# The Pull of the Center

## The Mobilizational Roots of Transformation in Social Revolution

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**Abstract**

I study how marginalized people have become integrated into networks centered on the state through revolutionary mobilization. Using a unique genealogical dataset from Laos, I test for the intergenerational, biographical effects of wartime mobilization into a revolutionary political party. In Laos, revolutionary mobilization in the 1960s pulled in individuals from peripheries into political organizations. Results show that descendants of such people were then over twice as likely to work for the party-state than people from similar, unmobilized families. Descendants were over five times as likely to have a cross-ethnic marriage and more than eight times as likely to attain a college diploma, among other social shifts. Mobilization conferred abilities and created opportunities for social advancement, leading to self-sustaining political and economic benefits, which have been transmitted within reconstituted families. The nature of revolutionary mobilization itself is an important, neglected, factor in post-revolutionary social transformation and class formation in revolutionary autocracies.

***Keywords***— social revolutions, state-society connections, authoritarianism, Southeast Asia

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# 1 Introduction

Soviet premier Nikita Kruschev, Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas, Vietnamese general secretary Le Duan, Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, and even U.S. secretary of treasury Alexander Hamilton: once peripheral people—farmhands, laborers, immigrants, and clerks—rose to the pinnacles of political power because of social revolutions. While some such stories are well known in isolation, the broader phenomenon of revolutionary mobilization, which pulled in many common people as participants in new political organizations during violent revolutionary conflicts throughout the twentieth century, has rarely been analyzed as constitutive to social transformation over the long-run.[1] What were the biographical consequences of revolutionary mobilization on the masses of mobilized individuals and their descendants?

In this paper, I advance a view of post-revolutionary polities that centers processes of mobilization during violent conflict. In this view, social transformation is rooted in individual "conversions," where skills, social networks, and cultural norms are durably altered by mobilization and participation in revolutionary political organizations.[2] These conversions allow previously marginalized people and their descendants to reach and retain positions of power. Families, the conduits for the persistence of pre-revolutionary culture and human capital,[3] are themselves disrupted and reconstituted in new ways through this process. This is important for understanding how social revolutions do not abolish or reverse class hierarchies, but leave behind new forms of social stratification rooted in the mobilizational moment. By the same token, it illustrates how enduring ties between revolutionary authoritarian regimes and communities are built through revolutionary mobilization, a perspective that has been lost in recent work.[4]

[1] Wood's (2003, 2008) work is foundational, although it does not trace the durability of social changes over multiple generations as I do here.

[2] This is related to communist ideas of mobilization, aimed at transforming political "consciousness" of the masses and durably connecting them to the revolutionary cause, Fitzpatrick, 1981, p. 23-24; Goscha, 2012, 2022, p. 248-280; Walder, 2015, p. 41-49. See also McAdam, 1989 on "conversions" after participation in social movements.

[3] cf. Lankina, 2022.

[4] Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; older literature focused on macro-level class alliances and did not address mechanisms and microfoundations behind durable changes to state-society relations, eg. Skocpol, 1979.

I study the case of Laos, which represents a certain paradigm of twentieth century social revolution: intensive conflict and mobilization centered on rural areas in the context of decolonization, followed by one-party rule. Laos also highlights underlying social transformation even where top-down policies for social change, although attempted for a time, have been weakly implemented.[5] In Laos, the revolutionary centers in the remote uplands were composed of small villages, often only connected by mountainous foot tracks, inhabited by subsistence agriculturalists from diverse ethnicities.[6] Loose pre-revolutionary orders were profoundly disrupted by the Laotian Civil War, which involved hundreds of thousands of 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 U.S., which supported the RLG and dropped 260 million bombs on the country.

To analyze the transformative effects of revolutionary mobilization over the long-run, I collected a unique dataset from rural areas of northern Laos that traces the ancestors, descendants, and extended family members of individuals who were mobilized into 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 that experienced large-scale communist mobilization during the war. It is precisely such remote rural areas, still largely unstudied, that were the centers of revolutionary movements in many parts of the world in the 20th century. Such genealogical data, which is very rare,[7] allows me to uncover key mechanisms of durable change, against tendencies towards a reversion to pre-revolutionary hierarchies emphasized in other work.[8]

Results show that newly mobilized people from isolated communities with minimal

[5]Evans, 1990, p. 44-64. 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.

[6]Evans, 1990, p. 27-31; cf. Scott, 2009.

[7]Similar data is used in a study by Wantchekon and coauthors on the long-run impact of colonial education in Benin but is otherwise missing in work on political and economic change, including in the analysis of revolutions, Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

[8]eg. Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Alesina *et al.*, 2020; Lankina; 2022.

involvement with the state under the old regime became agents of the emerging communist party-state. Community connections to the state persisted as local individuals in the post-war generation continued to work for the party-state and reach leadership positions. A key mechanism of persistence in these state-society connections involved the family. In fact, a deeper social differentiation—reflected in differences in education, migration, and marriage patterns, in addition to livelihoods—emerged between the descendants and close relations of mobilized revolutionaries and non-mobilized families. A second, aggregated empirical analysis using a unique national dataset also finds that spatial inequalities across a range of political and economic variables across upland Laos can be explained by the revolutionary disjuncture.

Methodologically, I separate the impact of mobilization from prior factors in three steps. First, I study communities that were highly disconnected from political and economic centers in pre-revolutionary times.[9] As a result, differences in occupation, class, and education were minimal. Second, the process of revolutionary mobilization occurred under conditions of low information, mostly 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, the data shows balance on attributes that are rarely measured, covering family structure, pre-revolutionary family social status, networks, and human capital. Finally, I show through a state-of-the-art sensitivity analysis that, given these contextual factors, selection bias would have to be implausibly high to nullify the observed results.[10] As a further robustness check, results hold in an instrumental variables analysis leveraging the specific dynamics of revolutionary conscription in these communities.

This research contributes to the study of revolutions, state-society connections, and authoritarianism. Foregrounding revolutionary mobilization as a microprocess of social transformation helps make patterns of continuity and discontinuity in post-revolutionary states and societies more intelligible. Results provide valuable microfoundations extending classic ideas of social class formation and modernization after communist revolu-

[9] Scott, 2009; Evans, 1990; Halpern, 1961a.
[10] Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.

tions.[11] They also contextualize recent work that emphasizes the striking continuity of old patterns of social stratification and political identities despite violent, top-down attempts at social transformation by revolutionary regimes.[12] I show that durable change in social hierarchies occurs when revolutionary mobilization endows human capital sufficiently, in ways that do not replicate prior social divides, and leads to shifts in kinship networks, thus transforming the very families that are the key channels preserving old cultural norms and skills.

A second contribution is to scholarship on state-society relations. A point of departure here is James C. Scott's canonical work on Zomia, a mountainous area spanning parts of South and Southeast Asia, including much of Laos, that has been removed from state control until recently. Scott explains state formation in Zomia after the mid twentieth century as a process facilitated by technological change, which allowed privileged lowlanders affiliated with the state to colonize the traditional zones of the egalitarian and "stateless" highlanders.[13] Instead, I show how local Zomians themselves have been central to forging enduring state-society linkages after transformation through revolutionary mobilization. Results shed light on the puzzle of the rapidity with which states have come to control even previously recalcitrant areas, often with surprisingly little resistance; I present a view where interactions, negotiation, and voice, although limited, rather than only coercion from the top-down, are central to state-society relations.[14]

Finally, I illustrate how revolutionary autocracies have embedded themselves in local communities. This perspective, perhaps partly due to a dearth of primary-source empirical studies like this one, has been neglected in the recent literature on authoritarianism, which focuses instead on elite-level dynamics, repression, and institutional manipulation by dictators.[15] The focus on mobilization itself, and mechanisms of persistence, is also distinct from older work that emphasized class-based alliances between regimes and

[11]Djilas, 1957; Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1979; Fitzpatrick 1981, p. 24.

[12]Janos, 1994;Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Pop-Eleches, 2007; Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Alesina *et al.*, 2020; Lankina; 2022.

[13]Scott, 2009, p. xii, 282.

[14]cf. Barkey, 1994; Zhang & Lee, 2020.

[15]Gandhi, 2008; Slater, 2010; Svolik, 2012; Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; Meng & Paine, 2022.

segments of society.[16] The basis of power for mobilizational post-conflict autocracies is not only in strategies of manipulation and repression; rather, such regimes benefit from durable connections to even far-flung localities within their borders, which have been forged in transformative processes of revolutionary mobilization.

## 2 Revolutionary mobilization and its downstream effects

### 2.1 Revolutionary mobilization as conversion

The idea that revolutionary mobilization itself is personally transformative was central to the thinking of communist revolutionaries like Lenin, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh.[17] Revolutionary leaders saw warfare as a way to accomplish the critical project of politicizing the peasantry and reconstituting the state by forcibly drawing in large numbers of marginalized people into the organs of an emerging party-state. I test whether revolutionary mobilization really led to durable social transformation along a range of dependent variables: these include employment by the state, education, social networks, and the salience of traditional cultural norms.

Revolutionary mobilization, considered broadly, is full-time participation in an organization engaged in violent conflict aimed at social revolution, which is a rapid change in the social hierarchies and state organizations of a given polity.[18] The paradigm here is the Maoist model of mobilization, though key dynamics will apply more broadly, as I explain below. Such mobilization uses a mix of indoctrination, inducements, and large-scale forced conscription.[19] These factors, moreover, often all work at once; for instance, land reform, which might be naturally seen as a policy concession, is also a direct way to politicize the peasantry, since it is implemented by marginalized people who are specifi-

[16] Skocpol, 1979, p. 279-280.

[17] Huntington, 1968, p. 337; Fitzpatrick, 1981; Goscha, 2012, 2022.

[18] This follows Skocpol's (1979) definition of revolution without imposing a social class structure on the patterns of revolutionary mobilization.

