International Journal of Social Science Research (IJSSR)
Volume- 3, Issue- 6 | November - December 2026 ISSN: 3048-9490

Conditional Electoral Participation: Tangkhul Civil Society and Political Authority in Ukhrul, Manipur

Chuileiton Ngalung
Research Scholar, Department of Political Science & Human Rights, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University- Regional Campus Manipur

Abstract

Civil society organisations in Ukhrul district, Manipur, operate across customary governance, community representation, Naga nationalism, and electoral politics. Their role cannot be adequately understood as either a voluntary association independent of political authority or an ethnic mobilisation that determines voting behaviour. This article develops the concept of conditional electoral participation to explain how community organisations seek to shape election legitimacy, candidate acceptability, and the obligations of elected representatives. Drawing on documentary evidence, including organisational notices, official records, election results, and regional and national reporting from 2010 to 2026, it examines three electoral mechanisms: collective abstention, consensus candidature, and post-election intervention. It treats conflict-time brokerage as a related institutional capacity rather than assuming that every act of mediation is, in itself, electoral. The evidence demonstrates that organisations have publicly challenged elections, endorsed candidates, announced sanctions, and acted as interlocutors with the state. It does not establish that these interventions reliably determine how individuals vote. The defeats of endorsed candidates and the resumption of electoral participation after a boycott show that community authority is consequential but neither uniform nor absolute. The article argues that the central issue is contested electoral legitimacy under overlapping forms of authority. It concludes that analysis must distinguish organisational claims from community-wide consent, social legitimacy from legal validity, and political influence from electoral control. These distinctions also highlight questions of procedural fairness, individual rights, gender, minority residents, and the relationship between civil society and armed nationalist actors.

Keywords: Tangkhul Naga, civil society, customary authority, electoral politics, Ukhrul, Naga nationalism, hybrid political order

1. Introduction

Studies of electoral politics in the hill districts of India's Northeast commonly examine party competition, candidate selection, ethnic mobilisation, and voting outcomes. These approaches remain necessary, but they do not fully explain political settings in which community organisations also claim authority to judge whether an election is legitimate, whether a

*Corresponding Author Email: chuileitonngalung@gmail.com
Published: 04 November 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i6.301417
Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

candidate is acceptable, and what obligations an elected representative owes to a wider political cause. In Ukhrul district, where Tangkhul Naga institutions, the constitutional order, and the Naga nationalist movement intersect, electoral politics takes place within a broader field of competing claims to representation.

Two episodes illustrate the changing relationship between community organisations and elections. In 2010, Tangkhul frontal organisations opposed the district council elections and declared candidates who participated to be "Anti-Naga national". A notice issued on 9 July, 2010 stated that the organisations had resolved to initiate action against candidates "as per the prevailing Tangkhul customary laws and practices" (Tangkhul Frontal Organisations, 2010). In June 2024, the United Naga Council (UNC) barred Congress MP-elect Alfred Kanngam S. Arthur and two independent candidates from public platforms and leadership positions in Naga society for seven years after they contested the Outer Manipur parliamentary election against the UNC's preferred position (EastMojo, 2024a). The episodes differ in institutional context and severity, but both reveal attempts to extend collective political expectations beyond the ballot.

The article asks how Tangkhul civil society organisations seek to shape electoral legitimacy and political accountability, and what limits their authority. It advances the concept of conditional electoral participation. The term refers to efforts by community organisations to attach conditions to participation in state-run elections without necessarily rejecting electoral politics altogether. The conditions concern the legitimacy of an electoral institution, the acceptability of candidates, and the conduct of elected representatives. The concept does not imply that organisations can deliver votes or that their declarations represent the preferences of every community member. Instead, it highlights the public standards, endorsements, warnings, and sanctions organisations use to influence political choices.

The article makes three contributions. First, it treats electoral politics as a relationship among overlapping forms of authority rather than as a process contained within parties and state institutions. Secondly, it distinguishes organisational influence over legitimacy from demonstrable control over electoral outcomes. Thirdly, it examines the democratic tensions created when organisations claiming collective representation impose or announce sanctions against individuals who dissent from a political position. The argument is based on documentary analysis and is therefore limited to publicly visible interventions. It cannot establish voters' private motivations or the extent to which community members accept or resist organisational decisions.

2. Ukhrul's institutional setting: overlapping political authorities

Ukhrul is a hill district of Manipur with a predominantly Tangkhul Naga population. The district also includes Kuki villages, which matters for any analysis of community authority and inter-community relations. The ethnic violence that began across Manipur in May, 2023 and the renewed Tangkhul-Kuki violence around Litan in February, 2026 made these relations more politically sensitive. Contemporary reporting described an assault followed by confrontations and arson in Litan and neighbouring areas. As events unfolded, reports differed

over the number and ownership of damaged houses, so this article does not treat early damage estimates as settled facts (Indian Express, 2026a, 2026b).

