



Evaluating the impact of political and economic factors on democratic support in Nagaland

Moayanger Ao, Moameren Pongen

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, Nagaland University, Lumami, Nagaland, India

Abstract

Based on data drawn from a Ph.D. field survey in Nagaland, this paper examines whether economic or political factors exert more influence over citizens' support for democracy.

Results clearly suggest that political evaluations exert the strongest influence on democratic support rather than economic evaluation. Overall the reaction of the citizens' to shortfalls in

Economic and political performance has been disillusionment with the way in which democracy is working but not discarding of faith in democracy itself.

Keywords: democracy, Nagaland, economic, political

Introduction

Popular support for democracy varies from country to country and depends on different factors, the important ones being economic and political. Those who favour economic factors argue that democracy earn its legitimacy if it is able to deliver the goods. If people feel that there has been improvement in their economic conditions under democracy, they will support it. For instance, Adam Przeworski (1991) ^[1] emphasised that the most important factor is the gap between individual belief and real economic experiences. If citizens' think that democracy improves their personal economic condition as well as of the country, then their support for democracy will increase. Russell Dalton (1994) ^[5] found that citizens' attitude toward democracy in the former East Germany is strongly linked to their assessment of the national economy. Claude Ake also argued that 'Africans view democracy in economic and instrumental terms. To him, Africans are seeking democracy as a matter of survival', he further posits that 'the democracy movement in Africa will emphasise concrete economic and social rights rather than abstract political rights; it will insist on the democratisation of economic opportunities, the social upliftment of people and a strong welfare system' (Ake, 1996: 138) ^[1]. In this formulation democracy is valued for what it can do rather than what it is.

On the contrary proponents of political interpretations caution against economic reductionalism and argue that citizens' perception of commitment to democracy may be because of how they experience democracy rather than the functioning of the economy. Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield (1995) ^[6] in their study found very little connection between economic experience and support for democracy. Richard Rose, William Mishler and Christian Haerpfer (1998) ^[12] also warned against simple theories that regard all political attitudes as though they were an offshoot of economic conditions. In their study they found that though both economic and political factors determine levels of support for democracy, it was the political factors that mattered more. Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton (2001) found that in Africa support for democracy is mainly driven by performance, though approval depends less on providing

economic goods than on the government's ability on securing basic political rights.

Research question

Since statehood in 1963, Nagaland has witnessed 13th Assembly elections and politically has witnessed all the major tendencies of the Indian electoral scene, such as, one party dominance, factionalism, defection politics, formation of coalition government, etc. One striking feature of electoral politics in Nagaland has been the phenomenon of constant defection and mergers among the different political parties. Amer attributes this phenomenon of defection as due to the non-ideological character of many political parties in the state (Amer, 2014: 6) ^[2]. Moreover, the state also suffers from various electoral ills. One of the major ill aside from electoral violence, inflated voters list, proxy voting, and voter intimidation is the menace of vote buying. This political malady has indeed become so pervasive in Nagaland with every preceding election. It is widely believed that elections in Nagaland are considered among the most expensive in the country (Amer, 2014: 9) ^[2]. Here it is noteworthy to mention that staggering amount of money is being expended during elections in the state. A Post Election Watch report 2018 released by an NGO named YouthNet in the state found out that a staggering amount of Rs.1061,09,25000 (one thousand and sixty one crores, nine lakhs and twenty-five thousand) was approximately spent in the election to the 13th Nagaland Legislative Election held in 2018. The report further revealed that each candidate on an average shelled out Rs. 5, 41, 37, 372 (five crore fourty one lakh thirty seven thousand and three hundred seventy two). The report stated that the trend of heavy expenditure in Nagaland for buying vote during election skyrocketed in the last two decades. The same organisation had in their Post-Election Watch study revealed that during the 2008 State Assembly election an approximate amount of Rs 569, 96,00000 (five hundred and sixty nine crores and ninety six lakhs) was spend by candidates which increased to Rs. 937,82,67,500 (nine hundred and thirty seven crores, eighty lakhs, sixty seven thousand and five hundred) in 2013 Assembly election (Morung Express, 18 Dec 2018).A renowned scholar on Northeast had commented

