The Pull of the Center

Mobilization, States, and Rural Transformation in Communist Revolution

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Abstract

I study how individuals and families from marginalized, rural communities have become integrated into networks centered on the state through revolutionary mobilization. Using a unique intergenerational and genealogical dataset from Laos, I test a historically influential view of communist revolutions, which sees individual-level mobilization into revolutionary political parties as central to revolutionary transformation. In Laos, revolutionary mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s pulled in individuals from marginalized communities into positions of power. I find that descendants of such people were then more likely to work for the party-state than people from similar, unmobilized families. I also find differences in social networks, human capital, and the salience of traditional social norms between unmobilized and mobilized families. Mobilization has conferred self-sustaining political and economic advantages, which have been transmitted within families, beyond "pork" from the state. By facilitating denser state-society interactions, these transformations have advanced state capacity and control.

Keywords— revolutions, state building, communism, Southeast Asia

1950: Born to an ethnic minority family of farmers and gatherers in a remote village.
1967: Soldier, cook, animal handler.
1969: Military team leader, student medic.
1973: Medic, squadron leader, full party member.
1975: District party secretary, district military command, head of district court.
1976: Student in an allied country.
1987: Major.
1994: Lieutenant colonel.
2008: Colonel.
2014: Brigadier general.

Promotion history of a Laotian revolutionary

1 Introduction

Social, and particularly communist, revolutions in the twentieth century pulled in masses of people from rural and peripheral areas abruptly into political modernity. Between 1950 and 1951 alone, North Vietnamese communists drafted a standing army numbering at least 150,000 people from rural areas along the Red River Delta amidst their conflict with the French, while thousands more were brought into other wings of the Communist Party (Goscha, 2022, p. 259-262). Further afield, from Indochinese and Burmese highlands to Malayan jungles, to the mountains of Dhofar in Oman, to the borderlands of Colombia, Mozambique, and El Salvador, places where state authority was historically absent or weak became centers of mobilization in violent revolutionary movements. Starting from these histories, I address a significant question in the study of revolutions, state-building, and authoritarianism: Where they took power, how have communist regimes durably attached their citizenry to the organs of the party-state?

I advance a canonical debate in the study of revolutions. Prominent sociological accounts have understood communist revolutions through the lens of class conflict, as the rebellion of a mass peasantry overburdened by demands from strong landlords and state bureaucracies (Moore, 1966, p. xxii). I argue instead for a mobilizational path to revolutionary social transformation. According to this view, the existence of class conflict or

other particular socioeconomic conditions does not spontaneously lead to revolution; such conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for revolution. Rather, the mobilization of new revolutionaries into political parties is a critical and contingent moment that is central to long-run societal change (cf. Lenin, 1929; Huntington, 1968). Through mass mobilization in violent revolutions—where rural communities were suddenly pressed into military, administrative, and political work—communists built the powerful political parties that, where they prevailed, empower the state and structure political participation over the long run. Despite the world-historical significance of this view, which guided prominent revolutionaries, a rigorously empirical, micro-level analysis of whether and how revolutionary mobilization itself created enduring connections between previously decentralized communities and emerging communist party-states is missing in existing work.

Addressing this gap, I collected a unique dataset from rural, upland areas of Laos that traces the ancestors, descendants, and extended family members of individuals who were mobilized into various wings of the Communist Party during the Laotian Civil War in the 1960s-1970s as well as those of similar, nearby people who were not mobilized. This data, covering approximately 1000 individuals across three generations, was collected in nine villages in a remote area of northern Laos that experienced large-scale communist mobilization during the war, which led to a communist takeover of the country. Such genealogical data is used in a study by Wantchekon and coauthors (2015) on the long-run impact of colonial education in Benin but is otherwise missing in studies of political and economic development, including the study of revolutions. This allows for a uniquely granular view into how revolutionary, centralizing states come to control communities that were previously governed in more localized ways.

I test how family histories of mobilization impact individual-level connections to the party-state, social networks, and human capital formation intergenerationally, starting from a history broadly characterized by localized networks, subsistence livelihoods, and loose connections to the state. These micro-level outcomes speak to the larger outcome of state capacity insofar as they facilitate legibility and the consistent interactions and

negotiations between communities and the state, which have been argued to be foundational to state capacity (Migdal, 1988; Barkey, 1994; Scott, 1998; Lee & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Lee, 2020). In Laos, I find that the nature of conflict and mobilization itself caused a deep social realignment, creating new political hierarchies, binding new social networks, and shaping patterns of economic development. During and after the Laotian Civil War, newly mobilized people from isolated communities with minimal involvement with the state under the old regime became local agents of the emerging communist party-state. Community connections to the state persisted into the subsequent generation, as local individuals in the post-war generation continued to work for the party-state and reach leadership positions. Results show that a key mechanism of persistence in these state-society connections involved the family. In fact, a deeper social differentiation—reflected in differences in status, education, migration, and marriage patterns, in addition to livelihoods—emerged between the descendants and close relations of mobilized revolutionaries and non-mobilized families.

The central methodological challenge is to convincingly separate the impact of mobilization itself from prior factors. I address this endogeneity problem in three steps, partly mirroring the approach followed by Wantchekon and coauthors (2015). First, more so than almost anywhere else in the world at the time, the communities under study were economically underdeveloped, disconnected, and remote from political and economic centers in pre-revolutionary times (Scott, 2010; Evans, 1990; Halpern, 1961a). As a result, social differentiation, whether in terms of occupation, class, or education was very minimal to begin with. Second, the process of revolutionary mobilization occurred under conditions of low information, where most mobilization happened through conscription during periods of intensive nearby fighting. Some families were thus less exposed to mobilization simply because of the gender and ages of family members at the time when drafts took place. Accordingly, I show balance across a range of individual-level covariates between mobilized and unmobilized people. The granularity of my data allows me to show balance on attributes that are almost never measured in existing work, covering family structure, pre-revolutionary family social status, networks, and human capital,

addressing pre-revolutionary social differentiation. Finally, I employ a state of the art sensitivity analysis (Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020) to show that, given these contextual factors, selection bias would have to be implausibly high to nullify the observed results.

As a further robustness check, I conduct an instrumental variables analysis leveraging the specific dynamics of revolutionary conscription in these communities. This relies on the exogeneity of the timing of nearby fighting and the fact that commanders targeted young men for conscription into revolutionary forces most intensively during such periods, leaving families with exogenous variation in exposure to mobilization based on the ages and genders of their children. The key results hold robustly in all specifications.

Laos represents a hard case for macro-social theories of revolution: the revolutionary centers in the remote uplands of the country had historically low levels of state capacity, there were essentially no landlords, bourgeoisie, or industrial proletariat, and impacts of French colonialism were also comparatively low in these inaccessible outer reaches of empire (Evans, 1990, p. 27-34). Rather, the setting was composed of small villages, often only connected by mountainous foot tracks, inhabited by subsistence agriculturalists from diverse ethnicites (cf. Scott, 2010). These loose pre-revolutionary orders were profoundly disrupted by the Laotian Civil War, which involved hundreds of thousands of Lao soldiers across the opposing communist Pathet Lao and Royal Lao Government (RLG) sides. It drew in the extensive participation of North Vietnam, which at times had over 100,000 troops and cadres in Laos, and the US, which dropped 260 million bombs on the country.

