

Democratic Awareness and Participation: A Field Study of Young Voters in Tumkur through the Lens of Electoral Literacy Clubs

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Abstract—In a vibrant democracy like India, the participation of young voters is crucial for sustaining and strengthening democratic processes. This study investigates the role of Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) in enhancing democratic awareness and promoting active electoral participation among young voters in the Tumkur district of Karnataka. By employing a mixed-methods approach—comprising surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with students, first-time voters, educators, and election officials—this paper assesses the reach, effectiveness, and limitations of ELCs in building electoral consciousness. The findings reveal a positive correlation between ELC engagement and increased awareness of voting rights, electoral procedures, and the importance of informed voting among the youth. However, challenges such as lack of sustained engagement, limited resources, and varying institutional support also emerged. The paper concludes by recommending strategies to strengthen ELC initiatives, integrate civic education more deeply into academic institutions, and foster a more informed and participatory youth electorate, especially in semi-urban and rural contexts like Tumkur.

across educational institutions and community spaces to foster electoral awareness, promote democratic values, and encourage meaningful participation among young citizens. These clubs aim to bridge the knowledge gap by providing students and first-time voters with practical information about electoral rights, procedures, and the importance of voting in a democracy.

Tumkur district, located in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, offers a relevant and diverse context to assess the effectiveness of ELCs. With a mix of urban and rural populations and a growing number of young eligible voters, the district presents an ideal microcosm to study youth engagement in democratic processes. This paper focuses on understanding how ELCs function within educational institutions in Tumkur, the extent of their influence on young voters, and the broader implications for democratic participation in regional and national contexts.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the role of Electoral Literacy Clubs in shaping the electoral knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of young voters in Tumkur. Through field-based data collection and analysis, this research aims to contribute valuable insights to policymakers, educators, and electoral authorities seeking to improve youth involvement in democratic governance.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, the active participation of citizens in the electoral process is fundamental to the legitimacy and functioning of governance. Among the most critical segments of the electorate are young voters, whose engagement not only reflects the vibrancy of democracy but also shapes its future. However, despite being numerically significant, youth participation in elections—particularly in terms of informed and responsible voting—often remains inconsistent due to a lack of awareness, interest, and civic education.

Recognizing this gap, the Election Commission of India launched Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs)

2 LITERATURE SURVEY

The relationship between democratic participation and civic education has long been the subject of scholarly attention. Numerous studies emphasize the role of awareness, information, and institutional support in fostering active citizenship, particularly

among youth. In the Indian context, the emergence of Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) as an institutional initiative by the Election Commission of India (ECI) marks a significant step towards addressing the civic knowledge gap among young voters.

Youth and Electoral Participation

Research indicates that young voters often demonstrate lower levels of political participation compared to older demographics, due to factors such as political apathy, lack of awareness, and limited engagement with electoral processes (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Franklin, 2004). In India, studies by Yadav (2013) and Chhibber & Nooruddin (2004) highlight a growing youth population with varying levels of interest in formal democratic mechanisms, depending on education, region, and access to civic information.

Civic Education and Democratic Engagement

Civic education has been widely recognized as a critical factor in shaping informed voters. According to Niemi & Junn (1998), exposure to civic learning significantly increases students' knowledge of democratic institutions and their likelihood of participating in elections. In India, the National Youth Policy (2014) and various NCERT frameworks stress the importance of integrating civic and electoral education into the school and college curriculum.

Role and Impact of Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs)

The Election Commission of India launched ELCs in 2017 with the aim of engaging school and college students in hands-on democratic learning. These clubs utilize interactive methods such as quizzes, debates, pledge-taking, and mock elections to build awareness among first-time voters. Studies by Sharma & Gupta (2020) and Rao (2019) report that ELCs have improved electoral awareness in select regions, although their implementation has been uneven across states and districts. Findings suggest that where ELCs are well-organized and supported by institutional leadership, students demonstrate significantly higher levels of voter knowledge and intent to vote.