Ukhrul's electoral institutions operate within a distinctive constitutional and statutory setting. Article 371C of the Constitution provides for a committee of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, consisting of members elected from the state's Hill Areas, and assigns the Governor special responsibility for their administration. The Hill Areas Committee is therefore constitutionally grounded. The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971, is a separate statutory framework for district councils; it should not be conflated with the Hill Areas Committee or with the Sixth Schedule arrangements that apply in certain other parts of India (India 1950, Art. 371C; India 1971). The distinction matters because Naga organisations have challenged the powers and institutional design of the district councils, including in the context of the 2010 elections.

The political order relevant to this study contains at least four overlapping sources of authority. The first is constitutional-electoral authority, exercised through election law, electoral administration, the state legislature, parliamentary representation, and district councils. The second is customary authority, exercised through village institutions, headmen, and councils whose standing derives from local histories and practices. The third is representative community authority, claimed by organisations such as the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) and its affiliated bodies for women, students, youth, and village headmen. The fourth is nationalist authority, associated with the wider Naga political movement and organisations including the UNC and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), commonly known as the NSCN (IM). These categories overlap in practice, but they are not interchangeable. A village council's decision, a TNL statement, a UNC resolution, and an NSCN (IM) instruction have different institutional sources and should not automatically be attributed to "Tangkhul civil society" as a single actor.

The TNL and its affiliated organisations can speak publicly on behalf of the Tangkhul community, organise demonstrations, issue memoranda, and communicate with state officials. Yet the breadth of a representative claim does not by itself establish that all villages, residents, or affiliated organisations endorse a particular position. Nor does the presence of customary institutions mean that their decisions have the same legal status as decisions made under state law. This article therefore treats authority as an empirical question: who made a decision, through what procedure, to whom it applied, and what evidence exists of its implementation.

3. Civil society, political society, and hybrid authority

The literature on civil society often emphasizes associations' capacity to generate trust, cooperation, and democratic participation. Putnam's account of civic traditions links associational life to institutional performance, while Varshney demonstrates the importance of intercommunal associations for managing ethnic conflict (Putnam, 1993; Varshney, 2002). These approaches illuminate important dimensions of civic life, but they cannot be applied uncritically to community-based organisations whose decisions may be enforced through customary institutions. The relevant question is not whether such organisations are "civil

society" in an absolute sense, but which functions they perform and how their authority is constituted.

Chatterjee's distinction between civil society and political society is useful because it highlights collective claims, informal bargaining, and political engagement outside the ideal of formally organised citizenship (Chatterjee, 2004). Tangkhul organisations operate through petitions, public meetings, demonstrations, and negotiation with the state. At times, however, they also announce sanctions against people who depart from collective positions. This capacity complicates any simple distinction between associations that represent citizens and institutions that govern or discipline them. It also makes questions of representation and procedure central to the analysis.

Scholarship on Northeast India situates electoral institutions within longer histories of insurgency, state management, ceasefires, and contested sovereignty. Baruah (2005) analyses the durable disorder produced by the region's political arrangements; Lacina (2009) examines the relationship between local ethnic power and uneven rule of law; and Kolås (2011) shows how ceasefires can alter relations among armed organisations and other political actors. Wouters's ethnographic work illustrates how insurgency and state responses become embedded in everyday life (Wouters 2018). These studies help explain why elections may be interpreted through a wider nationalist question. The present article adds a more focused inquiry into how organisations seek to regulate electoral legitimacy and the obligations of representatives.

Scott's account of upland Southeast Asia provides a comparative lens on state incorporation and local autonomy, although his empirical focus is not Manipur (Scott 2009). The analogy should therefore remain limited. Tangkhul organisations do not simply avoid the state; they may contest state institutions, negotiate with them, or engage them through electoral and administrative channels. The literature on hybrid political orders similarly describes the coexistence of formal institutions and local authority, but hybridity should not be treated as an explanation in itself (Boege et al. 2008). The analysis must identify whether institutions complement, compete with, substitute for, or seek to coerce one another.

The article's central theoretical claim is consequently narrower than a general theory of hybrid governance. It argues that community organisations may seek to condition participation in elections by claiming authority over legitimacy, candidate acceptability, and post-election obligations. Candidates, village institutions, political parties, voters, and other organisations mediate their influence. Conditional electoral participation is therefore a contested practice, not a settled institutional rule.

4. Defining conditional electoral participation

Conditional electoral participation describes a form of political engagement in which organisations do not necessarily reject state-run elections in principle but seek to establish conditions under which participation is considered legitimate. Three dimensions are analytically central. The first is institutional legitimacy: whether people accept an election or electoral body as a legitimate arena for political representation. The second is candidate acceptability: whether contenders are regarded as consistent with the community's stated

political commitments. The third is representative accountability: whether elected office-holders are expected to act after an election in accordance with collective positions.

These dimensions produce three principal electoral mechanisms. Collective abstention challenges the legitimacy of a particular election or institution. Consensus candidature seeks to narrow the field of acceptable candidates through consultation, endorsement, or pressure to withdraw. Post-election intervention seeks to discipline, criticise, or redirect elected representatives. The mechanisms may overlap, but they should not be collapsed into one another. A declared boycott is not the same as actual non-participation; an organisational endorsement is not proof of consensus; and a public criticism of a representative does not necessarily amount to an enforceable sanction.