[19] Zasloff, 1973, p. 79; Moran & Waldron, 2003; Goscha, 2022, p. 262-263.

cally mobilized for this purpose.[20] Education involves literacy as an inducement, but also propaganda, new hero worship, and emulation drives; it often begins or ends with coercive conscription. The Maoist model also assumes a party-state: an organization that both amalgamates political, administrative, and military functions and monopolizes political participation in areas under its control, retaining this monopoly after the conclusion of fighting.

Revolutionary mobilization is a critical moment of individual transformation, which then has broader spillovers.[21] Mobilization happens unevenly since not everyone in each locality is drawn into the organization of the party-state. It causes shifts in human capital and social networks. In addition to political, military, and administrative training and indoctrination, war exposes revolutionaries to intense leadership and organizational experiences; it removes them from their families and binds them to their compatriots in ways that are typically not seen in peacetime. Revolutionary mobilization is thus a moment of "conversion," changing an individual's associations, self conception, and world view.[22] These effects are similar to military mobilization, except that they come with more political content—propagandizing, mobilizing further recruits, and organizing civilian support—and they involve wider networks, cohered by an integrated political party rather than a military organization. After the conflict, if revolutionaries succeed, wartime experiences both equip revolutionary veterans with the necessary skills and also give 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 state and the communities from where they come.

When such people are drawn unevenly from different, especially previously marginalized, social backgrounds, it also creates a change in patterns of social stratification relative to the pre-revolutionary situation. The impact of mobilization has spillovers on families

[20]Walder, 2015, p. 45-49; Goscha, 2022, p. 412-413. Recent work frames such disruptive policy as irrational or puzzling but does not address this critical mobilizational dynamic, Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020, p. 565; Stewart, 2021, p. 8. Such policies are perhaps less puzzling when they are seen as uniquely powerful tools for directly raising loyal troops and cadres during wartime.

[21]Related findings in this vein, though involving different outcomes and different institutional contexts, include Jha & Wilkinson, 2012; Costalli & Ruggeri, 2019 Gaikwad *et al.*, 2023.

[22]cf. McAdam, 1989, p. 745-746.

and communities when revolutionary veterans socialize their families in different ways and use their networks, skills, and influence to draw benefits to their communities. The question I then examine is under what conditions such revolutionary transformation is intergenerationally durable, against existing findings of persistence in pre-revolutionary hierarchies.

## 2.2 Mechanisms of durable transformation

Two key processes determine whether revolutionary mobilization leads to durable changes in patterns of stratification. First, the question of who is mobilized is critical, since in order for mobilization itself to create enduring social change, it must happen in ways that do not reproduce old inequalities. Second, the socially transformative effects of mobilization need to persist over long periods of time, against tendencies towards reversion to pre-revolutionary hierarchies. This depends on the extent to which revolutionary mobilization reconfigures human capital endowments and social networks.

A key finding of a large existing literature is that participation in civil wars is often the result of subtle processes that do not simply reflect pre-existing social cleavages. Civil wars aggregate local conflicts, at the level of family or even individual-level feuding, and participation and factionalization respond to contingent processes internal to the conflict itself, like past local histories, proximity to armed forces, or the timing and sequencing of episodes of fighting.[23] While these factors often involve strategic choices and pre-revolutionary networks, there is space for new networks and factions to emerge in highly contingent ways through mobilization.[24] Local decisions, often made under great uncertainty, aggregate to the creation of new groups. Canonical accounts are thus consistent with the possibility that patterns of mobilization in many cases do not simply carry over old social divides. The extent to which this happens in any given case is an important empirical question, which I systematically analyze in section 4 below in the context of the communities under study.

After the end of conflict, positions of power or wealth that came into the hands of

[23]Kalyvas, 2003, p. 480; Wood, 2003, p. 226-229, 237-240; Walder & Chu, 2020.
[24]Wood, 2003; Walder & Chu, 2020.

previously marginalized groups can revert for at least two reasons. Old elite groups often manage to culturally preserve advantages in human capital, eventually outcompeting others for positions of power or wealth.[25] New networks formed through revolutionary mobilization also decay when individuals prioritize old identities, like ethnicity or ancestral social class, in associating with one another.[26] A concrete illustration of such processes comes from Baird's account of the Brao, a historically marginalized ethnic minority group in Cambodia that gained positions of power in parts of the country after the Vietnamese invasion in 1978.[27] Although some Brao people rose to power due to being trusted by the Vietnamese, this did not persist intergenerationally. The Brao had no culture of formal education, and simply receiving positions of power did not change this culture. Thus they were eventually outcompeted for administrative and political jobs by the Khmer, the historically dominant ethnic group of Cambodia. The social networks of the Brao also never came to intersect more powerful, ethnic-Khmer networks. Thus, despite efforts to the contrary, state-society relations ultimately came to follow Scott's account of Zomian state-formation: colonization by dominant lowland groups who monopolize the state, and old legacies prevailed.[28]

Important mechanisms of durable revolutionary transformation are rooted in the dynamics of revolutionary mobilization itself. Threats from competition are less when mobilization endows human capital in widespread and sufficiently intensive ways among previously marginalized individuals, relative to historically privileged groups. In some cases, as I will show below, relationships built during revolution lead to changes in familial networks through marriage across class, ethnic, or group lines. Changes that involve not just professional or social networks but also familial networks are more likely to be resilient due to the cultural primacy of family ties. Entirely new identities and interests emerge in the process. In turn, families play a primary role in shaping the beliefs, skills, and ambitions of the subsequent generation, causing revolutionary changes to persist in-

[25]Lankina, 2022.

[26]For instance, the Communist Party in non-Russian regions of the U.S.S.R. was typically factionalized along ethnic lines (Martin, 2001, p. 143).

[27]Baird, 2020.

[28]Scott, 2009.

tergenerationally.[29] In several cases of rural communist revolution, such effects have also been accompanied by the large-scale exodus and elimination of incumbent skilled groups, further intensifying the need for the human capital of trusted revolutionary veterans and further securing them positions of power.[30]

Where mobilization, often driven by the existential pressure of war, goes beyond the thin cooptation of a strata of people and seeds deeper social changes, transformations in political hierarchies are thus likely to be more durable. In the collinearity in shifts to different social dimensions, durable change after mobilization resembles a selective process of modernization, concentrated on mobilized individuals and those close to them.[31] Changes to political hierarchies, human capital, social networks, and cultural norms come to reinforce each other. Moreover, expansion in human capital endowments and social networks allows veterans and their communities to productively engage and interact with the party-state.[32] People seek out the party-state to a greater extent when they can use it to pursue and implement goals, not just those relevant to private benefits, but also those related to the wealth and culture of their communities and even the perceived good of their new nation.[33]

## 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.[34] 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

[29]Bisin & Verdier, 2001; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017.

[30]Lary, 2012, p. 124-125; Goscha, 2016, p. 385-386.

[31]Providing a different view of the idea that communism represented a distinct path of modernization, cf. Moore, 1966; Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1979.

[32]Zhang & Lee, 2020.

[33]This is related to Wood's idea of "pleasure in agency," an important motivation for insurgent participation in El Salvador (Wood, 2003, p. 235-236).

[34]This information is based on a biographical manuscript provided by the family. Chan is a pseudonym.

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.

He continued education in Vietnam, 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, while people in other neighboring villages continued traditional ways of life to a greater extent. In his community, he embodied the diligence and industriousness that was celebrated in the propaganda of the party-state. He brought investments in roads and temples to his village. He was thus integral to the broader social rise of a peripheral community and an enduring transformation of local networks through the party-state.

## 2.4 Expectations and scope

From common pre-revolutionary livelihoods in marginalized and decentralized communities in upland Laos, I test whether revolutionary mobilization created a new group of people, characterized by durably higher human capital, wider social networks, stronger connections to the party-state, and weaker adherence to traditional cultural norms. I expect to see a durable rise of some peripheral people and communities due to revolution that varies with the nature and intensity of mobilization.

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. Two alternate hypotheses here are, first, the hypothesis of reversion: where after initial revolutionary mobilization, locals are ultimately outcompeted for government positions by historically more privileged groups from outside. A second alternate hypothesis is the hypothesis of absorption or assimilation, where differences rooted in individual histories of mobilization cease to matter because of effective top-down provision of education and other public

goods, flattening the individual and familial impacts of revolutionary mobilization. While policy aimed at equalization has been the explicit aim of many revolutionary governments, implementation has often proven to be challenging.[35]

The second hypothesis then speaks to deeper societal transformations that support these state-society connections: those from historically mobilized families should have wider social networks and more human capital than people from otherwise similar but unmobilized families; the salience of traditional social norms that might impede connections to the state will also be less for mobilized families. This is operationalized through studying inter-ethnic marriage, education, and certain observable consequences of traditional cultural norms, described in greater detail below. By distinguishing individual-level outcomes according to family histories of mobilization and explicitly studying the transmission of cultural norms, these hypotheses speak to family socialization as a key mechanism in social persistence. In fact, an important reason that revolutionary mobilization creates a disjuncture is because it ruptures and then reconstitutes families, thus breaking old continuities before new skills and culture are socialized. In aggregate, I expect revolutionary mobilization to help explain spatial stratification across a range of political and economic outcomes.

I believe that this analysis has broad implications. Studies from countries as diverse as the U.S., El Salvador, and Oman, point to durable changes in hierarchies and political culture being rooted in participation in social revolutions.[36] However, existing work, much of it in history and area studies, does not provide a theory of revolutionary mobilization as constitutive to social transformation over the long-run, speaking to intergenerational persistence, nor does it bring systematic data to bear on analysis.

While revolutionary mobilization is transformative at the individual and community levels, the further political implication of this depends on macro-level factors involving the post-conflict institutionalization of politics, which of course differs greatly between cases like Laos, El Salvador, Oman, and the United States. The specific dynamics of

[35]See, for instance, the challenges with affirmative action policies in parts of the former Soviet Union detailed by Martin (2001, p. 125-181).