that corruption in Naga life has been the direct fallout of the introduction of electoral politics in the state (Misra, 1996) ^[10]. On the economic front, the state has a lackluster economy with virtual absence of any private industries, deteriorating infrastructure, corruption and high unemployment especially among educated youth because of bad governance. There is global consensus among scholars that bad governance and corruption represent formidable threats to new democracies and developing countries. Larry Diamond, one of the most prominent scholars in democratisation studies, stated that: "There is a specter haunting democracy in the world today. It is bad governance-governance that serves only the interests of a narrow ruling elite. Governance that is drenched in corruption, patronage, favoritism, and abuse of power. Governance that is not responding to the massive and long-deferred social agenda of reducing inequality and unemployment and fighting against dehumanising poverty. Governance that is not delivering broad improvement in people's lives because it is stealing, squandering, or skewing the available resources" (Diamond cited in Linde, 2011: 410) ^[8].

The state has an unemployment rate of 8.9 per cent which is nearly twice the national average (4.8%), according to the ministry of labour's annual Employment-Unemployment Survey, 2015-16 report (Nagas Connect, 27 Feb, 2018). The alarming part is that there are 70422 educated unemployed youth registered in the Life Register of the Department of Labour & Employment in the state (Morung Express, 4 Oct, 2016) ^[14]. Moreover, according to Nagaland's Economic Survey 2016, the state faces problems of poor quality infrastructure. For instance, despite having a road density of 95 per cent access remains a problem as many roads are in poor condition and prone to landslides thereby affecting transportation of people and goods and services, especially during monsoons (Business standard, 27 Feb, 2018). Corruption which has been recognised to erode political support for the system has become endemic in the state so much so that people are no longer shocked by exposure of corruption. Even Nagaland State Vigilance Commissioner (SVC) Mayang Lima acknowledged that corruption did lot of damage to society by destabilising communities, impeding economic growth and destroying ethics of democracy and political development (Northeast Today, 30 Oct, 2018).

Data and Methods

The data used in this paper came from a Ph.D. field work conducted between June 2018-August 2019 in Nagaland. The survey employed structured questionnaire from the fourth Asia Barometer Survey though some modifications were made keeping in mind the study area. The sampling design adopted was Multi stage random sampling. Out of 60 Assembly constituencies in the state, 10 assembly segments were selected using the Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) sampling method. From each of the sampled Assembly segment three polling stations were selected using the Systematic Random Sampling (SRS) technique. Finally using the same method (SRS) 411 respondents from the latest electoral rolls of the sampled polling stations were selected and data was obtained through face-to-face personal interview.

Assessing Democratic Support by Economic and Political Factors

In order to unravel whether economic or political factors

exerts more influence over citizens' support for democracy the present study bases the analysis on a survey item that is widely applied to measure popular support for democracy as a preferred political system. Usually respondents are asked to choose among three statements: "Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government"; "Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one"; "For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a nondemocratic regime." Table 1 shows that for 61 per cent of the respondents, democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. Only 16 per cent preferred an authoritarian government while 23 per cent remained indifferent.

Table 1: Preference for democracy/authoritarianism

Form of government	Frequency	Percentage
Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government	252	61
Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one	65	16
For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a nondemocratic regime	94	23

Source: Field work, June 2018-August 2019

Commensurate measurements to examine the effect of both the "sociotropic" consideration (how people perceive their state's economy is doing) and the instant egocentric evaluations (how their own household is doing) were used. The objective here is to identify whether there is a visible relationship between economic performance and democratic legitimacy (Chu *et al.*, 2008: 77) ^[3]. To evaluate the current condition of the state economy, respondents were asked "How would you rate the overall economic condition of our state today?" The response categories for economic evaluation were coded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very bad) to 5 (Very good). For assessing current personal economic condition respondents were asked "As for your own family, how do you rate the economic situation of your family today?" The response categories for economic evaluation were coded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Very bad) to 5 (Very good). It was found that the mean values for economic evaluations (sociotropic and egocentric) were 2.10 and 2.45 respectively indicating that citizens' held low perception of current economic conditions. To further prove the claim that economic performance plays a secondary role in shaping citizens' attitude towards democracy, correlation analysis was applied so that the strength at the individual level can be more systematically measured. Moreover, to assess the correlative importance of economic performance in explaining citizens' normative commitment to democracy, a measure of how many citizens' believe that democracy of an acceptable quality is being provided in the state was included. This study contains two sets of indicators that reveal essentials regarding how the political system looks in citizens' eyes. The first set measures how much people trust the key political institutions of the state. Here six political institutions are used and a composite measure of institutional trust was created. The second indicator used gathered data regarding citizens' overall satisfaction with the way that democracy works in their state. In the present study, trust in institutions is measured by using the following battery of questions available in the Fourth Asia

Barometer Survey: "I am going to name a number of institutions. For each one please tell me how much trust do you have in them." The response categories are coded on a Four point Likert scale ranging from 4 (A great deal of trust) to 1 (None at all). A Don't know option was also provided for those who did not want to reply or didn't have an opinion. Since the present study concerns with assessing the level of trust in the state of Nagaland, political institutions of the state have been included. The institutions included are the state government, political parties, courts, police, civil service and election commission.