Conflict-time brokerage is related but analytically distinct. Organisations may negotiate with officials, mediate between communities, mobilise relief, or present collective demands. Such activity can sustain their public standing and may affect how representatives are evaluated, but it is not necessarily electoral. This article therefore treats brokerage as a broader political capacity that contextualises the three electoral mechanisms. It counts as evidence of electoral influence only where a documented connection to candidate legitimacy, representative accountability, or electoral choice can be shown.

The concept differs from a conventional boycott because it allows both participation and abstention. It differs from clientelism because the primary claim concerns political legitimacy and collective obligation rather than an exchange of votes for material benefits. It differs from ethnic voting because it does not presume that shared identity determines the ballot. Organisational claims must be negotiated and can be rejected, as electoral outcomes in 2017 and 2024 indicate. The concept is most useful where community institutions claim representative authority, a broader nationalist movement advances political claims over the same population, and state electoral institutions are contested or, for some actors, seen as insufficiently responsive to those claims.

5. Sources and method

This article uses documentary analysis of material published between 2010 and 2026. The source base includes organisational notices and memoranda reproduced in news reports, official parliamentary and constitutional records, Election Commission data, and reporting by regional, national, and international news organisations. Academic literature provides the theoretical framework. The study is not based on interviews, surveys, or village-level observation, and it does not claim to measure individual voting behaviour.

The unit of analysis is the documented episode of organisational intervention. Each episode is examined in relation to the actor making the intervention, the instrument used, the target, the stated justification, and the reported response or outcome. A mechanism is identified only when the source record names an actor, describes a discernible action, and identifies a target or intended audience. This rule makes the cases traceable, but it does not by itself establish that a reported action was implemented or that it had the intended effect.

Organisational statements are treated as primary evidence of the position publicly adopted by the issuing body, not as neutral accounts of events or proof of community-wide consent. News reports establish the public record, but reports that reproduce the same press release are not treated as independent corroboration. The analysis prefers official documents for constitutional provisions, electoral results, and parliamentary proceedings. Where only a single report supports a claim, the analysis attributes the claim to that report or organisation. Where sources differ, the text avoids presenting an early or disputed figure as definitive.

The method has four important limitations. First, English-language reporting may omit local debate and disagreement. Secondly, sources are more likely to report dramatic episodes such as boycotts and protests than routine participation. Thirdly, the available sources rarely document the views of people subject to sanctions or the internal decision-making of organisations. Fourth, election results can show who won and by what margin, but they cannot independently identify why voters made their choices. The findings should therefore be read as an analysis of publicly visible organisational practices and their institutional implications, not as a causal measurement of their effect on votes.

6. Three mechanisms of electoral influence

This section examines three mechanisms through which civil society organisations seek to shape electoral legitimacy and representative conduct. The 2010 district council elections illustrate collective abstention and sanctions against participation; subsequent elections show how endorsements and consensus candidates may confer legitimacy without guaranteeing electoral victory; and post-election interventions reveal efforts to hold representatives accountable to collective political expectations. These mechanisms are analytically distinct, although they may overlap in practice. In each case, the evidence is assessed carefully to distinguish organisational claims from community-wide consent and political influence, and to separate demonstrable control over electoral outcomes from political influence.

6.1 Collective abstention: the district council elections of 2010

The 2010 district council elections provide the clearest documented example of an attempt to enforce collective abstention. The UNC opposed the elections held under the amended district council framework, arguing that the councils lacked the powers and institutional status sought by Naga organisations. The Ministry of Home Affairs reported that the blockade of National Highway 39 began on 6 April 2010 and that of National Highway 53 on 11 April, in protest against the district council elections; the blockade was finally lifted on 18 June (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2010). A parliamentary answer also connected the widening agitation to the state government's refusal to allow NSCN (IM) leader Th. Muivah to enter Manipur (Lok Sabha 2010). The official chronology establishes the stated grounds and duration of the blockade, but not the position of every Tangkhul village or voter.

A notice dated 9 July 2010, issued in the name of the Tangkhul Coordination Committee's Media and Publicity Cell and reproduced by Nagalim Voice, recorded that a meeting held on 19 May had resolved to declare the district council candidates "Anti-Naga national" and to "initiate action against the candidates as per the prevailing Tangkhul customary laws and practices" (Tangkhul Frontal Organisations, 2010). The notice also recorded a meeting with

the Council of Tangkhul Headmen, Chairmen, and *hanga* (village councils) at the TNL Hall on 25 May, where the organisations reaffirmed opposition to the elections. It warned that people who assisted the candidates would do so at their own risk. The notice set out the threatened measures in explicit terms: "They should be banished from their respective village(s) and not allowed to reside in Naga areas. Their properties, including dwelling houses, will be dismantled." This is a direct quotation from the communiqué, including its original wording.

