The Pull of the Center

Inequality and Autocratic Nation Building as Legacies of Revolution in Upland Laos

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Abstract

Revolutionary conflict and wartime mobilization can shape post-conflict inequalities and transform social interests and identities. This happens when wartime mobilization pulls in individuals from peripheral groups, socializing them to government work, transforming social networks, and providing leadership experiences and benefits. These impacts then spread through families and communities. I study this in the context of peripheral communities in Laos during and after the Laotian Civil War. Analysis of originally collected inter-generational microdata from a heavily mobilized ethnic minority area in upland Laos reveals that benefits and cultural transformations spread within mobilized families and persisted across generations. Comparing villages, I then find persistent correlations between wartime mobilization and subsequent economic and political outcomes. The coalitional effects of revolutionary conflict might help explain patterns of inequality and processes of nation-state formation in diverse contexts. By analyzing a case where top-down investments have been minimal, I highlight overlooked bottom-up processes of nation-state formation.

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

Promotion history of a Laotian revolutionary

1 Introduction

Revolutions around the world have plucked people from the peripheries of power, sometimes by force, trained and indoctrinated them, and then put them through intense experiences of war, leadership, and state administration. In this paper, I argue that the ramifications of such experiences can be integral to post-conflict political order. This helps make sense of important theoretical questions: what explains political and economic inequalities in revolutionary autocracies and other post-conflict polities? How do such governments become tied to specific communities, and when do previously peripheral groups of people come to be included in governing coalitions? In order to better understand the often puzzling patterns of transformation and continuity in post-revolutionary settings, we must account for the impacts and spillover effects of mobilization itself.

I argue that patterns of wartime mobilization can determine who benefits in enduring ways after revolutions and intensive civil wars. Indeed, beyond a simple ledger of losses and benefits, social interests and identities are themselves transformed by the particular dynamics of conflict and mobilization. I understand *mobilization* as the process by which previously unaffiliated people are pushed or otherwise decide to join an active war, either through serving in the military or through full-time administrative or political work in support of the war effort. Here, I study the effects of being mobilized, and thus

exposed to such transformative experiences, on the winning side of a conflict. Using originally collected family histories and multi-generational microdata from communities in the peripheries of Laos, I show that the exigencies of war can pull previously excluded people into positions of state power. This can then have a range of persistent spillover effects, involving closer ties to the state and changing social networks, for such families and communities across multiple generations. Thus, after the "shock" of war, state power takes hold in a bottom-up way, through familial and community-level connections to jobs and networks centered on the state, rather than only through top-down investments in control imposed by outsiders. This process also shapes post-conflict inequalities.

Though the messiness of post-revolutionary politics has long been acknowledged, there have been few attempts at untangling specific processes and mechanisms behind post-revolutionary transformations (cf. Beissinger, 2023;Gaikwad *et al.*, 2023, p 439-440; Moore, 1966, p. 427-429). An emerging literature has begun to consider how historical revolutions have contributed to political order in autocracies, but this work has focused on elites and not yet on deeper layers of society, as I do here (Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; Levitsky & Way, 2022). Meanwhile, though classic studies of revolution in political science and sociology have argued that a range of factors—most prominently class conflict and coalitions, international order, and the nature of the state under the old regime (Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1978)—help explain revolutionary situations and outcomes, these works do not consider the micro-level effects of mobilization itself in determining post-revolutionary politics. Path breaking work by Wood (2001) argues, like this paper, that conflict and mobilization in civil wars and insurgencies transform social interests, but this does not trace individual-level inter-generational impacts. Indeed, central to any investigation of such micro-level impacts is fine-grained, primary source data, which is at the heart of this study.

Historical examples plausibly illustrating the coalitional effects of conflict abound. During the Russian Civil War, ethnic Chechens and Ingush in parts of the North Caucuses made meaningful gains due to their wartime support of the Bolsheviks, who typically sided instead with urban ethnic Russians in the peripheries (Pipes,1964, p. 198; Martin,

2001, p. 60-61). Revolutionary Vietnam embarked on forced land reforms in 1953 partly because it needed to generate support among the peasantry, who were the backbone of the war effort in the lead-up to the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, after the communists had been dislodged from the urban areas where they originated (Goscha, 2022, p. 403-411). In the US, a range of artisanal and commercial interests, previously subservient to well-established patronage networks centered on influential landed gentry, gained power as a result of their importance during the American Revolutionary War (Wood, 1991, p. 247). Thus the idea that revolutionary conflict itself can induce political transformations that are not necessarily related to prior ideology and social interests finds support in the history literature (cf. Furet, 1981). However, there are few existing studies that attempt to systematically distinguish, in any given case, the effects of wartime mobilization itself from the ideology of the mobilizers and prior social factors. Clearly, civil wars and revolutions are endogenous, historical processes. But, starting at the micro-level, through the intense and new forms of socialization that come with wartime mobilization, and the new social networks that emerge, mobilization can come to have its own independent effect. The particular patterns of mobilization help determine the post-conflict order, separating winners from losers and transforming societal interests.

How has state power taken root in remote mountainous communities in Laos? The puzzle here is the emergence of the state in the heart of Zomia, an area that James Scott (2010, p. 13) described as "one of the largest remaining nonstate spaces in the world." I argue that loose pre-revolutionary orders were profoundly disrupted by the violence of the Laotian Civil War. The war was a significant conflict connected to the Indochina Wars, involving hundreds of thousands of Lao soldiers across the opposing communist Pathet Lao and Royal Lao Government (RLG) sides. It drew in the extensive participation of North Vietnam, which at times had over 100,000 troops and cadres in Laos, and the US, which dropped around 260 million bombs on the country. The nature of conflict and mobilization then caused a deep social realignment in some places, which created new political hierarchies, impacted long-run patterns of economic development, and determined paths of cultural change among the many ethnically diverse inhabitants of Laos.

