# VOTER AWARENESS AND LITERACY AMONG YOUTH
## A STUDY OF COLLEGE ELECTORAL LITERACY CLUBS IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

**Harsha Lal & Gaurishankar S**

**Youth Leadership Fellowship 2023**
**Centre for Public Policy Research**

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# ABBRIEVIATIONS

BLO - Booth Level Officer

CEO - Chief Electoral Officer

DC - District Coordinator

DEO - District Election Officer

ECI - Election Commission of India

ELC - Electoral Literacy Club

EVM - Electronic Voting Machine

IMF - Information, Motivation and Facilitation

IMF-EEE - Information, Motivation, Facilitation - Engagement, Education, Empowerment

NSS - National Service Scheme

PWD - Persons With Disability

SVEEP - Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation

UGC - University Grants Commission

VVPAT - Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

# ABSTRACT

In the 2019 general elections, India achieved an unprecedented voter turnout of 67.4%. This milestone is attributed in part to the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation Program (SVEEP), initiated by the Election Commission of India in 2009. India is the world's largest democratic country, with more than 50% of its population under the age of 25. Given this significant number, engaging youth in the democratic process should be a priority. Of the many concentrated efforts under SVEEP, the Electoral Literacy Club (ELC), started in 2018, is the only youth-targeted initiative that focuses on voter education, awareness, and literacy. The present study assesses college-level ELCs in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala, evaluating the achievement of objectives and creating a best practices framework for colleges that can be adopted at the state level to improve their structure and functioning. Insights gathered through the sample surveys and interviews with various stakeholders within the SVEEP-ELC ecosystem reveal that Thiruvananthapuram has the lowest ELC coverage and visibility among other Kerala districts. The study finds that there is a huge disparity in the functioning between private and professional degree colleges and arts and science colleges. Challenges, such as time constraints, resource limitations, and structural ambiguities, hinder even colleges that conduct regular activities as stipulated either by the ECI guidebook or through directives from the district administration. Continuing research and efforts to enhance voter awareness and empower the youth are crucial for a robust democracy.

**Keywords**

Electoral Literacy, Voter Awareness, Youth, Electoral Literacy Club (ELC), Voting

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since India's first election in 1951, the electorate has made significant progress. In 2019, voter turnout reached an all-time high at 67.4%, with a remarkable gender parity. Several factors contributed to this achievement, including the introduction of SVEEP (Systematic Voter Education and Electoral Participation) by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in 2009. SVEEP, a flagship initiative, focuses on voter education, awareness, and voter literacy. Amid calls to achieve a 75% turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the ECI has raised concerns about rising voter apathy among urban and young voters. Given that the future of Indian democracy relies on the youth, targeted initiatives, especially for new voters, are crucial. The only such youth-targeted ECI-SVEEP initiative is the Electoral Literacy Club (ELC), aimed at youth in educational institutions and rural communities. Initiated in 2018, ELCs have expanded their reach over time. However, the program needs universalisation and strengthening to meet its objectives.

The present study assesses college-level ELCs in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala, evaluating their objectives and creating a best-practices framework for colleges. As observed from our discussions, there are 67 ELCs in the district (as of August 2023), the lowest coverage in the state.

These ELCs, established by the ECI, operate alongside the National Service Scheme (NSS) due to limitations in time, membership and resources. In many colleges, ELCs are nearly invisible, particularly in private and professional degree institutions. Humanities and Social Sciences Colleges often limit their activities to district administration directives, even among the best ELC award winners. In spite of these challenges, they maintain regular activities and attract substantial participation, though they often cite issues related to time constraints and academic commitments.

The Election Commission of India's ELC guidebook's extensive activity list and ambiguity pose difficulties, like the requirement for Political Science Department teachers to be Nodal Officers. Notably, some colleges lack a Political Science Department, such as engineering and medical colleges. Hence, there's a need for a more adaptable guidebook that accommodates individual college structures and requirements.

To strengthen ELCs, a comprehensive evaluation is essential, which can address financial and administrative lacunae. ELCs should receive recognition under one of the programmes, either of the UGC or the NSS, which can allow them to function formally or in conjunction with the NSS, thus integrating them into formal education. This would officialize financial administration and evaluation. Motivating teachers and students with credits, certificates, and non-monetary incentives as per the SVEEP strategy is crucial.

Exemplified by the success of Govt. Higher Secondary School Agali in Palakkad among tribal hamlets like Attappadi, ELCs have the potential to significantly boost voter turnout by acting as foot soldiers in elections. However, this potential remains untapped in Thiruvananthapuram district. To unlock it, involving Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and collaborating with local communities and organisations in the ELC ecosystem is vital.

Enhanced communication between ELCs at district and state levels is needed to achieve ELC objectives. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system with a constant feedback mechanism is equally important. Despite being introduced in 2018, focused efforts from the CEO, Kerala-SVEEP, only commenced in 2022. Hence, continuous and targeted efforts are crucial for ELCs, as they play a pivotal role in shaping the future youth electorate.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Electoral Literacy Clubs: Concept and Implementation

Public political engagement and civic education are seen as the core of political considerations and a fundamental tenet of democracy. However, there has been a noticeable decrease in voter turnouts and a general loss of trust in political institutions and political systems worldwide since the turn of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century (Yoldaş, 2015). If individuals refrain from engaging in politics, the political structure and its legitimacy will be in question. Each year, India sees a significant increase in the electoral roll as a large number of young people reach the age of 18 and become eligible to vote. These young voters make up a crucial part of India's democratic system and its future. Through the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) program launched in 2009, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has prioritised educating and encouraging prospective voters, among other target groups, through a national initiative called Electoral Literacy Clubs. Democracies around the globe have promoted electoral literacy among young and future voters by establishing some variations of democracy and citizenship clubs. For example, those in countries like the USA, Bhutan, New Zealand, Tunisia, etc. serve as platforms for building networks and facilitating discussions on matters of electoral relevance. Following a similar model, the ECI prioritised the integration of electoral literacy into formal education at the school and college level through Electoral Literacy Clubs (ELCs). The establishment of the Electoral Literacy Club was a landmark initiative that materialised following an analysis conducted by a working group on civic studies course books from grades 6 to 10.