The communiqué records specific actions by village authorities in Talui, Hundung Kabongram, Lunghar, and Phalee. A contemporaneous report also cites declarations by Nungbi Khullen and Nongman and says that eight candidates had been banished or otherwise sanctioned (E-Pao, 2010). These reports should not be counted as independent corroboration: the E-Pao item reproduces the same organisational account and related village declarations. The communiqué provides strong evidence of the sanctions the organisations publicly announced or endorsed, but it does not independently establish every consequence, whether the organisations implemented all measures as described, or what remedies affected individuals had available. The article therefore treats these as reported and publicly defended sanctions rather than assuming that their full consequences are known.

The case demonstrates the coercive potential of collective abstention. The sanctions described were not measures election officials administered under electoral law. They were community-based actions directed at candidates and participants. The distinction between community membership and legal citizenship matters: the notice's reference to a community list should not be interpreted as cancelling Indian citizenship or legal voter status. If accurately described, the reported destruction of a dwelling represents a different and more severe kind of action than public censure. The absence of publicly available information about hearings, appeals, or remedies prevents a definitive assessment of procedure, but it also exposes the limits of the documentary record.

The episode does not show that the boycott achieved universal compliance. Candidates participated, and the organisations' own notice identified individuals against whom action was taken. Collective abstention should therefore be understood as an attempt to make participation politically costly, not as proof that a community acted with one voice. Its significance lies in the claim that a candidate's participation could be treated as a violation of collective political obligation, and in some authorities' willingness to support sanctions intended to enforce that claim.

6.2 Consensus candidature: endorsement and electoral limits

Consensus candidature operates before polling. Organisations may convene consultations, endorse a preferred candidate, appeal for unity, or warn against candidates whose participation is considered divisive. Such practices can shape the political environment without necessarily determining how electors vote. The distinction between a declared consensus and an actual consensus is central: an organisation may announce a preferred candidate while other organisations, parties, families, villages, or voters support alternatives.

The 2017 Manipur Assembly election illustrates this difference. The *Indian Express* reported that the NSCN (IM) had instructed village councils not to entertain candidates from parties other than the Naga People's Front (NPF) and described allegations that villagers were pressured to support the NPF (Indian Express, 2017). This is evidence of a reported instruction and allegations of pressure, not proof that every village council complied or that the instruction determined votes. The published constituency result gives Alfred Kanngam Arthur of the Congress 11,510 votes and Somatai Shaiza of the BJP 11,214, a margin of 296 votes; the NPF candidate, Samuel Risom, received 8,883 votes (Election Commission of India, 2017). The result shows that the NPF's reported preferred position did not win this constituency. It cannot tell us how many votes the instruction influenced, how many were cast in defiance of it, or what other considerations shaped voter choice.

The 2022 Assembly result further demonstrates that electoral competition remained meaningful. Ram Muivah of the NPF won Ukhrul with 15,503 votes, ahead of Arthur with 14,561 and Shaiza with 9,961 (Election Commission of India, 2022). The sequence of results cautions against treating organisational authority as a fixed electoral machine. The available documentary sources do not explain the changes in party support, and the article should not infer a single cause from the results alone. Kinship, party organisation, candidate reputation, local issues, and nationalist commitments may all matter, but establishing their relative weight would require voter-level evidence.

The 2024 Lok Sabha election provides a more explicit case of organisational endorsement. The UNC convened a consultative meeting of intending Naga candidates on 27 February, explaining that it was "crucial for a Naga representative to advocate for our people in the Lok Sabha" (EastMojo, 2024b). Subsequent reporting described Kachui Timothy Zimik of the NPF as the "unanimous candidate of the Nagas" (Deccan Herald, 2024b). Alfred Kanngam S. Arthur, who contested for the Congress, won the Outer Manipur seat with 384,954 votes against Zimik's 299,536, a margin of 85,418 (All India Radio, 2024). On 13 June, the UNC announced that Arthur and two independent candidates, S. Kho John and Allyson Abonmai, would be debarred from public platforms and leadership positions in Naga society for seven years. The notification, as reproduced by contemporary reporting, described their actions as a wilful challenge to the Naga people's position and unity (EastMojo, 2024a). The electoral figures and the organisational sanction are separate claims, each supported by its own source.

The episode reveals both the reach and the limits of consensus candidature. The UNC could convene candidates, publicly define a preferred position, and announce a substantial social sanction. It could not prevent Arthur's election. The result strongly challenges the assumption that an organisational endorsement automatically controls the ballot. It does not show that the endorsement had no effect: a candidate may face reputational costs even when elected, and the effect on votes cannot be isolated from aggregate results. Nor does the UNC's sanction establish that all Tangkhul organisations or villages accepted it. The sources reviewed here do not document a uniform response by the TNL, village councils, or the affected candidates.

The 2017 and 2024 cases also require institutional differentiation. The 2017 report attributed the instruction to the NSCN (IM), an armed nationalist organisation. The 2024 endorsement and subsequent sanction were attributed to the UNC, a Naga-wide organisation. The two

episodes should not be described as equivalent exercises of "Tangkhul civil society" authority. Instead, they show that different actors may try to shape candidate legitimacy through different channels, and that the consequences depend on their relationships with village institutions, parties, candidates, and voters.