[36]Wood, 1991; Wood, 2003; Takriti, 2013; Breen, 2019.

mobilization in the area of study in Laos, the total victory of the communists, which placed all formal politics under the purview of a single party, and the lack of post-revolutionary economic development, make this a relatively simple context for cleanly identifying individual-level impacts of mobilization over the long run. I would expect revolutionary mobilization to have had a similar impact in other revolutionary autocracies that heavily mobilized rural areas. This might include parts of Vietnam, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Algeria, Angola, and Mozambique, peripheral parts of the U.S.S.R. that were directly mobilized, like the North Caucuses,[37] parts of post-revolutionary Mexico, and perhaps Iran, especially after the Iran-Iraq War.

Similar effects might be present even in non-revolutionary intensive civil wars, such as in Afghanistan, though the lack of emphasis on capacity-building and state-building and the salience of ethnic or other insular divides in the process of mobilization in such cases would weaken the theorized impact. Importantly, places where communism, or other regimes claiming to advance revolutionary social transformation, have been imposed from the outside or through military coups are excluded. In such places, the unique pressures of existential war, in forcing inclusionary measures towards recruitment and capacity-building, in rupturing existing families and creating powerful new bonds, and in generating future claims on power through mobilization itself, have not existed.

## 3 Historical context

This study focuses on the upland parts of Laos, encompassing 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 most likely case for studying the impact of revolutionary mobilization on durable social transformation.

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-

[37] Pipes, 1964, p. 195-199.

3,000 inhabitants, while the average village had fewer than 100 residents; locals were almost exclusively subsistence farmers.[38] 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, while Christian missionary activity was minimal.[39] By and large, there were few large landlords, capitalists, or bureaucrats, and modern political identities, such as those between "left" and "right," did not exist among the general upland population under the old regime.[40]

Laos is made up of people who speak a variety of unrelated languages and follow diverse cultural traditions, brought together by colonial-era conflicts that set borders and caused migrations.[41] To this day, many people from 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%.[42] 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.[43] The Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, older inhabitants of the area, have traditionally occupied mountainous locales and were historically given the 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."

[38]Halpern, 1961b.

[39]Christian missionaries in the uplands were limited to a handful of individuals in total since 1900, though there was more Christian influence among some ethnic Hmong communities starting around 1950 (Andaya, 2014; Andrianoff, 2020). Many Hmong Christians sided with the U.S. during the Laotian Civil War.

[40]Corvée labor existed under traditional rulers as well as French colonial rule, but this was often inconsistently applied given the proclivity of locals to simply move away. Halpern, 1961a, p. 26-28; Evans 1990, p. 33-34.

[41]Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 24-33.

[42]Statistics Bureau, 2015a, p. 37.

[43]eg. Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 8.

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.[44] 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, after an invasion in 1953 led by their North Vietnamese allies.[45]

Fighting between the Royal Lao Government (RLG), supported by the U.S., 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. People from virtually all major ethnic groups were involved on both sides of the conflict.[46] The 1962 Geneva Conference instituted a ceasefire, though no official demarcating line between the factions was ever established.[47] Fighting continued and intensified immediately after and subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975.

**Post-revolutionary changes**

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.[48] 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

[44]Stuart-Fox, 1997.
[45]Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 73-79.
[46]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.
[47]Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 110
[48]Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002.

**Table 1: Ethnic diversity in party leadership**

See Appendix A on data sources.

| 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% |

the interests of minorities since the wartime period.[49] 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.[50]

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 (Table 1). 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 at all levels of the military and bureaucracy. Since information on party membership is not publicly available, originally compiled 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.

Unevenness also characterizes the economic situation of upland people in Laos. In aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates by ethnicity.[51] 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 highlight the importance of revolutionary histories as an important source of political capital in Laos.[52]

[49]Neo Lao Haksat, 1970; Neo Lao Haksat, 1980. The core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese.

[50]Baird, 2021.

[51]Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170.

[52]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 all extended family members in face-to-face interviews.[53] 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.

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. Since it covers all extended family members, this includes information on family members who have died, have moved to other places, and 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, this area faced few instances of aerial bombardment, and the impacts of bombing are not significant locally.[54] A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted.[55] 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 research, especially of contentious histories, where official records are unavailable, this study relies on truthful and accurate recall by interviewees.[56] In

[53] cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

[54] Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024. According to U.S. data from the Theater History of Operations Report, the area was bombed in a total of approximately 5 missions. These communities were also not located anywhere near the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[55] The collected family histories, along with results to follow, should only be seen as representative for Khmu in the specific area under study. My aim here is to test for the long-run impacts of mobilization in one important context rather than to assemble a nationally representative sample.

[56] Blattman, 2009; Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Sánchez De La Sierra, 2020.

studying the impacts of revolutionary mobilization on remote, rural communities anywhere in the world, there is simply no way around this. The histories in question here are more recent than those analyzed in other retrospective work, and the majority of interviewees lived through the war and were able to give detailed accounts of their experiences as well as those of their relatives.[57]

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.[58] 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.[59] 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. Based on available evidence, detailed further in Appendix C, I do not believe that these are high risks in the given context. Data on people who were

[57] Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017. There is, however, clear evidence of missing data on women in older generations. This is addressed below and in Appendix B.

[58] 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.

[59] 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.

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 where we directly asked well-informed elders about local migration patterns, entire extended families typically did not move away. Available data on family sizes in both the wartime and post-war generations (Tables 2 and 6 below) provides no evidence for meaningfully different birth or death rates.

**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. Individuals are considered 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. At lower levels of work, the day-to-day life of the person did not significantly shift away from that of a local farmer.[60] 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. Family histories of royalist involvement are accounted for in the analysis to come in order to ensure that any identified effects arise from benefits from revolutionary mobilization rather than the punishment of those on the losing side.

[60]Similar coding decisions are made, for instance, in Walder's (2002) study of cadre households in rural China.

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 many other cases, siblings or family members were forced into opposing sides. 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.

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, 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 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.[61] A particularly important pre-revolutionary societal network was the Buddhist priesthood.[62] Temples were the only source of education in this area in pre-revolutionary times, which was limited to young boys who became monks.[63] The imbalance on gender is due to the fact that most mobilization involved, to some extent, military service. There is also evidence of clustering by family, though this effect disappears in a regression analysis of the determinants of

[61] This combines different notable histories because there are so few (one or two) cases in each category.
[62] cf. Hansen, 2007; Zaw, 2024.
[63] Work on Russia suggests education was an important factor in mobilization, Lankina *et al.*, 2016.

**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. | p-value |
| Female | 62 | 0.081 | 0.275 | 167 | 0.515 | 0.501 | −0.434 | 0.000*** |
| Ave. no. siblings | 51 | 4.941 | 1.827 | 112 | 5.277 | 2.001 | −0.335 | 0.295 |
| Monk (males) | 54 | 0.241 | 0.432 | 80 | 0.275 | 0.449 | −0.034 | 0.658 |
| Other family mob. | 59 | 0.695 | 0.464 | 157 | 0.548 | 0.499 | 0.147 | 0.045** |
| From area 1 | 62 | 0.339 | 0.477 | 167 | 0.281 | 0.451 | 0.057 | 0.415 |
| Notable prior gen. | 50 | 0.4 | 0.495 | 118 | 0.339 | 0.475 | 0.061 | 0.462 |

p-values from standard two-sided t-test based on CLT, $H_0$: difference in means is 0.
$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$

mobilization controlling for village (Table A.2).[64] Overall, there is strong evidence that mobilization did not simply replicate existing patterns of social stratification, with the exception of gender.

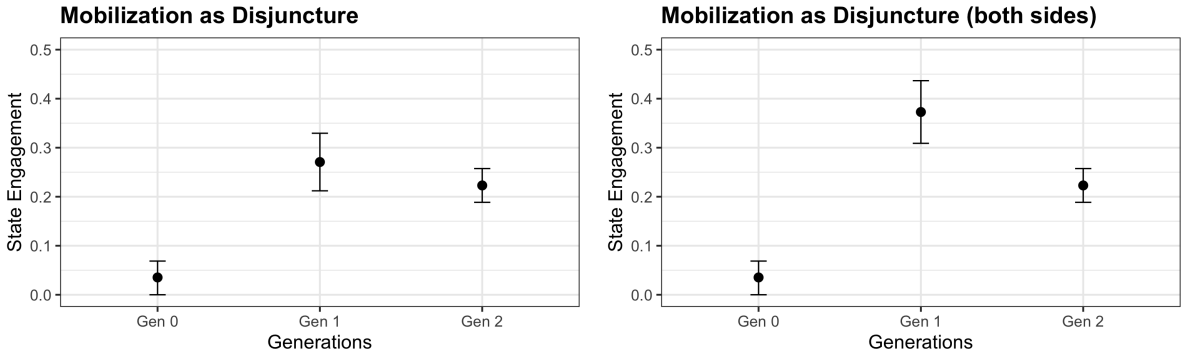
# 5 Main results

## 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, showing a durable shift in hierarchies and state-society relations. In generations 0 and 1 and much of generation 2, working for the party-state was the only form of formal employment in this area, also providing economic benefits and further access to training. "State engagement" in Figure 1 and Table 3 measures those who were mobilized in generation 1 (3b includes royalists) and those who worked for the government full-time in generation 0 and generation 2. 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.[65] Much of this involvement

[64]This analysis suggests that gender, number of siblings, and the specific village of the individual are the only measured factors correlated with mobilization. Based on information gathered through qualitative interviews, the result on number of siblings is likely because people were able to avoid conscription when their siblings had already been conscripted.

[65]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.