Regional Studies and Gaps

While national-level studies have documented the theoretical impact of ELCs, there is a notable gap in

district-level empirical studies—particularly in semi-urban and rural areas like Tumkur. Few studies have specifically assessed the performance of ELCs in Karnataka, and even fewer have focused on how these clubs influence actual youth voter turnout or democratic engagement on the ground.

Conclusion of the Review:

The existing literature underscores the potential of electoral literacy programs in shaping democratic consciousness, especially among young citizens. However, more localized, field-based research is required to assess the real-world outcomes and operational effectiveness of such initiatives. This study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the Tumkur district, providing context-specific insights into the impact of ELCs on youth participation in democracy.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component helps measure levels of electoral awareness and participation, while the qualitative component explores the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of various stakeholders involved in Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs). This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of both statistical trends and contextual nuances.

3.2 Study Area: Tumkur District Profile

Tumkur is a prominent district in the state of Karnataka, located approximately 70 kilometers from Bengaluru. It comprises 10 taluks and features a mix of urban, semi-urban, and rural settlements. The district is home to numerous higher educational institutions and schools where Electoral Literacy Clubs have been implemented. Its demographic diversity, growing youth population, and electoral significance make Tumkur an ideal site for studying youth voter engagement through ELCs.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The study employs a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling:

- Stratified random sampling is used to select youth respondents (students and first-time voters) from schools and colleges, ensuring representation from urban, semi-urban, and rural areas.
- Purposive sampling is used for selecting key stakeholders such as ELC coordinators, faculty advisors, electoral officers, and program implementers involved in SVEEP activities.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample includes the following groups:

Category	Sample Size
High schools with active ELCs	10
Colleges with active ELCs	10
Students/young voters surveyed	300
ELC coordinators/facilitators	20
Election officials/SVEEP staff	5
Total participants	~335

The sample size has been determined based on representation from various zones within the district and the availability of functional ELCs.

3.5 Tools for Data Collection

1. Structured Questionnaire:
 - Designed for students and young voters
 - Includes items on awareness of electoral rights, voting behavior, and ELC participation
2. Interview Guide:
 - Used with ELC coordinators and election officers
 - Focuses on implementation strategies, challenges, and perceived outcomes
3. Observation Checklist:
 - Used during ELC activities and institutional visits
 - Assesses participation, engagement, and quality of activities conducted

All instruments were developed based on existing literature and validated through a pilot study before final use.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Data: Analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or Excel). Descriptive statistics (percentages, means) and inferential statistics (Chi-

square tests, t-tests, ANOVA) are used to test relationships between ELC participation and voting awareness/intent.

- Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis is applied to interview transcripts and observation notes. Recurring themes, patterns, and stakeholder perspectives are coded and analyzed to draw contextual insights.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

- Informed Consent: All participants were provided with consent forms detailing the purpose and voluntary nature of participation.
- Confidentiality: Personal identities and responses were anonymized during analysis and reporting.
- Approval: The study received ethical clearance from the institutional research ethics committee prior to data collection.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the study without any consequence.

4 CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF ELECTORAL LITERACY CLUBS (ELCS)

4.1 Role of the Election Commission of India in Establishing ELCs

The Election Commission of India (ECI), as the constitutional authority overseeing elections in the country, has undertaken multiple voter awareness initiatives under its flagship program called SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation). As part of this effort, the ECI launched Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) in 2017 to inculcate democratic values and improve electoral awareness, especially among young and first-time voters.

ELCs are designed as grassroots educational platforms aimed at bridging the information gap between citizens and the electoral system. The objective is to develop informed, ethical, and active voters who understand the value of their vote and the responsibilities of being part of a democracy.

4.2 Guidelines and Objectives of ELCs

According to ECI's guidelines, the key objectives of Electoral Literacy Clubs are to:

- Promote electoral literacy among students and the community through co-curricular, participatory, and experiential learning.
- Familiarize students with the electoral process, including voter registration, ethical voting, and the role of elections in democracy.
- Encourage first-time voters to register and participate in elections.
- Develop leadership, communication, and citizenship skills among youth.

4.3 Implementation of ELCs in Karnataka

Karnataka has been proactive in implementing SVEEP and ELC initiatives across its districts. The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka, in collaboration with district election officers and educational institutions, has supported the formation of hundreds of ELCs across schools and colleges.