6.3 Post-election intervention and representative accountability

Community organisations continue to make claims on elected representatives after elections. Such interventions may concern legislative decisions, the wider Naga political question, local development, or administrative matters. These cases should not automatically be treated as one form of accountability. The relevant questions are who is being addressed, what obligation is asserted, and whether the intervention seeks explanation, policy change, public censure, or exclusion.

In 2015 and 2016, Naga and Tangkhul organisations protested legislation that they regarded as adverse to tribal interests. In October 2016, the TNL imposed a 24-hour bandh over the Chief Minister's visit to Ukhrul. Reports quoted organisational leaders as maintaining that legislators who supported the bills were subject to a continuing boycott (Newmai News Network, 2016). This episode linked elected representatives' conduct to a collective grievance about legislation. It is therefore a relatively direct example of political accountability as the organisations themselves understood it, although the documentary record does not show how individual legislators or voters responded over time.

A different kind of dispute arose in October 2023, when Ukhrul MLA Ram Muivah suggested that Ukhrul could become a second or summer capital of Manipur. The TNL publicly rejected the proposal, saying it did not want Tangkhul land to become "a Summer, Second or any other Capital of Manipur" (EastMojo, 2023b, 2023c). The TNL framed its position through the wider Naga political question and its interpretation of the Chief Minister's visit. Other Tangkhul organisations had participated in a memorandum associated with the visit, exposing differences within the broader community-organisational field. The episode matters not because it shows the TNL controlled the MLA's mandate, but because it shows that an elected representative's development proposal could be publicly evaluated against a nationalist political position.

In January 2025, Tangkhul organisations, including the TNL and the Tangkhul Shanao Long, protested the transfer of the Deputy Commissioner of Ukhrul. Reports described the officer as the first woman to hold the post in 76 years. Demonstrators blocked the entrance to the Mini Secretariat Complex, and the organisations appealed to the Chief Minister to reconsider the transfer, citing the officer's performance (EastMojo, 2025b). This was an intervention in administrative policy rather than a direct sanction against an elected representative. It demonstrates the organisations' capacity to mobilise around appointments and district administration, but it should not be treated as evidence of electoral accountability unless a link to the conduct or evaluation of elected representatives is shown.

Taken together, these episodes establish that community organisations act as political interlocutors between elections. They publicise collective expectations, contest representatives' conduct, and seek to influence policy and administration. However, their authority varies across these domains. A public statement, a bandh, a protest over an administrative transfer, and a

seven-year exclusion from public platforms differ in target, procedure, and possible consequence. They should not be arranged on a single ladder of severity without evidence about their effects. A more defensible classification records the instrument used, the target, the stated grounds, the reported response, and the degree to which implementation is independently documented.

7. Brokerage as a wider political capacity

The political work of Tangkhul organisations extends beyond elections. During the violence and displacement that followed May 2023, the TNL opposed proposals to establish semi-permanent relief camps in Ukhrul for people displaced from other districts. The UNC similarly expressed concern about what it described as adverse demographic imbalances in Naga areas (EastMojo, 2023a; Newmai News Network, 2023). These statements reflect the organisations' publicly stated concerns. They do not, by themselves, establish an electoral motive. Although demographic change can affect political representation, treat any link to electoral rolls or electoral strategy as an inference unless the organisations explicitly state it or further evidence supports it.

Organisations also serve as interlocutors with the state and with other communities. After the Litan violence of February 2026, Tangkhul legislators and community leaders reportedly met with Kuki organisations and village leaders to reduce tensions (North East Now, 2026). Representatives also met with the Chief Minister, while the TNL raised concerns about district hospitals during the Chief Minister's April visit (EastMojo, 2026). Such activity illustrates how elected representatives may work through community forums and how organisations present themselves as collective interlocutors. It does not establish that voters rewarded or punished representatives for this work. That relationship remains a question for interview-based or survey research.

The reception of NSCN (IM) leader Th. Muivah at Ukhrul in October 2025 offers another example of mobilisation capacity. The Associated Press reported that thousands welcomed him on 22 October after five decades away from his hometown (Associated Press, 2025). Tangkhul organisations had coordinated preparations, and the student organisation called for educational institutions within its jurisdiction to close for the day (EastMojo, 2025a). The episode demonstrates the organisations' ability to convene a public around a nationalist event. It also shows why the relationship between civil society and the nationalist movement requires careful analysis. Mobilisation may reflect shared political commitments, institutional coordination, or pressure; the available reports do not permit a general conclusion about which explanation applies in every case.

Brokerage should therefore be treated as an enabling capacity, not automatically as a fourth electoral mechanism. It may sustain an organization's standing, provide access to officials, and create opportunities for representatives to demonstrate responsiveness. To establish an electoral effect, however, research would need evidence connecting brokerage to voters' evaluations, candidate selection, campaign behaviour, or electoral outcomes. The present documentary record shows political activity and institutional access more securely than it shows the effects of that activity on voting.