**Table 3: Sample characteristics across three generations**

Proportions of sample who were women, worked for the state, worked for the military, and attained high positions for each generation.

| Generation | N | Female | State Engagement | Military | High Positions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 122 | 0.311 | 0.035 | 0.035 | 0 |
| 1 | 229 | 0.397 | 0.271 | 0.183 | 0.057 |
| 1 (both sides) | | | (0.373) | (0.297) | |
| 2 | 584 | 0.491 | 0.223 | 0.144 | 0.038 |

came from military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff (Table 3). Distinction between political, administrative, and military roles was not sharply drawn, with the same individuals often serving in all three capacities. Mobilization into teaching and administrative positions typically also involved conscription of very young people who initially provided labor or military support 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. Two out of 229 people in the sample died on the battlefield, while two more became permanently disabled.

## 5.2 Mobilization, kinship, and the state

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. According to the hypothesis of mobilizational transformation, there should be a durable shift wherein local individuals retain connections to the state over the long-run but that this happens selectively, according to proximity to revolutionary mobilization. The alternate hypothesis of reversion would hold if state jobs returned to historically more privileged Lao-Tai or ethnic Vietnamese, who previously monopolized these positions. Figure 1 already provides evidence that this has not been the case, since state employment in these Khmu communities, even in leadership positions, has not dropped back to its pre-revolutionary levels. Finally, if the alternative hypothesis of absorption is true, we should see no difference according to family histories, since in this scenario, state policy should flatten such inherited inequalities by providing broad public services like education.

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. This controls 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 (Tables 4 and 5). 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 positions. Presumably, working for the party-state also inculcates ideological loyalty, though it is impossible to explicitly ask about this in Laos. The incorporative effects of mobilization spread, through families, beyond those directly mobilized, causing these effects to persist, against findings of pre-revolutionary persistence in other contexts. The fact that the results hold even among extended family is important because it helps specify the extent and nature of spillovers from mobilization. Insofar as extended family members do not share common last names and households and might thus not be easily identified as descendants of revolutionaries, this also suggests that the intergenerational effect is not simply rooted in top-down directives to target the trusted descendants of revolutionaries for benefits. More evidence against a story exclusively built on patronage emerges through tests of the second hypothesis.

**Table 4: 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 $\alpha$
$^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

**Table 5: 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 |

Sensitivity analysis results, following Cinelli & Hazlett,[66] 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 D.1).[67] This chain of effects is highly implausible given the context under study. As a robustness check, results also hold in an instrumental variables 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—primarily conscription—responded to nearby conflict.

## 5.3 Social networks and human capital

In addressing the second hypothesis, I first test how mobilization has transformed the social networks and skills of families and individuals in the long-run. Human capital and social networks also provide the foundation from which locals are able to maintain connections to the state and productively engage it. Table 6 provides further evidence that the incorporation of mobilized families has not only been a thin, top-down cooptation by party leaders or an alliance between peasants and the state, where interests and identities are stable. Rather, mobilized families saw self-sustaining advantages and fundamental changes along a range of social variables that speak to identity and economic and political interests, including education, migration, livelihoods, and marriage patterns.

[66] Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.

[67] 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 6: 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 | Migr. to capital | Inter-ethnic | Diploma | Sibs. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 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] |
| 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] |
| 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] |

Changes in education and marriage patterns especially speak to the durability of revolutionary changes. Human capital accumulation, through education and participation in skilled labor,[68] allows people to better adapt to subsequent political and economic changes in a way that cooptative exchanges involving money or limited access to positions of power by themselves do not. Changes to kinship networks, beyond changes to professional and friendship networks only, are likely to be more resilient because of the cultural primacy of family ties. Inter-ethnic marriages brought Khmu people into familial relationships with people from historically more privileged Lao-Tai communities as well as other minority groups.[69] Based on qualitative fieldwork, it is clear that in some cases, such families are more linguistically and culturally assimilated into ethnic Lao identity, while in others they maintain mixed forms of identity.

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 mobiliza-

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

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

**Table 7: 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 | | |
| $^*p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$ | | |

tion itself, which first separated locals from their traditional family lives, brought them into large multi-ethnic networks centered on the party, and gave them formal education along with political and organizational experience. In turn, benefits from broader social networks and education 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 (Table 7).

## 5.4 Cultural norms

The results above point to families being important in sustaining revolutionary changes. I find further evidence of a selective change to traditional cultural norms, passed down within families, according to mobilization histories. 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 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 places responsibilities on individuals that make it difficult to pursue careers in the party-state.

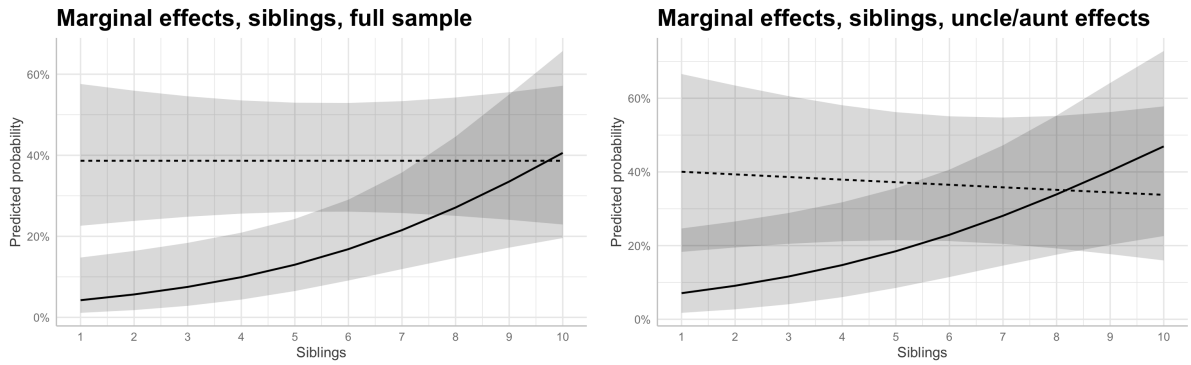
Traditionally, in the studied communities, at least one male child was expected to stay with his parents and support the parental household throughout his life. This would pre-

clude 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, there are 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 holds when comparing nieces and nephews, but not children, of revolutionary veterans with children from unmobilized families (Figure 2b). The cultural norm thus appears to not apply even in families where the parents are farmers but an uncle or aunt was mobilized during the revolution, suggesting wide socialization effects, which cannot be explained by the parents having government jobs and thus needing less household labor. While alternative explanations cannot be ruled out, this 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.[70]

In the area of study, three related social shifts were rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself. First, social—and kinship—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 or broad top-down investments by the state alone, since such change would apply broadly through

[70]This divergence in preferences could, in turn, have been driven by economic and political incentives, though systematically testing such deeper mechanisms is infeasible. 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.




**(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.6). 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.

these communities. Rather, they are rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself. They also show that transformations were intergenerationally durable, against the alternate hypothesis of a reversion to pre-revolutionary patterns. I now turn to two important implications of these results at higher levels of aggregation: macro-processes of cultural recognition and spatial stratification across a range of political and economic variables.

## 6 Voice and negotiated cultural change

One important macro-level outcome arising directly from the intensive mobilization of some groups of ethnic minority Khmu people has been the creation of *Boun Greh*, a constructed national festival based on certain older Khmu rituals. Though unable to identify its exact origins among competing stories, the only existing study of this notes that the festival "was created on the initiative of some [Khmu] elites with a view to giving voice to [Khmu] claims vis-à-vis the state and Laotian society in general."[71] As shown for the area under study, the reason there were any Khmu elites at all who were able to take such initiative at a national level is because of the impact of wartime mobilization. In addition to the origin stories given by Petit, I heard one where *Boun Greh* arose from

[71] Petit, 2013, p. 483.

the efforts of Khmu soldiers, who were upset at having to work through the Hmong New Year, when their Hmong colleagues went back home, while having no such recognized ethnic festival of their own. Today, school textbooks place *Boun Greh* alongside the Lao and Hmong New Years as a nationally recognized holiday of the Khmu and a part of Lao national identity.[72]

This history builds on the micro-results above in two important ways. First, it shows that local transformations in political hierarchies and state-society connections had emergent national-level implications, which go beyond an aggregation of the direct effects of mobilization on individuals and families. Second, this provides direct evidence that mobilized people from marginalized backgrounds had some voice, however limited, in policy-making; concurrently, they used the skills and networks described above to productively engage with the state. Even people not directly involved recognized that *Boun Greh* was the creation of people like them—in some cases, their direct relatives or relatives of their friends. The utility received through simply exercising this agency, what Wood refers to as "pleasure in agency,"[73] further binds these communities to the party-state and helps explain why they have not returned to traditional ways of life.

# 7 Histories of mobilization and spatial patterns of stratification

## 7.1 Spatial measures of revolutionary mobilization

A final empirical analysis, marshaling a broad range of new data at the national level, provides evidence that revolutionary mobilization was a disjuncture in patterns of social stratification across upland Laos. My suggestion is that these aggregate results are, in part, due to the microprocesses detailed more locally above.

Two wartime variables operationalize intensive revolutionary mobilization spatially, at the village level, across upland Laos: (1) wartime school construction and (2) birthplaces of National Assembly members who were revolutionaries.

**Wartime schools**

[72]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2009, p. 30-31.
[73]Wood, 2003, p. 235-236.

Schools, as a matter of policy, were set up as centers of revolutionary mobilization during the war with the explicit goal of creating and staffing a unified party-state; thus, they provide one spatial measure of intensive mobilization.[74] 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.[75] Village schools were typically small huts built of the same local materials as other village houses, so their construction did not represent a discontinuous investment in physical infrastructure.[76] Students learned basic literacy, were indoctrinated in anti-imperialist and communist ideas, and contributed labor during the school day to the war effort. Few schools were built by colonial authorities 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 providing open access development-related data.[77] 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). Mekong lowland areas, along with areas captured by the PL after 1973, are excluded from the analysis since the focus here is on comparable areas in the historically remote uplands.