After the revolution, the typical communist policies of agricultural collectivization and industrial modernization were not effectively carried out in much of the country for long (Evans, 1990, p. 44-64). Politics in Laos has since been characterized by a paradox of strong one-party hegemony over society on the one hand and weak and uneven state capacity on the other (Creak & Barney, 2018). These factors together make Laos a crucial case, and a baseline, for studying the mobilizational path to revolutionary state formation; if such effects are identifiable anywhere, they should be identifiable in Laos given its relative lack of pre-revolutionary modernization and subsequent challenges with

top-down policy change.[1]

The central contributions of this paper are to the study of revolutions, communism, and state formation. To my knowledge, there is no existing empirical study that analyzes whether and how revolutionary mobilization itself contributed to post-revolutionary social transformations and state capacity in the rural communist revolutions of the mid twentieth century. Results suggest micro-level dynamics behind Koss's (2018) findings that the Chinese Communist Party continues to be strongest in the areas where they fought the Sino-Japanese War (also cf. Johnson, 1962). Results also build on recent work by Lankina (2022) on Russia in showing how families have been an important pathway of persistence in political and economic outcomes even in communist contexts. However, unlike Lankina (2022), who shows persistence of old regime social hierarchies despite the Russian Revolution, I detail a process of revolutionary transformation that then ossifies in the post-revolutionary period. Even in a context like Laos, where the implementation of typical communist policies has been limited and uneven (Evans, 1990), revolution has been meaningfully transformative through the impact of mobilization itself. By studying deeper layers of society at a micro-level, I also push a recent literature on revolutionary autocracies (Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; Levitsky & Way, 2022) beyond its current focus on elites, suggesting ways in which violent revolution durably transforms the interface between state and society.

Although the connection between war and state-making is well known (Tilly, 1990), prior work has not brought systematically collected and fine-grained data covering generations of people to bear on studying this process. At the same time, this study is an important contribution to theories of state formation that emphasize "bottom-up" or interactive dynamics between states and societies, rather than only "top down" coercive processes of state formation. Classic work by Karen Barkey (1994) on Ottoman Turkey, for instance, details a process of state formation built on bargaining and cooptation, rather than contestation, between states and social groups who seek out state resources

[1]Resettlement of mountain villages to lowland areas (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004), especially since the mid 1980s, is one notable area of state-led change, but even this has been largely managed by local authorities and is thus arguably endogenous to the local penetration of state power.

and connections. In recent work, Zhang & Lee (2020, p. 1001) emphasize the "everyday practice of rule-making authority...predicated upon frequent and dense encounters" between states and their societies as foundational to state capacity. The structure of social networks and the nature of state-society interactions, which are concretely *individual level* phenomena, are pivotal for state capacity in such theories, but existing work does not empirically drill down to the level of individuals. By studying long-run individual-level transformations after revolutionary mobilization, I am able to elucidate the process of state penetration of societies through the shifting of networks, norms, and individual capacities in uniquely rich detail.

In Section 2, I outline the key mechanisms in my theory connecting revolutionary mobilization to individual and local transformation, which in turn supports state capacity. Section 3 introduces the Laos case, Section 4 describes the data, and Sections 5 and 6 present empirical results. The main results are based on the collected family histories. As an extension, I also conduct a macro-level analysis comparing villages across upland Laos to trace infrastructural, political, and economic legacies of mobilization across Laos, further speaking to state capacity. This uses a dataset drawn from a host of both official and originally collected sources, covering wartime school-construction, the birthplaces of revolutionaries across Laos, and historical settlement patterns. Results suggest that variation in revolutionary mobilization helps explain political and economic differentiation across upland Laos even today.

2 Conceptualizing a Post-Revolutionary State-Society Interface

2.1 Mass Mobilization in Rural Communist Revolution

My goal is to study how revolutionary mobilization into a political party transforms individuals in ways that promote the building of state capacity. I begin with a Maoist notion of revolutionary mobilization, since this was the guiding ideology for communist leaders in Laos and Vietnam (Goscha, 2012, p. 146). This is a vision that sees conventional warfare instrumentally to some extent, as a tool in accomplishing the critical project

of politicizing the peasantry and reconstituting the state by forcibly drawing in large numbers of people from marginalized social classes into a party-state. Such mobilization uses ideology and inducements, but is ultimately based on large-scale forced conscription (Zasloff, 1973, p 78; Goscha, 2022, p. 262-263, Moran & Waldron, 2003). Nevertheless, given that indoctrination, inducement, and force all work at once in such contexts, I do not claim to be able to cleanly separate the effects of different "types" of mobilization. The Maoist model assumes a *party-state*: an organization that both amalgamates political and administrative functions and monopolizes political participation in areas under its control, retaining this monopoly after the conclusion of fighting. In contrast to much prominent work on mobilization in insurgencies and civil wars (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008; Blattman, 2009; Hanson, 2021), I thus study a context where ideologically motivated revolutionary leaders raised entire batallions of soldiers for conventional warfare rather than insurgency, through a distinct model of mass mobilization directly transmitted from China to Indochina (Goscha, 2022). Soldiers were supported by massive amounts of conscripted logistical labor and political cadres, all of whom were integrated into a single emerging party-state (Goscha, 2012).

War exposes revolutionaries to intense leadership and organizational experiences, and binds them to their compatriots in ways that are not possible in peacetime. After the conflict, where revolutionaries succeed, mobilization both equips revolutionary veterans with the necessary skills and also gives them strong moral claims for pursuing political and material benefits within the emerging party-state. The rise of such people creates a connection between the central state and the communities from where they come.

At least two factors help sustain this connection in the short-run in cases of successful rural revolution. First, in many such cases, revolutionaries were mobilized from remote, economically underdeveloped localities where competing political organizations and identities under the old regime were weak or nonexistent (Huntington, 1968, p. 342); in such cases, veterans had no strong competing allegiances that threatened to drive a rebellion. Second, rural revolutions often expelled and eliminated skilled groups, who held privi-

leged positions in urban centers under the old regime.[2] Especially where human capital was scarce after revolutionary victory, trusted revolutionary veterans, now armed with practical administrative experience, were unlikely to be removed from positions of power in the party-state, which now needed to administer a peacetime polity.

2.2 Long-run Individual Capacities and State Capacity

How do these state-society connections deepen and when are they sustained over the long-term? Connections to the state are deeper when local people are formally embedded in the party-state to a greater extent, creating flesh-and-blood points of intersection between localized and party-state networks. The long-run sustenance of these formal connections depends on yet deeper shifts in social networks, cultural norms, and human capital rooted in revolutionary mobilization. For instance, veterans might transfer skills and aspirations to their descendants through socialization (Bisin & Verdier, 2001; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017), leaving these descendants well placed for party-state work on purely meritocratic grounds. Veterans might use their larger social networks to help relatives and community members gain access to resources and jobs through engaging with the state; they might also use their positions of authority in the party-state to secure enduring benefits and positions of power for those close to them. In these ways, individual transformations through mobilization have spillover effects, over the long-run, within families and communities.

In casting this revolutionary transformation as an expansion of state capacity, I am informed by highly interactive conceptualizations of state capacity (cf. Barkey, 1994). For instance, Zhang & Lee (2020) see state capacity as being rooted in the removal of transaction costs of communication between states and localities. While they conceptualize literacy, through linguistic intelligibility and human capital, as one transaction cost, other similar frictions, impeding state initiatives, might arise from asymmetries in networks and norms between agents of the state and local inhabitants. Such asymmetries

[2]The exodus of intelligentsia after communist takeovers in places like China and Vietnam is well known (Lary, 2012, p. 124-125; Goscha, 2016, p. 385-386). This is less true in the earlier Russian Revolution (eg. Lankina *et al.*, 2016).

might impact legibility and the frequency and scope of state-society interactions. An illiterate person, or one with no known people among state employees will find it hard or impossible to obtain party-state employment. Equally, they might be unbanked, or unable to register their business, and rely more on informal and untaxed financial networks; they might be less able to engage the state in negotiations over land or local policy, impeding state action; they might be less exposed to ideological indoctrination. I show how state-building happens, to some extent epiphenomenally after revolution, through local revolutionary veterans rather than through continual top-down investments from the center and coercion applied by external authorities.

