interest in politics and education-with political information being the best indicator over all. Therefore, political awareness refers to how much factual information voters have about politics.

It is clear from the above discussion that for a meaningful participation in the electoral process, it is essential that voters should have a certain degree of information and knowledge about politics and related issues. This will make them understand better and be aware of their political rights, of issues that are taking place in the political realm, who their representatives are, how the political institutions functions and the impact of public policies on their own interest.

Methodology

The selection of the sample is done using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method. For the study, 18 (eighteen) Assembly Constituencies were sampled for the survey using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) method. From each selected Assembly Constituency, 3 (three) polling stations has been selected. As it is practically not possible to make direct observation of every individual in the population, a representative sample was drawn from each sampled PS to make inferences about the entire youth population according to the Systematic Random Sampling Technique with a random start. In order to generate the target sample for the study, the study sample has been drawn from the most updated electoral roll of the selected polling stations. Twenty respondents were selected from each sampled polling stations. The lists of sampled respondents

were prepared containing the name, age, sex, and address of each of the sampled respondents who were approached for interview.

After the selection of the sample trained field investigators were send to conduct face to face interview of the selected respondents using a standard set of Questionnaire. The fieldwork for the survey was conducted by college graduates who were imparted a 2 day training in techniques of survey research and data collection methods. All the interviews were conducted at the voter's house or their places of work. A total of 1080 voters were randomly selected, of which 2023 voters were successfully interviewed.

Measurement of level of Political Awareness

To measure level of political awareness respondents were asked questions pertaining to names of public figures, political institutions and public issues regarding. These questions tap into different areas of political awareness. Knowledge of this sort demands a certain level of attention and absorption of what is going on in the political realm. A knowledge scale was calculated to place the respondents in one of the three levels of political awareness scale – high political awareness, moderate political awareness and low political awareness. This was calculated by summing up the number of correct answers based on political awareness questions for every individual voter. Although the questions do not cover all possible relevant issues and facts, they do include a wide range of questions covering different aspects of politics and related issues, which affect political awareness.

The knowledge scale ranges from high awareness, moderate awareness, and low awareness. Based on the respondent's answers, each correct answer is counted as one (1) point. Those respondents who scored between 1-3 points were placed in

'low political awareness' category, those who scored between 4-6 were placed in 'moderate political awareness' and those securing 7-9 points were placed in 'high political awareness' category.

Table 1 Political Knowledge Scale

Political Knowledge Scale	Total	Percentage
High Political Awareness	555	54.25
Moderate Political Awareness	323	31.57
Low Political Awareness	145	14.18
Total	1023	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

As noted, the political knowledge scale has been created by summing the number of correct answers based on different political awareness questions. None of the respondents answered all questions correctly. However, the number of youth falling at the highest end of the knowledge scale is high (54.25 %). The study reveals that majority of young people in Nagaland have high political awareness about politics and related issues. On the other hand, 31.57 per cent of youth are at the moderate knowledge score and only 14.18 per cent of them are low knowledge scorer.

Having identified that there is an important amount of variance in the level of political awareness among youth; it remains to account for these differences. An attempt is made to identify specific individual and contextual factors or characteristics which may be associated with differential levels of political awareness among youth. Factors such as media exposure, having an interest in politics and discussing politics with others are taken into consideration. All these factors are expected to have an impact on level of political awareness.

Youth and Mass Media Exposure

In considering differences in level of political awareness, patterns of media use is one critical area to consider. This is because voters' pattern of media use is likely to increase their level of political awareness^{vi}. Knowledge of public representatives, political parties, and political issues, has become a cornerstone of democratic societies. Political awareness of the voters is mostly influenced by the information on political matters that voters get from different sources. People inevitably learn most of what they know about current events and political figures from the mass media. Therefore media play an important role in how much political knowledge an individual gain. This is expected because the mass media, whether television, radio, newspaper or internet are considered to be major source of news for many people.