The analysis revealed that although students are taught about democracy and government functioning, there is a lack of content focusing on fostering active electoral participation. The objectives, activities and timelines of ELCs came as a result of extensive deliberations to make elections and related activities more relevant to the young population.

## 1.2 Relevance of the Study

ELC is the only initiative of the ECI that has direct access to youth. Till now, there has not been any significant initiative to assess the result of electoral awareness spread through Electoral Literacy Clubs. In 2018, National Law University, Delhi, partnered with the Election Commission of India to conduct an Impact Assessment of Electoral Literacy Clubs in India. The study aimed to assess the citizen's literacy in voting, voter registration, elections, and the election process. However, comprehensive reports of the assessment have not been accessible to the general public and constituent ELCs. To that effect, the present study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of ELCs in achieving their objectives. It also seeks to develop a best practices framework for Electoral Literacy Clubs in colleges, making it a significant and comprehensive exploration of the Election Commission of India's flagship initiative in Kerala.

This study adds to the growing literature on youth electoral participation by focusing on Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala and sampling colleges in that district.

## 1.3 Research Objectives

The current study is focused on reviewing the extent to which ELCs have been successful in achieving their objectives and developing a best practices framework for ELCs in colleges.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**3** How has the ELC impacted electors within their colleges?

**2** How has the ELC as a platform for youth voter awareness penetrated within colleges in Thiruvananthapuram District?

**1** Has the ELC been able to achieve/align ECI SVEEP strategy and activities?

# 2. METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Research Design

The study is conceptualised as a multi-method study. A quantitative questionnaire was administered to the members of all sampled ELCs and qualitative interviews were conducted with various officials working closely with the ELC activities in Thiruvananthapuram district.

## 2.2 Target Population and Research Sample

The defined universe for the study is all ELCs in colleges within Thiruvananthapuram District. When we started this study in the first quarter of 2023, the total number of colleges that had ELCs was 43. But as of August 2023, there were 67 ELCs.

The study consists of two parts -
1) A quantitative sample survey using a soft copy questionnaire administered through Google Forms was conducted among the selected colleges (listed below) in Thiruvananthapuram.

Out of the 43 college-level ELCs in the district, 7 colleges were purposefully selected in consultation with the Junior Superintendent of the Elections Section, Thiruvananthapuram administration and ELC District Nodal Officer. Two of them have been awarded as the Best ELCs in Thiruvananthapuram in 2022.

a. Government College, Nedumangad (Best ELC, Thiruvananthapuram)
b. University College, Thiruvananthapuram (Best ELC, Thiruvananthapuram)
c. NSS College for Women, Neeramankara
d. Law College, Thiruvananthapuram
e. PMS of Dental Science and Research, Vattappara
f. Sree Chitra Thirunal College of Engineering & Technology, Thiruvananthapuram
g. College of Engineering, Thiruvananthapuram

**Figure 2.1: Sampling Approach**

## SAMPLING APPROACH

Figured the total number of ELCs within the district through informal discussion with Jr Supdt., Elections section

**43\***

Narrowed down the number by talking to District coordinator about their performance

**12\***

Through convenience sampling selected the final sample (Geographical Proximity, Time Constraints, Paucity of Resources)