**Birthplaces of members of the 4th NA**

Geocoded data on the birthplaces of prominent revolutionaries who were mobilized provide a second, more direct, measure of mobilization. Data on prominent revolutionaries is drawn from biographies of members of the 4th National Assembly (1997-2002), since this information is easily available from 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.[78] Figure 3 reveals a

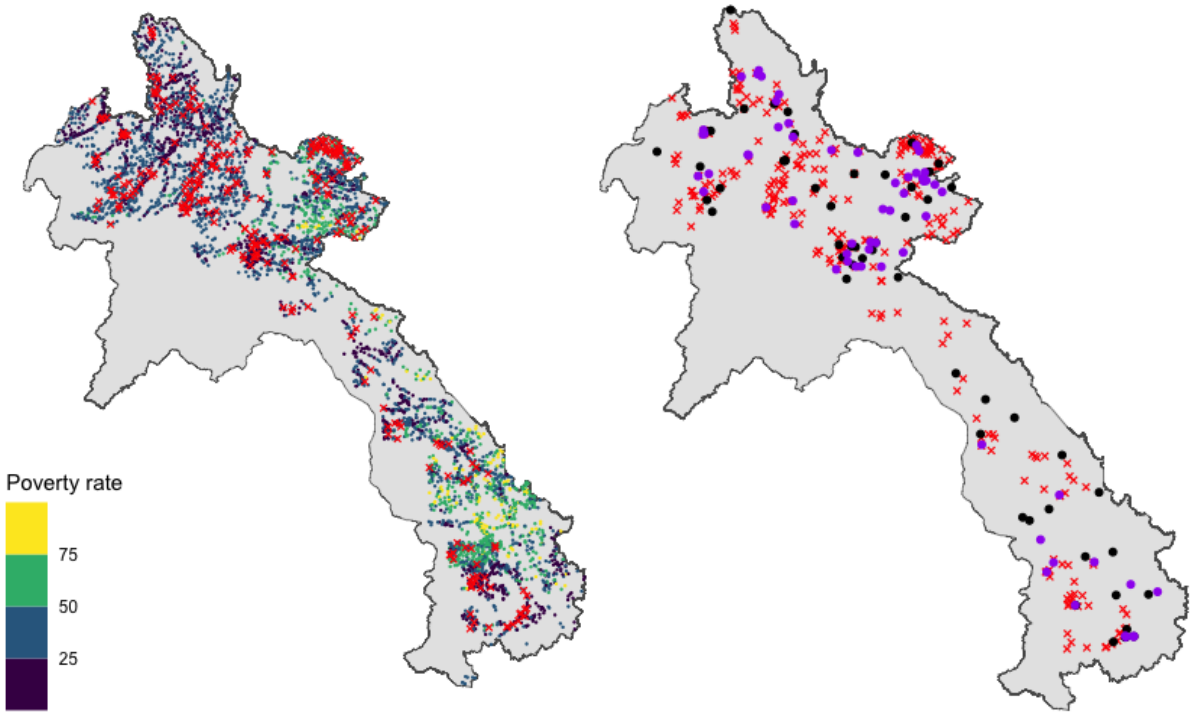
[74]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 102.

[75]Whitaker *et al.*, 1972, p. 102

[76]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 58.

[77]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).

[78]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.




**(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.

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.

## 7.2 Model and estimation

Estimating standard regression models, three outcome variables are indicative of various dimensions of social stratification and state-society connections: (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, designed to capture high levels of

revolutionary mobilization, 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—drawn from the revolutionary generation—was born within 5 kilometers of the centroid of the village.

Unlike the more arbitrary nature of local, individual-level mobilization seen above, spatial variation in mobilization is clearly correlated with geographic accessibility (Table A.7). Thus the empirical strategy is to structure highly local comparisons of villages through a district-level fixed effect and add historical and geographical controls. Districts include approximately 70 or 80 villages today, each typically within about 30 kilometers of one another. Such neighboring villages are likely similar across many unobservables. Given the basic state of economic development in pre-war times, unobservables that vary within districts are likely correlated with geography and climate.[79]

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.[80] This then gives a measure of historical local settlement density, which likely correlates with economic development. It also provides information on which settlements were district and provincial capitals as well as the best available information on the location of Buddhist temples, which were the only sources of formal education in much of the country. Finally, a measure of the historical density of nearby villages with non Lao language names provides a control for pre-war ethnicity.

Along with district specific intercepts, 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.[81] Using data from the Theater History of Operations Report (THOR), which includes information on all U.S. air operations conducted during the course of the Vietnam War, I count the number of airstrikes flown

[79] cf. Huillery, 2009, p. 188-189.

[80] This provides the best available approximation of spatial patterns in the early 1950s and prior, see Appendix F.4.

[81] Lin, 2022; Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024.

within five kilometers of each village to get a measure of the local intensity of bombing. I also control for wartime school building by the RLG in areas that changed hands. Finally, historical controls are: the number of named settlements within 5km of each village according to the historical maps, whether the village is within 5km of a historical district capital or provincial capital, the presence of a historical temple within 5km, the presence of a pre-war school within 5km, and the number of settlements within 5km in 1965 that had non-Lao names.

## 7.3 Spatial inequalities across upland villages

Results from estimating these models further show revolutionary mobilization to have been a disjuncture that helps explain post-revolutionary patterns of stratification across a range of political and economic outcomes. 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 members of the 4th NA are also less poor than similar nearby villages and had greater subsequent school-building.

Moreover, with the exception of the contemporary NA members outcome (model 3), these effects are stronger than those associated with local pre-war sources of human capital and economic development: Buddhist temples and schools. A further robustness check finds that the effect is also much stronger than the effect from schools built immediately after the war (Appendix F.5). The strong pre-war legacy effect on the birthplaces of contemporary members of the National Assembly is consistent with a story that emerges from the local analysis in section 5 above: the most successful families, even if originating in more peripheral areas, moved to more built-up areas after the war, thus preserving one kind of spatial continuity while still maintaining connections and drawing economic benefits to their origin villages. The estimated impact of pre-war schools should also be contextualized in terms of the very limited number of such schools, which typically existed in the most important towns (Figure A.1).

**Table 8: Local economic and political legacies of wartime mobilization**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Poverty 2015 | N. Schools 76-90 | 9th NA |
| Model | OLS | Poisson | Logit |
| wartime school | $-2.974^{***}$ | $0.361^{***}$ | $0.978^{***}$ |
| | (0.718) | (0.038) | (0.19) |
| 4th NA birthplace | $-1.794^{**}$ | $0.196^{***}$ | 0.285 |
| | (0.85) | (0.047) | (0.245) |
| pre-war temple | −2.426 | −0.074 | $0.931^{***}$ |
| | (1.8) | (0.071) | (0.326) |
| pre-war school | $-2.568^{***}$ | 0.07 | $2.084^{***}$ |
| | (0.917) | (0.047) | (0.295) |
| district dummies | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| geographical controls & bombs | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| historical controls | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| adj. $R^2$ | 0.571 | | |
| N | 4919 | 4919 | 4919 |
| standard errors clustered by district | | | |
| $*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$ | | | |

In aggregate, although older legacies leave their mark, 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. This provides more evidence that patterns of mobilization, unevenly applied, shaped post-revolutionary social transformation. The individual-level results presented in Section 5 provide insights into the mechanisms behind these larger correlations between historical revolutionary mobilization and subsequent spatial inequalities.

## 8 Conclusion

Some social revolutions have been durably transformative because of the ways in which previously marginalized people were mobilized over the course of revolutionary conflict. Post-revolutionary political transformations are more likely to be durable where revolutionary mobilization reshaped social networks and patterns of human capital allocation; where families, the keepers of tradition, were separated and then reconstituted as their youths were pulled into a revolutionary party-state only to return as profoundly

changed people. New interests and identities emerged from revolutionary mobilization as it brought together new networks of people and even led to the creation of new cultural forms. In prominent cases like Russia and China, such processes have been modified by purges or subsequent waves of mobilization. But even here, by showcasing the transformative power of mobilization, results from Laos arguably help illuminate the politics of purges, as a backlash against new centers of power, and of continuing violent mobilization, as a way to continually form and reform new social groups and remake connections between the state and society.

Analyzing social change in a revolutionary base area over the long-run and at a granular level of detail leads to a novel framing of the idea, made famous in the work of Moore, Huntington, and Skocpol, that there was a distinctly communist path to modernization. Durable political transformation is rooted in multidimensional social change, which is endowed unevenly through revolutionary mobilization, leading to a kind of selective modernization. This then forges closer connections between previously remote localities and an emerging party-state. It allows revolutionary authoritarian regimes to embed themselves in even far-flung communities, not on the basis of social class alliance or institutional manipulation, but through transformative processes of revolutionary mobilization. Even in a part of the world famous for holding out against modern state control, state power has progressed not only through coercion and top-down investments, but also through the initiatives of locals seeking agency through the state, after the transformative experience of revolutionary mobilization.

Across the social sciences there is a dearth of empirical knowledge about basic facts and trends in rural places that underwent heavy revolutionary mobilization, and this presents a significant impediment to theory building. Revolutionary mobilization was a defining feature of politics in much of the developing world in the twentieth century. Studying the impacts of such mobilization at a granular level in cases where revolutionaries were defeated, or where conflicts reached negotiated resolutions, is a natural area for future work. In countries like Colombia, Brazil, and Thailand, ex-revolutionaries have reached positions of political prominence through varying channels of opposition

and cooptation, in the absence of a total revolutionalary victory. Indeed, even in earlier social revolutions in the West, the idea that social transformation commenced from the bottom up, through the work of ordinary people who were removed from their traditional lives and gained valuable political experiences and new connections in support of new political causes and organizations, is worth further analysis.