Table 2 lists the mean values and standard deviations of the trust that people have in the six political institutions as well as the mean value of the Generalised Institutional Trust Index. The overall mean rating for the six institutions was found to be 2.13 which is below the scale midpoint of 2.50 indicating very little trust in any political institutions in the state. Although most institutions are distrusted, the levels of distrust are generally moderate. Political parties generate the greatest distrust (1.73) followed by state government (1.85).

Table 2: Level of Institutional Trust

Trust in	Mean	SD	Ranking
Political parties	1.73	0.93	6
State government	1.85	1.09	5
Courts	2.33	1.27	2
Police	2.20	1.31	4
Civil service	2.21	1.34	3
Election commission	2.44	1.33	1
Generalised Institutional Trust Index	2.13		

Source: Field work, June 2018-August 2019

From table 3 it can be seen that 54 per cent of the respondents are not satisfied with the way democracy is working in their state while 46 per cent are satisfied. This dissatisfaction is an obvious response to the state's government policy paralysis and political crisis which emerged as a result of the internal fighting within the ruling Naga People's Front government during 2017-18.

Table 3: Satisfaction with democracy

Satisfaction with democracy	Frequency	Percentage
Very satisfied	68	16
Fairly satisfied	123	30
Not very satisfied	175	43
Not at all satisfied	45	11

Source: Field work, June 2018-August 2019

In table 4 the correlation between support for democracy and the two economic indicators with the two political indicators are juxtaposed. It was found that the correlation coefficients are not strong for any of the four explanatory variables. Citizens' economic evaluation of the state's economy had the strongest impact on support for democracy than assessment of their own personal economic condition with correlation of. 231 as compared with. 099. But neither wields the kind of influence on attitudes towards democracy than the political factors do. Among the two political indicators, institutional trust wields the strongest influence on citizens' normative commitment to democracy with correlation of. 366 as compared with satisfaction with democracy which had a correlation of. 265 and also matter more than does the perception of state's economic condition and perception of personal economic conditions. The results clearly suggest

that political evaluations exert the strongest influence on democratic support rather than economic evaluation.

Table 4: Sources of popular support for democracy: Correlation analysis

Variables	Nagaland	
	(r)	P
Current state economic evaluation	.231	0.01
Current personal economic evaluation	.099	0.05
Institutional trust	.366	0.01
Satisfaction with democracy	.265	0.01

Conclusion

Even in the face of lacklustre economic performance over the years and despite persistent economic inequalities and political crisis that have rocked the state, public support for democracy has remained intact in Nagaland. Overall, the reaction of the citizens' to shortfalls in economic and political performance has been disillusionment with the way in which democracy is working but not discarding of faith in democracy itself. Democracy is valued by the citizens' for the political goods that it produces rather than perceived shortfall in its economic performance. However, it would be wrong to conclude that economic factor does not play a role in democratic consolidation. Democratic governments are always under pressure to produce robust economic growth and are subjected to the harsh likelihood of economic fluctuations especially in the age of globalisation as Non-state actors increasingly restrict the ability of democratically elected governments to manage their own economies and protect their citizens' economic interest. Moreover, democracies are also subject to the likelihood that prolonged economic stagnation may result in snapping popular support for democracy by obliterating the sense of satisfaction with democracy's performance that is essential to its legitimation. Lastly it is also to be noted that popular conception of the 'D-word' have been so contaminated by competing public discourses and socialising mechanisms that the word 'democracy' has lost much of its conceptual clarity and semantic consistency across borders (Chu & Huang, 2010: 121). This study has made an honest attempt to unravel the possible effects of both economic and political factors on support for democracy in Nagaland with use of limited variables and as such use of more variables are required for measuring democratic legitimacy to a greater extent in the state.

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