Though there is a sense in which mobilization occurs at the level of a locality as a whole, shifts in social networks, cultural norms, and human capital are ultimately individual-level phenomena. Membership and incorporation into a party organization is also concretely an individual-level phenomenon. Unlike all existing work in this vein, I thus conduct the analysis systematically at the individual level, so that I can directly test for changes in these micro-processes rooted in revolutionary mobilization, which in turn speak to the conception of state capacity described above.

2.3 An Illustrative Example

The life story of an ethnic minority man who ended his career as a brigadier general (*naiphon chattava*) in the Lao Peoples' Liberation Army (LPLA) helps solidify these ideas.[3] Naiphon Chan was born in an upland village in northern Laos to a family that lived by subsistence agriculture and the gathering of forest products. He was drafted into the communist army as a child and taught to read and write by party staff. At first a cook and animal handler, after fighting against the opposing Royal Lao Government (RLG), he was promoted and selected to receive training to be an army doctor. As hostilities subsided in 1975, when he was in his mid-twenties, he was a party member, involved in district-level administration of the military and youth union, and was also the chief of the district-level court.

[3]This information is based on a biographical manuscript provided by the family. Naiphon (general) Chan is a pseudonym. His story is also detailed in the epigraph of this paper.

He married inter-ethnically, something that was exceedingly rare under the old regime, to someone he met through his work, and became assimilated into the dominant lowland ethnic Lao, Buddhist culture. By the mid-1980s, he had become a senior officer in the LPLA. He pulled in his children, some nephews and nieces, and others from his birth village into party-state work. In his community, he embodied the diligence and industriousness that was celebrated in the propaganda of the emerging party-state. He is remembered for bringing investments in roads and temples to his village. Thus, though he rose to national-level leadership, he was part of an enduring incorporation of local networks into party-state networks, increasing the number and variety of interactions between his community and the party-state. Many others, though they did not reach such positions of power, were perhaps able to transmit similar changes, albeit at a smaller scale, after revolutionary mobilization.

2.4 Hypotheses

Where revolutionaries succeed, achieve stability in the critical post-revolutionary moment, and banish or significantly weaken incumbent elite groups, wartime mobilization drives enduring connections to the emerging party-state. To trace long-run outcomes rooted in mobilization at the maximally granular level, I test for within-family effects, based on family histories of mobilization. At this level, one can test for "bottom up" dynamics, where local individuals, rather than the state on its own, work to build denser state-society connections (cf. Lankina, 2022).[4]

As a baseline, my first hypothesis is that descendants, including in the extended family, of mobilized revolutionaries are more likely to hold positions in the party state than the descendants of nearby, similar people who were not mobilized. My second hypothesis then speaks to deeper societal transformations, rooted in revolutionary mobilization, that support state capacity: I hypothesize that those from historically mobilized families will have wider social networks and more human capital; the salience of traditional social

[4]I do not rule out top-down mechanisms, indeed communist parties are by their nature hierarchical and top-down. The possibility of bottom-up mechanisms is more theoretically interesting because it sheds new light on how party-states penetrate localities through the efforts of local revolutionaries.

norms that might impede connections to the state will also be less for mobilized families. I operationalize this through studying inter-ethnic marriage, education, migration, and certain observable consequences of traditional cultural norms, described in greater detail below.

3 Historical Context

Before presenting results, I briefly describe the historical context of Laos. This study focuses on the upland parts of Laos. I take this to encompass all of the country apart from the low-lying areas along much of the Mekong River, which are home to the urban centers. Historically low state-capacity and underdevelopment coupled with a violent communist revolution that mobilized large numbers of people and displaced the incumbent elite make Laos a critical, most likely case for studying the impact of revolutionary mobilization itself on durable party-state formation.

Many upland areas of Laos even in the 1960s were some of the least economically developed and sparsely populated places in the world. The largest settlements had 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, while the average village had fewer than 100 residents; locals were almost exclusively subsistence farmers (Halpern, 1961b). Conflict over land was thus not salient. There were active trade networks in opium and forest products, and Buddhist monastic networks extended into some upland communities.[5] But by and large, there were no landlords, capitalists, or state bureaucracies. Corvée labor existed under traditional rulers as well as French colonial rule (Halpern, 1961a, p. 26-28), but by most accounts this was inconsistently applied given the proclivity of locals to simply move away (Evans, 1990, p. 33-34). Given this state of affairs, modern political identities and preferences, such as those between "left" and "right," did not exist among the general upland population under the old regime.

In line with this condition of sparse, subsistence economies and weak state power (cf.

[5]The historical presence of Christian missionaries in the uplands appears to have been limited to a handful of individuals in total, though there was more Christian influence among some ethnic Hmong communities starting around 1950 (Andaya, 2014; Andrianoff, 2020). Many Hmong Christians sided with the US during the Laotian Civil War.

Scott, 2010), cultural identities were diverse and diffuse. Laos is made up of people who speak a variety of unrelated languages and follow diverse cultural traditions. To this day, many people belonging to minority cultures live in ethnically homogeneous villages in upland areas of the country. Out of 50 officially recognized ethnicities, the ethnic Lao make up a bare majority of the population across the country, while the broader category of Tai ethnic groups (*Lao Loum* or "lowland" Lao), which includes the Lao, make up around 60% (Statistics Bureau, 2015a, p. 37). Historically, the Lao-Tai have been politically dominant in Laos, ruling over towns (*meuang*) in many of the arterial valleys of present-day Laos by the early 1300s (eg. Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 8). The Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, older inhabitants of the area, have traditionally occupied mountainous locales and were historically given the pejorative label of *Kha*, or slave, by the Lao-Tai, reflecting the perceived backwardness associated with highlanders. These people are also sometimes referred to as the *Lao Theung* or "upland" Lao. The third most populous group after the Khmu, the Hmong—categorized as *Lao Soung*, "highland" Lao—arrived fleeing unrest in southern China in the 1800s to settle in the mountains of northern Laos. I refer to all groups outside of the Lao-Tai as "ethnic minorities" or "upland ethnic minorities."

In this context, the Laotian Civil War, or Laotian Revolution, was rooted in political instability following decades of French colonialism, Japanese occupation during World War 2, and then a return of French rule after a brief period of independence (Stuart-Fox, 1997). Subsequently, splits emerged among the Lao elite between those who wanted French rule and those supporting the Viet Minh's anti-French insurgency in Indochina; this faction developed into the communist Pathet Lao (PL), heavily supported by North Vietnam. Laos gained independence, as a constitutional monarchy, from the French in 1954. At this time, the PL were active in many areas of Laos and retained full control of two upland, northeastern provinces bordering Vietnam: Sam Neua and Phongsaly (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 73-79).

Fighting between the Royal Lao Government (RLG), now supported by the US, and communists continued sporadically. Communist control gradually expanded from their

original strongholds in the northeast to include much of eastern and upland Laos. At the same time, boundaries were fluid and frequently changing, front lines were highly fractured and both sides came to hold areas behind enemy lines at various times. People from virtually all major ethnic groups were involved on both sides of the conflict.[6] The 1962 Geneva Conference instituted a ceasefire, though no official demarcating line between the factions was ever established (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 110). Fighting continued and intensified immediately after and subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975.