As discussed above, there is no doubt that media plays a very important role in guaranteeing access to political information to the potential voters. Ideally, media is expected to provide at least two

sets of information. In the first place, it should try bringing the real issues of the contemporary society to the fore; and secondly, it should also try to provide information about the candidate's ability and credentials vis-a-vis- those real issues^{vii}. This way the media ensures that the voters make responsible and informed choices rather than acting out of misinformation^{viii}.

While many young people feel excluded from formal politics, interestingly enough, social media, mobile technology and online sites have become platforms for young people to express their views on issues that concern them. Such platforms give them opportunities to have political voice, express and exchange their political ideas, engage in debates about politics and other issues and they have also used such platforms for social causes. Even though large parts of Nagaland still remain outside the digital world, young men and women are creating new concepts of the 'public sphere' where views are expressed, ideas are debated, identities are explored, and in some cases, the established power

structures are challenged. These accounts provide evidence for how the Internet as well as the different media outlets has gained increasing importance in the everyday life of youth.

In order to assess how much level of political awareness can be accounted for by their usage of media, youth were asked questions about their frequency of media consumption. Attention to politics in newspaper is captured by a question asking how often they read newspapers, with five responses, "daily (everyday), frequently (several times in a week), rarely (several times in a month), never and 'no opinion'". Attention paid to political news on television is measured by a question about the frequency of viewing newscasts on television with responses, "daily, once in 1-2 days, 2-4 times in a week, 5-6 times in a week, and never. While attention paid to political news on radio is measured by question about the frequency of listening to newscasts on radio with responses, "daily, once in 1-2 days, 2-4 times in a week, 5-6 times in a week, and never.

Table 2 Frequency of Reading Newspaper

Frequency of reading newspaper	Total no of respondents	Percentage
Daily	404	39.49
Frequently	204	19.94
Rarely	199	19.45
Never	173	16.92
No opinion	43	4.20
Total	1023	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 2 highlight the result of frequency of exposure to the newspaper. Majority of youth read newspaper daily (39.49%). Those who frequently read newspaper constitute around 19.942 per cent. Those who rarely read newspaper constitute

19.45 per cent. On the other hand youth who never read newspaper constitute 16.92 per cent of the sample and around 4.20 per cent of the sample did not have any opinion on the issue.

Table 3 Frequency of Exposure to Television

Frequency of exposure to Television News	Total no of respondents	Percentage
Daily	167	16.33
Once in 1-2 days	219	21.40
2-4 times in a week	296	28.94
5-6 times in a week	94	9.19
Never	247	24.14
Total	1023	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

It appears that television is not a popular medium for collecting news for the youth. Majority of them (28.94%) watch television news broadcast only 2-4 times in a week. They are followed by youth

who never watch television news (24.14%), those who watch once in 1-2 days (21.40%), those who watch daily (16.33%) and those who watch 5-6 times in a week.

Table 4 Frequency of Exposure to Radio News

Frequency of Exposure to Radio News	Total no of respondents	Percentage
Daily	64	6.25
Once in 1-2 days	140	13.68
2-4 times in a week	145	14.18
5-6 times in a week	57	5.58
Never	617	60.31
Total	1023	100

Source : Field Survey, 2015

Similarly radio is also not a popular media outlet for youth. An overwhelming majority of them never listen to news on the radio (60.31%). 14.18 per cent of them listen to radio 2-4 times in a week, 13.68 per cent of them once in 1-2 days and 5.58 per cent listen just 5-6 times in a week. Only 6.25 per cent of youth listen to news on radio daily.

The young people use the Internet for a diverse range of participation activities. The internet facilitates activities which bring together the political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of young people's lives.

Table 5 Internet Usage

Internet Usage	Total no of respondent	Percentage
E-mailing	47	8.12
Chatting/Social networking	295	50.95
For information and education	215	37.13
Gaming	16	2.76
Online transaction	6	1.04
Total	579	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

It appears that among the net users one of the main online activities is to log in for chatting and social networking purpose (50.95%). While around 37.13 per cent of them use the internet for information and education purpose, 8.12 per cent use it for e-mailing, 2.76 per cent for gaming and another 1.04 per cent for online transaction.