Revolutionary violence and mobilization was a key factor in connecting the periphery of the country to the political center of an emerging Lao communist party-state in highly uneven ways. These connections were then sustained by mobilized families themselves. The specific patterns of conflict and mobilization, in turn, help explain the persistent unevenness in these transformations. To test this argument, I leverage a multi-method research design. This is built on several years of local engagement and deep fieldwork involving over 50 hours of interviews and informal conversations, in addition to micro-data collection encompassing approximately 1000 individuals across three generations. I also analyze a wide range of economic, political, and infrastructural data, including a hand-coded dataset of historical settlement patterns compiled from close to 300 maps. Starting from the experiences of mobilization, the processes of state-societal change I describe touch many aspects of social life. In their overall assimilative effect, they resemble modernization. However, they differ in that effects are centered only on mobilized families and are not preceded by a broad economic development. Due to the depth of these transformations, this paper speaks to a range of literatures.

One important lens clarifies processes of nation-state formation. In the case at hand, coalition formation and nation-state formation were deeply intertwined. The fact that wartime mobilization pulls people into positions of state power in enduring ways has implications for state formation in the peripheries. While the connection between war and state-making is well known (Tilly, 1990), prior work has not brought such systematically collected and fine-grained data, at the level of individuals and families across generations, to bear on studying this process. Indeed, upland Laos—the remote mountainous periphery that makes up much of the land area of the country—is an ideal case in that it is perhaps one of few places where such granular information on transitions from statelessness is still recoverable, given its almost uniquely low levels of state authority and infrastructural development only sixty or seventy years ago (Halpern, 1961). In contrast to classic work that emphasizes the coercive role of the state in absorbing peripheries and diversities in a top-down manner (Tilly, 1990; Weber, 1976; Scott, 1998), my account highlights the important part played by some people from the peripheries

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who were transformed by their experiences of wartime mobilization and became agents of the state, passing on new social networks, skills, and connections to state power to their descendants and other family members. Different from accounts where the state is superstructural to society, by focusing on a case where top-down investments have been very low, I am able to highlight how state power can spread through and within families. This argument might be of general interest since most places have been peripheral to state power at some point in their history, and the mechanisms I describe might, in principle, apply to a wide range of contexts.

In its concern with using microdata and isolating causal effects at the individual level, the study also speaks to related literatures on the microdynamics of violent conflict and the causal effects of mobilization and war on those that experience such destabilizing moments (Kalyvas, 2008; Kocher *et al.*, 2011; Bauer *et al.*, 2016). Perhaps the most closely related such study is a paper by Jha & Wilkinson (2012), who argue that wartime experience provides a way for members of disenfranchised groups to gain skills to conduct collective action and change institutions. My paper instead considers how wartime mobilization, through some similar mechanisms, can connect people to the state in enduring ways, shape economic opportunities, and shift social networks. The paper also contributes to the literature on ethnic politics. While existing research points to civil society links, trade institutions, or group size (Varshney, 2001; Jha, 2013; Posner, 2004) in explaining ethnic conflict or the lack thereof, I consider how revolutionary mobilization can attach minorities to the state and impact both ethnic and national identities. Though beyond the scope of this study, one can speculate that such assimilation might reduce impulses for ethnic separatism and armed conflict, all else equal. Laos is a country that has seen sporadic ethnic insurgency, but despite having both low state capacity and rough terrain—key factors conducive to insurgency (Fearon & Laitin, 2003)—by most accounts, ethnic insurgency has not been as disruptive as in neighboring Myanmar, Thailand, or Vietnam in recent decades. Finally, this paper also speaks to a burgeoning literature in economics and political science on historical legacies, especially to those studies focusing on analyzing legacies of war or explaining historical roots of inequality

(eg. Balcells, 2012; Gaikwad *et al.*, 2023; Huillery, 2009; Ricart-Huguet, 2021). Recent work by Lankina & Libman (2021) shows the persistence of the pre-revolutionary bourgeoisie in Russia, through and despite the Russian Revolution. Here, I instead show how wartime mobilization disrupts old orders and identities in enduring ways; however, like in Lankina & Libman's study, families are shown to be important mechanisms of persistence in political and economic outcomes. Identifying mechanisms explaining the persistence of effects originating in remote historical events is a major challenge in such studies generally. This paper analyzes the mechanism of persistence through leveraging inter-generational microdata.

In what follows, I first develop a bottom-up theory of political and economic transformation rooted in mobilization and derive hypotheses. I then introduce the Laos case and historical context. Next, I describe my data sources and the key hypothesis tests. The main empirical results are based on the originally collected family histories. They isolate at the individual level how mobilization itself can persistently alter livelihoods, social networks, interests, and identities, and they show how these transformations can spread inter-generationally within families. Finally, I conduct a macro-level correlational analysis involving data on wartime school-construction and the birthplaces of revolutionaries across Laos. Results suggest that variation in wartime mobilization helps explain economic and political inequalities across upland Laos even today.

2 The Theory

Revolutions and intensive civil wars do not happen randomly, their roots are to be found in the society and state of the old regime (Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979). But does this mean that the post-revolutionary order is also largely determined by the ideologies and social interests that rose up under the old regime? Against such a view, I argue that the revolutionary conflict itself can induce political transformations that escape prior ideology and social interests. An important dynamic in my theory is that it is "bottom-up." The unit of analysis is the individual. When individuals are mobilized into war, they

receive training, indoctrination, leadership experience, and new connections. Mobilization socializes them into military, political, or administrative work. After the conflict, it both equips them with skills and also gives them strong moral claims for pursuing political and material benefits. In turn, through the influence and activities of the treated individuals, the impacts of mobilization extend outwards to those not directly mobilized: the families and communities of the mobilized. Thus mobilization brings direct effects as well as an *externality structure*. By externality structure I mean the nature and extent of political, economic, and cultural impacts of mobilization on those who were not directly mobilized.