Post-revolutionary Changes

Table 1: Ethnic diversity in party leadership

Body	Year	Total size	Ethnic minorities
National population	2015	6,446,690	∼40%
Lao Peoples' Revolutionary Party (LPRP), 11th Politburo	2021	13	38.46%
9th National Assembly (elected reps.)	2021	164	18.3%
7th National Assembly (all candidates)	2011	190	26.3%
LPRP, 8th Central Committee	2006	55	27.27%
6th National Assemby	2006	115	20%
4th National Assembly	1997	99	32.32%
LPRP, 4th Politburo	1986	13	7.69%
LPRP, 2nd Politburo	1972	7	0%

In this historical context, early Lao nationalists, who were part of the small ethnic Lao elite under French colonialism, looked to their ethnicity as the basis of political community (Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002). Leadership positions at the district level and above under the old regime were almost always held by Lao-Tai aristocrats. The communists, who were based in upland areas bordering Vietnam during much of the war, have claimed to represent a multi-ethnic Lao people and to champion the interests of minorities since the wartime period (Neo Lao Haksat, 1970, 1980). While such proclamations are typical in communist contexts and often hollow, wartime US sources also noted that the PL leadership structure and ethnic policy "appear[ed] to live up to these principles" (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 133-134), despite the fact that the core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese, who provided much

[6]The Hmong are well known to have been recruited by the CIA, but in fact many Hmong were also on the communist side, with clan-level splits (Pholsena, 2008; Naotoayang, 2014). See Goudineau, (1997, p. 23) for examples of local geographical splits among and within Khmu subgroups.

of the military manpower. Many from the educated, elite classes under the old regime fled the country after the war, while others—especially those in RLG leadership positions who chose to stay—perished in Pathet Lao prison camps (cf. Baird, 2021).

Today, a diversity of ethnic groups are represented at all levels of the party-state, including in the Politburo and Central Committee, which are the primary policy-making bodies. At the same time, many of the poorest and most isolated communities in the country are ethnic minority communities. Outside of the very highest echelons of the party-state, many ethnically non-Lao people also hold positions, including prominent ones, in the military as well as in the bureaucracy. Since information on party membership is not publicly available, data on the National Assembly of Laos gives some sense of the extent to which the deeper ranks of the party-state encompass underlying social groups (see Appendix A).

Unevenness also characterizes the economic situation of upland people in Laos. In aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates between the majority Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman, and Hmong communities (Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170). However, these aggregates mask a significant amount of variation across geographical areas and within the state-sanctioned broad ethnolinguistic categories (table A.1). In making sense of this differentiation, I build on work by scholars of Laos who have highlighted the importance of revolutionary histories as an important source of political capital in Laos (Goudineau, 1997; Baird & Le Billon, 2012; Dwyer, 2022).

4 Family Histories

With the aid of local partners, a sample of family histories was gathered from nine ethnic Khmu villages in northern Laos. This was done using a backward sampling procedure, where enumerators systematically sampled from individuals living in these communities today, asking these people about their ancestors and other family members in face-to-face interviews (cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015). These communities, about whom little is known in any academic field, were very heavily mobilized by the communists during the Laotian

Civil War while also being historically remote and peripheral to state power.[7] Thus they provide a good setting for studying the impact of mobilization on state formation.

These histories recover the stories of approximately 1000 people across three generations, providing relational data as well as data on professions, education, and migration during the old regime, during the time of intensive revolutionary conflict, and in the subsequent generation. This includes information on family members who have died, have moved or reside in other places, and some who were royalist soldiers and went to reeducation camp (*semana*, "seminar" in Lao). Although Laos is well known as the most bombed country in the world (Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024), this area faced few instances of aerial bombardment, and the impacts of bombing are not significant locally.[8] A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted.[9] Historically similar villages were selected for data collection, and households were randomly sampled within each village. There are significant data constraints in identifying historically similar villages, since no pre-war data exists at the village level. As an alternative, local elders with deep knowledge and first-hand experience of the area going back to the 1950s were enlisted to help with village selection. This process is described in detail in Appendix B.

Like similar historical studies, especially of contentious histories, where official records are unavailable, this study relies on truthful and accurate recall by interviewees (Blattman, 2009; Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Sánchez De La Sierra, 2020). In studying the impacts of revolutionary mobilization on remote, rural communities anywhere in the world, there is simply no way around this. With regards to recall, the histories in question here are more recent than those analyzed in other retrospective work (Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017), and the majority of interviewees had directly lived through the war and were often able to give detailed accounts of their experiences as well as those of their relatives.[10]

[7]These communities did not experience significant US bombing, nor were they located anywhere near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[8]According to U.S. data from the Theater History of Operations Report, the area was bombed in a total of approximately 5 missions.

[9]The collected family histories, along with results to follow, should only be seen as representative for Khmu in the specific area under study.

[10]There is, however, clear evidence of missing data on women in older generations. This is addressed below and in Appendix B.

While I cannot guarantee that all data is accurate, several steps were taken to ensure good data quality. Data was collected by two enumerators, both of whom are themselves Khmu, have professional training and over a decade of experience in survey research, and also have familial ties to the surveyed communities. Due to the insider status of the enumerators, interviews were conducted as semi-structured conversations among community insiders in the Khmu language. During interviews, information on family histories was often verified, corrected, or sharpened through discussions among multiple community members. The villages under study have only between 15 and 20 unrelated households, and families are well-informed about each others' histories.[11] In all but one village, follow-up conversations, sometimes with original respondents and sometimes with their close relations, for clarifying and verifying information were also conducted over phone, social media, and in person over the course of six months for all families.[12] While it cannot be fully ruled out, I believe that the unique nature of the interviews, conducted as conversations among trusted community insiders, represents an unusually high safeguard against social desirability bias. A sign of this is the fact that respondents reported historical participation on the royalist side at rates that exceeded prior expectations based on knowledge of this area.

Other concerns with retrospective data might involve the possibility of differences in migrations, death rates, and birth rates between mobilized and unmobilized families, leading to biased results (see Appendix C). Data on people who were displaced or have migrated away is typically available, since many such people retain connections to family members who have remained in the surveyed villages. Based on interviews, entire extended families typically did not move away. Available data on family sizes in both the wartime and post-war generations provides no evidence for differential birth or death rates.

[11] Officially, some of these settlements are at a sub-village level, since in some cases nearby settlements are grouped together administratively into the same "village." I refer to the sampled settlements, rather than the broader official administrative units, as villages. Almost all of these villages have been relocated closer to roads and waterways and other villages since the time of the revolution, but the analysis here largely involves events and histories that preceded relocations.

[12] In one village, follow-ups were not successful because of a lack of phone and internet signal and difficulties in obtaining permissions for follow-up in-person interviews.

Revolutionary Mobilization and Selection

A detailed qualitative account of local mobilization and pre-revolutionary society, based on extensive fieldwork and interviews conducted over several years, is available in an appendix. I present such qualitative information summarily here due to space constraints. I identify individuals as mobilized into the communist revolution only if they had a military, political, or administrative position in support of the war on the communist side at the district (*meuang*) level or higher. Given that the area underwent mass mobilization, with many people contributing to the war effort in different ways, this is simply meant to capture a threshold of integration into the communist party, which is the core theoretical idea behind the treatment, following Huntington (1968). At lower levels of work, the day-to-day life of the person would not have significantly shifted away from those of a local farmer.[13] Individuals in the post-war generation (notated generation 2) are considered to be from a mobilized family if they are a grandchild, child, niece or nephew, or younger sibling of someone who was mobilized.

The "unmobilized," or control, group includes a few different types of people, all of whom remained, to varying extents, remote from the Communist Party: those who worked for the communists at the village or sub-district level at times, those who were mostly uninvolved in the conflict, and those who were mobilized into the Royal Lao Army (FAR). Some of the villages under study were actively contested during the war and came under royalist control for some time, hence the history of mobilization into the right wing forces. Family histories of royalist mobilization are accounted for in the analysis to come in order to ensure that any identified effects arise from benefits from mobilization rather than the punishment of those on the losing side.

