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National Service Scheme: Voting Awareness Importance and Efforts

M. Moulika¹, Dr. Shabana Naz Siddique², Mr. Abhijeet Lal², Dr. D.S. Raghuwanshi³

¹ NSS Volunteer, Bhilai Institute of Technology, Durg, Chhattisgarh.

² NSS Programme Officer, Bhilai Institute of Technology, Durg, Chhattisgarh.

³ Programme Co-ordinator, NSS, Chhattisgarh Swami Vivekanand Technical University, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh.

ABSTRACT

Voting is the fundamental aspect of a democratic nation, providing citizens with the right to determine the course of action of their country. Although our country, India is the largest democracy in the world, the country is facing the issue of low voters among youth and rural citizens. To solve this issue, the National Service Scheme (NSS) has made some efforts in spreading electoral literacy and actively engaging citizens in several awareness, campaigns process. This paper concentrates on the importance of educating citizens about voting and explains various approaches undertaken by NSS volunteers, including street performances, public rallies, door-to-door campaigns, and social media-based campaigns. Through these campaigns, volunteers not only educated neighborhoods about voting processes and its consequences but also inspired many first-time voters to register and vote. The paper also discusses the challenges faced during the campaign, the approaches used to overcome them, and the combined implications of these events. The findings highlight the crucial role that the NSS can play in strengthening democracy at the ground level by inspiring responsible and informed citizenship.

Keywords: Electoral Literacy, Voting Awareness, National Service Scheme (NSS), Youth Participation, First-time Voters, Democracy, Community Outreach, Voter Education.

INTRODUCTION

Voting is the most basic right and duty in a democracy. It allows citizens to select their representatives and decide the line of government policies. In a multi-cultural country such as India, active participation by all the eligible voters is necessary to provide a representative and responsible government. Even in the world's largest democracy, India, low turnout, however, is an issue, especially among first-time and youth voters. Lack of information, misinformation, and overall lack of interest in the election process tends to result in disengagement from this critical democratic process. The National Service Scheme (NSS) of the Government of India is a key instrument for social awareness and the training of civic responsibility among the youth & among students. With its widespread presence among educational institutions nationwide, NSS is that effective medium for creating awareness regarding the value of voting. Through activities like rallies, street plays, voter registration, and social media campaigns. NSS volunteers are actively engaged in making communities aware and encouraging them to exercise their democratic rights.

The aim of the paper is to study the significance of voting awareness and note the various activities of NSS volunteers in developing electoral literacy and encouraging more voters to cast their votes, particularly from the marginalized and less-informed sections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The section examines past studies, government reports, and current programs concerning voting awareness, civic participation, and the potential of youth organizations such as NSS in enhancing electoral literacy. The discussion is in key themes, and terminologies relevant to the discussion are explained for clarity.

1. Voting Awareness

Voting awareness refers to the knowledge and familiarity that people possess about the electoral process, their right to vote, and the importance of participating in electoral activities.

Studies show that unawareness of the process and logic of voting is among the key reasons for low polling. The Election Commission of India (ECI) contends that electoral awareness is important so that there can be "free, fair, and participative elections."

2. Electoral Literacy

Electoral literacy refers to the capacity of citizens to engage in the electoral process informed, which surrounds knowledge about voting processes, candidates, and the potential consequences associated with their vote.

Initiatives such as SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation), initiated by the ECI, aim to develop electoral literacy among Indian citizens. SVEEP is mainly directed at one-time voters, the marginalized, and women.

3. Youth Vote Turnout and Youth Participation

Surveys by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) find that while India has a large young population, youth voting percentage (18–25 years) is relatively low. Some of the most commonly reported reasons include:

- Voter registration information is lacking.
- Disinterest in politics.
- The belief that their vote "doesn't make a difference."

This suggests the necessity for behavioral change communication (BCC) strategies to effectively engage youth.

4. Civic Engagement

Civic engagement involves active participation by citizens in the affairs of a community with the aim of improving the welfare of others or helping in determining the destiny of the community.

Youth involvement in civic responsibilities, such as voting, is regarded as a key to improving democracy. Researchers believe that civic education should not only be limited to textbooks but extend to actual experience through volunteering and public service.

5. NSS's role in Electoral Literacy

National Service Scheme is a central government scheme run under the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. It focuses on the development of the personality of the students through service to society.

NSS units throughout India have organized numerous voter awareness campaigns:

- Nukkad nataks (street plays) to convey in an effective and simple manner.
- Processions and demonstrations with slogans and banners.
- Door-to-door campaigning to educate rural people.
- Voting rights college quizzes and workshops.

