



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUTH IN MIZORAM

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the role of Mizo youth in the political processes. In a democratic state, political participation is very important for every section of society. Political participation of the youth is very crucial for any society. It is a must to have a representative and this should include all parts of the society. When young people are not involved in politics and are not active, a large segment of the population is not able to influence decisions that have an impact on the lives of group members. Young people must necessarily participate more in political processes and even have a voice in shaping the politics of the present and the future for the welfare of the state. It is critical that young people are involved in politics from the outset. The youth also need to play an active part in formulating tomorrow's politics as they are the future of the state. Increasing youth participation can automatically bring new and fresh visions and ideas to the political process of the state.

Keywords: Youth, Participation, inclusion, political process.

Introduction

The stages of human development are infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Youth is immensely instructive for both the individual and the society in which he lives. The definition of youth differs by country, depending on typical ages and cultural influences. The concept of “youth” varies not only from society to society, but from age to age and even from class to class, from stratum to stratum, and from segment to segment. Youth is a time of transition and exploration.

Youth demonstrate significant passion, inspiration, and determination, making them the most precious human resource for nurturing a nation's economic, cultural, and political development. The amount of a country's youth population determines its capacity to fulfil its growth.

Youth energy and passion, when used appropriately, can bring about significant good change in society and progress in the country. UN adopted the age group 15 to 24 for defining youth; the National Youth Policy initially (in 2003) defined the youth

as in the age group 13-35³⁴. According to UNESCO, youth is the time when a person acquires the social and cognitive skills necessary to be prepared for the responsibilities and financial rewards that come with becoming an adult. Therefore, rather than being a time only used to define age limits, youth can be seen of as a specific stage of life with distinct social, economic, psychological, and political features. In this paper, youth will be confined to the age group of 18-35 ages for the convenience of the study.

Coming to political participation, it can be said that a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on the world and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2022). It is the community's voluntary efforts to directly or indirectly influence public policy decisions or the choices made by those who make such decisions. Though typically associated with voting in elections, political participation includes activities such as working on political campaigns, donating money to candidates or causes, contacting public officials, petitioning, protesting, and working with other people on issues (Robert, 2022).

A strong and dynamic political system requires the active participation of young people in the political process. Political participation of the youth can include – contesting elections, boycotts or protest movements, members of political parties, taking part in online political activism,

engaging through any youth organization, casting votes, election campaigns, etc. It should be mentioned that youth engagement varies throughout time, location, and other factors. Although certain youth are enthusiastic and willing to take part, others may lack the necessary information or assistance to take part.

Interest in politics is another aspect that affects youth engagement. Gender, educational attainment, and place of residence can all influence the degree of interest in and sorts of political engagement. Young people's interest in politics and engagement must be cultivated at both the local and national levels. Politicians must be approachable and transparent to the public, and young people must have access to avenues for participation. Two very essential characteristics that promote political engagement are interest and knowledge. This is a result of political indifference and ignorance, which have an impact on youth engagement and are seen to be the primary causes of low election participation rates.

In the past, the Mizo youth plays a very crucial role in society. They were regarded as the backbone and defender of the villages. The youth served as an army when their villages were under attack by other villages. The peace and harmony of the villages rely on the capability of the youth. Moreover, one of the most important tasks of the youth was to carry out *tlawmngaihna* in the Mizo society (Tlawmngaihna means always being ready to assist others and compelling moral force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others without seeking them

back). The coming of Christianity transformed the Mizo society into a more civilized society. Regardless of Christianity, the youth continuously carry forward 'tlawmngaihna' through the social institution known as the Young Mizo Association (YMA is the largest non-profit, secular and nongovernmental organization of the Mizo people). Moreover, the youth services in the churches, i.e. Kristian Thalai Pawl, Thalai Kristian Pawl, Pentecostal Youth Department, etc. play a very important role in the society. In short, the youth are very active in social and religious life. It can be mentioned here that though the youth are very active in socio-religious; they are not very active in politics.

Youth and Politics in Mizoram

Mizoram is known for its strong cultural and moral values, which resonate with the youth. These values, rooted in Christianity, emphasize honesty, integrity, and social welfare. The youth often view politics as a means to uphold these values and create a more equitable society. Their participation in politics is driven by a desire to bring positive change in alignment with these core principles. One of the driving forces behind the youth's involvement in politics in Mizoram is education. The state has made significant strides in improving its education system. With higher literacy rates and access to quality education, the youth are better equipped to critically analyze political issues and actively engage in the political process. Many educated Mizos are returning to the state after completing their education to contribute to the political and social development of their homeland.

Several issues motivate the youth to get involved in politics in Mizoram. These include unemployment, infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and social justice. With high unemployment rates, the youth are eager for economic opportunities and job creation, pushing them to engage with political parties that prioritize these concerns. Additionally, they are concerned about environmental degradation in the region and demand sustainable development practices from their political leaders.