8. Democratic tensions and the limits of collective authority

The practices examined in this article raise a basic question: when does collective political representation become an attempt to constrain individual political choice? Community organisations may regard electoral participation as inseparable from collective aspirations, especially where state institutions are perceived as inadequate or externally imposed. Yet a collective claim does not automatically settle the legitimacy of sanctions against people who disagree with it. The analytical task is to examine the source of authority, the procedure used, and the consequences for those affected without assuming in advance that customary authority is either inherently democratic or inherently illegitimate.

Three criteria are useful. Proportionality concerns the relationship between the conduct being challenged and the sanction imposed. Procedural fairness concerns whether the affected person can understand the allegation, respond to it, and seek review. Reversibility concerns whether a sanction can be reconsidered and what conditions permit a person to regain standing. These criteria are especially relevant to the 2010 notice and the UNC's 2024 seven-year debarment. The public documents record the organisations' decisions and justifications, but the sources reviewed here do not establish whether hearings, appeals, or consistent review procedures were available. This is a limit of the evidence, not proof that no procedure existed.

The distinction between sociological legitimacy, normative legitimacy, and legal validity is equally important. Sociological legitimacy concerns whether people recognize an organization's authority. Normative legitimacy concerns whether its decisions can be justified to those affected, including dissenters. Legal validity concerns compatibility with applicable law. These dimensions may diverge. A decision can command respect among some members while others contest it; a customary practice can have social authority without the legal status of a state decision. Article 326 of the Constitution provides that elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies are based on adult suffrage, subject to constitutional and legal qualifications (India 1950, Art. 326). This provision is relevant to the broader importance of electoral participation, but the legal status of any particular customary sanction must be assessed in its specific context rather than assumed from the constitutional principle alone.

The claim to represent a whole community also requires scrutiny. The TNL, UNC, and other organisations may possess substantial public standing, but their statements cannot automatically be treated as proof of unanimous consent. The 2017 and 2024 election results demonstrate that electoral outcomes may diverge from organisational preferences. The available documentary evidence does not show how internal decisions are made, how dissenting villages are represented, or how affected individuals respond to sanctions. These are not peripheral questions. They determine whether collective authority is accountable to those it represents.

Gender is another unresolved institutional question. Women's organisations have been prominent in mobilisation and advocacy, including in the 2025 transfer protest. However, public visibility does not establish the extent of women's influence over candidate selection, village-level decision-making, or formal organisational leadership. Nor does the documentary record establish that such influence is absent. Further research should examine membership,

decision-making procedures, office-holding, and the relationship between women's mobilisation and final organisational decisions.

The position of minority residents presents a related problem. Ukhrul includes Kuki villages, and reports of threats or ultimatums directed at Kuki groups show that collective mobilisation can affect people who do not necessarily share the identity or political commitments of the organisation issuing the statement (The Week, 2025). Such reports should be attributed to the issuing body and not generalised to all Tangkhul organisations or residents. The comparison with Kuki-Zo organisations' advice to their members not to contest the Outer Manipur parliamentary seat in 2024 shows that conditional electoral participation is not confined to one community (Deccan Herald, 2024a). It does not establish that the institutional settings, coercive capacity, or consequences were equivalent. Comparative analysis must examine each case on its own terms.

Finally, the relationship between civil society and armed actors remains difficult to establish. The 2017 reporting attributed an instruction to the NSCN (IM), whereas the 2024 endorsement and sanction were attributed to the UNC. Statements that align with nationalist positions may reflect shared beliefs, coordination, or pressure. Without direct evidence, these explanations cannot be collapsed into one. The distinction matters because it affects how we understand the source of authority: community preference, organisational representation, nationalist mobilisation, or coercive influence.

9. Analysis: influence without electoral control

The cases support a limited but significant conclusion. Tangkhul and wider Naga organisations seek to shape election legitimacy, candidate acceptability, and elected representatives' obligations. Their interventions are visible in declarations, consultations, sanctions, public protests, and engagement with officials. Yet these practices do not reliably control electoral outcomes. The return to district council participation after the 2010 boycott and the defeats of organizationally favoured candidates in 2017 and 2024 show that collective authority is negotiated and contested.

The mechanisms differ in their operation. Collective abstention is the most confrontational because it challenges the legitimacy of an electoral institution and may involve sanctions against participants. Consensus candidature operates through consultation, endorsement, and efforts to define acceptable representation. Post-election intervention seeks to maintain or enforce expectations after a representative has taken office. Brokerage is a wider political capacity that can connect organisations, representatives, officials, and other communities, but its electoral consequences remain to be demonstrated. This differentiation is more useful than treating all activities as equivalent expressions of a single civil society power.

The case also qualifies conventional expectations about civil society. Dense community networks can facilitate rapid mobilisation and collective action, but they do not guarantee pluralism or cross-community trust. Varshney's emphasis on intercommunal associations highlights this study's limited evidence of routine associational ties across community boundaries (Varshney, 2002). Likewise, Chatterjee's distinction between civil society and political society helps explain informal bargaining, but community sanctions complicate any

simple separation between the governed and those who govern them (Chatterjee, 2004). The article does not classify Tangkhul organisations as outside civil society, but it shows why their associational, representative, and governance-like functions require separate examination.