Figure 1: Two paths of change

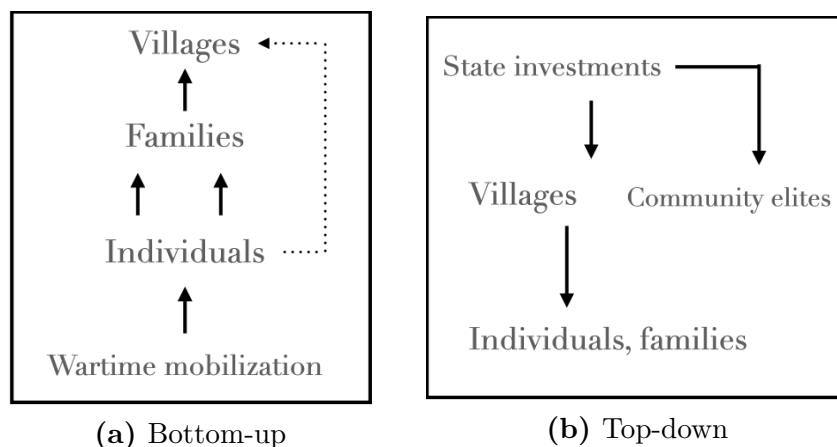**(a)** Bottom-up   **(b)** Top-down

Figure 1 illustrates the difference between my framework of bottom-up externalities originating in wartime mobilization and top-down strategies of state formation and cooptation. Of course, both top-down and bottom-up mechanisms will be present together in any historical instance of revolutionary conflict. In this paper, I simply focus on elucidating how bottom-up processes, which have been less studied, can be transformative long after the initial shock of mobilization in a setting where top-down investments have been thin. One key distinction with typical accounts of cooptation, where benefits are exchanged for support (eg.Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006), is that the social impact goes deeper, broadly transforming social interests and reaching beyond directly mobilized individuals whenever externalities are significant. On the other hand, if externalities are minimal, the impacts of mobilization will be transient and will disappear as those directly mobilized grow older and pass away. Where mobilization is not extensive, such

situations begin to look more like elite cooptation, where a thin class of local notables is "bought off" and the state might simply imprint itself on prior hierarchies and cleavages, for instance by capturing pre-existing patronage networks.

Revolutionary war, or intensive civil war, is central to my story because it creates uniquely existential pressures that work against existing hierarchies. First, as conflict expands, people from increasingly diverse social groups become involved, sometimes in haphazard ways that are removed from the original impetus of the conflict. Patterns of engagement might reflect pre-existing local conflicts. However, in many cases, mobilization locally occurs in ways that do not mirror old antagonisms, as highly contingent and localized decisions are made under conditions of tremendous uncertainty (cf. Walder & Chu, 2020). Close relatives, neighbors, or friends might join opposite sides of the conflict simply as a result of the places or social networks where they find themselves. Importantly, mass mobilization, which occurs in many revolutionary conflicts, also comes with coercion, creating an almost mechanical sorting by age and family characteristics along lines of control, leaving little choice for individuals locally. During fighting, the concrete need to survive and win or face severe consequences can incentivize more meritocratic standards of promotion in military and political hierarchies for all factions, regardless of their ideological bent. Finally, during and after the conflict, the costs of war in lives and hardship borne by contributing individuals and communities can be a powerful moral basis for claims for reparations.[1]

The phenomena described above can be contextualized under two broader processes of great theoretical importance, which in Laos were deeply connected: social coalition formation and state formation. Individual transformations aggregate to a reshuffling of political hierarchies, patterns of economic benefits, and social networks, which in turn describes a coalitional shift relative to the old regime. Additionally, especially where pre-existing political orders and identities are weak, this transformation culminates in nation-state formation. People and communities who used to have minimal connections

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[1]For instance, Scheve & Stasavage (2012) connect inheritance taxation to wartime mass mobilization across a range of countries globally using a similar logic of compensation for the life-and-limb costs of war.

to the state under the old regime come to be tied more strongly to the state through their jobs, social networks, and emerging identity after intensive mobilization. Upland areas in Laos provide an ideal context to study this process because both the coalitional and nation-state formation aspects of the theory can be studied, given the very low levels of pre-revolutionary state power in these areas in recent times. Because of its low prior levels of development and lack of strong prior political identities (described below), this setting also provides a useful benchmark in considering the general question of how mobilization impacts post-conflict inequalities and patterns of state formation.

2.1 An Illustrative Case

In Laos, the theory is personified in 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), Naiphon Chan.[2] Naiphon Chan was born in an upland ethnic Khmu village in the stateless peripheries of northern Laos to a family that largely lived by subsistence agriculture and the gathering of forest products. He was taught to read and write by party mobilization staff as a child in the mid 1960s. He joined the army due to the encouragement of a man from the same village who had joined the communist Pathet Lao military and had risen in its ranks. At first an army cook and animal handler, after fighting against the opposing Royal Lao Government (RLG) in 1969 he was promoted and selected to receive training to be an army doctor. As hostilities subsided in 1975, when he was in his mid-twenties, he was a party member, involved in district-level administration of the military and youth union, and was also the chief of the district-level court. By the mid-1980s, he had become a senior officer in the LPLA. He married inter-ethnically, something that was exceedingly rare under the old regime, to someone he met through his work, and became assimilated into the dominant lowland ethnic Lao culture. He pulled in his children, some nephews and nieces, and others from his birth village into party-state work. In his community, he embodied the diligence and industriousness that was celebrated in the propaganda of the emerging party-state, and he was a key link in

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

social networks connecting these Lao peripheries to the capital city, Vientiane and farther to Vietnam and the USSR. He also helped bring investments in roads and temples to his village. The theory I offer is the story of Naiphon Chan writ large. Starting from the fractured, arguably accidental geographies of violence and mobilization, some people from previously peripheral upland areas mobilized during the Laotian Civil War have risen farther than Naiphon Chan, while many others were incorporated into the party-state but never wielded as much influence.