In the area under study, beyond its intensiveness, the local dynamics of mobilization were haphazard and do not map on to pre-revolutionary interests. There were several cases where the same individual switched between opposing sides of the conflict, while in

[13]The particular operation of a Leninist party structure in these localities also leads to a situation where many local people are affiliated with mass organizations during certain periods of their life without this concretely impacting their skills, social networks, livelihoods, or political power.

Table 2: Mobilized and unmobilized balance

Individuals have a notable prior generation if at least one of their ancestors was a soldier, village head, *taseng* head, trader, or important spiritual figure based on reported data.

	Mobilized			Unmobilized			
	N	Mean	Sd.	N	Mean	Sd.	Diff.
Female	63	0.079	0.272	166	0.518	0.501	−0.439
Ave. no. siblings	52	4.981	1.831	111	5.261	2.012	−0.28
Monk (males)	55	0.255	0.44	79	0.266	0.445	−0.011
Other family mob.	60	0.7	0.462	156	0.545	0.5	0.155
From area 1	63	0.333	0.475	166	0.283	0.452	0.05
Notable prior gen.	51	0.392	0.493	116	0.328	0.471	0.064

many other cases, siblings or family members were forced into opposing sides.[14] Based on interviews with locals who experienced the war, the primary determinant of individual mobilization was simply being in the village as a young man at the time that the local military commander happened to come looking for men (see Appendix D). Drafts were particularly likely when conflict happened to intensify nearby, as was the case in 1967-1968 when areas nearby were part of an active front-line in the war. Commanders were not well informed about the capacity of draftees and faced significant manpower pressure from ongoing conflict; rather, key determinants of being drafted were simply being the right age and gender (male) when conflict happened to intensify nearby.

Despite the prevalence of conscription, I do not make strong claims about the randomness of recruitment, since it is impossible to recover the precise motivations, and the mix between coercion, inducements, and indoctrination, in the process of mobilization writ large. However, I am able to show balance along key covariates, at a high level of granularity and historical depth, between mobilized and unmobilized people in the sample. Especially given the very low levels of pre-revolutionary social differentiation locally, this provides evidence that mobilization did not select for a particular type of person.

Table 2 shows balance across several individual-level covariates for which data was collected and which might confound results to come. Family size might correlate with economic status and thus is an important variable for balance. Prior connections to the

[14]As Walder & Chu (2020) show in a seminal sociological study of the Cultural Revolution in China, faction building in settings of intensive conflict where institutions have collapsed happens through contingent, localized decisions, made under conditions of high uncertainty; the influence of prior interests and identities are minimal in such chaotic settings.

state, which were exclusively through military service or attaining village and sub-district head positions, as well as connections to supra-local trade are captured by the "notable prior generation" variable, on which there is balance.[15] A particularly important pre-revolutionary societal network was the Buddhist priesthood (cf. Hansen, 2007; Grzymała-Busse, 2023; Zaw, 2024). This was the only source of education in this area in pre-revolutionary times, which we might expect to be an important factor in mobilization, following work on Russia (Lankina *et al.*, 2016). Monastic networks might well have played an important part in the Laotian revolution broadly, but I find that exposure to them does not predict revolutionary mobilization.[16] In assessing covariate balance, data at this level of granularity, speaking to deep family histories, is rare in existing work. Building on this, to further address the issue of selection bias (either selection by the party-state or by mobilized people according to some unobserved capacity), I conduct sensitivity analysis of the key results to come. I also present an instrumental variables analysis as a robustness check.

5 Main Results

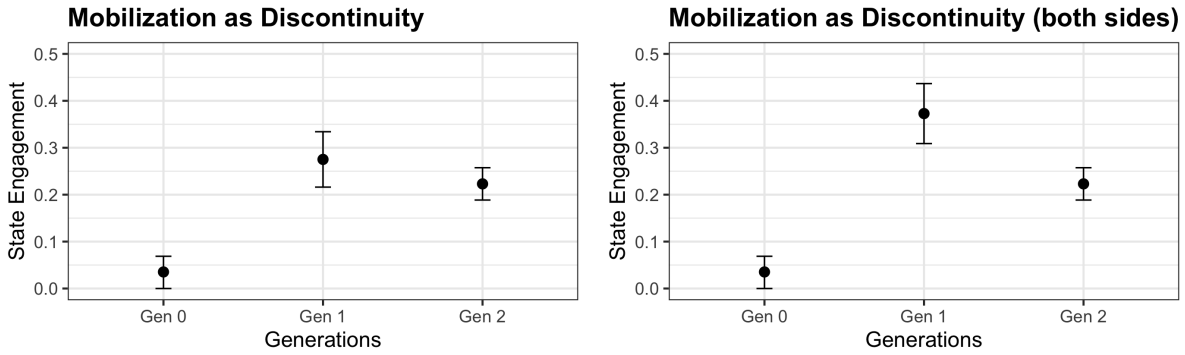
5.1 Intergenerational Connections to the State

Involvement with the state increased during the wartime generation and remained at a significantly higher level in the post-war generation. Remarkably, over 37% of the sample was involved in the war effort at the district level or above on both sides, with about 27% being mobilized by the communists, consistent with mass mobilization in the Maoist mold.[17] Much of this involvement came from military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff

[15]This combines different notable histories because there are so few (one or two) cases in each category.

[16]Regression analysis of the determinants of mobilization suggests that gender, number of siblings (weakly), and the specific village of the individual are the only measured factors correlated with mobilization (see table A.3). The result on number of siblings is likely because some people were able to avoid conscription because their siblings had already been conscripted.

[17]Royalist involvement is driven entirely by mobilization into the armed forces (FAR). All data on FAR involvement is tentative, since this is still a sensitive history. Women are consistently underrepresented in the sample, though the problem improves across generations. Estimated rates of state involvement are thus likely biased upwards. This issue should not disrupt the basic picture.



(a) **(b)**

Figure 1: A mobilization shock

Gen 0 is the pre-war generation, gen 1 is the wartime generation (born between 1940 and 1960), and gen 2 are the children, nieces, and nephews of gen 1 along with siblings born after 1960. Panel (a) shows means for mobilization and government employment at the district level or higher. Panel (b) also includes mobilization on the royalist side for gen 1. Error bars indicate a two standard error interval.

(see table A.2). Mobilization into teaching and administrative positions typically also involved conscription of very young people who initially provided labor and were given basic education by the party.

Individuals were counted as reaching high positions if they had a leadership position at the district level or higher and/or they attained a senior officer rank in the military or police (*nai phan* or higher—battalion commander or higher). In the sample, 35 individuals reached high positions across generations 1 and 2. In generation 1, this includes a former district governor (*jao meuang*), a former deputy district governor (*hong jao meuang*), a former member of the National Assembly of Laos, a military general, and several other senior soldiers and police. 63 out of 229 people were mobilized in the revolution, while 130 out of 584 people in generation 2 worked full-time for the party-state.

5.2 Mobilization, Kinship, and the State

As a first step, to directly test if party-state work in generation 2 is rooted in histories of revolutionary mobilization, I consider correlations between histories of family-level mobilization and being employed full-time by the party-state in the subsequent generation. Almost all employees of the party-state in the sample worked at local and provincial levels as bureaucrats, doctors, teachers, soldiers, or police, while several reached national-level

Table 3: Generation 2, determinants of party-state work

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Govt. work	Govt. work	Govt. work
Model	Logit	Logit	Logit
family mobilized	1.164***		
	(0.224)		
parent		1.289***	1.289***
		(0.2)	(0.222)
aunt/uncle		0.903***	0.765**
		(0.302)	(0.325)
sibling		1.142***	0.984***
		(0.219)	(0.25)
area1	−0.084	0.015	
	(0.376)	(0.34)	
individual controls	✓	✓	✓
village dummies			✓
N	568	568	568

standard errors clustered by village, Bonferroni corrected α
$^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

Table 4: Predicted probabilities of party-state involvement in generation 2

Model: 3, Village: 7, Birth cohort: 1975-1990, FAR: No, Siblings: 5

	Only parent mobilized	Only aunt/uncle mobilized	No close family mobilized
Male	0.483	0.357	0.205
Female	0.202	0.131	0.065

positions. I rely on a theory of state capacity that sees the density of state-society interactions as central to state capacity. From a past of highly localized networks, greater intersection between local kinship networks and party-state networks, rooted in revolutionary mobilization, thus speaks to an expansion of state capacity. In some sense, the idea that children follow in the footsteps of their parents is a mundane fact. However, the key point here is that the incorporative effects of mobilization spread, through families, beyond those directly mobilized, causing these effects to persist.