**7\***
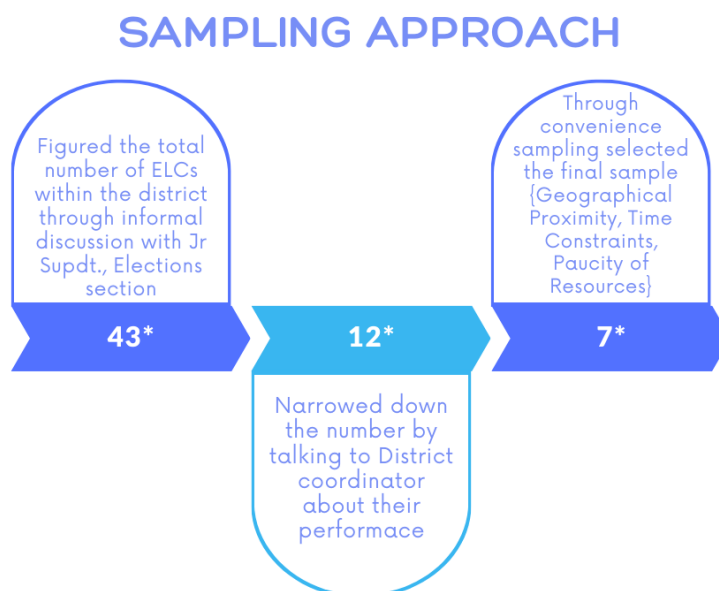
• number of colleges level ELCs

**Map 2.1: Geographical location of selected colleges**
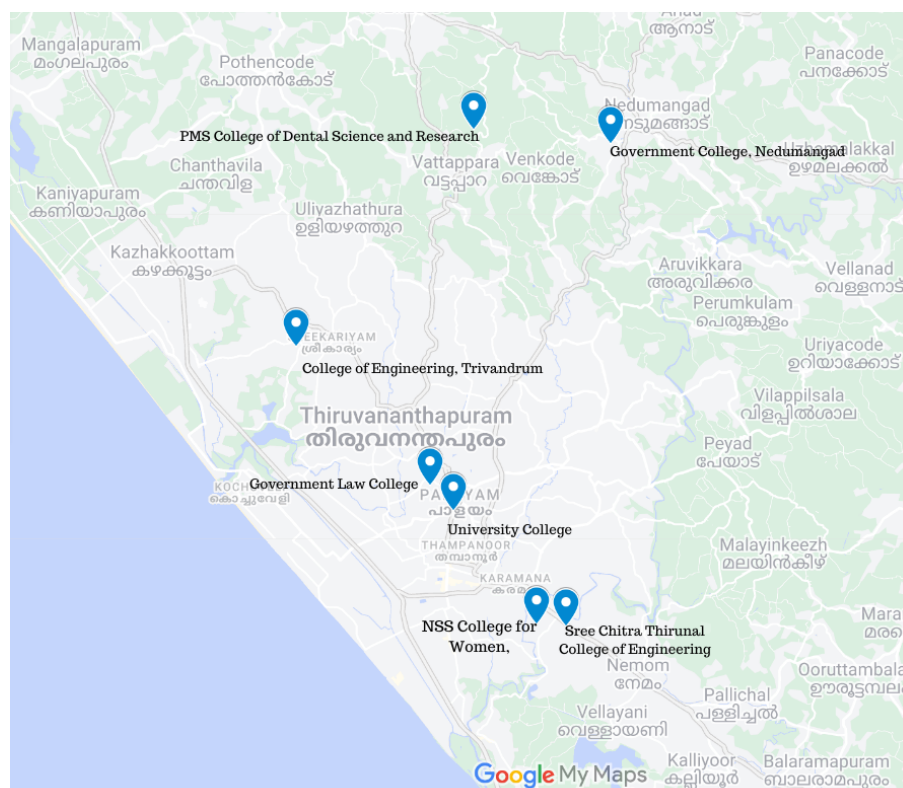


**Table 2.1: Number of respondents from sampled colleges**

| S. No. | ELC | Number of Responses |
|--------|-----------|---------------------|
| 1 | College 1 | 21 |
| 2 | College 2 | 4 |
| 3 | College 3 | 20 |
| 4 | College 4 | 3 |
| 5 | College 5 | 21 |
| 6 | College 6 | 0 |
| 7 | College 7 | 20 |
| | Total | 89 |

2) 8 Semi-structured interviews were conducted with officials working in the ELC ecosystem.

**Figure 2.2: Interviews conducted**



State ELC Coordinator
Kerala

District ELC Coordinator
Thiruvanathapuram

Deputy Collector (Elections)
Thiruvanathapuram

**Interviews**

Nodal Officers of 4 Sampled Colleges

ELC Coordinator
Palakkad*

*Recognized by ECI for their exemplary participation
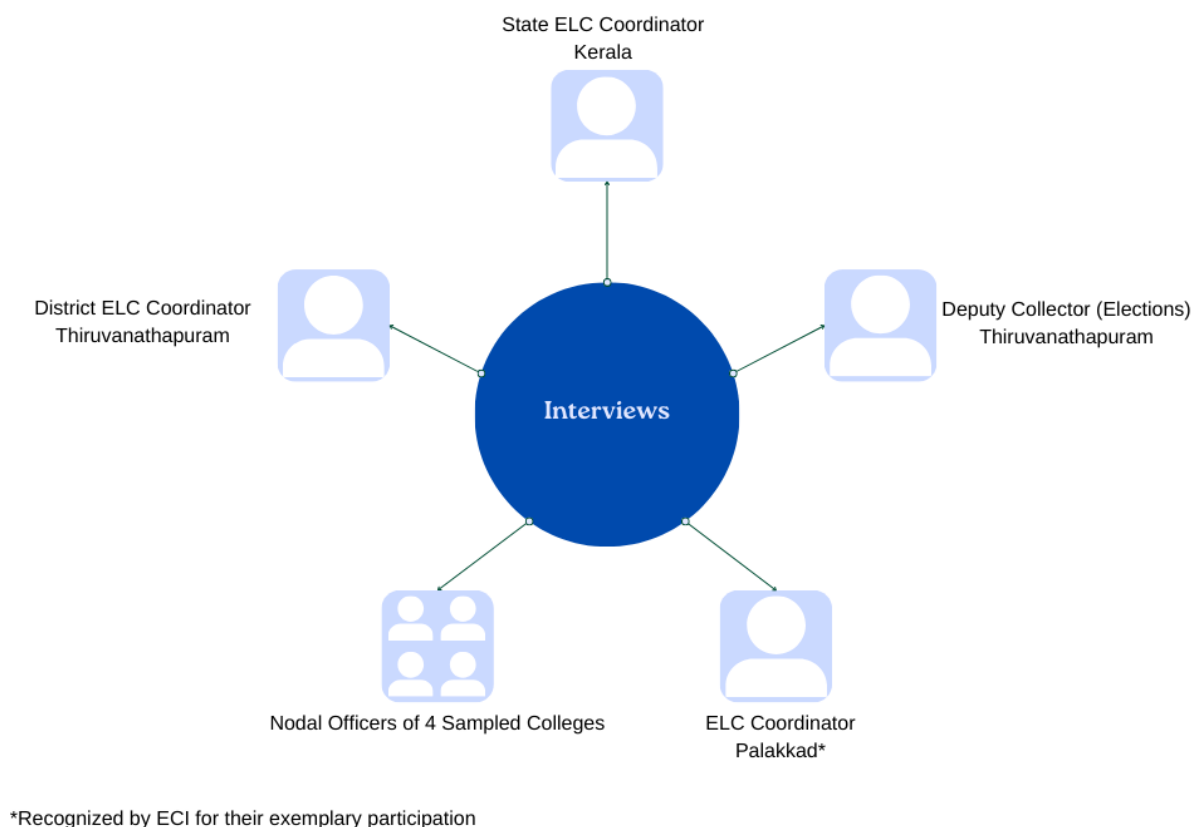
## 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

All interviews, with the exception of one, were conducted face-to-face. To facilitate convenience and ease, the interviews were conducted in a mix of both English and Malayalam so that the interviewees could comfortably express their views. In order to facilitate digitization and streamline the subsequent analysis, a sample survey with quantitative questions was conducted through Google Forms. Prior to circulating the Google Forms, we conducted focused discussions with the nodal officers and campus ambassadors of the college to emphasise the aim of the survey and address any queries they may have.