In Nagaland as per the response of the respondents newspaper reading is widespread among the youth in Nagaland. However, it appears that, the youth are failing to avail themselves in sufficient numbers of the available media resources, especially radio and television, to keep themselves informed about political events and issues. And though 56.69 per cent of youth use internet, majority of them uses it for chatting and social networking purpose.

Political Awareness and Mass Media Exposure

All media outlets are likely to increase a person's exposure to political issues and events and thereby increase political knowledge. In fact, the literature review on media effects shows that all forms of media can significantly increase political awareness and thereby engagement in politics. Therefore, since people get a great deal of information on politics and related issues through the media, their level of political awareness would be closely related to the degree of media consumption. In other words, increased access and use of media are likely to increase an individual's level of political awareness. Such a relation is elaborated further in Table 6.

Table 6 Political Awareness and Frequency of Exposure to Mass media

Frequency of exposure to mass media	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Total
Newspaper				
Daily	3.45	45.20	45.59	404
Frequently	16.55	20.12	20.72	204
Rarely	35.17	17.03	16.76	199
Never	38.62	12.07	14.05	173
No opinion	6.21	5.57	2.88	43
Television				
Daily	2.07	4.33	27.03	167
Once in 1-2 days	4.83	22.29	25.23	219
2-4 times in a week	12.41	45.51	23.60	296
5-6 times in a week	2.76	6.19	12.61	94
Never	77.93	21.67	11.53	247
Radio				
Daily	2.07	2.79	9.37	64
Once in 1-2 days	16.72	16.72	12.25	140
2-4 times in a week	8.28	21.67	11.35	145

5-6 times in a week	7.59	310	6.49	57
Never	69.66	55.73	60.54	617
Internet				
E-mailing	18.18	9.84	7.13	47
Chatting/Social networking	59.09	16.48	47.59	295
For information and education	9.09	24.59	42.07	215
Gaming	13.64	3.28	2.07	16
Online transaction	0	0.82	1.45	6
total	22	122	555	579

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Traditionally, individuals who read newspapers have higher levels of political knowledge than those who receive information only through television news because news that is read seems to be retained more easily than news that is heard or seen on television^{ix}. This argument is also supported by another study which holds that people who turn to newspapers as their primary source of news know more than people who turn to broadcast media^x.

Reading data on exposure to newspaper, youth who have the highest level of political awareness are those who read newspaper daily (45.59%). They are followed by those who read paper frequently (20.72%). Those who read paper rarely and never are represented by 16.76 per cent and 14.05 per cent respectively.

A similar result is shown in the moderate level of political awareness. Those youth who read newspaper daily scored the highest (45.20%) followed by those who read paper frequently (20.12%). Those who read paper rarely and never are represented by 17.03 per cent and 12.07

per cent respectively. And as expected those who never read newspaper have the lowest level of political awareness (38.62%).

Those youth who watch television news daily are the ones who have the highest level of political awareness (27.03%). However the top scorers in the moderate political awareness group are those youth who watch television news 2-4 times in a week. And those who never watch television news are the ones with the lowest level of political awareness (77.93%).

Radio is not a popular medium of mass media among the youth. Around 60.31 per cent of them never listen to news on radio. However, it is this category of youth who dominate all three categories of political awareness.

Around 56.60 per cent of the sample respondents use internet and amongst them 50.95 of them use internet for chatting and social networking. The highest level of awareness about politics has come from those who use internet for chatting and social networking (47.59%). The moderate

level of political awareness has come from youth who use the internet for information and education purpose. The low awareness category is dominated by youth who use internet for chatting and social networking (59.09%).