In Mizoram, many people said that apathy towards politics is one of the most common syndromes in state politics. Bribes, dishonesty, corruption, and malpractices have become popular day by day. These circumstances are turning young people away from politics, which means the system is losing out on potential and energy that could really make a difference. The most affected systems are the legislative and political ones. Corruption among the politicians is one of the main factors for the lack of political participation among the youth in Mizoram. Furthermore, many politicians are greedy for power and money. In other words, the way they (people) see and experience the politicians turns them away from the field of politics. Meanwhile, the youth are much aware and indeed have cognitive knowledge of the state politics/ political system. But the enigma is that although the youth are aware they are normally apathetic towards the state political system.

Table 1: Participation in protests among youth and other groups

Sl. No.	Question	Youth (320)		Others (178)	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Did you take part in the 2018 Central Young Mizo Association-organized protest seeking the ouster of Chief Electoral Officer Shashank?	190 (59.38%)	130 (40.63%)	119 (66.85%)	59 (33.15%)
3	Do you participate in the Mizo Zirlai Pawl-organized demonstration against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 in the year 2019?	172 (53.75%)	148 (46.25%)	111 (62.36%)	67 (37.64%)

Source: Fieldwork

Level of political participation among the youth and other age groups

In the dynamic landscape of political engagement, understanding the varying levels of participation among different age groups is crucial (Jankowski & Strate, 1995). This exploration delves into the contrasting degrees of political involvement between the youth and other age demographics. Political participation is also a crucial aspect of any thriving democracy. As societies evolve, understanding how different generations participate in the political process sheds light on the dynamics shaping governance and policy decisions.

Moreover, participation in protests and demonstrations has historically been essential tools for social and political change, by providing platforms for voicing grievances and advocating for reform. While these events often draw participants from various age groups, it is evident that youth involvement in protests and demonstrations tends to be comparatively lower. Coming to Mizoram, the youth's involvement in protests and demonstrations is lower than that of other age groups.

According to Table No. 1, youth turnout at protests and demonstrations is generally lower than that of other age groups. In the protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016 in 2019 organized by Mizo Zirlai Pawl, 53.75 per cent of the youth among the respondents attended; however, the percentage turnout of the other age groups among the respondents (62.36%) was higher than the youth. This indicates that compared to other age groups, the Mizo youth are less likely to engage in political activities.

One of the important factors for the lower youth participation in protests is the growing sense of apathy and disillusionment among young people. The youth believe that politics is divisive and unresponsive to their concerns; further deterring their involvement in protests and demonstrations (Spragens, 1977). Also, with the increase of social media and online activism, many young individuals have shifted towards digital platforms to express their views and seek change. In other words, digital activism is a powerful tool; it can replace physical protest for some youth. Engaging in online discussions and petitions can provide a sense

of activism without the perceived risks or time commitment involved in on-the-ground protests. It is important to understand the reasons behind the lower participation of youth in protests and demonstrations to nurture a more inclusive and effective activist movement. It is essential to address issues such as disillusionment, lack of representation, and the need for clear objectives to increase youth engagement. Empowering young individuals to voice their concerns and contribute to social and political change will not only strengthen activism but also lead to a more robust and vibrant democracy. Moreover, creating safer spaces for peaceful demonstrations and providing education about the importance of activism can help to overcome the barriers that prevent many young people from participating in protest movements.

Joining a party or paying the primary membership among the youth

Joining a political party and paying the primary membership fee is a crucial step for youth looking to actively engage in the political process. By becoming members, young individuals gain a voice in shaping policies and decisions that directly impact their future. It provides an avenue to influence the direction of the party and participate in selecting candidates who align with their values and beliefs. Joining a party as a youth is not just a civic duty but also an opportunity to drive positive change and ensure their concerns are heard and addressed within the political landscape.

Table 2: Joining a party or primary membership fee

Question	Answers		
	Yes	Not Certain	No
Do you intend to join a party or are you planning to give a primary membership fee?	20 (6.25%)	82 (25.62%)	218 (68.13%)

Source: Fieldwork

In recent times, there has been a noticeable decline in the youth's interest in joining political parties or paying for primary membership. Historically, political parties have been the cornerstone of democratic participation, fostering civic engagement, and shaping public policies. However, the younger generation seems increasingly disenchanted with traditional party structures and is exhibiting a reluctance to become active members. In the context of Mizoram, the study reveals that the vast majority of respondents (68.13%) have no intentions of joining a party or paying the primary membership fee. Contrarily, only a very small percentage of respondents (6.25%) indicated that they intended to join a party or pay the primary membership fee to a political party (Table No. 2). One major factor that dissuades the youth from joining political parties is a lack of trust in the established institutions. Many youth perceive political parties as disconnected from the realities and concerns of their lives. They view parties as perpetuating existing power structures rather than addressing the pressing issues faced by the youth, such as climate change, economic inequality, and social justice. This erosion of

trust can lead to a sense of disillusionment, causing young people to seek alternative means of engagement. Also, even if young individuals consider joining a political party, they often feel that their voices and concerns will be overshadowed by senior members. The lack of representation and influence in party decision-making processes dissuades young people from taking on an active role within the party (Samuel Zoramthanpuia 2022). Another reason is that perceptions of corruption and internal power struggles within political parties deter the youth from getting involved. They are more likely to view party politics as a breeding ground for self-serving politicians rather than as a platform for genuine public service (Vanlalruata, 2022). This negative perception leads to reluctance to invest time and money in a system they consider to be inherently flawed.