## 2.4 Limitations of the Study

The analysis of ELCs presented here is based solely on the study of our sample in the Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala. The study might be limited by a relatively small sample size, which could affect the generalizability of its findings to the larger contexts of ELCs across India. The findings may not be representative of other regions in Kerala or India, which might have different sociopolitical contexts and dynamics.

# 3. FINDINGS

We present below the responses to select questions relevant to the discussion. The analysis is presented under the following headings:

- Achievement of ELC Objective
- Penetration of ELCs in Colleges within Thiruvananthapuram
- Impact on Voter Awareness of Students in Colleges

## 3.1 Achievement of ELC Objectives

### 3.1.1 Overview of ECI's SVEEP Strategy and Objectives of ELC

ECI implemented the SVEEP program as a response to the low registration of eligible citizens and the need to enhance voter turnout for greater democratic participation. Since its inception, the program has focused on different areas of electoral awareness, as outlined in the table below.

**Table 3.1: Focus area of SVEEP through the years**

| SVEEP PHASE (YEAR) | MAIN FOCUS |
| --- | --- |
| Phase I (2009-13) | Information, Education and Communication activities to understand what was stopping citizens from registering in the electoral rolls and voting. |
| Phase II (2013-14) | Motivation of voters through the National Voters' Day (NVD) celebrations and voter awareness through institutional linkages. |
| Phase III (2016-2020) | Mainstreaming of electoral literacy among young and future voters through curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular interventions. |
| Phase IV (2022-25) | Transition into the new IMF-EEE paradigm - Information, Motivation, Facilitation, Education, Engagement and Empowerment. |

*Source: SVEEP Strategy 2022 -2025. Election Commission of India*

No Voter to be Left Behind

Table 3.2: Basic Setup of ELCs

| Type of ELC | Type of Establishment | Target Population |
|---|---|---|
| ELC Future Voters | ELCs at Schools | Secondary and Senior Secondary Level Students from Class IX, X, XI and XII |
| ELC New Voters | ELCs at Colleges and institutions of higher learning | Young voters aged 18-25 Students in universities and colleges |
| ELC for Communities (Chunav Pathshalas) | Booth Centric in urban and rural areas of the country | Future voters and new voters left outside the formal education system |
| Voter Awareness Forums | Government Departments, Government and Non-Government Organisations and Institutions, Corporate and other institutions. | Employees of the concerned office |

*Source: Project Document on Electoral Literacy Clubs in India, Election Commission of India*

## 3.1.2 Assessment of ELCs Aligning with SVEEP Goals and Objectives

**Figure 3.1: ELC members' response to "What are the objectives of ELC?"**



15%
4%
32%
27%
19%

- To promote and facilitate voter registration and electoral participation
- To familiarise EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) and VVPAT (Voter Verigiable Paper Audit Trail)
- To educate the youth on the power of informed and ethical voting
- To promote political party membership & leaders
- To gather crowdfunding for elections
- To strengthen student club activity points

Resources shared by ECI list six objectives for ELCs. We found that a total of 78% of the ELC members knew what the main objectives of the ELC were. Electoral Literacy Clubs are designed to educate the targeted populations about voter registration, the electoral process, and the value of their vote through hands-on experience and EVM/VVPAT familiarisation.

They seek to empower ELC members to spread electoral literacy in communities and facilitate voter registration for eligible members. Ultimately, the objective is to cultivate a culture of electoral participation, ensuring informed and ethical voting while adhering to the principles of 'Every vote counts' and 'No Voter to be Left Behind'. The current guiding document for ELC activities is the SVEEP strategy 2022-2025.

**Figure 3.2: ELC members' perception of college ELC success**



Neutral
17.7%

Strongly Agree
22.1%

Agree
60.2%
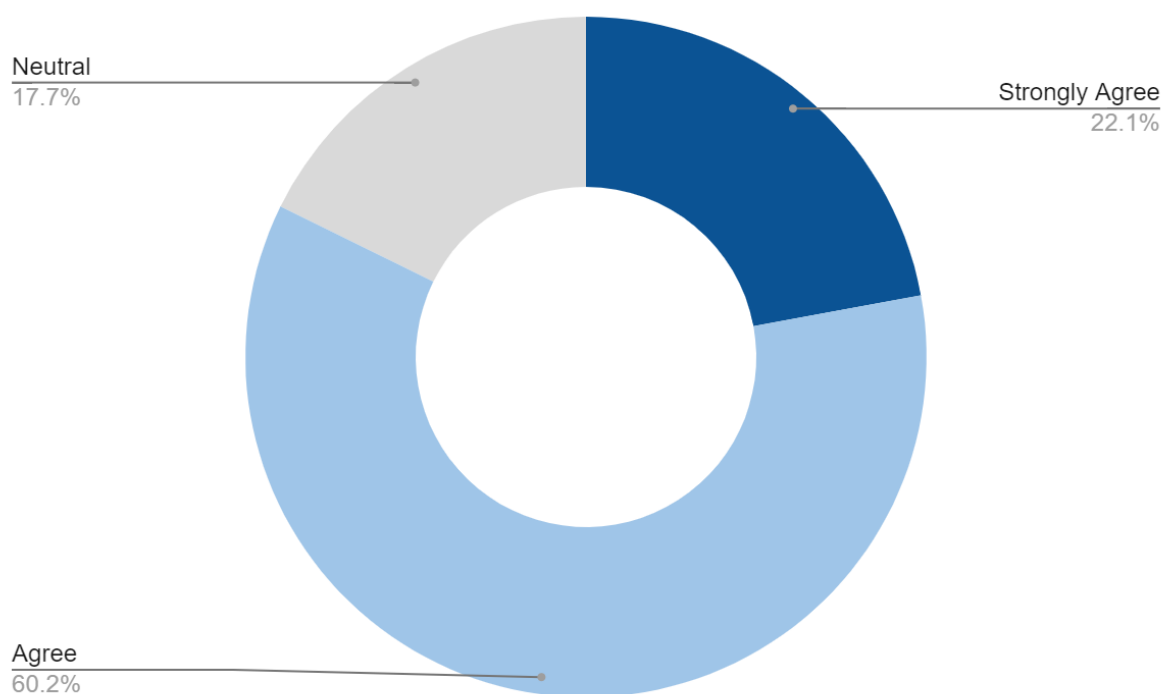
82% of members are of the opinion that their respective ELCs have been successful in achieving the ELC objectives. A majority of ELC members hold a positive perception of their ELC's performance, indicating that with more focused efforts in other colleges, ELCs could be instrumental in promoting electoral literacy and awareness.