2.2 Hypothesis

My core hypothesis is that mobilization in some peripheral areas of Laos was both extensive and generated significant and persistent political, economic, and cultural externalities. I first test for within-family externalities and then for locality-specific externalities arising from wartime mobilization. Specifically,

- [**H1a**] I expect that descendants of mobilized people are more likely to have state jobs than their neighbors who have no family history of mobilization.

To further capture changes in social network as well as changes in culture,

- [**H1b**] I also expect the descendants of mobilized people to be more likely to engage in inter-ethnic marriages than those with no mobilized ancestors.

I describe and justify these variables in greater detail below. Subsequently, testing for broader, locality-specific externalities,

- [**H2**] I expect heavily mobilized villages to receive more public goods after the war and have persistently lower levels of poverty than similar unmobilized villages.

3 Historical Context

Before presenting the empirics, I provide some brief background on the Laos case. In addition to the context of the Laotian Civil War, two aspects of upland Laos are particularly important for this study: historical population sparsity and "statelesness," and

ethnic diversity. To further motivate the results to follow, I also provide a summary of political and economic inequalities in Laos today using census data as well as originally compiled data on political leadership.

3.1 Low Historical State Capacity and Development

This study focuses on the upland parts of Laos. I take this to encompass all of the country apart from the low-lying areas along much of the Mekong River, which are home to the main urban centers. These upland areas are within the broader so-called "Zomia," a part of the world famous for having low levels of state power until relatively recent times (Scott, 2010). The enduring appeal of studies of this area is that they provide insights into early-modern and pre-modern political changes, which might be similar to those that took place in other parts of the world in a more remote past. Many upland areas of Laos even in the 1960s were some of the least economically developed and sparsely populated places anywhere in the world. The largest settlements in the area under study had 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, while the average village had fewer than 100 residents; population densities were likely around five or six people per square kilometer, and locals were almost exclusively subsistence farmers (Halpern, 1961). As a result, conflict over land was not salient; while there were active trade networks in opium and forest products, by and large, there were no landlords or capitalists. Given this state of affairs, modern political identities and preferences, such as those between "left" and "right," did not exist among the general upland population.

3.2 Ethnic Diversity

In line with this condition of sparse, subsistence economies and weak state power, cultural identities were diverse and diffuse. Laos is made up of people who speak a variety of unrelated languages and follow diverse cultural traditions, with differences mostly traceable to successive waves of migration to the region from the north, in present-day China, over centuries. To this day, many people belonging to minority cultures live in ethnically homogeneous villages in upland areas of the country. The current government officially

recognizes 50 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%, as of 2015 (Statistics Bureau, 2015a, p. 37). Historically, the Lao-Tai have been politically dominant in Laos, ruling over towns (*meuang*, urban centers) in many of the arterial valleys of present-day Laos by the early 1300s (eg. Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 8; Lieberman, 2003, p. 241). The Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, the indigenous inhabitants of the area, have traditionally occupied mountainous locales and were historically given the pejorative label of *Kha*, or slave, by the Lao, reflecting the perceived backwardness associated with highlanders. These people are also sometimes referred to as the *Lao Theung* or "upland" Lao. The third most populous group after the Khmu, the Hmong—categorized as *Lao Soung*, "highland" Lao—arrived fleeing unrest in southern China in the 1800s to settle in the mountains of northern Laos. I refer to all groups outside of the Lao-Tai as "ethnic minorities" or "upland ethnic minorities," to emphasize the concentration of these groups in upland (or "highland") areas as opposed to the political centers in riverine valleys.

3.3   The Laotian Civil War

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

Fighting between the Royal Lao Government (RLG), now supported by the US, and communists continued sporadically. The frontlines of the conflict moved in ways that

generally favored the PL and their Vietnamese allies, with communist control gradually expanding from their original strongholds in the northeast to include much of eastern and upland Laos. At the same time, boundaries were fluid and frequently changing, front lines were highly fractured and both sides came to hold areas "behind enemy lines" at various times. The 1962 Geneva Conference instituted a ceasefire, though no official demarcating line between the factions was ever established (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 110). Fighting continued and intensified immediately after and subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975.

3.4   Post-Revolutionary Inequalities

Ethnicity is a starting point to make sense of coalitional change at the national level because there have been clear changes in the ethnic composition of political leadership since the revolution. In the historical context described above, it is not surprising that early Lao nationalists, who were part of the small ethnic Lao elite under French colonialism, looked to their ethnicity as the basis of political community (Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002). Leadership positions at the district level and above under the old regime were almost always held by Lao-Tai aristocrats. Against such visions, the communists, who were based in upland areas bordering Vietnam during much of the war, have claimed to represent a multi-ethnic Lao people and to champion the interests of minorities since the wartime period (Neo Lao Haksat, 1970, 1980). While such proclamations are typical in communist contexts and often hollow, wartime US sources also noted that the PL leadership structure and ethnic policy "appear[ed] to live up to these principles" (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 133-134), despite the fact that the core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese, who provided much of the military manpower.[3] Today, a diversity of ethnic groups are represented at all levels of the party-state, including in the Politburo and Central Committee, which are the primary policy-making bodies. At the same time, many of the poorest and most

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[3]By 1973, there were an estimated 62,600 North Vietnamese Army (NVA) personnel in southern Laos, while there were only about 6,500 Pathet Lao in the same region. Meanwhile, in the north the split was estimated to be 22,200 NVA to 17,800 PL (CIA Intelligence Memorandum, "The Current Status of Military Forces in Laos," April 1973).

Table 1: Ethnic diversity in party leadership

Body	Year	Total size	Ethnic minorities
National population	2015	6,446,690	∼40%
LPRP, 11th Politburo	2021	13	38.46%
9th National Assembly	2021	164	18.3%
7th National Assembly (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%

isolated communities in the country are ethnic minority communities.