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# Appendices

The Pull of the Center

## Contents

# A Laos: History and context

### Lao National Assembly

The Lao National Assembly remains a "rubber stamp" parliament, which does not hold any real policy-making or oversight power. Still, candidates typically come from positions of leadership in various wings of the party-state, and the composition of the National Assembly thus provides a window, however imperfect, into the broader party-state. Through an opaque process, candidates to the National Assembly are nominated by different branches of the party-state to run in elections, where they are selected by universal suffrage at the provincial level. There are no official ethnic quotas.

### Ethnicity, geography, and poverty

**Table A.1: Three northern provinces, poverty and altitude data by major ethnic groups**

Villages in which a majority of the population belongs to the given ethnic group are counted. Values for the three most populous groups are shown in each province. Poverty data from Population and Housing Census of Laos, 2015 (Statistics Bureau, 2015). Elevation data from the NASA Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM). The standard deviation of elevation at all points captured by SRTM within 500 meters of each village centroid gives a measure of local terrain roughness.

| Province | Group | Majority villages | Mean Poverty | Mean Alt. | Mean SD Alt. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phongsaly | Tai | 65 | 18.78% | 658.06m | 31.04m |
| Phongsaly | Khmu | 128 | 23.9% | 693.31m | 53.12m |
| Phongsaly | Tibeto-Burman | 272 | 23.37% | 969.28m | 47.58m |
| Luang Namtha | Tai | 76 | 10.36% | 577.05m | 15.84m |
| Luang Namtha | Khmu | 90 | 26.17% | 617.59m | 31.62m |
| Luang Namtha | Tibeto-Burman | 135 | 25.07% | 768.55m | 32.88m |
| Xieng Khouang | Tai | 229 | 22.1% | 987.25m | 18.51m |
| Xieng Khouang | Khmu | 59 | 52.86% | 839.07m | 45.64m |
| Xieng Khouang | Hmong | 186 | 37.28% | 1138.18m | 36.81m |

### Data collection on party leadership

The ethnicities of Politburo members are often well-known and easy to ascertain. Information on the 4th National Assembly was gathered from an official directory (National Assembly & United Nations, 2000). For the 9th and 7th National Assemblies, data was gathered from brief candidate biographies distributed during election time and accessed through Lao-language news websites and Facebook groups. Data on the 6th

National Assembly is derived from summaries in Stuart-Fox (2007). Data on the Central Committees was gathered from a mix of Lao-language print media, online media, social media, and Wikipedia pages. Confirmation through cross-referencing different sources was conducted whenever possible.

# B Family histories

## B.1 Data collection

### Village selection

In selecting villages, a sampling frame was constructed around two villages that are locally well-known today to have been important sites for communist mobilization during the wartime period. For one of these core villages, two additional nearby villages were selected, which are both also Khmu villages that were situated in similar topographies and occupied similar ecological niches during the pre-war and wartime periods. Likewise, four nearby villages were selected for the other core village. The different number of "matched" villages for each core village is due to differing levels of village density and accessibility between the two areas. One additional village, which did not exist during the wartime period but was founded soon after was also selected because it is almost exclusively home to the descendants of individuals from villages in the sampling frame. Families from this village were then matched to each of the two sampling areas based on their histories.

### Survey procedures

Working at the village level in a low state-capacity and authoritarian context, it is imperative to have the trust and buy-in of local communities and officials. For this reason, as well as for reasons of data quality, family histories were collected by two local researchers who have extended family connections in the communities under study. In each village, researchers first introduced themselves to the village head and asked permission to con-

duct interviews for this project. This is a requirement for doing such work in Laos.[1] The village head then introduced researchers to all elderly inhabitants of the village for interviews. Subsequently, researchers also walked through the villages and randomly asked residents for interviews on local and family histories. All interviews were conducted in an informal, semi-structured way largely in the Khmu language. Each interviewee was asked about the livelihood, jobs, marriage patterns, and educational attainment of members of their extended family, going as far back in time as the respondent could remember.

## B.2 Coding

Coding schemes were developed based on a qualitative understanding of the villages under study with a view towards first identifying the generational cohort that most intensively experienced revolutionary mobilization. Familial relationships to this cohort were used to define the post-war and pre-war generations. Questions of judgment in coding are marginal, involving judgments on one or two families or several individuals (see below).

**Generation 0/Generation 1**

Birth years are unknown across the sample for people in the pre-war generation (see Section B.4 below). To get around this issue, the pre-war "generation 0" includes all people who had a child born in the 1950s or earlier. Almost all such people were likely born in the 1930s or earlier, although some might have been born in the early 1940s. Thus there is possible overlap between generation 0 and generation 1, which is defined as 1940-1960 births. Triangulation was used based on the reported ages of their siblings, children, parents, and other relevant family members to place marginal cases in generation 0 vs. generation 1. Eight out of 94 people from generation 0 in the sample were mobilized during the Laotian Civil War. These cases are dropped from figure 1 in the paper to better approximate the pre-war situation, but their relations are coded to reflect these mobilization histories in all other analysis.

**Coding mobilized families**

[1] In the villages under study, the village head is a local person who typically has a similar livelihood to others in the village (usually involving smallholder agriculture and small-scale trade), but village heads are selected by the party-state.

An individual in generation 2 is said to belong to a mobilized family if they have a parent, sibling, grandparent, or aunt or uncle who was mobilized. This is meant to capture a threshold of familial proximity to the mobilized individual. In two marginal cases, where an individual's aunt or uncle through marriage was mobilized (rather than a direct sibling of their parent), a judgment on coding was made based on qualitative information on the strength of the family tie of the given wing of the family with the mobilized individual.

## B.3 Missing data

**1. Identifying mobilization:** In some cases, interviewees were not sure about the exact time when a family member in generation 1 began party-state work. In such cases, there is uncertainty about whether such a person was mobilized during the war or after the war. Unless confirmed otherwise, individuals born between 1940 and 1960 were coded as being mobilized if they joined party-state work. 1960 is used as a cutoff due to the prevalence of child soldiers in the war, starting from the age of 13 or 14. 1940 is used at the other end to reflect the fact that mobilization, which was most intensive from 1967/1968 onwards in this area, typically involved young people in their early-mid twenties.

Uncertainty about mobilization status might result in some people being coded as being mobilized when they in fact started working after the official end of the war. The possibility of such misclassification was probed in follow-up interviews; I believe that if it exists at all, it is likely minimal. Families with significant missing data were dropped from the sample. All such cases followed the two following molds: (1) the interviewee was in their 30s and did know details about prior generations, (2) the interviewee was in their 80s and did not remember details about subsequent generations.

**2. Identifying birth years:** Birth information was not typically recorded in this area, and many people do not know their exact age. This information is important for sorting people into the three generations and for the birth cohort controls. This is not generally a problem since the cohorts span multiple decades. In cases of people who were born around the cutoff years, triangulation was used based on the reported ages of their siblings, children, parents, and other relevant family members.

**3. Missing family members:** In some cases, there is missing data on entire wings of families. For instance, a nuclear family might only have connection with the father's side and have lost contact with the mother's side. This would only be an issue for (1) models where general "family mobilization" is used as the treatment variable and (2) in models where aunt/uncle relations are used, and where no reported aunts and uncles were mobilized, but there is missing information on some of them (there is no missing data in the sample on parents of people in gen 2).

Family results can be viewed as conditional on an active relationship. The mechanisms of transmission depend on there being an active relationship between the people involved, thus a relative with whom there is no active relationship can justifiably be left out of coding. In cases where there is in fact an active relationship between relatives, but the interviewee lacks the relevant information, there should be no reason for systematic bias. Individuals with significant missingness in relational data were dropped from the sample.

**4. Gender imbalance:** The gender imbalance in the sample is due to the fact that respondents were much more likely not to know about their female relatives, especially those from older generations who might have passed away years ago. Given the gender dynamics in these communities and the patterns of mobilization, essentially all of these missing people are likely to have been subsistence farmers.

# C Backward sampling and bias

Backward sampling might induce biased estimates in three main ways (cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015). First, estimates might be biased if there is significant migration and the outcomes for migrated individuals are not captured in the dataset. Second, bias might also result from treated and untreated people having children at different rates. For instance, if mobilized individuals have more children than unmobilized individuals and potential outcomes depend on whether a person is a first, second, or third child (and so on), then there will be selection bias. Finally, results might be biased if unmobilized people have died or been displaced at higher rates, and such people are excluded from

the sample.

It is impossible to know for sure whether some populations are systematically missing from the sample due to migration, but qualitative interviews do not suggest any such movements. Distant migrations were difficult until relatively recent times due to a lack of road and transportation infrastructure. During the 1970s-1990s, those who migrated typically did so for work or study and thus mostly came from prominent, mobilized family backgrounds. If such people tend to be missing from the sample, then key estimates should actually be biased downward. Immediate postwar migrations to Thailand and farther to France and the US by those on the RLG side appear to have been very rare given the distance to the Lao-Thai border.

Family sizes between treated and untreated families in the post-war generation are similar in the sample (5.573 vs. 5.389, see table 5), suggesting no differences in child-bearing rates.[2] Finally, interviewees relayed information on people in their extended family who had passed away; family sizes in the wartime generation in both groups are also similar (4.941 vs. 5.277, see table 2), suggesting no survivorship related data censoring.