**Figure 3.3: Participation in EVM/VVPAT familiarisation activities**



Didn't Conduct
9.2%

Yes
26.9%

Don't Know
31.7%

No
32.2%
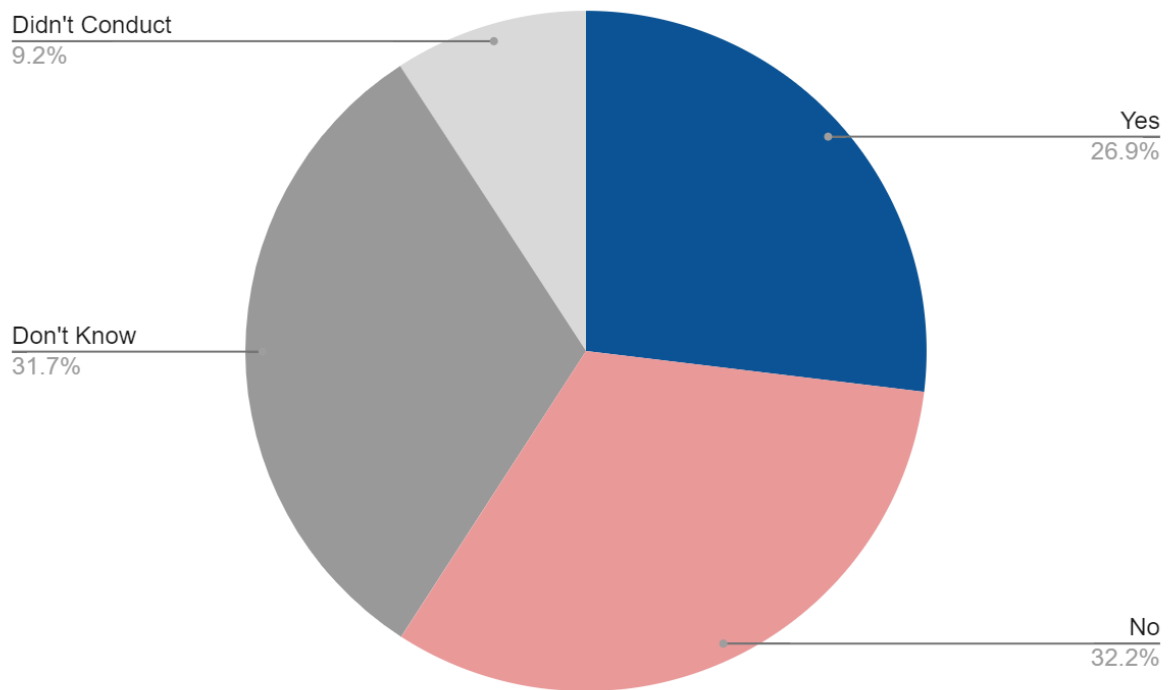
One of the stated objectives of ELC is to enable its members to become familiar with EVM and VVPAT. Not only that, ELC members themselves are expected to be very well versed in using EVM/VVPAT and take this knowledge to their families and the larger community. Yet, of the surveyed ELC members, only 27% have taken part in it. This setback may result in less extensive dissemination of knowledge regarding the reliability and tamper resistance of EVM and VVPAT, as well as the appreciation of technology's role in the electoral process.

ECI envisions ELCs as an inclusive club and mandates that all efforts must be made to ensure the same. It is laid out that steps must be taken to ensure the participation of students with disabilities as club members and to also make the activities accessible. However, our sampled colleges did not have any active participation from such students or PwD.

### 3.1.3 Voter Education Initiatives

The ELC guidebook for colleges stipulates a list of activities (mandatory and optional) that should be carried out in the colleges during an academic year. From our study, the most effective activities conducted, as mentioned by the respondents, are listed in Figure 3.4.

Even in the defunct clubs, voter registration drives are conducted regularly. However, technical difficulties arising from network issues, glitches in the voter helpline application and the voter's service portal make the drives cumbersome.

Other than the activities mentioned in the guidebook, the ELC members felt that the following activities were also very impactful:
1. Flash Mobs
2. Linking of Voter ID with Aadhar
3. Voter awareness classes

## TOP ACTIVITIES

**01**    National Voter's Day Celebration

**02**    Quiz Competition

**03**    Special Registration Drive

**04**    Voter's Pledge

**05**    Debate/Speech Competition

## 3.2 Presence of ELCs in Colleges in Thiruvananthapuram District

### 3.2.1 ELCs in Kerala

To attract the youth to the democratic process and encourage them to exercise their franchise, the then CEO of Kerala inaugurated Electoral Literacy Clubs at the state level *(Thiranjeduppu Saksharatha Club)* on August 16, 2018 at Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram. As of August 2023, 1671 Electoral Literacy Clubs are functioning in schools and colleges across Kerala. Since 2022, the 'Best ELC Award' has been awarded by ECI at district levels to recognise commendable efforts in promoting voter awareness and registration.

### 3.2.2 ELC Establishment and Growth

To assess the presence and reach of the ELCs in Thiruvananthapuram district, we had discussions with relevant officials and ELC members. We found that there are a total of 43 ELCs (the number has since increased from this) in the district. However, through our study, it has become evident that most of them are either redundant or defunct, with only a few working as per the guidelines prescribed by ECI.

Insights from the study revealed that the existing organisational structure of ELCs in Thiruvananthapuram is as illustrated in the figure 3.5.