A legislator may face two potentially conflicting accountability claims: the electoral mandate, mediated by voters and party politics, and the collective political expectations articulated by community organisations. This is better understood as dual accountability than as a strict principal-agent relationship, since the two sources of authority do not have identical procedures or legal status. Dual accountability is not necessarily harmful. Community organisations can communicate local concerns and scrutinise representatives between elections. The problem arises when a second source of accountability claims to represent a whole population but offers limited opportunities for dissent, review, or contestation.

The argument yields four propositions for comparative research. First, collective abstention is more likely when an electoral institution is perceived as imposed rather than negotiated, but its effectiveness depends on the cooperation of candidates, parties, and local authorities. Secondly, consensus candidature is more likely to influence political legitimacy when apex organisations, village institutions, kinship networks, and parties converge; organisational declarations alone should not be assumed to indicate convergence. Thirdly, post-election interventions are likely to be more intense when representatives' actions are interpreted as touching collective political claims, although administrative matters can also become politicised. Fourthly, acceptance of sanctions may depend on procedural fairness as well as on the identity and standing of the organisation imposing them. These propositions require testing through interviews, organisational records, village-level research, and comparative evidence from other Naga areas.

10. Conclusion

Electoral politics in Ukhrul operates within a political order in which constitutional institutions coexist with and interact with customary authorities, community organisations, and the broader Naga nationalist movement. The concept of conditional electoral participation helps explain how organisations set standards for legitimate participation, acceptable candidates, and representative conduct. The evidence examined here identifies three electoral mechanisms: collective abstention, consensus candidature, and post-election intervention. Brokerage during conflict and administrative negotiation provides a wider context for these mechanisms, but should not automatically be treated as electoral action.

The principal finding is that organisational influence should not be confused with electoral control. The 2010 district council episode documents an attempt to enforce collective abstention through public declarations and reported village sanctions. The 2017 and 2024 elections show that organisational preferences do not necessarily determine winners. Later interventions demonstrate that community organisations remain active between elections, but their authority varies by issue, institution, and target. The documentary record establishes publicly visible practices more securely than it establishes their effect on individual voters.

The democratic implications are therefore conditional. Community organisations may give collective political claims a voice and provide channels for approaching officials and elected

representatives. Their authority becomes harder to justify when decisions are presented as unanimous without transparent procedures, or when sanctions restrict dissent devoid of clear safeguards. A careful assessment must distinguish social recognition from normative legitimacy and legal validity, while accounting for individuals' entitlements and the position of minority residents.

Future research should investigate how organisations make decisions, how village authorities interpret apex-level resolutions, how women participate in decision-making, how people affected by sanctions understand them, and whether brokerage changes voters' assessments of representatives. Comparative work should also distinguish community organisations' authority from that of armed nationalist actors. These questions would test whether conditional electoral participation is a recurring institutional pattern or a useful description of a limited set of episodes. For now, Ukhrul demonstrates that elections cannot be understood solely through party competition or identity-based voting. They must also be analysed through the contested relationships among collective representation, customary authority, nationalist claims, and constitutional rights.

References

All India Radio. 2024. "Congress Wins 2 Manipur Lok Sabha Seats." June 5, 2024. https://newsonair.gov.in/congress-wins-2-manipur-lok-sabha-seats/.

Associated Press. 2025. "A Naga Rebel Leader Returns to His Hometown in India's Northeast after 5 Decades, in Photos." October 22, 2025. https://apnews.com/article/012ff4c0d1589b6ba18bac918654665e.

Baruah, Sanjib. 2005. *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Boege, Volker, Anne Brown, Kevin Clements, and Anna Nolan. 2008. "On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: State Formation in the Context of 'Fragility.'" Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series 8. Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management.

Chatterjee, Partha. 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Deccan Herald. 2024a. "Kuki-Zo Groups in Manipur Decide Not to Contest in LS Polls." March 26, 2024. https://www.deccanherald.com/amp/story/india%2Fmanipur%2Fkuki-zo-groups-in-manipur-decide-not-to-contest-in-ls-polls-2951804.

Deccan Herald. 2024b. "Lok Sabha Elections 2024: Manipur Naga Body 'Bars' Congress MP, 2 Others from Public Platforms for Defying Poll Diktat." June 14, 2024. https://www.deccanherald.com/amp/story/elections%2Findia%2Flok-sabha-elections-2024-manipur-naga-body-bars-congress-mp-2-others-from-public-platforms-for-defying-poll-diktat-3067543.

EastMojo. 2025a. "Manipur: Ukhrul All Set to Receive Th Muivah after Five Decades." October 21, 2025. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2025/10/21/manipur-ukhrul-all-set-to-receive-th-muivah-after-five-decades/.

EastMojo. 2025b. "Manipur: Why Tangkhuls Are Opposing the Transfer Order of Ukhrul DC." January 31, 2025. https://eastmojo.com/premium/2025/01/31/manipur-why-tangkhuls-are-opposing-the-transfer-order-of-ukhrul-dc/.

