

# Student Politics in Arunachal Pradesh: History, Dynamics, and Contemporary Engagements

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## Abstract

This article explores the development, organisational structure, and socio-political significance of student politics in Arunachal Pradesh. It examines the emergence of student unions, their involvement in identity formation and policy debates, major movements and protests, the challenges these organisations encounter, and their wider impact on the state's political landscape. Drawing on academic literature, media reports, and organisational records, the study offers a comprehensive overview of student political mobilisation in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** student politics, Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU, citizenship, indigenous rights, youth activism

## 1. Introduction

Student politics has long occupied an important place in India's political history, contributing to movements ranging from the anti-colonial struggle to assertions of regional and cultural identity (Panyang, 2026, p. 5). In Arunachal Pradesh, a northeastern border state with a distinct socio-cultural context, student organisations have similarly emerged as influential agents of socio-political activism. Their engagement has extended beyond campus-based issues to encompass concerns related to indigenous rights, citizenship, educational reform, and demographic change (AAPSU, n.d., para. 3; India Today NE, 2019, para. 2). Over time, these organisations have played a central role in articulating student and community interests within the broader political discourse of the state.

## 2. Historical Overview of Student Organisations

### 2.1 Emergence of AAPSU

The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) is the apex student organisation in the state. It was originally formed in the late 1960s as the All NEFA Students' Union during the transition of the region from the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) to full statehood (AAPSU, n.d., para. 1). Since its inception, AAPSU has remained a key platform for student mobilisation and collective action across Arunachal Pradesh.

While AAPSU represents the academic and welfare interests of students, its role has frequently expanded beyond conventional student concerns. In the absence of a strong and consistent political opposition, the organisation has often functioned as an influential pressure group, openly questioning, opposing, or critiquing government policies on issues affecting the state and its indigenous population (Panyang, 2026, p. 7).

## 2.2 Other Student Unions

Alongside AAPSU, several community- and tribe-based student organisations play important roles in shaping student politics in Arunachal Pradesh. These include the All Idu Mishmi Students Union (AIMSU), which has been actively involved in cultural preservation and environmental advocacy; the Adi Students' Union (AdiSU), which represents the interests of the Adi community and addresses local educational and social issues; and the Apatani Students' Union (ASU), which focuses on community development and social welfare within the Apatani society (CRDO Analysis, n.d., para. 4).

These organisations often collaborate at district and state levels, contributing to wider student coalitions and coordinated mobilisations. Through such networks, tribal student unions reinforce both community-specific concerns and broader collective student agendas within the state (AAPSU, n.d., para. 5).

## 3. Core Issues and Mobilisations

### 3.1 Citizenship and Illegal Immigration

Questions of citizenship and demographic change have been among the most prominent political concerns addressed by student organisations in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly by AAPSU. A central focus of these mobilisations has been the settlement of Chakma and Hajong communities in the state, which student bodies perceive as having significant implications for indigenous identity, land rights, and political representation (AAPSU, 2025a, para. 2).

In 2025, AAPSU spearheaded statewide rallies and organised a referendum march articulating several key demands: the immediate deportation of individuals identified as illegal immigrants, the deletion of non-APST names from electoral rolls, and stronger legal and administrative safeguards to protect indigenous identity, land, and natural resources (AAPSU, 2025b, para. 3). The scale of these protests was notable, with participation from numerous district-level student unions and community organisations, reflecting a high degree of coordination across the state (Panyang, 2026, p. 14).

### 3.2 Earlier Citizenship-Related Protests

Student organisations in Arunachal Pradesh had previously mobilised around similar concerns in 2019, when protests were organised against the proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. During this period, student bodies aligned themselves with the North East Students' Organisation (NESO), expressing apprehensions that the proposed legislation could alter the demographic composition of the region and undermine the rights and cultural security of indigenous communities (India Today NE, 2019, para. 4).

### 3.3 Engagement with Peace and Security Issues

In addition to citizenship and identity-related movements, student unions have responded to issues of peace, security, and insurgency. Protests following the killing of a former Member of the Legislative Assembly by insurgents illustrate their willingness to engage with matters of law and order and public safety (Panyang, 2026, p. 16). Such interventions demonstrate that student politics in Arunachal Pradesh extends beyond academic or community-specific issues to encompass wider concerns affecting state governance and social stability.

## 4. Organisational Role and Influence

### 4.1 Student Unions as Pressure Groups and Political Actors

Scholarly studies frequently characterise AAPSU as a pressure group whose activities extend well beyond conventional student welfare. Through sustained activism and strategic framing of public issues, the

organisation has significantly influenced debates surrounding citizenship, indigenous rights, and identity politics (Panyang, 2026, p. 18).

AAPSU's methods of engagement include public demonstrations, negotiation with government authorities, interaction with print and electronic media, and coalition-building with other civil society actors and political stakeholders. These strategies highlight the organisation's hybrid character, functioning simultaneously as a representative student body and a quasi-political actor within the state's political system (CRDO Analysis, n.d., para. 6).

#### **4.2 Youth Leadership Development**

Student politics in Arunachal Pradesh also serves as an important space for political socialisation and leadership development. Many individuals who began their public engagement as leaders within AAPSU and allied student organisations have transitioned into formal political roles. Their movement from student activism to electoral politics and administrative positions underscores the role of student organisations as training grounds for future political leadership in the state (Panyang, 2026, p. 20).

#### **5. Internal Dynamics and Criticisms**

Despite their considerable influence, student political organisations in Arunachal Pradesh face a range of internal and external challenges. One recurring issue is internal factionalism, where leadership rivalries and organisational divisions have, at times, weakened unity and reduced the effectiveness of collective action (The Arunachal Times, 2026, para. 2).

Student unions have also been criticised for their methods of protest, particularly the frequent use of strikes and bandhs. While such tactics have historically been effective in drawing attention to key issues, they can disrupt everyday life and risk alienating sections of the public. Additionally, concerns have been raised regarding political co-optation, with critics arguing that student elections and leadership positions are increasingly shaped by broader political patronage networks rather than being driven solely by student welfare (The Arunachal Times, 2026, para. 4).

#### **6. Contributions to Education and Policy Advocacy**

Beyond mobilisations centred on identity, citizenship, and demographic concerns, student unions in Arunachal Pradesh have consistently engaged with issues related to education and youth development. They have drawn attention to deficiencies in educational infrastructure, shortages of qualified teaching staff, and unequal distribution of resources between urban and remote areas (Panyang, 2026, p. 22).

Through petitions, memoranda, and public campaigns, student organisations have sought to influence education policy and budgetary priorities. Their interventions highlight the importance of student participation in shaping policies that directly affect educational access, quality, and equity, reinforcing the role of youth voices in public decision-making (Panyang, 2026, p. 23).

#### **7. Future Directions and Conclusion**

Student politics in Arunachal Pradesh has gradually evolved from a focus on campus-based concerns to a form of sustained socio-political engagement deeply intertwined with the state's broader political life (Panyang, 2026, p. 25). The persistence of movements addressing demographic change, indigenous identity, educational equity, and governance reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of student organisations in the region.

As Arunachal Pradesh continues to grapple with complex questions surrounding identity, citizenship, and development, student unions are likely to remain significant actors in the public sphere. They will continue to function both as advocates for collective concerns and as critical voices challenging existing political and policy frameworks, thereby shaping the future trajectory of the state's socio-political landscape (Panyang, 2026, p. 26).

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