### 3.2.3 Challenges in College Adoption

From discussions with various stakeholders, we have identified the following challenges for extensive ELC adoption at the college level.

★ Nodal Officers' role is crucial to the effectiveness of ELCs. Thus, they must be extensively trained in their roles and

## Figure 3.5: ELC Ecosystem in Thiruvananthapuram
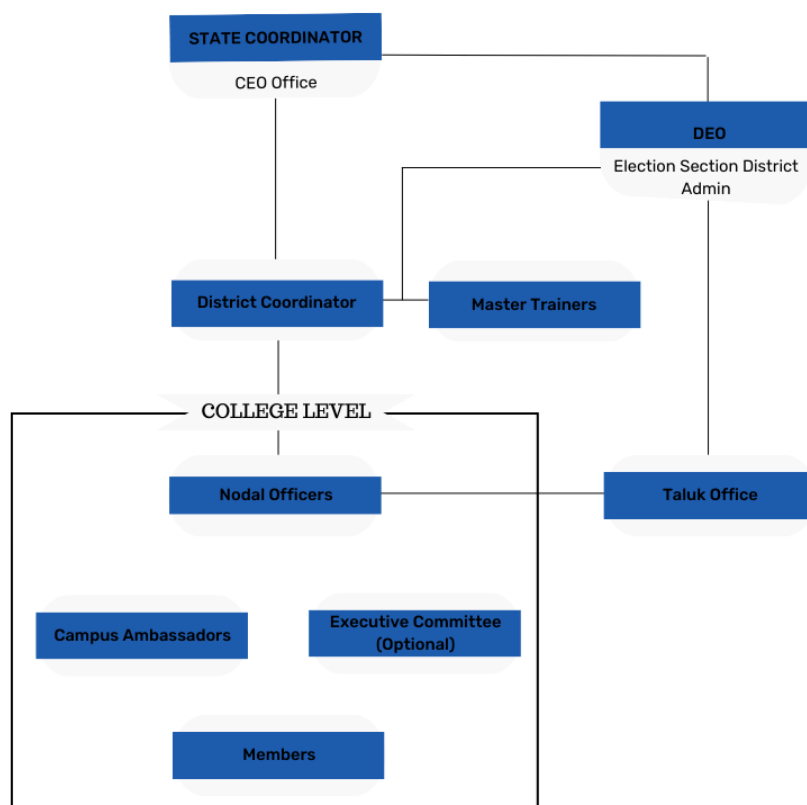


responsibilities and how best to conceptualise and conduct activities based on the IMF-EEE paradigm. Satisfaction with the involvement of Nodal Officers has an impact on the overall satisfaction of ELCs.

★ Stipulations such as "nodal officers shall be from Political Science departments" hinder teachers who are otherwise interested in orchestrating ELC activities. This is a cause for concern, especially in professional degree colleges that do not have political science departments.

★ There are no proper funding mechanisms for ELC activities. The expenses for most of the activities are coming out of the pockets of the nodal officers or coordinators. Thus, conducting activities boils down to the passion and interest they have for the cause. This could be a possible reason for certain ELCs performing exceptionally well while others are not even functional.

The existing reimbursement model appears to have a demotivating effect. A more proactive approach involving budgetary allocations, preferably on an annual basis, is deemed more favourable than the current practice of reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses post-activity completion.

★ The findings suggest that there are problems in setting up ELC. No proper directions are given to colleges regarding the establishment of ELC. This most likely has a profound effect on certain ELCs remaining just for name-sake.

"It is after orders from the collectorate that someone takes charge as Nodal Officer. We had received an instruction that someone from the political science department needed to take charge. And in accordance with that, I took charge. When we started the club, we gave a very basic introduction to the students, as they didn't have much idea about it."

~ Nodal Officer College 7

**Figure 3.6: Level of Satisfaction with Nodal Officers**



Dissatisfied
3.1%

Neutral
28.1%

Satisfied
68.8%
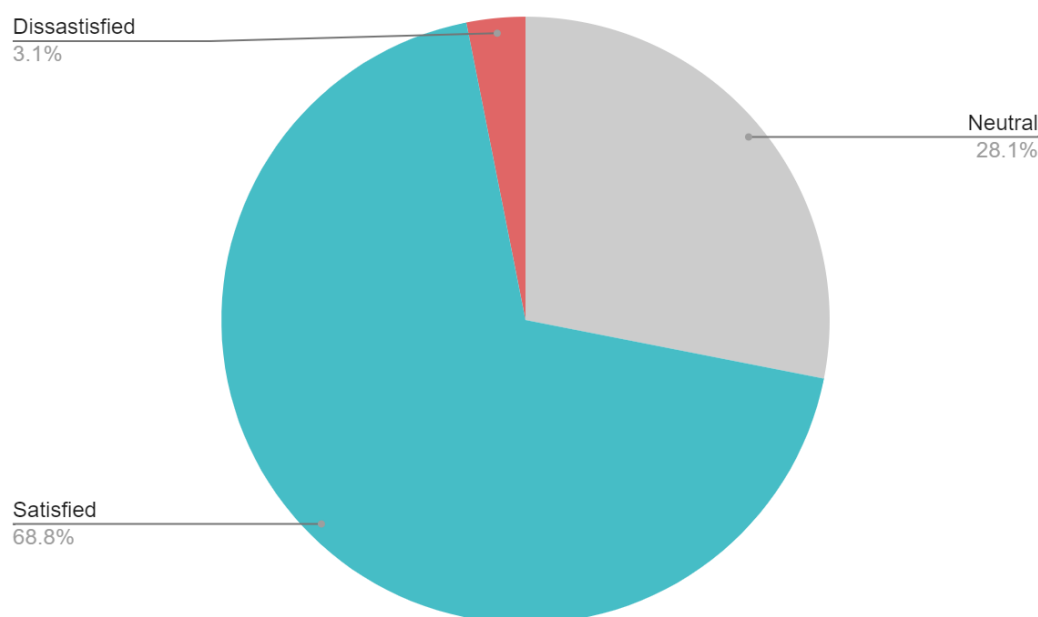
★ It was observed that the setting up of ELC is more of an instruction-based activity as opposed to initiative-based. All the ELCs established within Thiruvananthapuram and especially within our sample were set up as a directive from the taluk. Nominations for a nodal officer and a campus ambassador were to be filed and ELCs were said to have formed. One of the colleges in our sample could not grow beyond this two-person club as they were unaware of the aims and motives behind setting up an ELC, what activities needed to be conducted or how to motivate students to be members.