No ethnic minority has ever been the General Secretary of the party or President of Laos. Yet, several of the highest ranking members of the LPRP today come from ethnic minority groups.[4] Outside of the very highest echelons of the party-state, many ethnically non-Lao people also hold positions, including prominent ones, in the military as well as in the bureaucracy. Since information on party membership is not publicly available, data on the National Assembly of Laos gives some sense of the extent to which the deeper ranks of the party-state encompass underlying social groups. Although the Lao National Assembly remains a "rubber stamp" parliament, which does not hold any real policy-making or oversight power, essentially all candidates 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.[5]

Unevenness also characterizes the economic situation of upland people in Laos. The relative economic backwardness of minorities in Laos is prominently mentioned in the existing literature, as it contradicts the notion of a truly multi-ethnic Lao polity (Pholsena, 2005, p. 88; Schlemmer, 2017, p. 276). Indeed, in aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates between the majority Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman, and Hmong communities (Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170). However, these aggregates mask a significant amount of variation across geographical areas and within the state-

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[4]The LPRP publicizes little information about its composition and inner workings, thus the uneven data. This data was compiled from a range of scattered print and social media sources (see appendix).

[5]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.

Figure 2: Poverty rates by village and ethnicity, Laos 2015

In panel b, lighter blues indicate higher population density. The urban centers of Laos are located along the western border of the country. Data from Population and Housing Census of Laos, 2015 (Statistics Bureau, 2015a), maps by author.

(a)   **(b)**
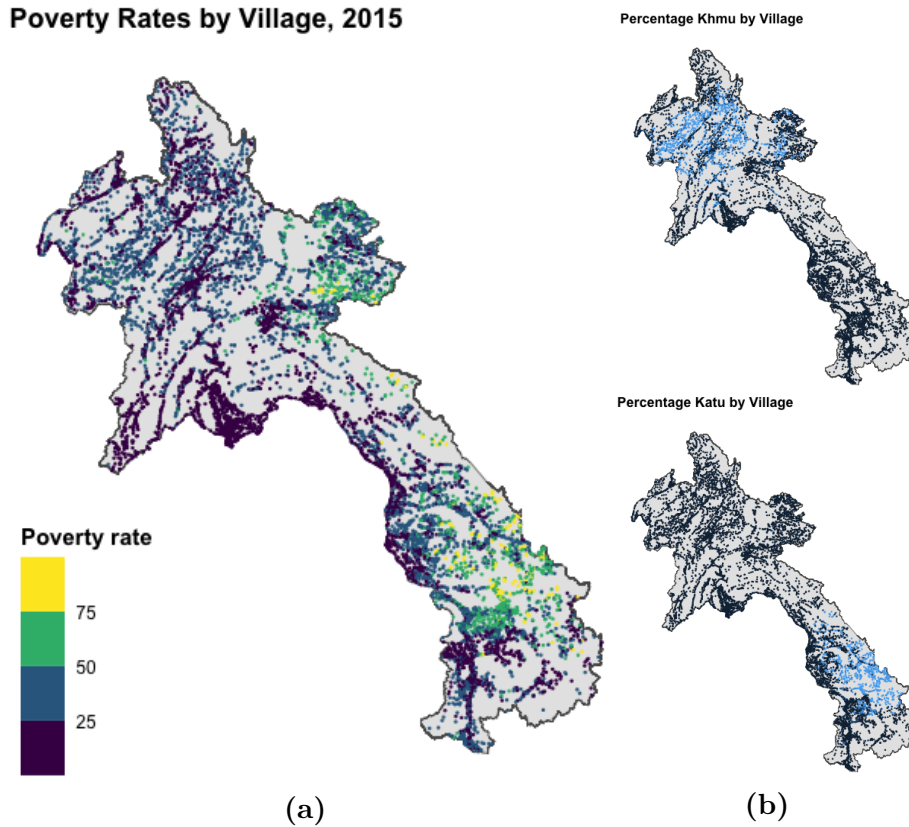
sanctioned broad ethnolinguistic categories. For instance, data from the 2015 Lao Census reveals that among Mon-Khmer groups, severe poverty is much more concentrated among Katuic speakers in southern Laos than among the Khmu in northern Laos (figure 1).[6] But even within these groups, there are major differences in poverty levels between communities in different localities. A further complicating factor is that despite state-led, sometimes coercive, village resettlement policies over the last several decades (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004), minority villages to this day occupy terrain that is rougher than the Lao-Tai and thus less accessible. Using census data, table 2 nevertheless shows that the economic situation of minority groups varies sharply even between nearby provinces, in ways that might not be fully explainable by geography.

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[6]The 2012-2013 Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS-5), which includes expenditure data, was used to estimate village and district level poverty rates using multi-level modeling, linking household-level characteristics to expenditures (Coulombe *et al.*, 2016). Though this is an imperfect measure of poverty, it is the best aggregate available at the village level.

Table 2: 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. Elevation data is from the NASA Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM). I take the standard deviation of elevation at all points captured by SRTM within 500 meters of each village centroid to construct 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

4 Data and Empirics

Can wartime histories help explain the uneven post-revolutionary incorporation of peripheral communities? The main empirical exercise in this paper involves an analysis of originally collected family histories from a heavily mobilized ethnic minority Khmu area in northern Laos. These communities were among the most heavily mobilized in the country by the communists during the Laotian Civil War while also being historically remote and peripheral to state power. Thus they provide a good setting for studying the impacts of mobilization pertaining to development and state formation. With the aid of local partners, a sample of family histories was gathered from nine villages. This was done using a backward sampling procedure, where enumerators systematically sampled from individuals living in these communities today and then asked these individuals about their ancestors and other family members (cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015). This is an unprecedented data collection effort among hard to reach communities about whom very little is known in any academic field. 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.

