

Modeling Students' Participation in Politics: A Game of Strategies¹

Aarti and Bharati J. Krishnan

Introduction

In theory, students' participation in politics paves through an ideal political mechanism in a specified region. In practice, however, students' politics is as tangled as any other civic mechanism. What makes it far more intricate is the implicit presence of various factors that affect the probability of a student's participation in politics. This article paper aims to discuss such factors and the implication of their presence in a societal system on the effectiveness of student politics in India.

Social Norms

In a dynamic game-theoretical model, as the concerned agents participate in a game in different time periods over a period of time, the setting in which the game is set evolves leading us to some social norms at the end. These social norms, in the end, tend to govern agents' behavior in the game setting. They act as a framework of sets of behavior that are expected from a member of a particular social group. These expectations are so embedded in the fabric of social setups that the agents often do not realize that it is the society that instills these behavior patterns within them.

India has had a vibrant history when it comes to students' participation in politics. The Nationalist Movement had first galvanized students into action during the Pre-Independence era. Hence, India was ahead of the rest of the world in terms of student participation in politics, her contemporaries only caught up during the 1960s. In India, social norms have a crucial role to play in determining. Thus it becomes crucially important to take social norms into account for our article paper.

According to H. Peyton Young in his 2014 paper on 'The Evolution of Social Norms', H. Peyton Young discusses three key features relating to social norms:

1. Norms are self-enforcing at the group level. People adhere to a norm because they expect others to do the same.
2. Norms evolve through organic interactions between members, rather than by deliberate design.
3. Norms differ from one social context to the next, and can even be contradictory.

When an individual enters a new social environment, which in this case is a university campus, different pre-existing and new factors have leverage on how she reacts to this new environment.

¹ We are indebted to Mr. Basab Ranjan Dahal, a third-year Mathematics student at Ramjas College and Mr. Ashish Singh, a third-year Political Science student at Ramjas for their time and assistance in the research study. Both the students are active participants in the political arena at Delhi University.

Variables and Justification

Now, if we consider an individual's degree of participation in politics to be the final equilibrium outcome, then there are various other crucial factors that go into their final decision regarding their respective participation in politics.

Such factors are as following:

1. The original/initial state of their participation

The original state can be referred to the state of various factors at the time when the model is set up, or the time when they are initially offered with choice to officially participate in students' politics.

- (a) *Social/Cultural background*: The participation of the individual in politics greatly depends on personal experiences. If they belong to a minority group, many of the issues that are tossed around in politics may have had a direct impact on their lives. Hence, an individual's social background, whether they are a minority or not, might influence their inclination to participate. Directly facing these issues, as opposed to being a mere spectator, might impact the perspective people have on the need for political participation. It also might also create an overt need in them to change the current circumstances.
- (b) *Political background*: Already having family members tied to politics might provide experience, connections and familiarity to political roles, procedures and the pros and cons related to politics. It might also imply prior biases, which might push individuals to join a particular political ideology. Individuals who don't come from a politically active background might not enjoy the same level of family support when it comes to politics.
- (c) *Financial background*: Money and muscle power still reigns in India and in fact, most democracies. Having a strong financial base might not only ease the way for prospective participants but might also improve their chance to rise in ranks within their organization. Having monetary support also provides mental security to well-off candidates as opposed to not so well-off candidates. At the same time, having a sound financial background might prevent certain individuals from entering something as unstable as politics. Hence, a person's financial base can have a huge say in their political activities.

2. Parents' ideological beliefs

What discussion goes on a dinner table is likely to play a crucial role in affecting a human's perception about all sorts of issues that go around and are related to politics. Political leanings of a parent almost always comes into play while deciding their child's political ideological, at least in the kid's initial years, to a significant extent. A human mind is likely to get programmed according to the way many minds around him/her are programmed.

This process is likely to follow in case of determining one's perception around political ideology too. Also, the approval or disapproval of parents can be a salient variable while considering the willingness of students to participate in active politics.

3. Personal beliefs/convictions of students

The personal passions and ideologies of young inspired students, formed through their own individual experiences can also translate into a desire to support organizations that claim to represent those ideologies. Furthermore, this desire to support organizations representing their ideologies may be supported by the educational institute/setting they are a part of or may be not.

Setting Up of the Model

Know Your Variables

Variable	What is it?
P_d	Degree of Official Participation, varying from 0 to 1. It is a function of efforts put up by the student: $f(e)$.
e	Efforts put in by the student to participate in students' politics. It has neither a lower bound nor an upper bound, unlike P_d . It is a function of Net Satisfaction (U_p) from participating in students' politics: $g(U_p)$.
U_p	It is the net satisfaction that a student accrues from participating in politics. It is the difference between Gross Satisfaction and the Cost of Participation.
U_{psyc}	This is the entirely psychological utility that a student derives from participation. This has neither a lower bound nor an upper bound.
U_t	This is the utility from the more visible or tangible benefits that come along with participation in politics. This has neither a lower bound nor an upper bound. This does not have a lower bound because there is a possibility of a loss of property due to a student's affiliation to a particular subset of the larger set of students engaged in politics. This includes only the indirect loss (and not the direct loss) of property/cash/assets. However, this does include the direct benefits of cash/assets.
U_f	This is the utility derived from the concerned family's response/reaction to the agent's participation in the exercise. As expected, this variable too is neither bounded below nor bounded above.
C_f	This is the financial cost that a student of interest incurs in exchange for his participation in this exercise. This includes only the direct loss of cash/liquid or near-liquid assets. This is bounded below by 0 and not bounded above.
C_{nf}	This is the non-financial cost of participating in politics. This can be seen as the sum of time cost and psychological cost which comes along with participating in students' politics.