★ ELCs were launched in 2018 as a flagship initiative. Five years in, there has not been a proper evaluation of ELC activities from any authority. There are no monitoring interventions for individual ELCs or the whole ecosystem within the state. It is evident that a revamped set of guidelines is necessary to enhance their effectiveness. The authors have designed a modified version of the ECI guidebook. The goal was to simplify it and tailor it to better serve the initial setting up of ELCs at the college level.

"Based on the directive from the Taluk previous year post-November, we set up an ELC at our college. And as per the instructions, a senior teacher was essential as a Nodal Officer. So I was nominated. However, there was too much ambiguity about what was to be done and what composition needed to be made. So there were a lot of difficulties in building a new club without any such proper guidelines. What is really needed is a proper manual to set up the club and its objectives. When they first asked to establish an ELC, we didn't even know what it was intended for; beyond that, it deals with election matters."

~Nodal Officer College 6

"There has to be a separate wing at the administrative level focusing on ELCs or youth voter awareness so that there is proper monitoring of students activities first."

~ Nodal Officer College 4

★ A notable shortcoming is the lack of a robust communication channel among officials at different levels and ELC members. The primary mode of communication relies on online messaging platforms like WhatsApp, but it is primarily used for disseminating information, particularly regarding upcoming activities. Unfortunately, there is a notable absence of mechanisms for providing feedback, fostering innovation and exchanging new ideas.

★ Additionally, there is no network of ELCs. Members from one college have no interaction whatsoever with those from other colleges. This creates a vacuum for concentrated and sustained collaborative efforts, apart from providing collective feedback to enhance effectiveness.

"There is a huge ambiguity regarding who is the competent authority for any requirement, if needed. So there was confusion regarding who's directives should be followed. What is needed is a better structure and manual for us to understand how authority flows and communication should work. "

~ Nodal Officer College 3

## 3.3 Impact on Voter Awareness of Students in Colleges

Figure 3.7: Top Reasons that Motivated Members to Join ELC

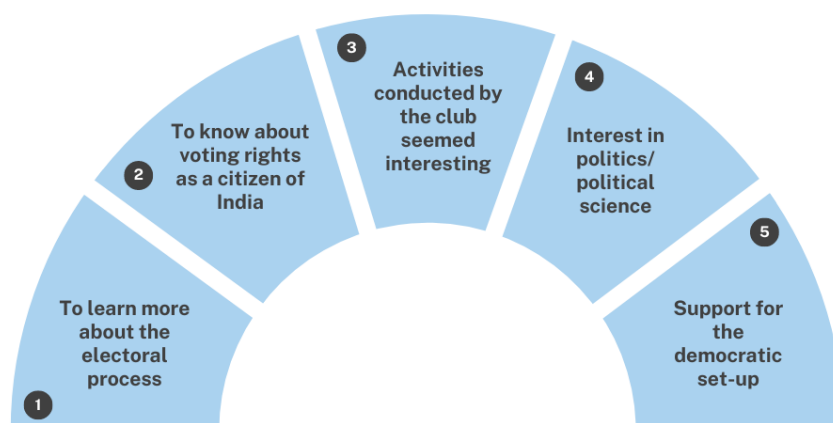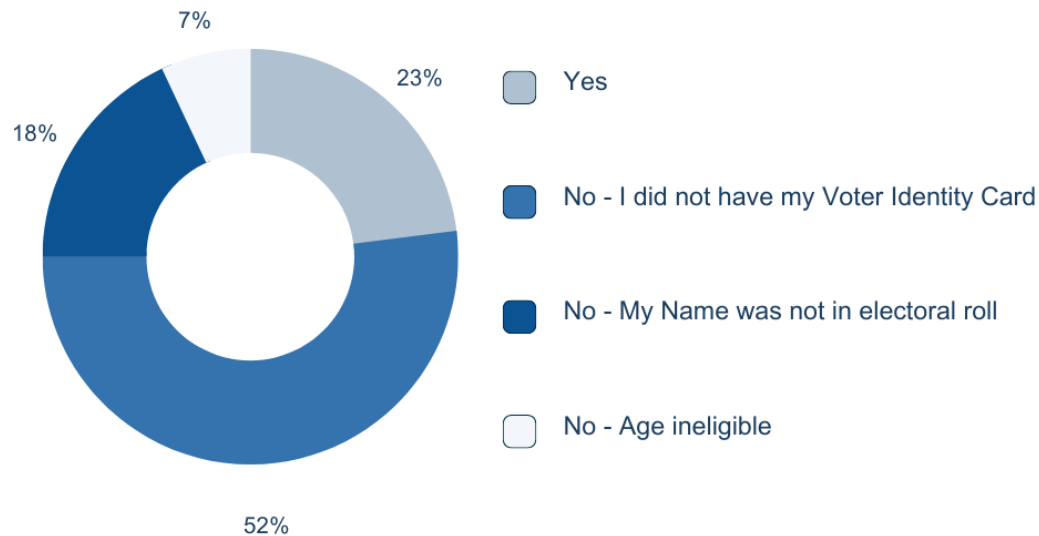### Top Motivators for ELC Enrolment



23

**Figure 3.8: ELC members' responses to "Did you vote?"**



- 7%
- 23%
- 18%
- 52%

Legend:
- Yes
- No - I did not have my Voter Identity Card
- No - My Name was not in electoral roll
- No - Age ineligible

Of the total surveyed members, only 23% have cast votes in elections. This needs to be viewed in the context that most of the surveyed members have just come of age and may not have been eligible to vote during the latest state or central election.