Using this data, I then trace the social transformation that has taken place in these communities. I test for within-family externalities, comparing outcomes between individuals from mobilized families and those from unmobilized families. The unit of analysis is the individual. The key treatment variable is having a mobilized ancestor. The main outcome variables of interest are (i) working for the party state and (ii) being in an inter-ethnic marriage, while trends in education, migration, and livelihoods are also described. In the communities under study, inter-ethnic marriages almost always involve cultural changes. Thus marriage patterns get at changes in social networks as well as in ethnic identity. In addition to producing quantitative results, the family histories provide significant qualitative evidence on the nature of political, economic, and cultural externalities from wartime mobilization. This is especially important because there are no written histories of this locality. The qualitative stories also speak to mechanisms at an even finer level of detail than the quantitative results.

4.1   Supplementary Empirics

In a second analysis, I then look at whether histories of mobilization help shed light on broader patterns of inequality across all of upland Laos. Here, I conduct the analysis at the village-level and test to see if villages that had a high number of mobilized individuals have better political and economic outcomes subsequently than nearby villages that saw less mobilization. The unit of analysis here is thus the village, although village "mobilization" is seen as simply an aggregation of the individual treatments into mobilization. Though this analysis is suggestive and correlational, I leverage a wide range of data to address alternative explanations and endogeneity concerns that might explain the findings of persistence. The dataset used here combines data from the Lao Census of 2015, geolocated data on Lao schools and the dates of their establishment, originally collected geolocated data on the birthplaces of political elites, and a hand-coded dataset of historical settlement patterns compiled from approximately 275 maps.

4.2 Sampling

In order to study the long-run impacts of mobilization, it is necessary to study localities where a sufficient number of people were mobilized. Thus family histories were collected from a heavily mobilized area in northern Laos. One further aim of research design here is to isolate the effects of wartime mobilization from prior factors. This was done by selecting historically similar villages for data collection. 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. 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. One additional village, which did not exist during the wartime period was also selected because it is almost exclusively home to the descendants of individuals from villages in the sampling frame. The typical village in this area today has between 15 and 20 unrelated households (sampled villages have between approximately 30 and 80 total households).[7] Almost all of these villages have been relocated closer to roads and waterways and other villages since the time of the revolution, although the analysis here largely involves events and histories that preceded relocations.

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, family histories were collected by local researchers who have extended family connections in the communities under study. In each village, these researchers first introduced themselves to the village head and asked permission to conduct interviews for

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[7]Officially, some of these settlements are at a sub-village level, since in some cases nearby settlements are grouped together administratively into the same "village." I refer to the sampled settlements, rather than the broader official administrative units, as villages.

this project. 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. The village head then introduced researchers to 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. In this way a backward sample of individuals from these communities who lived during pre-war, wartime, and post-war times was constructed. This includes information on family members who have moved or reside in other places. This individual-level data was later coded into a relational dataset. Further specifics of this process are discussed in an appendix. A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted. The collected family histories should not be seen as representative for all Khmu in Laos, let alone for other ethnic groups, but only for Khmu in the specific area under study. Similarly, the results and analysis to follow, which look at inter-generational impacts of mobilization, should be seen as conditional on these highly mobilized Khmu communities in a remote area of northern Laos.

4.3 Data Quality and Verification

The norm in these villages is for gatherings to occur in public or semi-private settings; house doors are never closed during the day and people typically spend their time in public areas and walk between houses freely. Following this norm, interviews were never conducted in total privacy. This environment arguably acts as a safeguard against respondents misrepresenting family histories, since any misrepresentation would be heard by at least several villagers, who generally are well-informed about each others' families. Enumerators themselves also had strong connections to some of these villages and were thus seen as community insiders. In the case of family members who have been particularly successful, pictures in official dress are often prominently displayed in houses,

allowing for easy verification. During interviews, information on family histories was often verified, corrected, or sharpened through discussions among multiple community members. 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 several months for all families. A sign that the data is likely high quality lies in the fact that respondents reported historical participation on the royalist side at rates that exceeded prior expectations based on knowledge of this area. If there is any aspect of family history that respondents might wish to hide or misrepresent, it is participation on the losing side of a revolutionary war.

4.4   Treatment and Selection

I identify individuals as mobilized 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. This is because at lower levels of work, the livelihood, day-to-day life, and social networks of the person would not have significantly shifted away from those of a local farmer, and my theory of state-societal transformation rooted in individual experiences of mobilization should not apply. Individuals in the post-war generation (notated generation 2) are treated if they are a child, niece or nephew, or younger sibling of someone who was mobilized. The unmobilized, or control, group includes a few different types of people: 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 periodically came under royalist control, hence the history of mobilization into the right wing forces. Family histories of royalist mobilization are accounted for in the analysis to come in order to ensure that any identified effects arise from benefits from mobilization rather than the punishment of those on the losing side.

The key threat to causal inference comes from the possibility that certain kinds of people selected into communist mobilization. This is also substantively important be-

cause it speaks to the question of whether or not mobilization really did create social transformations. While I cannot rule out all possibilities of selection bias, local histories of mobilization and an analysis of the available data on mobilized individuals in the sample provide evidence against such endogeneity.

As Walder & Chu (2020) argue in their study of the Cultural Revolution in China, faction building in settings of intensive conflict where institutions do not exist or have collapsed often happens through highly contingent, localized decisions, made under conditions of high uncertainty; the influence of prior identities and interests are minimal in such chaotic settings. Beyond its intensiveness, the local dynamics of mobilization in this area 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. Since the studied area was largely behind Pathet Lao lines since at least the late 1950s and near a local communist base, most mobilized people in the sample were drafted into the war and had little choice in the matter. 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. Based on interviews, there is no further systematic answer to the question of who would be sent during drafts. In some cases family labor needs were considered, especially in cases where a family had already sent a young person. In other cases, people with a family history of working with the PL were actively recruited by cadres or their family members.