I conduct regression analysis, with the outcome variable being full-time employment by the party-state in generation 2 and the treatment variables being various indicators of familial revolutionary mobilization in the prior generation. I control for gender, birth-year cohorts, number of siblings, and family history of royalist mobilization, since these factors might independently affect the outcome variable. An important baseline level of

control, including on unobservables, is achieved through sample selection. All individuals come from the same ethnic community, with family histories in upland villages that have historically occupied essentially the same ecological and economic niches. I also control for the specific village (or "area" encompassing a sampling cluster, see Appendix B), further accounting for village histories that might have been pertinent to mobilization.

Results suggest that revolutionary mobilization, including among extended family (uncles and aunts), led to a significantly greater likelihood of party-state employment among family members in the subsequent generation. Instead of arguing directly for a causal interpretation based on an exogenous treatment, I use a sensitivity analysis based approach and contextual knowledge to argue that these results are meaningful. Most mobilization happened through conscription in a low-information environment, in response to the intensity of nearby fighting; selection by draftees or communist commanders was minimal, and pre-war social differentiation was also minimal. Sensitivity analysis results, following Cinelli & Hazlett (2020), show that in order for results to lose statistical significance at the 95% level, all of the following would have to be true: (1) a very high level of selection on an unobserved ability during a chaotic process of mobilization, (2) an independent intergenerational transfer of this underlying ability, and (3) this underlying ability influencing participation in state work at rates even higher than having male gender, which is the strongest measured predictor of party-state work (Appendix E.2).[18] This chain of effects is highly implausible given the context under study.

As a further robustness check, I estimate an instrumental variables specification. Results hold robustly in the IV specification (table A.5), which uses the ages and genders of children in the family in 1967-1968 as exogenous sources of variation in exposure to mobilization, under the assumption that mobilization responded to nearby conflict. Though age cutoffs for conscription were not sharp, using a conservative cutoff there is strong evidence that the instrument is both relevant and exogenous.

[18]Selection into mobilization on an unobserved ability would also have to be over half as strong as the observed selection into mobilization on gender, which is by far the strongest predictor of mobilization, in order for results to lose significance.

Table 5: Generation 2, sample characteristics by mobilization history

Averages/proportions of sample in generation 2, grouped by mobilizational history, with high position government jobs, skilled jobs (including govt.), residence in Vientiane, inter-ethnic marriage, college diploma, and number of siblings. CLT standard errors in parentheses. Number of observations in brackets.

Mobilization	Leader	Skilled	VTE	Inter-ethnic	Diploma	Sibs.
Family	0.048	0.345	0.118	0.197	0.142	5.561
	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.023)	(0.029)	(0.018)	(0.107)
	[393]	[391]	[391]	[365]	[310]	[392]
None	0.016	0.153	0.053	0.038	0.017	5.426
	(0.006)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.01)	(0.009)	(0.166)
	[190]	[190]	[190]	[182]	[176]	[183]
Parent/sibling	0.073	0.426	0.114	0.203	0.162	5.77
	(0.02)	(0.037)	(0.024)	(0.03)	(0.028)	(0.151)
	[177]	[176]	[176]	[158]	[136]	[178]
No parent/sibling	0.022	0.218	0.089	0.121	0.071	5.406
	(0.007)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.111)
	[405]	[404]	[404]	[388]	[350]	[397]

5.3 Social Networks and Human Capital

In addressing my second hypothesis, I first test how mobilization has transformed the social networks and skills of families and individuals in the long-run, giving them advantages in seeking connections to the state. As table 5 shows, there are significant intergenerational differences between mobilized and unmobilized families. This suggests that the incorporation of these families has not only been a thin, top-down cooptation by party leaders; it has been driven by self-sustaining advantages. I focus on social networks and human capital because these are factors that leave locals both well placed to work for the party-state as well as engage party-state institutions in more and more varied ways (Lee & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Lee, 2020).

I operationalize social networks by examining trends in inter-ethnic marriage and migration to the capital city, Vientiane; both inter-ethnic marriage and urban migration imply more varied social networks. In addition, many inter-ethnic marriages brought Khmu people into familial relationships with people from historically more privileged Lao-

Table 6: Regression results, marriage and education

	(1)	(2)
DV	Inter-ethnic marriage	Diploma
Model	Logit	Logit
family mobilized	1.571***	2.3*
	(0.571)	(1.198)
individual controls	✓	✓
village dummies	✓	✓
N	534	471
standard errors clustered by village		
$^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$		

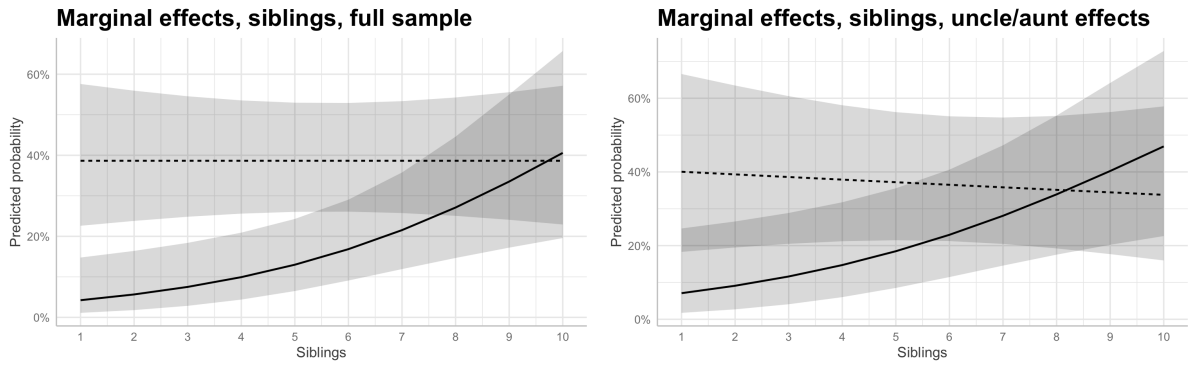
Tai communities.[19] I operationalize human capital using trends in educational attainment and participation in skilled labor.[20] Few people from this area spoke the Lao language in pre-war times, literacy was minimal, and there were virtually no cross-ethnic marriages. Trends in table 5 thus represent a revolutionary social transformation. These trends started with revolutionary mobilization itself, which first brought locals into large multi-ethnic networks centered on the party and gave them formal education. In turn, benefits from better social networks and education likely reinforced local party-state connections. Regression analysis provides further evidence that a family history of mobilization led to higher rates of inter-ethnic marriage and higher rates of tertiary education in the post-revolutionary generation.

5.4 Cultural Norms

Traditional cultural norms might function as another source of friction in interactions between the state and local communities. This is perhaps especially relevant given Scott's (2010) influential argument that the inhabitants of "Zomia" are particularly culturally averse to state control. Anecdotally, ambitions of children in generation 2 were affected by family mobilization histories through socialization, even across extended families. For instance, in one case, a woman who attained higher education and skilled non-governmental

[19]Many such relationships developed as a direct result of participating in multi-ethnic revolutionary networks and workplaces.