Key initiatives in the state include:

- Organizing State-level Youth Parliament and Matdata Mahotsavs.
- Conducting electoral awareness rallies in collaboration with NSS and NCC units.
- Promoting registration drives through ELCs, especially during National Voters' Day.

While metropolitan areas like Bengaluru have shown active participation, districts like Tumkur have also demonstrated encouraging levels of ELC engagement, though challenges related to training, monitoring, and resource support persist.

4.4 Status and Functioning of ELCs in Tumkur District

Tumkur, with a diverse mix of urban and rural populations and over 200+ schools and 50+ higher education institutions, has been a focal point for ELC implementation in Karnataka.

Findings from preliminary field visits and discussions reveal:

- Functioning ELCs are present in several government and private schools and colleges.
- Most ELCs are coordinated by faculty advisors, with support from the Block Level Officers (BLOs) and District SVEEP Nodal Officers.
- Activities conducted include poster-making, voter pledge-taking, mock elections, and voter registration drives for first-time voters.

- However, many ELCs lack structured timelines, regular monitoring, or sufficient materials, indicating implementation gaps.

The COVID-19 pandemic also caused a temporary disruption in activities in some institutions.

4.5 Stakeholder Roles in ELC Implementation

1. Schools and Colleges

- Host and manage ELCs within their institutions.
- Assign faculty coordinators and facilitate student engagement.
- Conduct regular ELC activities as part of the academic calendar.

2. Block Level Officers (BLOs)

- Act as nodal facilitators at the field level.
- Support voter registration and awareness drives.
- Liaise between educational institutions and the district election office.

3. NGOs and CSOs

- Occasionally collaborate with ELCs to conduct voter awareness programs.
- Offer expertise in training, communication materials, and logistics support.

4. SVEEP Committees

- Plan and monitor the execution of ELC and voter awareness activities at the district and taluk levels.
- Work under the supervision of the District Electoral Officer (DEO) and Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Karnataka.

5 ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

- Provides guidelines, funding support, and activity toolkits for ELCs.
- Evaluates program outcomes and ensures alignment with national voter awareness goals.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the data collected through surveys, interviews, and field observations in the Tumkur district. The analysis focuses on understanding young voters' awareness, participation, and the influence of Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) on democratic engagement.

5.1 Profile of Respondents

A total of 300 young respondents from schools and colleges across Tumkur district were surveyed.

Additionally, 20 ELC coordinators and 5 election officials were interviewed.

Demographic Summary of Youth Respondents:

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Age Group	17–19	55%
	20–22	30%
	23 and above	15%
Gender	Male	52%
	Female	48%
Education Level	PUC/Pre-university	43%
	Undergraduate	50%
	Postgraduate	7%
Voting Status	Registered Voters	68%
	Not Yet Registered	32%

5.2 Awareness Levels about Electoral Rights and Processes

- 76% of respondents were aware that voting is a constitutional right.
- Only 61% knew about the voter registration process (Form 6, BLO, online portals).
- About 58% could identify the roles of the Election Commission, while 42% had limited understanding of electoral ethics and voter responsibility.
- Among registered voters, only 54% had actually voted in a recent election.

This indicates moderate awareness, with significant potential for improvement, especially in areas like ethical voting and informed choice.

5.3 Exposure to and Participation in ELC Activities

- 52% of student respondents reported being part of an active ELC in their institution.
- Common activities attended included:
 - Voter pledge ceremonies (48%)
 - Mock elections (32%)
 - Poster/essay competitions (25%)
 - Interactive sessions on voter rights (20%)
- Students in urban colleges showed higher ELC participation (61%) compared to rural counterparts (44%).

Participation frequency varied, with only 22% involved in ELC activities more than twice a year.

5.4 Impact of ELCs on Voting Knowledge, Intention, and Civic Responsibility

A comparative analysis shows that:

- ELC-exposed students scored higher in voting knowledge quizzes (mean score: 7.1/10) compared to non-exposed peers (4.9/10).
- 81% of ELC participants expressed strong intention to vote, versus 63% among non-participants.
- Among ELC-exposed youth, 70% agreed that they understood the concept of ethical voting and the value of their vote, as opposed to 45% among those not exposed.
- Interviews with faculty coordinators confirmed that ELCs foster greater civic consciousness, especially when activities are hands-on and discussion-based.