If and how these members vote in the general election in 2024 will be an indicator of the extent to which ELC activities have been able to inculcate a sense of civic and voter awareness among its members.

"The students have even asked us personally, 'Why should we vote? What is the need for having a Voter ID?'. It is through us that they get to know how important voting is."
~ Nodal Officer College N

"If you ask someone what democracy is, most of them won't know. They don't know who the candidate is. Most don't even know why they cast their vote. They just do it because someone has instructed them."
~ Nodal Officer College X

Students have expressed disinterest in the electoral process to the nodal officers.

A lack of awareness of electoral processes is very evident among college students.

# 4. BEST PRACTICES FRAMEWORK FOR ELCS

Based on the findings of the study, the following are some of the recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of ELCs.

## 4.1 Strategies for Strengthening ELCs

➔ Financial Support: ELCs lack substantial monetary and non-monetary support. The present reimbursement model should be replaced with a minimal budget allotment on an annual basis. This shall be supported by an independent ELC-level funding campaign in accordance with the district-level administration.

➔ Incentives: Along with the best ELC award to each district, recognise and appreciate Nodal Officers' efforts through awards, incentives, or recognition events.

➔ Documentation: Emphasise accurate and thorough documentation of ELC activities and outcomes in the annual reports.

➔ Feedback Mechanism: Implement a feedback mechanism for ELC members to report any concerns related to guideline adherence and to gather insights about Nodal Officers' performance, etc.

➔ Reform Structure: Reform the structure to ensure that the Nodal Officers have a single point of contact, who is the District Coordinator (DC). An alternate channel with the Taluk and Booth Level Officer (BLO) shall be maintained at ELC level, only for resource support or as recommended by the DC.

➔ Guidebook Awareness: Conduct periodic orientation sessions to ensure all ELC members are aware of the Guidebook. The activities shall be conducted in accordance with the Guidebook so that each focus area of the IMF-EEE paradigm gets reflected.

➔ Training and Development: Provide additional training to Nodal Officers on specific aspects of electoral literacy and effective mentorship, especially during election year. They shall also be trained in matters relating to polling and election duties.

➔ Monitoring Committee: Consider establishing a committee responsible for monitoring and ensuring guideline compliance.

➔ Regular Review: Establish a regular review process to ensure ongoing compliance with the guidelines.

## 4.2 Integrating ELCs with Formal Education

➔ Universalization: ELC must be established in all colleges with official recognition under the Directorate of Education/UGC. This shall also be achieved by incorporating the ELCs with the National Service Scheme (NSS) if the college requires so.

➔ Institutionalisation and Recognition: ELCs should be incorporated into the formal education structure.

It must be given the official status of a statutory club along the lines of NSS and NCC. Universalization with proper recognition shall ensure the provision of non-monetary incentives like credit points, certificates, etc. to students and teachers.

➜ Membership enrolments at admission time: The institutionalised functioning shall allow for ELC membership enrolments during the admission process itself, similar to other clubs.

➜ Focused Approach: Have separate ecosystems for schools and colleges, thereby enabling focused and specific activities based on the target population. This should be done at least at the district level to ensure the bandwidth of the District Coordinators.

## 4.3 Promoting Collaborations

➜ Collaboration with organisations: As suggested in the SVEEP Strategy 2022-25, collaborations shall be fostered with organisations and departments working on youth voter awareness.

➜ Election day foot soldiers: ELC members shall act as volunteers for election day to inculcate a culture of electoral participation and strengthen the election personnel force.

➜ Increased BLO involvement: BLOs shall be roped into the ELC ecosystem to ensure the strengthening of localised interventions and community engagement.

➜ Resource Sharing: Create a platform/portal at the individual ELC level for Nodal Officers to share successful resources, strategies and success stories with each other.

# 5. CONCLUSION

Through a comprehensive analysis of ELC objectives, their presence within colleges in the district, and their impact on student voter awareness, we have gained valuable insights into this flagship initiative of the Election Commission of India. Thiruvananthapuram, with 67 college ELCs (as of August 2023), has the lowest coverage of ELCs within Kerala. There is ambiguity regarding the whole process of setting up ELCs and its objectives. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that there is an acute need for a proper set of instructions on the whole structure of ELC, the roles and responsibilities, the aims and context for setting up, etc. This will ensure more efficiency and less redundancy for ELC as a club.

The vision with which ELCs were launched is pertinent in current times. The SVEEP strategy for 2022-2025 has adopted an IMF-EEE paradigm prescribing focused, data-driven efforts for each identified target group rather than expansive interventions. ELC activities have the capability to drive youth voter engagement. The youth should be motivated to exercise their voting rights. In this regard, workshops, campaigns and other activities as laid out in the resource guide should be carried out consistently, as they have proven to be effective and impactful.

ELCs hold great potential to be instrumental in advancing electoral awareness and empowering youth voices. However, there is a pressing need for an objective evaluation of the ELC ecosystem and machinery in Thiruvananthapuram as well as Kerala. The insights from these will be influential in creating campaigns as we are underway for the general elections in 2024 and beyond.

Ultimately, we underscore the importance of continued research and initiatives aimed at enhancing voter awareness and empowering the youth to be educated and informed voters. The effectiveness of Electoral Literacy Clubs relies not only on their presence but also on their capacity to inspire active participation and foster an enduring commitment to the principles of democratic engagement. We hope that this study serves as a catalyst for further actions that will strengthen civic education and voter awareness within Thiruvananthapuram and the state as a whole.

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**Centre for Public Policy Research**
**First Floor, 'Mandoli House',**
**New Link Road (Opp. Metro Pillar 821),**
**Elamkulam, Kochi- 682020,**
**Kerala, India**

**www.cppr.in**

**Phone: 0484 3533966**
**Mobile: 091 97457 09174**