[20]In addition to government work, I counted working in an office setting, owning or operating a business, working in a technical trade, and working in the arts as skilled jobs.



(a) **(b)**

Figure 2: Heterogeneous effects: siblings

Results are from regressions following table 3, column 1, which include an additional interaction term between treatment and siblings (see table A.7). Predicted probabilities, given covariates: Gender=Male, FAR=No, Area 1, Birth cohort=1975-1990. Dotted line is mobilized group and solid line is unmobilized group. Panel (a) uses the full sample; panel (b) restricts the sample to children who only have a mobilized uncle/aunt (but no mobilized parent or sibling) and those from unmobilized families.

work in the national capital mentioned that her uncle, a senior soldier, had encouraged her to study hard from her childhood, promising her a job as an army doctor if she did so. To test the salience of differences in socialization more systematically, I focus on the observable implications of a cultural norm that might impede party-state connections by placing responsibilities on individuals that make it difficult to pursue careers in the party-state.

Traditionally, in the studied communities, at least one male child was expected to stay with his parents and support the parental household throughout his life. This would preclude the travels and training necessary for much party-state work. To test the salience of this norm, I leverage the fact that party-state opportunities would thus be more available to male children from bigger families, where some such children would be less affected by the burden of the traditional role.

Accordingly, in unmobilized families, I find positive marginal effects of the number of siblings on party-state employment at the individual level, suggesting the maintenance of this cultural norm. However, no such effect exists for mobilized families, for whom the number of siblings has no impact on the probability of party-state employment. Furthermore, this effect is not simply driven by children whose parents are government employees, and who might thus not be needed at home; a similar heterogeneity exists

when comparing nieces and nephews, but not children, of revolutionary veterans with children from unmobilized families (figure 2b). In other words, the cultural norm appears to not apply even in families where the parents are farmers but an uncle or aunt was mobilized during the revolution. While I cannot rule out alternative explanations, this result provides suggestive evidence that revolutionary mobilization shifted parents' preferences on traditional family roles for their children; parents in historically mobilized families encouraged their children to pursue opportunities with the party-state even at the expense of traditional familial responsibilities.[21] This also points to within-family socialization as a mechanism of persistence in state-society connections.

I thus find evidence for three related shifts rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself that have supported an intensification of local connections to the state over the long run. First, social networks expanded and intersected more privileged groups. Second, relevant skills were built through formal education, even at the highest available level. Finally, there is evidence of shifts in preferences and ambitions regarding family roles that would allow individuals to pursue party-state work even at the expense of traditional family duties. The within-family effects show that such transformations have not been based on development and industrialization (cf. Gellner, 1983) or broad top-down investments by the state, since such change would apply broadly through these communities. Rather, they are rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself. These outcomes, in turn, suggest a local expansion of state capacity, conceptualized as the density of interactions between the state and the locality.

6 Revolutionary Mobilization and State Capacity Across the Uplands

I conclude with an analysis connecting wartime revolutionary mobilization to infrastructural, political, and economic outcomes, which speak directly to state presence and ca-

[21] This divergence in preferences could, in turn, have been driven by economic and political factors, though I am unable to systematically test such deeper mechanisms. Mobilized families, if they were wealthier, might have required less household labor. Mobilized families might also have had higher returns from sending their children to study or work if their children were likely to be privileged in such contexts based on their family histories.

pacity at a higher level of aggregation. Building on the results above, my objective in this section is to marshal the broadest possible range of data to provide suggestive evidence that the party-state has continued to be more active in areas that were heavily mobilized during the revolution. To this end, I use an extensive range of originally collected data on local pre-war covariates. My suggestion is that these aggregate signs of state capacity are, in part, a result of the micro-processes detailed more locally above.

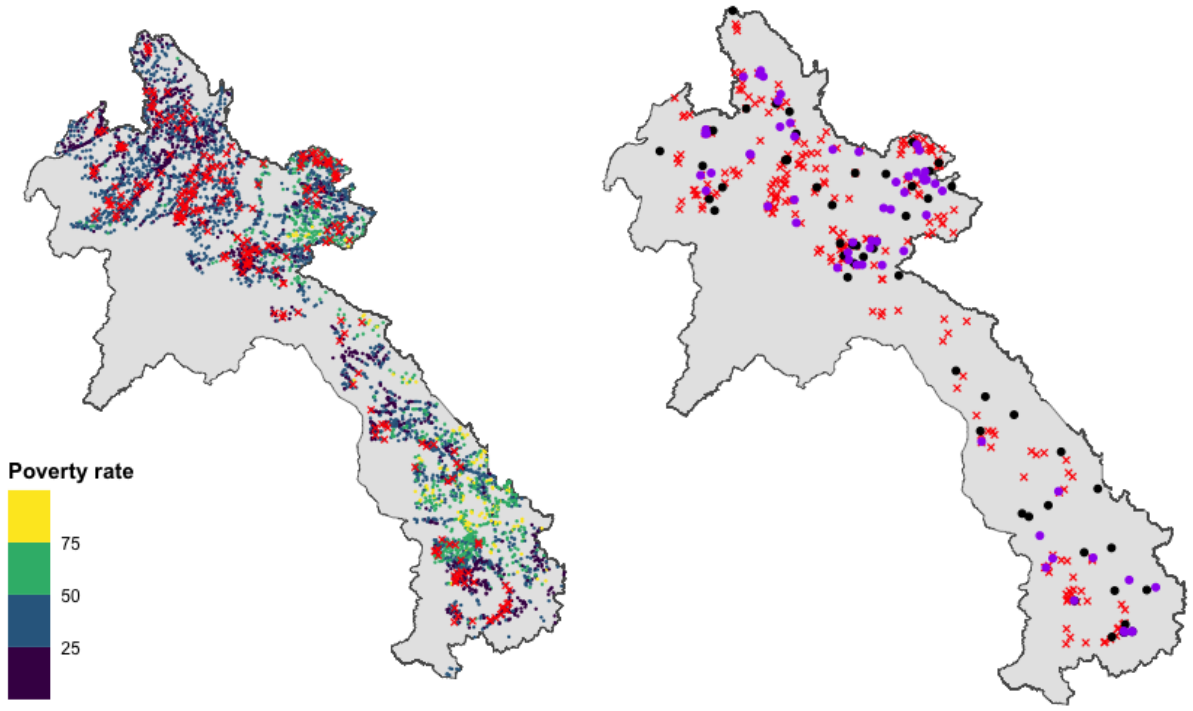
6.1 Measuring Revolutionary Mobilization

As before, my conception of revolutionary mobilization into a political party relies on the Maoist model, where strategies like ideological indoctrination, emulation drives, and new hero worship were combined with conscription (Goscha, 2012, 2022). I focus on two wartime variables to operationalize this kind of intensive revolutionary mobilization at the village level across upland Laos: (1) wartime school construction and (2) birthplaces of National Assembly members who were revolutionaries.

Wartime schools

One of the explicit goals of wartime education in the communist areas was to create and staff a unified party-state (Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 102). A wartime American study notes that the phrase "going to school" had become a euphemism for being drafted in communist areas because students were frequently pushed into the war effort (Whitaker *et al.*, 1972, p. 102). Village schools were typically small huts built of the same local materials as other village houses (Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 58), so their construction did not represent a discontinuous investment in physical infrastructure. Students learned basic literacy, were indoctrinated in anti-imperialist and communist ideas, and contributed labor during the school day to the war effort. Essentially no schools existed in upland Laos prior to the war (figure A.1).