A further question involves promotion. This is important since my measure of mobilization only counts people who worked at the district level or higher. Abilities and commitment under fire likely played a part in promotions. But here, a concurrent mechanism working against selection bias is the revolutionary "morality," which assigned great importance to the extent of losses borne in the course of revolutionary participation. In many cases, people were promoted or otherwise recognized because they had been bombed or lost relatives to fighting rather than due to their abilities. This moral logic has no obvious mapping to deeper historical factors, since prior abilities are arguably un-

Table 3: Mobilized and unmobilized balance

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

		Mobilized			Unmobilized		
	N	Mean	Sd.	N	Mean	Sd.	Diff.
Female	63	0.079	0.272	166	0.518	0.501	−0.439
Ave. no. siblings	53	4.962	1.818	110	5.273	2.018	−0.311
Monk (males)	55	0.255	0.440	79	0.266	0.445	−0.011
Other family mob.	60	0.7	0.462	156	0.545	0.5	0.155
From area 1	63	0.333	0.475	166	0.283	0.452	0.05
Notable prior gen.	51	0.392	0.493	116	0.328	0.471	0.064

likely to impact personal costs borne in the course of revolution. A detailed qualitative history of local mobilization is available in an appendix.

While I cannot rule out all sources of selection, table 3 shows balance across several important variables for which data was collected. Family size might correlate with economic status and thus is an important variable for balance (although, in this setting economic and political differentiation was minimal in pre-war times). The Buddhist priesthood was the only available source of education in pre-war times, and thus a history of being a monk might signify greater pre-mobilization human capital. Descendants of local, old regime notable were roughly just as likely to be mobilized as non-notable families. Finally, one of the sampling clusters is only slightly more represented in the treated group than the other, suggesting approximate balance by locality within the sample. Further regression analysis of the determinants of mobilization suggests that gender and the specific village of the individual are the only measured factors correlated with mobilization (see appendix).

5 Main Results

5.1 Inter-generational Transformations

Involvement with the state increased during the wartime generation and remained at a significantly higher level in the post-war generation. Remarkably, over 37% of the sample was involved in the war effort at the district level or above on both sides, with about 27%

Figure 3: 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 involvement 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.
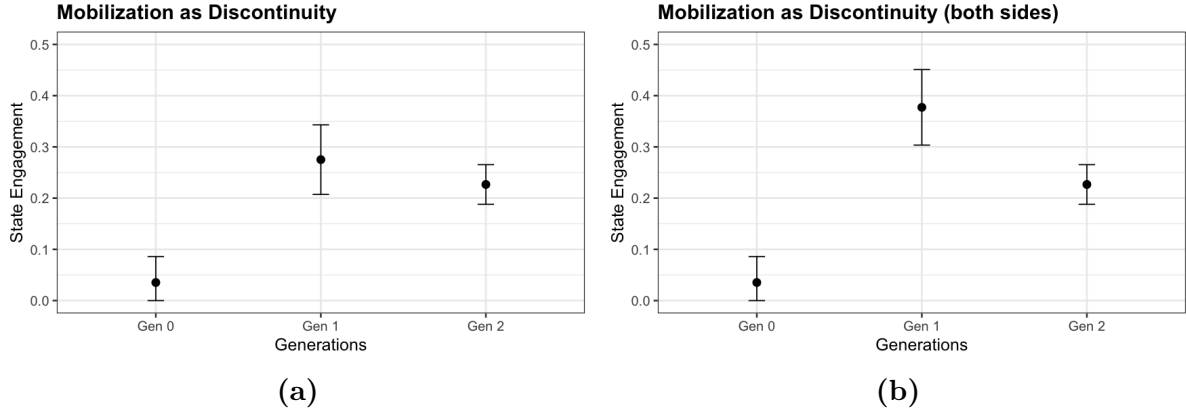

(a)

(b)

Table 4: Sample characteristics across three generations

Generation	N	Female	State Involvement	Military	High Positions
0	122	0.311	0.035	0.035	0
1	229	0.397	0.275	0.188	0.057
1 (both sides)			(0.377)	(0.293)	
2	579	0.491	0.217	0.145	0.038

being mobilized by the communists.[8] Much of this involvement comes from military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff. 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—command of a battalion or higher). While many soldiers returned to their villages after the war, many others continued to climb the ranks of the party-state.

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. At this time, individual lives also began to be transformed in other ways linked to wartime mobilization: eight

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[8]Royalist (RLG) 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.

individuals in generation 1 married people from other ethnicities; five of those that did so were mobilized (one additional person joined the royalist side), while the rest were siblings of mobilized communists. Many such relationships developed as a direct result of participating in multi-ethnic revolutionary networks and workplaces. Access to such networks was a sharp change in this area, where many people did not speak the Lao language in pre-war times, and there were virtually no cross-ethnic marriages. After the war, eight people from the sample, seven of whom were mobilized and one who was a sibling of a mobilized person, also permanently moved to the capital city of Laos, Vientiane, while many more moved to the district capital and other parts of the country for government work.[9] Further historical detail on this transformation gathered through fieldwork and interviews is relegated to an appendix.

5.2 Family Externalities

Table 5: Generation 2, sample characteristics by mobilization history

Proportions of sample in generation 2, grouped by mobilizational history, with government jobs, high positions, skilled jobs (including govt.), residence in Vientiane, inter-ethnic marriage, and college diploma.