# D Local histories and revolutionary mobilization

## D.1 Pre-war society

Though many details on individuals born in the 1930s or earlier are forgotten and unverifiable, the collected family histories are the most fine-grained data available on livelihoods in the area of study in this time period. Out of 94 individuals on whom data is available, two had sub-district (*tambon* or *taseng*) level leadership positions, three were French soldiers—including one who went to Hanoi for training. One person was an influential trader with the royal capital Luang Prabang, another was an opium trader, while another had spent about 20 years in Thailand and Burma working as a laborer before returning

[2]As a point of reference, Wantchekon *et al.*, (2015, p. 741) find intergenerational differences of 2+ in family sizes after an educational treatment in Benin.

and becoming an early and influential supporter of the communists. Another person is reported to have owned many plots of land and led French labor gangs. Communist mobilization in this area started among people in this generation born in the 1920s and 1930s, but the vast majority of sampled people still lived traditional livelihoods of small-scale farming and gathering forest products by all accounts, as is further backed up by the small number of notable cases in the sample (exhaustively described above).

Past histories might have influenced revolutionary mobilization in more nuanced ways. For instance, early revolutionary leaders in one of the areas were ex-monks. Meanwhile, the first district head under the revolutionary government, a man from the second sampled area, soon had to be replaced because he was illiterate and unable to effectively administer the area. Literacy and other forms of human capital were at a premium in this area. There were exceedingly few local people with administrative skills in the pre-revolutionary period. These people were likely targeted for mobilization by the communists, but this was complicated by the fact that any such people would also have had relatively stronger prior connections, whether through the priesthood or trade, to the royalist center in Luang Prabang.

## D.2 Determinants of mobilization

Regression analysis suggests that the only statistically significant determinants of mobilization were gender, village, and number of siblings. The result on number of siblings is consistent with a story where some children are able to avoid drafts because their siblings have already been conscripted, which was described to us by several interviewees. The logic here is one of a "flat tax" on family contributions: all families contribute equally. It is impossible to say for sure if family size correlated with social status. If anything, assuming that larger families were better off, results show a slight proclivity for mobilization to select for less fortunate people.

**Table A.2: Determinants of mobilization**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Mobilization | Mobilization | Mobilization |
| Model | Logit | Logit | Logit |
| male | 2.725*** | 2.76*** | 2.659*** |
| | (0.799) | (0.988) | (0.913) |
| monk | −0.111 | 0.03 | 0.06 |
| | (0.447) | (0.662) | (0.579) |
| other family mobilized | 0.957 | 1.066* | 1.048* |
| | (0.627) | (0.617) | (0.654) |
| prior generation notable | | −0.011 | |
| | | (0.449) | |
| siblings | | | −0.229*** |
| | | | (0.077) |
| village dummies | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| N | 214 | 163 | 163 |
| standard errors clustered by village | | | |
| $*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$ | | | |

## D.3 Narrative account of revolutionary mobilization

Most revolutionary mobilization in this area happened through conscription. Here, I provide a longer-run picture of mobilization for additional context. It is useful to think of communist mobilization in Laos in terms of two-stages. In the first stage, support was built in local areas by communist cadres attempting to persuade local leaders, families, and individuals. In the second stage, once a sufficient level of strength had been built, locals could simply be drafted into the military and other wings of the communist war effort (Zasloff, 1973, p. 78-81).

Why did some communities become communist strongholds while other, sometimes nearby areas, did not? Given the lack of prior political identities and preferences, and the disconnected, low-information environment faced by leaders, it is difficult to find any general or systematic reasons that apply across the country, other than (1) basic conditions of geographic accessibility and (2) manpower needs due to nearby fighting.[3] When asked in interviews, no one, including one person who attained a high position in the government, offered any ideological or otherwise systematic reason for why the area

[3]In more hierarchical communities, such as among the Hmong in some areas, the royalist/communist split mapped onto local elite power struggles.

under study was so heavily mobilized. Rather, the typical answer was that the most important reason for this was the fact that this happened to be an area which saw heavy nearby fighting.

In later stages, in areas where drafts were instituted, the primary determinant of individual mobilization was simply being a young man. All mobilized interviewees reported some degree of coercion in this process, and none looked back at it as purely voluntary. Many people who were drafted were children. While some individuals and families fled to more remote areas or across lines of control, given the risks of such travel during wartime, many stayed in their villages. Sometimes, individuals avoided conscription when families that already had members in service convinced authorities to keep some remaining children at home, or when they were already involved in the Buddhist *sangha* and not living in the village.

Striking examples of the contingent nature of mobilization come from stories of people who were involved on both sides of the war. In one case, a local man joined the Royal Lao Armed Forces (FAR) and received military training from Americans in Phitsanulok, Thailand before crossing over to the communist side and joining one of his brothers to become a PL soldier. Another story shows an opposite route: a man started out working with the communists, was captured by the FAR, and eventually became a FAR officer trained in Thailand. Nine out of 64 total extended families had siblings mobilized on opposite sides of the war.

# E Individual level analysis

## E.1 Sensitivity analysis

The idea behind the sensitivity analysis is to (1) identify how strong an unobserved confounder would have to be to reverse the key results, and (2) compare this to the strength of observed variables. The was done using the "sensemakr" R package (Cinelli *et al.*, 2024). Regressions were estimated as linear probability models, using OLS, in order to apply the sensitivity analysis.

An oddity in this context is that the unit that receives treatment is different than the unit for which key outcomes are measured (ancestor vs. descendant). Thus any unmeasured ability that might bias results, for instance intelligence or ambition, would itself need to be transmitted intergenerationally. For this reason, partial $R^2$ values from the key regression (table 3) as well as from the mobilization regressions presented in table A.3 above, are relevant points of comparison.[4] Unobserved confounders would have to explain 10.3% of the residual variance of both the treatment and outcome to make the observed effect lose statistical significance at the 95% level. This is higher than the observed partial $R^2$ (6%) of having male gender on having a party-state job in generation 2. Meanwhile, it is more than half as much as the observed partial $R^2$ (16%) of having male gender on being mobilized in generation 1.

**Table A.3: Cinelli-Hazlett sensitivity analysis**

Outcome: *Govt. job*

| Treatment: | Est. | S.E. | t-value | $R^2_{Y\sim D\|\mathbf{X}}$ | $RV_{q=1}$ | $RV_{q=1,\alpha=0.05}$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Family mobilized* | 0.165 | 0.036 | 4.545 | 3.6% | 17.4% | 10.3% |
| df = 560 | | | *Bound (1x Gender=M)*: $R^2_{Y\sim Z\|\mathbf{X},D}$ = 6%, $R^2_{D\sim Z\|\mathbf{X}}$ = 16% | | | |

## E.2 Robustness check: Instrumental variables

An instrumental variables analysis of party-state jobs in generation 2 leverages the exogeneity of the timing of nearby conflict and the fact that local conscription responded to nearby conflict. Families were thus more or less exposed to revolutionary mobilization simply because of the ages and genders of their children.

The instrument for mobilization takes the value of 1 for individuals who are males and born between the years of 1942 and 1954. Nearby fighting was most intensive in 1967-1968, thus this instrument captures all males who were between the ages of 13 and 25 during this period. Given severe manpower constraints and the total lack of transport infrastructure, young men from nearby villages under communist control were pushed to fight or otherwise support combat operations. While there was no strict age cut-off for

[4]Table A.6 is adjusted accordingly.

conscription, given contextual knowledge, I expect this demographic to be systematically more exposed to mobilization based only on the timing of nearby fighting. Villages that were actively contested at this time are excluded, since local individuals in the key demographic were also exposed to the FAR in these places.

I adapt a 2SLS approach to the inter-generational analysis here. The first-stage regression is estimated using the generation 1 sample. Then the maximum of predicted mobilization values across individuals within each family is used to derive a measure of exogenous family-level exposure to revolutionary mobilization. Next, this predicted family-level value maps to individuals in generation 2 and serves as the key predictor in the second-stage regression, which maps family mobilization histories to party-state jobs in generation 2. For statistical inference, I resample families in generation 1 and repeatedly run the above procedure.

**Exclusion Restriction:** There is no reason to believe that having a male born between 1941 and 1954 in the family should impact party-state connections for the subsequent generation of that family through any mechanism other than revolutionary mobilization.

**Instrumental Relevance:** The first stage regression is a bivariate regression of the instrument on mobilization. It provides evidence that the instrument is highly correlated with the potentially endogenous treatment.

**Table A.4: IV, First stage**

| DV | Mobilization |
|---|---|
| Model | OLS |
| IV (male born in 1941-1954) | $0.412^{***}$ |
| | (0.086) |
| N | 123 |
| F-stat | 23.2 |
| Adj. $R^2$ | 0.154 |
| $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$ | |

**Results:** IV results provide further evidence that revolutionary mobilization itself created family-level connections to the party-state in the subsequent generation.[5]

[5]I omit village and area controls due to the restricted sample in this case, which already omits most of area 2.

**Table A.5: IV, Second stage**

| DV | Govt. job |
|---|---|
| Model | OLS |
| Family mobilization (IV fitted) | 0.479*** |
| 99% CI | [0.126, 0.998] |
| individual controls | ✓ |
| N | 244 |
| Boostrap confidence interval | |
| *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 05$; ***$p < 0.01$ | |

## E.3 Cultural norms: Heterogeneous effects

**Table A.6: Heterogeneous effects, siblings**

| | (1) | (2) |
|---|---|---|
| DV | Govt. work | Govt. work |
| Model | Logit | Logit |
| family mobilized | 2.959*** | |
| | (0.880) | |
| aunt/uncle only | | 2.473*** |
| | | (0.721) |
| siblings | 0.304** | 0.272** |
| | (0.14) | (0.134) |
| siblings × mobilized | −0.304** | −0.302*** |
| | (0.131) | (0.102) |
| individual controls | ✓ | ✓ |
| area 1 control | ✓ | ✓ |
| N | 568 | 383 |
| standard errors clustered by village | | |
| *$p < 0.1$; **$p < 05$; ***$p < 0.01$ | | |

Marginal effects plots in figure 2 are based off of regressions in Table A.6. In column 2, the sample only includes generation 2 children who have only an uncle/aunt mobilized along with those with no mobilized family.