Their reluctance stems from various factors, including distrust in traditional party structures, preference for digital avenues of activism, and a lack of representation of youth. They must adapt to the changing dynamics of political engagement and proactively address the concerns and issues that matter most to the youth for political parties to attract and retain young members. Moreover, young people, particularly those who are still in school or just starting their professions, may have financial hardships that make it challenging for them to join politics. In addition, many young people are searching for alternate means of participating in political dialogue and pushing for change as a result of the growth of social media and online activism. They can choose to get involved in independent

campaigns, online groups, or grassroots movements that are more in line with their principles and offer the chance to make a difference right away (Rudolph, 1971).

Why Mizo Youth should participate in politics?

Firstly, representation and Inclusivity. One of the foremost reasons for youth participation in politics is the need for better representation and inclusivity in government. Young people often bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the table, which are essential for addressing contemporary challenges. When youth are actively involved in politics, the government is more likely to make policies that reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the entire population. Second, a voice for the future. The decisions made in the political arena have a profound and lasting impact on the future. As youth are the ones who will inherit the consequences of today's policies, they must have a say in shaping those policies. Engaging in politics allows young individuals to advocate for issues that directly affect them, such as education, employment, climate change, and social justice.

Third, for social change and progress. Youth participation is often synonymous with social change and progress. Historically, many significant movements and revolutions have been spearheaded by young people who were passionate about transforming their societies. By engaging in politics, the youth can be a catalyst for positive change, challenging outdated norms and pushing for more equitable and just systems. Fourth, for accountability and

transparency. The involvement of young people in politics promotes accountability and transparency within government institutions. Their presence encourages politicians to be more responsive to the needs of their constituents and to act in the public's best interest. Youth participation can help combat corruption and inefficiency in the political system.

Sixth, for learning and personal growth. Participating in politics offers invaluable opportunities for personal growth and learning. It allows young individuals to develop leadership skills, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of complex societal issues. Engaging in political activities can be a transformative experience, equipping young people with the skills necessary to effect change in their communities and beyond.

Seventh, for strengthening democracy. A robust democracy requires active citizen engagement, and youth participation is an integral part of this equation. When young people actively participate in politics, it strengthens the democratic process by ensuring that a wider spectrum of voices and perspectives are heard. This, in turn, leads to more informed decisions and policies that benefit the entire society. Eighth, to foster a culture of civic engagement. Encouraging youth to participate in politics fosters a culture of civic engagement that can endure for generations. When young people see the positive impact of their involvement, they are more likely to continue participating throughout their lives, ensuring a continuous renewal of political leadership and activism.

Age of the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Mizoram

It can be noted here that the average age of the MLA in Mizoram is 53. This indicates that the youth was still overshadowed by the aged in the field of politics. Among the MLA Tawnluia (75), Dy. The Chief Minister is the oldest and the youngest MLA is TJ Lalnuntluanga (39). Moreover, the average age of the Cabinet Minister is 62 years; this means that the top leaders or the decision-makers are the senior citizens and not the youth. And the Cabinet were those who were usually senior in the party. Furthermore, the average age of the Minister of State (MoS) is 46 years of age. The average age of the MLA, MoS, and Cabinet indicates that the aged politicians overshadowed and still dominate the youth in Mizoram. Looking at the current political scenario, it can be said that the politics of Mizoram is dominated by senior citizens.

Conclusion

In order to bring about meaningful change in society, youth involvement in politics is no longer only a desire but an urgent necessity. Young people's involvement will broaden their participation experience, give them the opportunity to exercise their political rights, aid in their democratization, and permit active participation. Youth involvement in politics is not only advantageous in the near run but also lays the groundwork for future robust political engagement. They must acknowledge that they are today's leaders and that, as such, they have a bigger say in the course of their future. Throughout history, youth have surely engaged in,

contributed to, and even initiated significant changes in political systems, power-sharing dynamics, and economic opportunities. They can also be creative forces and dynamic sources of innovation. The government should reserved some seats for youth, encourage them, and create awareness about the importance of youth engagement in the field of politics.

Youth participation in politics is not only beneficial but essential for the health and vitality of any democracy. By actively engaging in political processes, young individuals contribute to better representation, promote social change, hold governments accountable, and pave the way for a brighter future. Their voices, energy, and enthusiasm are vital assets that must be harnessed for the betterment of society and the world at large. Encouraging youth to participate in politics is not just a choice but a necessity for the progress of nations and the preservation of democratic ideals.

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