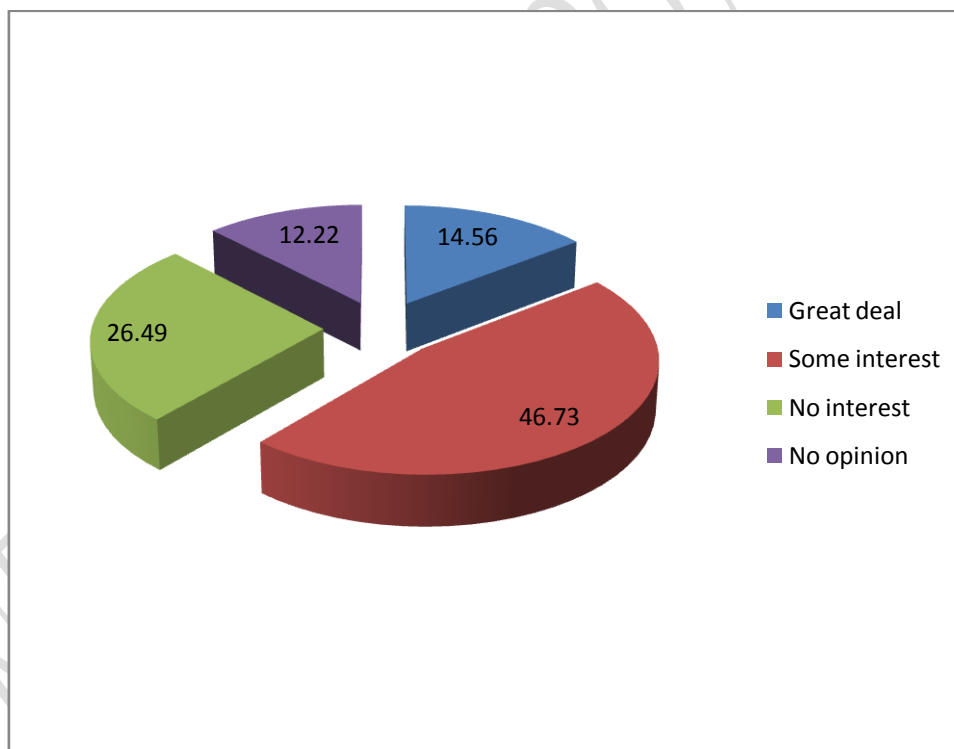
Political Awareness and Political Interest

Another factor that has been considered to explain differing levels of political awareness is political interest. An individual's interest in politics is important because it is interest that motivates citizens to follow political events and acquire information. Political interest is also considered to be a consequence, as well as

a cause of political activity^{xi}. Level of political awareness may be related to how much of an interest the youth have in politics. It is only when an individual is interested in politics that he/she may pay attention to political information and presumably will be more knowledgeable about politics. If they are not interested in politics, they may not be motivated to seek and acquire political information.

The youth's level of interest in politics was assessed by using the standard question on political interest. "How interest would you say you are in politics and public affairs? With responses, "great deal, some interest, no interest and no opinion".

Figure 1 Youth Political Interest



Source: Field Survey, 2015

As highlighted in Figure 1 majority of youth have some interest in politics (46.73%). 26.49 per cent of them have no interest in politics, 14.56 per cent have

great deal of interest in politics and 12.22 per cent of them have no opinion on the issue.

Table 7 Political Awareness and Political Interest

Level of Political interest	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Grand Total
Great deal	12.41	11.45	16.93	149
Some interest	34.49	45.52	50.64	478
No interest	42.76	28.48	21.08	271
No opinion	10.34	14.55	11.35	125
Total	145	323	555	1023

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The relationship between level of political awareness and political interest is made clearer through further elaboration of Table 7. As highlighted in Fig 1 majority of youth have some interest in politics. And it is this category of youth who dominate the high and moderate level of political awareness and as expected those youth who have no interest in politics at all dominate the category of low political awareness.

Political Awareness and Political Discussion

In societies where modern channels of communication and mass media are not readily available to citizens or are not very common the interpersonal channels of word-of-mouth communication from family members, neighbours, friends, etc.

are very important in order to affect the receiver's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in desired ways. Participating in political discussion with others is a very important variable because if one engages in political discussion with other people they show an interest in politics and some level of knowledge. According to Galston, discussing politics with others is a matter of interest and awareness. The experience of discussing politics with others may also stimulate a sense of political engagement^{xii}. If one engages in political discussion with others, they are exposed to other people's views and have the potential of being educated in the process. Therefore, political discussion is expected to have a positive and strong impact on political awareness.