# F Village-level analysis

## F.1 School data

Details on how the school data was collected are not available, but the data appears to code all schools that existed in 2014 in Laos. An important contextual point in interpreting results is the significant history of village relocation in Laos. Since some villages within five kilometers of a wartime school today might have been relocated to this area after the war, results are consistent with a story where benefits emanate from revolutionary centers, but extend to relocated villages that might not have themselves been heavily mobilized. This does not undermine my argument insofar as heavily mobilized areas remain the central nodes of subsequent development. Additionally, a potential missing data issue here is that data on wartime school-building in villages that subsequently relocated might not be included in the dataset (it is impossible to say for sure). Existing work suggests that heavily mobilized villages tended to benefit from favorable relocation to areas with more public goods (Goudineau, 1997). To the extent that this is true, such villages, even after relocation, should tend to be near areas that saw wartime school-building.

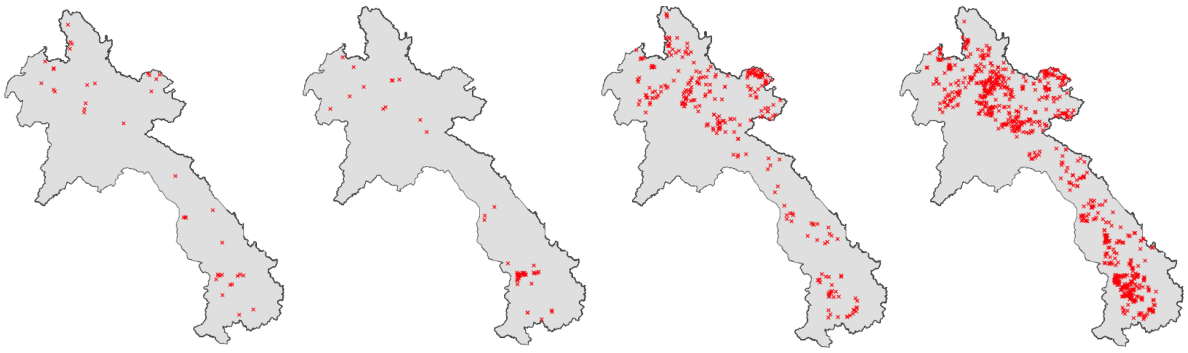
## F.2 Coding communist schools

In order to code schools built by communists in upland areas, I matched school data to the evolving zones of control. This was done using the following declassified documents from the online archives of the CIA:

- Mission Coverage Indexes: Mission 3206, 27 December 1962; Mission 3226, 17 May 1963; Mission 3241, 16 November 1963; Mission S074E, 1 March 1964; Mission 3767, 20 May 1964; Mission 5143, 23 March 1966
- Memo on Preliminary Evaluation of Mission 0074E, 6 March 1964
- Memo on Laos Transportation and Control, 26 June, 1964 (PAG/M-800-64)
- Photographic Interpretation Reports, IPIR: Mission 3224, 14 May 1963; Mission 3225, 15 May 1963; Mission 6071, 30 December 1963; Mission S074E, 1 March 1964; Mission 0014E, 8 January 1964; Mission 0064E, 29 February 1964; Mission C595C, 23 November 1965
- Developments in Indochina, Directorate of Intelligence: 26 November 1971; 12 January 1973; 12 February 1973
- The President's Daily Briefs: 12 March 1968; 9 April 1969; 15 April 1969; 21 February 1970; 9 May 1970; 10 June 1970; 4 February 1971; 17 May 1971; 20 May 1971; 29 November 1972

- Central Intelligence Bulletins: 10 February 1966; 27 December, 1967; 15 January 1968; 19 November 1968;17 December 1968; 6 January 1970; 31 January 1970; 27 October 1972
- Weekly Summaries, Directorate of Intelligence: 28 April 1967; 22 December 1967
- Special National Intelligence Estimate, Communist Capabilities and Intentions in Laos Over the Next Year, 31 October 1968
- Laos, Territorial Control as of 6 June 1972
- Military Areas: Ban Pha Home, Laos, 13 July 1964; Ban Na Nhom, Laos, 23 November 1964; Ban Na Hi, Laos, 7 January 1965
- Military Camps, Ban Kok Tong Area, Laos, 23 February 1965; Ban Thay Area, Laos, 2 March 1965
- Military Complex, Khang Khai, Laos, 2 December 1965
- Churchdoor Mission C055C, 22 February 1965
- Intelligence Report, Geographic Brief on Laos, February 1967
- Khang Khai Military Complex, Laos, 13 July 1964
- Memo on Indochina Control Maps, June 27, 1972
- Memo: The Situation in Phong Saly Province, 19 September 1961
- Intelligence Memorandums: Recent Communist Logistical Developments in Southern Laos, June 1971; The Current Status of Military Forces in Laos, April 1973
- Military Activity Route 65, Laos, 19 May 1965
- Staging Areas: Ban Nakay Neua, Laos, 11 May 1965; Muong Dai, Laos, 17 May 1965
- Day/Night Comparative Photography Muong Phalane, Laos, 22 December 1964
- Military Activity and Transportation Routes, Laos Panhandle, July 1965
- Route 12 Mu Gia Pass Area, Laos, 4 November 1965
- Situation Summaries: Developments in Laos and North Vietnam, 9 May 1962; Developments Along Sino-Laotian Border, 18 November 1963
- 92nd Congress, 1st Session, Staff Report, Laos: April 1971, August 3, 1971

## F.3 Historical school construction



**(a)** Schools -1952 **(b)** RLG sch.1953- **(c)** PL sch. 1953-1975 **(d)** Schools 1976-1990

**Figure A.1: Historical school building**

Figure A.1 shows (a) upland school construction in the pre-war period (to 1952) in areas that would later come under communist control before 1973, (b) school construction by the RLG in such areas, which changed hands after 1953, (c) communist school construction between 1953 and 1975, and (d) upland school construction immediately after the war, between 1976-1990. Communist school-building began in earnest after 1962, while royalist school-building did not leave much of a mark in these uplands.

**Table A.7: Villages with wartime schools and no schools, balance**

| | Schools, N=1166 | | No schools, N=3770 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Sd. | Mean | Sd. | Diff. |
| District capital | 0.22 | 0.415 | 0.037 | 0.188 | 0.184 |
| Altitude (m) | 605.641 | 374.022 | 618.455 | 368.103 | −12.814 |
| Sd. altitude (m) | 22.976 | 19.289 | 27.818 | 21.38 | −4.841 |
| River | 0.34 | 0.474 | 0.251 | 0.434 | 0.088 |
| Rainfall (m) | 14.15 | 4.689 | 14.976 | 4.44 | 0.825 |
| N. historical vills. | 7.574 | 7.017 | 4.88 | 4.644 | 2.694 |
| N. minority vills. | 0.94 | 1.608 | 1.206 | 2.121 | −0.266 |

## F.4 Historical settlement patterns

Historical settlement patterns were coded using digitized maps available from the University of Texas libraries at https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/laos.html. All available maps from Series L7015 (1965) and Series L509 (1954) were used.[6] Only named settlements from the map were coded. This was done to avoid coding small, temporary or transient settlements that likely shift with upland swiddens. Ethnic minority settlements were identified based on village names. Known minority villages were also coded as such regardless of their name. [7]

[6]Series L7015 maps were used whenever available, since these maps provide a greater level of detail. Series L509 maps were used for areas where Series L7015 maps were not available and as a pre-war check for areas where more detailed maps where only available for 1970 or later. Based on these comparisons, it is clear that maps made during the war include location and name data on settlements that were destroyed or abandoned as a result of fighting.

[7]This was an imperfect process, since many minority villages have Lao language names, and distinguishing Lao from minority language names requires some guesswork in the absence of established conventions. Names with consonants or sound clusters that do not appear in Lao language, names that include known minority language words, or names that refer to ethnic minority groups were coded as minority villages.

## F.5 Robustness check

An alternative explanation of the aggregate results is that they are consistent with a story of development leading to more development (cf. Huillery, 2009). The political mechanisms emanating from wartime mobilization that are central to my story thus might not be necessary for these results.

**Table A.8: Robustness check, post-war schools**

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| DV | Poverty | Poverty | 9th NA |
| Model | OLS | OLS | Logit |
| school 1975-1990 | $-1.367^{*}$ | $-3.393^{***}$ | 0.365 |
| (no wartime school) | (0.754) | (0.867) | (0.357) |
| wartime school | | $-4.95^{***}$ | $1.171^{***}$ |
| | | (0.877) | (0.331) |
| 4th NA birthplace | | $-1.679^{**}$ | 0.288 |
| | | (0.818) | (0.723) |
| district dummies | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| geographical controls & bombs | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| historical controls | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| adj. $R^2$ | 0.568 | 0.575 | |
| N | 4919 | 4919 | 4919 |
| standard errors clustered by district | | | |
| $*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$ | | | |

The revolutionary birthplaces variable addresses this to some extent, since it captures areas that had prominent revolutionaries without having investments in schools. I also perform a robustness check, where I instead use villages that saw no wartime school construction but saw school building immediately after the war in 1976-1990 as a placebo treatment variable. If effects are solely driven by infrastructural investments, then we should see no difference in development outcomes between villages with wartime schools and those with no wartime schools but schools built soon after the war. Results suggest that, using the same control strategy as above, wartime school construction brings a development premium. As might be expected, post-war school building also significantly reduces poverty in 2015, though, unlike the treatment variables, it does not predict contemporary National Assembly representation.

# G Research ethics

This research was approved by IRB at the author's institution. All respondents provided consent before interviews. No compensation was provided. A major motivation for the data collection effort is to preserve the histories of these communities, which are currently unrecorded and at risk of being permanently lost as individuals from the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary times have largely died. Preserving and learning from these neglected histories is important for social science. There is also significant local interest in these communities for preserving these histories.

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