These initiatives are geared towards public service and, in the process, enhance the NSS volunteers' comprehension of their citizenship responsibilities.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

Even in the world's largest democracy, India, electoral participation, particularly by first-time voters and youth, continues to be a significant obstacle. Young citizens are mostly unaware of the importance of voting as well as the voter registration process, typically because electoral education has had little exposure to them. Misinformation, prevailing myths regarding eligibility, as well as the lack of reliable information in rural and underdeveloped regions further add to the disengagement from the democratic process. Government initiatives such as the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) have attempted to bridge the gap; however, their outreach is typically short of comprehensive, particularly at the ground level. There is also an emerging culture of civic disinterest, with many believing that their vote doesn't count. Although efforts by the National Service Scheme (NSS) attempt to raise awareness, many of these are short-term, unorganized, and seldom subjected to effectiveness assessment. These considerations highlight the need for concerted, well-organized, and youth-oriented voter awareness campaigns with the ability to educate, motivate, and mobilize citizens towards active participation in the democratic process.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To create awareness about the significance of voting.
- To inform youth and communities about voting procedures and rights.
- To capture NSS volunteers' activities in voter education.
- To motivate new voters to register and vote.
- To evaluate the effect of NSS-organized awareness programs.
- To determine challenges in increasing voting awareness.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- Emphasizes the critical role of youth and NSS volunteers in reinforcing democracy via civic education.
- Stresses voter awareness as a deciding factor in boosting the number of first-time voters.
- Provides a glimpse into ground-level movements that can inspire similar movements in other regions and institutions.
- Assists policymakers and schools in comprehending the value of well-organized awareness campaigns.
- Sustains scholarly knowledge through documentation of community-based, real-world interventions in electoral literacy.
- Encourages more NSS units and youth groups to engage actively in democratic processes and in building the nation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Area of Study:

Local rural and semi-urban communities where NSS awareness drives were conducted.

Respondents:

NSS volunteers, youth, first-time voters, and local residents who engaged with the campaign.

Duration:

Based on short-term NSS campaigns conducted over 1–2 weeks prior to local/state elections.

FINDINGS

- Street performances and demonstrations were discovered to be the most effective methods, commanding massive audiences and positive reactions from the public.
- College poster contests and quizzes created for student interest and participation.
- Numerous individuals within the community indicated that they lacked awareness regarding the voter registration process prior to the campaign.
- NSS volunteers also indicated that their civic awareness and level of confidence improved after the campaign. The residents and residents' leaders embraced the campaign and suggested regular awareness campaigns before every election.
- Challenges were faced with initial resistance from rural dwellers, few resources, and brief campaign period.

RECOMMENDATIONS & SUGGESTIONS

- Arrange frequent awareness drives by NSS before every major and minor elections to keep the voters engaged and active. Incorporate electoral literacy into the training and orientation of the volunteers of the National Service Scheme.
- Join forces with local organizations such as the Election Commission and village government for wider outreach and credibility.
- Use engaging mediums such as street performances, web videos, and social media campaigns to capture youth attention.
- Offer follow-up assistance to enable new voters to finish enrolling or to find their polling station.
- Issue resource kits to NSS units (posters, banners, guides) to enable effective and standardized messaging.
- Encourage student-conducted polls to learn about voting behavior and accordingly modify awareness efforts.
- Identify and acknowledge active volunteers to encourage future participation in civic initiatives.
- Translate content and slogans into local languages to target non-English/Hindi-speaking communities.
- Publish and document campaign results to serve as models for best practices for other institutions and regions.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The NSS-led voting awareness campaign had a noticeable impact on the target community. Street plays were particularly effective in drawing attention and delivering messages in an engaging way, especially in rural areas. Many participants reported that they were previously unaware of how to register

or why voting was important. Volunteers also noted a boost in their own civic understanding and confidence. However, the campaign faced challenges such as limited time, lack of materials, and initial delay from the public. These results suggest that while NSS volunteers can play a strong role in promoting electoral literacy, the effectiveness of such campaigns can be further enhanced with better planning, more resources, and continuous follow-up.

LIMITATIONS

- The study was conducted over a short duration, limiting the ability to observe long-term impact.
- The campaign was restricted to a specific geographic area, so the findings may not be applicable to all regions.
- Lack of formal surveys or quantitative data limits the ability to measure awareness improvement statistically.
- Due to resource constraints, only a limited number of activities and materials could be used.
- Feedback from participants was mostly informal and verbal, which may not fully capture the effectiveness of the campaign.
- The study focused primarily on youth and first-time voters, so the awareness levels of older or marginalized groups may not be fully represented.

CONCLUSION

The vote is an electoral power that can be flourished effectively in a democracy, but too many citizens—particularly youth and rural dwellers—are ignorant of its importance or its exercise. This research brings to light the significant role that NSS volunteers can help fill in closing this gap through ground electoral awareness campaigns. Rallies, street performances, and door-to-door visits were some of the effective activities in educating and influencing first-time voters to take part in the democratic process. The campaign not only benefited the people but also empowered the volunteers with increased civic knowledge and sense of responsibility. Although some limitations like time and availability of resources existed, the overall campaign was effective in creating electoral literacy and voter participation. In the future, such programs should be increased and institutionalized as a regular feature of NSS activities to consolidate democratic values and ensure informed participation in elections.

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