$$P_d = f(e); \quad 0 \leq P_d \leq 1 \quad \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

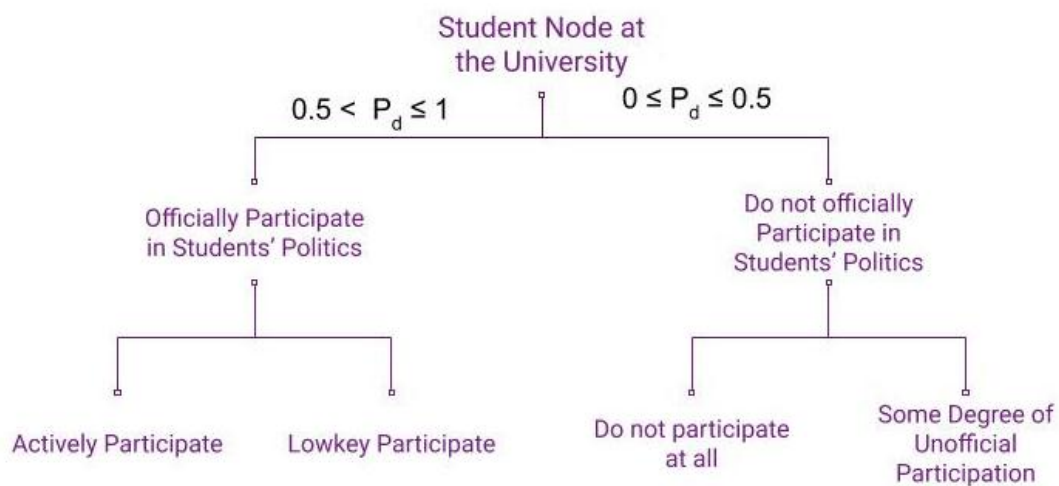
$$e = g(U_p)$$

$$U_p = \text{Gross Satisfaction} - \text{Cost}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Gross Satisfaction} &= \text{Psychological Satisfaction} + \text{Tangible Satisfaction} + \text{Family}_s \\ &= U_{\text{psyc}} + U_t + U_f \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{Cost} = C = \text{Financial Cost} + \text{Non-financial Cost} = C_f + C_{\text{nf}}$$

Interpreting the Model



The main aim of the article paper was to understand the factors that determined the degree of political participation of university students. The factors were both internal (the personal convictions of students) and external (the political climate of their respective campus, their parents' beliefs, financial support, prior familiarity with politics, etc.).

The equilibrium state of participation was a result of these individual factors acting independently, as well as, in relation to the other factors.

In order to root the model in reality, two telephonic interviews were conducted with two politically active students from Delhi University. The takeaways from the interviews have been included along with the results from the model.

Key takeaways:

1. It was found that *given that* there is a strong correlation between a student's political participation and the tangible benefits that the student derives from active involvement in politics, a student with some sort of a political back-up, be it through his family or friends, is much more likely to participate in students' politics. On the other hand, if a student is deprived of political backing, either through family or friends, then, by symmetry, there is a very strong likelihood that they may not participate in politics. This finding/inference was reinforced by the interviews, where both the interviewees had political backing from either their

family or the friend circle, or both. Additionally, one of the interviewees made it a point to tell us that while individuals who were both financially strong and came from a politically active background were highly likely to engage in politics, individuals who were financially well off without a politically active background, overtly avoided political participation. Hence, a prior or current political support from either the family or social group has a dominant role in determining the political participation of a student.

2. If a college/university is currently very politically active. It leads to a higher rate of conversion (of efforts) into tangible or non-tangible benefits. Hence, if we put an evolutionary game theory model into place, the steady state Nash equilibrium is extremely likely to be the majority of students (at the institution) participation in politics.
3. The psychological satisfaction that students derived from political participation is a crucial incentive in both the entry and sustained commitment of students in politics. One of the interviewees found that the moral stimulus of "bringing about some change" in society was a crucial motivator for the entry of some students into the political realm. The other interviewee found that social media attention, as well as the connections that you made while engaging in political activity was another major impetus for political participation.

We can say that if we are to take a weighted average of the expected value of the three different utilities, U_{psyc} might be placed with a larger weight than the other two, $U_t + U_f$, especially in determining the entry of an agent/student.

Conclusion

Student participation in politics has always been a crucial indicator of the society's values, ideals and potential. Through this article paper, our primary aim was to establish a nexus between various independent factors that might add up to either increasing or reducing the likelihood of political participation by a student. The resultant degree of a student's participation in politics was found out to be a result of the interlinked interaction of various factors. While the addition or even absence of these factors does not guarantee a final result, their existence majorly impacts the final result.

References:

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