Information on the year of construction for every school in Laos that existed as of 2014 is publicly available through Open Development Mekong, a consortium of NGOs



(a) Poverty rates and wartime schools **(b)** Politician birthplaces and wartime schools

Figure 3: Wartime school building, poverty, and politics

Red x's denote locations of schools built by the communists during wartime. Areas retained by the RLG till late into the war are excluded from the analysis. Data on poverty rates is from the Population and Housing Census of Laos, 2015 (Statistics Bureau, 2015a). In panel b, purple dots represent birth villages of candidates for the 9th National Assembly in 2021 and black dots are birth villages of members of the 4th National Assembly in 2000.

providing open access development-related data.[22] In order to identify wartime school construction by the Pathet Lao, I traced the evolution of areas of communist control using dozens of briefs produced by the CIA during the war (see Appendix F.2). I exclude Mekong lowland areas, since the focus here is on the historically remote uplands. I also exclude areas captured by the PL after 1973, since these places are unlikely to have seen much wartime mobilization by communists so late in the conflict, after lengthy prior royalist control.

Birthplaces of members of the 4th NA

I use geocoded data on prominent revolutionaries who were mobilized as a second, more direct, measure of mobilization. I identify prominent revolutionaries by using data on members of the 4th National Assembly (1997-2002), since this is easily available from

[22]This is the best available data, but it is imperfect due to the fact that details of how the data was collected are unavailable (see Appendix F.1).

an official registry. Almost all members of the 4th NA had personal histories of being mobilized into the war; the few that did not were excluded from the analysis. The assumption is that places that were home to prominent revolutionaries had high levels of mobilization more generally. There are no signs that political leadership strives for geographical balance in the National Assembly; instead, famous revolutionary areas seem to be especially well represented. Figure 3 reveals a striking, though suggestive, correlation between 2015 poverty rates and wartime school building in the uplands as well as a clustering of wartime school building and birthplaces of National Assembly members in the 4th and 9th National Assemblies.

6.2 Model and Estimation

Estimating standard regression models, I consider three outcome variables that are indicative of variation in the capacity of the post-revolutionary party-state. These are: (1) poverty rate in 2015, measured as the percentage of people in the village below a common poverty threshold, (2) the number of schools built within five kilometers of the village in the immediate post-revolutionary period in 1976-1990, and (3) whether a candidate from the 9th National Assembly (elected in 2021) was born within 5 kilometers of the given village. The unit of analysis is the village. The treatment variables are (1) a dummy variable for wartime school construction within five kilometers of the centroid of the village and (2) a similar variable that indicates if a member of the 4th NA was born within 5 kilometers of the centroid of the village.

Though I do not make causal claims, I account for a variety of observable and unobservable confounding factors. The empirical strategy is to structure highly local comparisons of villages through a district-level fixed effect. Districts include approximately 70 or 80 villages today, each typically within about 30 kilometers of one another. Thus, the idea is to compare neighboring villages, which are likely to be similar across many unobservables. Given the basic state of economic development in pre-war times, there is also good reason to believe that unobservables that vary within districts are highly correlated with geography and climate, for which I also control (cf. Huillery, 2009, p. 188-189).

To further account for deeper historical factors, working with research assistants, I compiled a dataset of pre-war settlement patterns across all of upland Laos. This dataset was hand-coded from about 300 American maps from the 1950s and 1960s. This then gives a measure of local settlement density, which likely correlates with economic development. It also provides information on which settlements were district and provincial capitals as well as on the location of Buddhist temples. Finally, as a control for pre-war ethnicity, I coded a variable that indicates the historical density of nearby villages with non Lao language names.

I include district-specific intercepts, so that effects are within-district. Additionally, I control for altitude, terrain roughness, river access, distance to the nearest international border, a dummy for being on an international border, and mean annual precipitation. Wartime bombing is a particularly important history that needs to be accounted for (Lin, 2022; Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024). I use data from the Theater History of Operations Report (THOR), released by the US Department of Defense, which includes information on all US air operations conducted during the course of the Vietnam War. To get a measure of the local intensity of bombing for each village, I count the number of airstrikes flown within five kilometers of each village according to THOR. Finally, I control for the historical factors mentioned above: (1) the number of named settlements within 5km of each village according to the historical maps, (2) whether the village is within 5km of a historical district capital or (3) provincial capital, (4) the presence of a historical temple within 5km, (5) the presence of a pre-war school within 5km, and (6) the number of settlements within 5km in 1965 that had non-Lao names.

6.3 Political and Economic Incorporation of Upland Villages

Results from estimating these models further connect revolutionary mobilization to long-run state capacity, now at a higher level of aggregation. Wartime school construction is associated with significant decreases in contemporary poverty rates, increases in post-war school building, and increases in the probability of being the birthplace of a member of the 9th National Assembly. Villages that are near birthplaces of revolutionaries who were

Table 7: Local economic and political legacies of wartime mobilization

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Poverty	N. Schools 76-90	9th NA
Model	OLS	Poisson	Logit
school	-2.93^{***}	0.362^{***}	1.068^{***}
	(0.672)	(0.037)	(0.19)
4th NA birthplace	-1.86^{**}	0.188^{***}	0.333
	(0.861)	(0.047)	(0.244)
district dummies	✓	✓	✓
geographical controls & bombs	✓	✓	✓
historical controls	✓	✓	✓
adj. R^2	0.571		
N	4919	4919	4919
standard errors clustered by district			
$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$			

members of the 4th NA are also less poor than similar nearby villages and had greater subsequent school-building. These outcomes point to greater party-state initiative and higher density of state-society interactions. Results hold after structuring highly local comparisons and controlling for geographic and climactic factors, bombing histories, pre-war settlement characteristics and patterns, pre-war schools, and pre-war temples. A further robustness check is available in Appendix F.6.

This analysis, though suggestive, thus builds on the individual level results and points to state-building in Laos emanating from histories of revolutionary mobilization. It connects the micro-processes described in the local results directly to state investments and policy. The individual-level results, in turn, provide insights into the mechanisms behind these larger correlations. In aggregate, villages that saw wartime school construction continue to see greater benefits and stronger ties to the party-state, relative to similar nearby villages, even close to fifty years after the end of the Laotian Civil War.

7 Conclusion

A distinguishing characteristic of post-revolutionary communist governments has been their ability to incorporate even far flung communities into a party-state. I have pointed to revolutionary mobilization, at the origin of these party-states, as a critical moment

in this process of state formation. This advances a canonical debate in the study of revolutions between Marxist perspectives, emphasizing class conflict (Moore, 1966), and political perspectives emphasizing the transformative impact of contingent processes of revolutionary mobilization (Huntington, 1968). Recent work has made important inroads into studying the local micro-processes behind revolutionary change and state-building in canonical cases (Koss, 2018; Lankina, 2022), yet the empirical microfoundations of post-revolutionary change and persistence over the long-run remain largely unstudied. This paper provides an account of revolutionary transformation in agrarian communist revolution rooted in mobilization into a revolutionary political party.

As far as I am aware, this is the only paper systematically tracing processes of state formation after war at the individual level, intergenerationally. This also contributes to a recent literature, building on classic work by Weber (1976), Scott (1998), and other scholars of state building, which conceptualizes state capacity as rooted in the density of state-society connections (Lee & Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Lee, 2020). I have shown that connections between an emerging party-state and previously "stateless" localities, emerged directly from revolutionary mobilization. The political party was key in integrating and channeling individual revolutionary transformations into further participation in the state and party, shifting social networks, human capital, and social norms. Intergenerationally, these changes were transmitted within families, which socialized their children according to the networks, norms, and skills built through revolutionary mobilization. Thus even in a part of the world famous for being a hold-out against modern state control (Scott, 2010), state building has progressed not only through coercion and top-down investments, but also through the initiatives of locals seeking connections to the state.

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