Table 8 Political Awareness and Political Discussion

Political discussion	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Grand Total
Frequently	8.96	5.88	14.23	111
Sometimes	43.45	69.97	71.72	687
Never	47.59	24.15	14.05	225
Total	145	323	555	1023

Source: Field Survey, 2015

As highlighted in Table 8 above, an overwhelming number of youth discuss politics sometimes (67.15%) and it is this group of youth who have the highest level of political awareness (71.72%). They are followed by those youth who discuss politics frequently (14.23%) and those who never discuss politics (14.05%).

Again youth who discuss politics sometimes are the top scorers in the moderate level of political awareness (69.97%). Those who never discuss politics predictably dominate the low political knowledge category (47.59%) followed by those who discuss politics sometimes (43.45%) and those who frequently discuss politics (8.96%).

Thus it appears that frequency of political discussion is important in assisting individuals in gathering political information and increasing political knowledge.

Political Awareness and Political Participation

Political awareness has been shown to have an impact on political participation. It is generally assumed that higher the level of political awareness, higher would be the level of participation in electoral activities. Therefore, this section examines if there is any connection between political awareness and participation in electoral activities.

Table 9 Political Awareness and Political Participation

Political Participation	Political Awareness			
	Low	Moderate	High	Grand total
Voters	76.56	83.29	81.27	831
Non voters	23.44	18.73	16.71	192
Participation in election meetings/rallies	29.65	39.31	46.48	428
Participation in election campaign	6.20	16.71	14.77	145
Membership of political parties	11.72	17.64	19.81	184
Membership of youth/student wing	13.79	18.26	28.28	236

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 9 show that voting is the electoral activity where youth participate at a high rate (81.23%). Majority of the voters are those youth with moderate level of

political awareness (83.29%) followed by those with moderate (81.27%) and low level of political awareness (76.56%). On the other hand majority of the non voters

have come from youth with low political awareness (23.44%). They are followed by youth with moderate level of political awareness (18.73%) and high political awareness (16.71%) respectively.

Looking at data for participation in election meetings/rallies, it appears that having awareness about politics does matter for participation in election meetings/rallies. Those who attended election meetings/rallies in large numbers (46.48%) are also those youth having high political awareness. Such high attendance in election meetings/rallies are followed by youth having moderate and low political awareness respectively.

Campaign is not only an essential part of an election process; it helps the voters to become aware of the cross-currents in social, economic and political affairs in the country. Political awareness and campaign exposure are significantly related. Some find that campaigns affect the politically unaware most, some find bigger effects among more aware citizens, and some find similar effects across the awareness distribution. However this study does not support a positive relation between participation in campaign activities and political awareness. The highest level of participation in election campaign among youth has come from those having moderate level of political awareness (16.71%), followed by those youth who have high political awareness (14.77%) and low political awareness (6.20%).

Being a member of a political party may be the most common channel for gaining political experience. Joining a political party or being a member is likely to generate an interest to take part in electoral activities and acquire information about

politics. As expected those youth who have the highest level of political awareness are also the ones who are members of political party in large numbers (19.81%) followed by those in moderate (17.64%) and low political awareness category (11.72%).

Similarly, political awareness matters when it comes to membership of youth/student wing. Highest membership of youth/student wing has come from youth having high political awareness (28.28%) followed by youth in moderate (18.26%) and low political awareness category respectively (13.79%).

Therefore political awareness appears to have differential impact on different types on electoral activities.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the level of political awareness among the youth. This was assessed by a measure of political knowledge questions. The study found that majority of youth has high level of political awareness. The study also found that the respondents showed differences in their level of political awareness and these differences are produced by different influences. On examination it was found that factors such as patterns of media use and having an interest in politics have strong impact on the amount of political information that young people have.

The study also reports the connection between political awareness and participation in electoral activities. Having awareness about politics does matter for electoral activities such as voting, attending election meetings and being a member of a political party and youth/student wing. However, this study

does not support a positive relation between participation in campaign activities and political awareness.

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