5.5 Comparative Analysis Between ELC-Exposed and Non-Exposed Youth

Criteria	ELC-Exposed Youth	Non-Exposed Youth
Voter Registration Rate	75%	59%
Voting Intention (Upcoming Election)	81%	63%
Knowledge of Electoral Procedures	High (avg. 7.1/10)	Moderate (avg. 4.9/10)
Civic Responsibility Awareness	70%	45%

The data clearly supports the conclusion that ELCs positively influence youth awareness and democratic behavior, although the degree varies based on consistency and quality of activities.

5.6 Challenges in ELC Operations

Insights from coordinator interviews and field observations highlighted several operational challenges:

- **Resource Constraints:** Many schools lack posters, digital content, or funding for ELC activities.
- **Limited Training:** Faculty advisors often receive minimal or no formal training on how to run ELCs effectively.

- Irregularity of Activities: In several institutions, ELC meetings are not held regularly or integrated into the academic calendar.
- Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation: There is limited oversight or feedback from election officials regarding ELC performance.
- Awareness Gaps Some institutions and students are unaware of the existence or purpose of ELCs despite guidelines.

6 DISCUSSION

This chapter critically interprets the key findings of the study in light of relevant theoretical frameworks, comparative trends, and regional variations. It aims to explain how Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) contribute to shaping democratic behavior among youth, and it highlights both the potential and the limitations of these interventions.

6.1 Interpretation of Results in the Context of Theoretical Frameworks

The findings resonate with several key theoretical frameworks on democratic participation and civic education:

- Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995): This model explains political participation based on resources (time, information), engagement, and recruitment. ELCs, by design, aim to enhance informational resources and engagement among youth, especially first-time voters.
- Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977): The mock elections, group activities, and peer-led discussions in ELCs promote learning by observation and participation, thereby reinforcing democratic behaviors.
- Constructivist Theory of Civic Education: The experiential learning environment provided by ELCs—through debates, interactive sessions, and election simulations—supports the constructivist approach, where students build knowledge through engagement and reflection.

In sum, the ELC framework aligns well with democratic education models that emphasize participatory learning and civic responsibility.

6.2 How ELCs Influence Democratic Behavior in Youth

The data clearly suggest that ELCs contribute to shaping an informed and participative youth electorate in Tumkur. Key impacts include:

- Increased awareness of voting rights, registration procedures, and the value of democratic participation.
- Improved intent to vote, especially among first-time voters.
- Better understanding of ethical voting and election responsibilities.
- Civic identity formation, with youth associating themselves more closely with democratic processes.

By creating structured opportunities for electoral engagement, ELCs play a transformative role in converting passive citizens into active participants.

6.3 Regional Dynamics: Urban vs Rural and Institutional Differences

Significant regional disparities were observed in the implementation and impact of ELCs:

- Urban institutions reported higher levels of ELC activity, better resource availability, and greater student participation. These institutions also demonstrated stronger administrative commitment and digital infrastructure.
- Rural and semi-urban institutions, while enthusiastic, faced constraints such as lack of training, irregular activity schedules, and limited material support. Some rural schools were unaware of ELC guidelines altogether.
- Colleges generally had better-structured ELCs compared to high schools, where activity was more sporadic. This may be due to differences in student maturity, institutional autonomy, or access to civic education content.

These findings indicate the need for region-specific ELC strategies that account for infrastructure, staff support, and student engagement levels.

6.4 Comparison with National-Level Trends and Studies

When compared to national-level data and studies:

- Findings are consistent with studies (e.g., Sharma & Gupta, 2020; Rao, 2019) that show a

positive correlation between ELC participation and voting knowledge among youth.