EastMojo. 2026. "Manipur CM Calls for Dialogue to Resolve Kuki-Tangkhul Conflict." April 17, 2026. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2026/04/17/manipur-cm-calls-for-dialogue-to-resolve-kuki-tangkhul-conflict/.

EastMojo. 2023a. "Manipur: Tangkhul Nagas Oppose Relief Camps for Non-Ukhrul Residents." July 8, 2023. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2023/07/08/manipur-tangkhul-nagas-oppose-relief-camps-for-non-ukhrul-residents/.

EastMojo. 2023b. "Manipur: Ukhrul Should Be Second Capital, Says MLA Ram Muivah." October 19, 2023. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2023/10/19/manipur-ukhrul-should-be-second-capital-says-mla-ram-muivah/.

EastMojo. 2023c. "Tangkhul Body Says No Wish to Become Any Capital of Manipur." October 21, 2023. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2023/10/21/tangkhul-body-says-no-wish-to-become-any-capital-of-manipur/.

EastMojo. 2024a. "Manipur: Naga Council Bars Congress MP, Two Others for 7 Years." June 14, 2024. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2024/06/14/manipur-naga-council-bars-congress-mp-two-others-for-7-years/.

EastMojo. 2024b. "Manipur: UNC Meets Intending Naga Candidates Ahead of Lok Sabha Polls." February 27, 2024. https://eastmojo.com/manipur/2024/02/27/manipur-unc-meets-intending-naga-candidates-ahead-of-lok-sabha-polls/.

E-Pao. 2010. "8 Tangkhul ADC Candidates Banished from Their Villages." July 10, 2010. https://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=18.100710.jul10.

Election Commission of India. 2017. "Statistical Report on 11th Manipur Legislative Election-2017: Final Result Sheet, 44 - Ukhrul (ST) Assembly Constituency." Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur. https://ceomanipur.nic.in/StatisticalReport/AssemblyElection/statistical_report_2017.pdf.

Election Commission of India. 2022. "General Election to Vidhan Sabha Trends and Result March 2022: Manipur, Ukhrul." https://results.eci.gov.in/ResultAcGenMar2022/ConstituencywiseS1444.htm?ac=44.

India. 1950. *The Constitution of India*. New Delhi: Government of India. https://upload.indiacode.nic.in/showfile?actid=AC_AN_91_1361_00006_00006_1696917644691&filename=constitution_of_india.pdf&type=actfile.

India. 1971. *The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971*. Act No. 76 of 1971. India Code. https://www.indiacode.nic.in/indiacode/handle/123456789/1600.

Indian Express. 2017. "From NSCN Leader's Divided Family, Two BJP Candidates." March 8, 2017. https://pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20170308/281887298103543.

Indian Express. 2026a. "Fresh Violence Erupts in Manipur's Ukhrul District, Internet Suspended for 5 Days." February 10, 2026. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/fresh-violence-erupts-in-manipurs-ukhrul-district-internet-suspended-for-5-days-10524094/.

Indian Express. 2026b. "Villagers Flee, Houses and Govt Quarters Burnt Down, Violence Rocks Manipur's Ukhrul District." February 9, 2026. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/villagers-flee-houses-govt-quarters-burnt-down-violence-rocks-manipurs-ukhrul-district-10522251/.

Kolås, Åshild. 2011. "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics in the Shadow of Ceasefire." *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (6): 781–92.

Lacina, Bethany. 2009. "The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India: Local Ethnic Autocracy and the Rule of Law." *Asian Survey* 49 (6): 998–1020.

Lok Sabha. 2010. "Blockade in Manipur." Unstarred Question No. 296, answered July 27, 2010. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/585542/1/89667.pdf.

Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. 2010. "HM's Statement in Parliament on Blockade of National Highways." August 19, 2010. Press Information Bureau. https://www.pib.gov.in/newsite/erelcontent.aspx?lang=2&reg=48&relid=65064.

Newmai News Network. 2016. "Naga Organisations in Mnp React to Ukhrul Incident." *Morung Express*, October 24, 2016. https://morungexpress.com/naga-organisations-mnp-react-ukhrul-incident.

Newmai News Network. 2023. "UNC Opposes Semi-Permanent Relief Camps in Naga Areas." *Morung Express*, July 20, 2023. https://mail.morungexpress.com/unc-opposes-semi-permanent-relief-camps-in-naga-areas.

North East Now. 2026. "Manipur Chief Minister Meets Ukhrul CSOs." March 28, 2026. https://www.nenow.in/?p=498190.

Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Scott, James C. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Tangkhul Frontal Organisations. 2010. "Press Communiqué." July 9, 2010. Reproduced by Nagalim Voice. https://nagalimvoice.com/press-release/press-communique-2/.

The Week. 2025. "Tangkhul Naga Groups Issue 24-Hour Ultimatum to Kukis for Handing Over Attackers." June 27, 2025. https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/national/2025/06/27/ces12-mn-nagas-ultimatum.html.

Varshney, Ashutosh. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Wouters, Jelle J. P. 2018. *In the Shadows of Naga Insurgency: Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.