



Azim Premji University

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Community, Numbers, and Politics in Nagaland

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Vikas Kumar



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This volume offers interdisciplinary perspectives on the historical, cultural, and traditional inferences, inner-logic, and intricacies of democratic politics and elections in Nagaland. It goes beyond ‘institutional analyses’ of democratic structures and governance by looking at the troubled historical context in which modern democracy was introduced, how Nagas themselves view democracy, the reasoning they adopt as they engage in campaigns and perform elections, the remapping of traditional practices and values unto the new democratic playing field, and at the gender and ‘clean elections’ debates such practices evoke.

Is democracy an abstract set of universal ideals? Or is it lived out in the political moments of history as a set of practices that mobilise people’s wishes? This volume articulates the multivalent ways in which Nagaland has evolved in the modern era when the dominant mode of electoral representation is through the ballot box. It suggests that this process unravels in different ways, seen through the landscape of militarisation, nationalism, the influence of money, the role of customary laws, and the ways social structures – family, clan, village, tribe, gender, and church – mark electoral politics. Crucial pointers emerge on how the political is lived and actualised in the quotidian workings of Nagaland, producing its own political culture. A brilliant exposition of these processes, this collection will enliven debate on the vernacularisation of democracy in Northeast India and elsewhere.

— Arkotong Longkumer, Anthropologist, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Democracy in Nagaland offers a prism through which an array of perspectives reveal the ‘underbelly’ of an active Naga ‘colonial’ context that is constantly interacting with postcolonial systems and practices of democracy and elections. Through grounded and empirical approaches, the various contributions shed light, among other things, on how an ‘imposed’ democracy created a parochial power structure in which elections are reduced to acceptable procedures for power holders to assert, maintain, and exercise their political power and interests. This book will help to navigate the urgent change that is needed to prevent modern democracy from further corroding Naga values and society.

— Aküm Longchari, author of “Self Determination: A Resource For Just Peace” published by Heritage

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COVER IMAGE: A picture of the Plebiscite of May 16, 1951
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 **DEMOCRACY IN NAGALAND**

Jelle JP Wouters & Zhoto Tunyi

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NAGALAND

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Democracy is commonly understood in the singular – a governing system that a society has more or less of. Democracy in Nagaland encourages us to think about democracy differently, as something that can take different forms, always mediated through local histories, societal complexities, and cultural idioms. Without being the haven of indigenous democracy, the ‘traditional’ Naga village council seeks consensus decisions through elaborate public deliberations. The main issue, however, as several contributors stress, is that women are debarred from taking part. We are invited to engage such paradoxes and contradictions; for example, how democracy has been appropriated to serve existing power structures, yet also used to question these very structures. This is a powerful book that opens a new conversation about contemporary indigenous politics, one that moves beyond stereotypical depictions that either celebrate or condemn tribal societies. The violent postcolonial experience of the Nagas naturally frames the discussion, pointing to the difficulties of building inclusive democratic participation in a heavily militarized situation. Highlander Books are showing the way for critical scholarship on and in Northeast India.

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DEMOCRACY IN NAGALAND

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