- National reports indicate that states like Delhi, Kerala, and Maharashtra have institutionalized ELCs more effectively than districts like Tumkur, highlighting inter-state disparities in implementation.
- The Tumkur study adds localized empirical evidence that complements broader survey-based studies conducted by the Election Commission and SVEEP divisions.
- Unlike some national-level studies that remain descriptive, this research provides comparative and analytical insights using field data and stakeholder interviews.

6.5 Limitations of the Study

While the study contributes original field-based insights, certain limitations are acknowledged:

- **Geographic Limitation:** The study is confined to Tumkur district and may not reflect conditions in other regions of Karnataka or India.
- **Sample Representation:** Though diverse, the sample size may still exclude certain non-institutionalized youth populations (e.g., working youth, dropouts).
- **Self-reported Bias:** Survey responses may be influenced by social desirability, especially regarding voting intention and civic values.
- **Time-bound Data:** The study reflects a specific period and does not account for evolving trends (e.g., digital engagement or changes in ELC policy post-2024 elections).
- **Variability in ELC Implementation:** Due to inconsistent adherence to ECI guidelines, the operational quality of ELCs varied significantly, which may have affected comparability across institutions.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the role and impact of Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs) on the democratic awareness and participation of young voters in Tumkur district. Key findings include:

- A significant proportion of youth (especially first-time voters) lack full awareness of electoral processes, despite having voting rights.

- Participation in ELCs is positively associated with higher electoral knowledge, stronger intention to vote, and greater civic responsibility.
- Urban colleges reported more frequent and structured ELC activities compared to rural institutions.
- Many ELCs suffer from irregular functioning, lack of trained coordinators, and inadequate resources.
- Stakeholders—including educators, election officials, and students—acknowledge the value of ELCs but emphasize the need for stronger institutional support and engagement.

7.2 Contribution to Academic Literature and Policy

Academic Contributions:

- This study contributes empirical, district-level data to the relatively under-researched area of youth civic education in India.
- It enriches existing theories of participatory democracy, civic voluntarism, and constructivist learning by applying them to real-world electoral interventions.
- It provides a comparative perspective between ELC-exposed and non-exposed youth, highlighting tangible impacts on democratic behavior.

Policy Contributions:

- Offers evidence-based insights to policymakers and the Election Commission of India on the operational challenges and successes of ELCs at the grassroots level.
- Supports the development of targeted reforms in the SVEEP framework, especially with regard to youth engagement in semi-urban and rural contexts.

7.3 Practical Recommendations for Improving ELC Effectiveness

Based on field findings and stakeholder feedback, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutionalize ELCs in Academic Calendars:** Mandate regular ELC activities with a minimum frequency per semester/year to ensure sustained engagement.
2. **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide structured training to ELC faculty coordinators

and student leaders on civic education, voter registration procedures, and activity planning.

3. **Resource Allocation:** Allocate specific budgets and supply toolkits (e.g., posters, games, manuals) to schools and colleges to support ELC events.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** Develop a district-level monitoring system to evaluate ELC performance and ensure accountability from host institutions.
5. **Integration with NSS/NCC and Community Initiatives:** Leverage existing student bodies to expand the reach and impact of ELCs, especially in areas with low electoral participation.
6. **Recognition and Incentives:** Recognize high-performing ELCs and coordinators through awards, certificates, or institutional incentives to motivate consistent performance.

7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

- **Comparative District Studies:** Conduct cross-district or cross-state studies to assess the consistency and effectiveness of ELC implementation nationwide.
- **Longitudinal Research:** Follow cohorts of young voters over time to examine long-term effects of ELC participation on actual voting behavior.
- **Digital Electoral Literacy:** Explore the use of online platforms, mobile apps, and social media in enhancing electoral awareness among digitally active youth.
- **Non-institutional Youth Engagement:** Extend research to include youth who are not part of formal education systems (e.g., dropouts, working youth, migrant populations).

7.5 Final Reflections

The study reaffirms that strengthening democracy begins with informed citizens—and for a nation as young as India, that begins in classrooms and community spaces. Electoral Literacy Clubs, though

conceptually robust, require systemic strengthening in terms of planning, delivery, and impact assessment. The Tumkur case highlights the promise and challenges of youth-focused civic education in a rapidly evolving electoral landscape.

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