Mobilization	N	Govt.	Leader	Skilled	VTE	Inter-ethnic	Diploma
Family	397	0.273	0.048	0.343	0.117	0.198	0.141
None	182	0.126	0.016	0.165	0.055	0.04	0.018
Parent/sibling	179	0.36	0.073	0.424	0.113	0.201	0.161
No parent/sibling	399	0.165	0.023	0.224	0.09	0.126	0.073

How exactly did the political transformations from the shock of mobilization persist over decades and across generations? My theory suggests that families should be an important conduit for the transfer of the new skills, attitudes, connections, and information that entered the community through mobilization, as mobilized individuals transfer these attributes to those closest to them first. Below, I find strong within-family effects. Indeed, as table 5 suggests, the political, economic, and cultural externalities I detail in the following sections are highly endogenous to each other—they are tightly bound together in a

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[9]Women are consistently underrepresented in the sample, though the problem improves across generations. Estimated rates of state involvement, military work, and high positions are thus all likely somewhat biased upwards. This issue should not disrupt the basic picture that wartime mobilization was a sharp discontinuity, and involvement in the party-state has continued in the post-war generation, including at high positions.

process of incorporation set in motion by the shock of mobilization. People from mobilized families in the post-revolutionary generation are much more likely to have government jobs, leadership positions, skilled work, residence in the national capital, inter-ethnic marriage, and post-secondary education. In some sense, the idea that children follow in the footsteps of their parents is a mundane fact. However, the key point here is that the incorporative effects of mobilization spread, through families, beyond those directly mobilized, causing these effects to persist. Crucially, the within-family effects show that transformation and assimilation have not been based only or largely in modernization and industrialization (cf. Gellner, 1983), since such change would apply broadly through these communities. Rather, they are legacies of wartime mobilization. The revolutionary ideology as well, though it surely mattered, should apply to everyone under the state's administration and can thus not explain these variations.

Outcome variables

Using regression analysis, I more systematically test for the impact of historical mobilization on two outcome variables: party-state jobs and inter-ethnic marriage. These two variables get at political and economic changes as well as social-network and cultural changes. Party-state involvement brings economic benefits to individuals and communities in the form of steady salaries and pensions, wider social networks, and opportunities for kickbacks; such people can also benefit from further education and training, sometimes in Vientiane or foreign countries. Politically, it also comes with prestige, likely fosters ideological attachments to the nation-state, and ensures that the broader ethnic group continues to be represented at all levels of administration. I look at marriage patterns as an indicator for shifts in social networks and assimilation into the dominant lowland Lao culture. Inter-ethnic marriage was non-existent in the sample in generation 0, but became more commonplace starting with the revolutionary generation. These marriages reflect the shifts in social networks that came with wartime mobilization; they also further reify assimilative effects. In this setting, such couples and their children almost always communicate in the Lao language and identify with lowland Lao culture, though in some cases they adopt a multi-ethnic identity.

Model selection

I estimate standard logistic regressions of the form,

$$y_i = \exp(\alpha_j + \beta\boldsymbol{m}_i + \theta\boldsymbol{x_i}) + u_i, \tag{1}$$

where y_i is either having a government job or being in a cross-ethnic marriage, and the vector $\boldsymbol{m}_i$ includes the key treatment variables. This is a vector because in some models, I specify a list of the specific relationships to the mobilized. I include a village-specific intercept or, in some specifications, an area-specific intercept for each of the two clusters of villages, and I also include individual-level controls. 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. Furthermore, by controlling for the specific village, I further account for village histories that might have been pertinent to treatment assignment (differences in such histories that were revealed as a result of data collection are discussed in an appendix). Finally, I include controls for gender, birth-year cohorts, and family history of royalist mobilization, since these factors might independently affect the outcome variables. Generation 2 encompasses three different birth-year cohorts: 1961-1975, 1976-1990, and 1991 onwards. Individuals were coded as having a family history of FAR mobilization if anyone in their family was in the FAR.

5.3   Results: State Work

Testing H1a, I estimate two different models: in model 1, I use a measure that indicates if an individual has anyone in their extended family who was mobilized, while in model 2, I code specific, close family relationships.[10] Across the board, results support within-family inter-generational effects. The data is consistent with a story where the mobilized

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[10]Missing data is a potential issue since respondents do not know the histories of all family members. We discarded data on individuals for whom this was a severe problem. In cases of missing information, we also asked individuals for general information on whether people in the "missing" wing of the family had been mobilized during the wartime. See appendix.

Table 6: Generation 2, determinants of involvement in party-state

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Govt. work	Govt. work	Govt. work
Model	Logit	Logit	Logit
family mobilized	1.072***		
	(0.209)		
parent		1.274***	1.278***
		(0.192)	(0.206)
aunt/uncle		0.895***	0.789**
		(0.279)	(0.319)
sibling		1.21***	1.077***
		(0.261)	(0.265)
area1	−0.063	−0.026	
	(0.346)	(0.28)	
individual controls	✓	✓	✓
village dummies			✓
N	572	571	571

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

Table 7: Predicted probabilities of party-state involvement in generation 2

Model: 3, Village: 7, Birth cohort: 1975-1990, FAR: No			
	Only parent mobilized	Only aunt/uncle mobilized	No close family mobilized
Male	0.501	0.381	0.218
Female	0.218	0.146	0.072

generation mostly pulled in those that were very close personal relations in the subsequent generation. Due to the intensity of mobilization during the war time, this process has been enough to sustain meaningful party-state involvement in this community at both elite and sub-elite levels

5.4 Results: Inter-Ethnic Marriage

Strikingly, only about 4% of generation 2 individuals from unmobilized families married inter-ethnically in the sample, while about 20% of those from mobilized families did so (table 5). Testing H1b, regression analysis provides further evidence that a family history of mobilization was associated with inter-ethnic marriage in generation 2. In the case at hand, inter-ethnic marriage has virtually always involved cultural assimilation into

Table 8: Generation 2, inter-ethnic marriage

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Intereth. Marr.	Intereth. Marr.	Intereth. Marr.
Model	Logit	Logit	Logit
family mobilized	1.574***	1.78***	
	(0.482)	(0.446)	
parent			0.702
			(0.36)
aunt/uncle			0.562
			(0.628)
sibling			0.489
			(0.512)
grandparent			2.202**
			(0.865)
area1		−0.49	
		(0.61)	
individual controls	✓	✓	✓
village dummies	✓		✓
N	538	538	531

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

Table 9: Predicted probabilities of inter-ethnic marriage in generation 2

	Gender: F, Birth: 1975-1990, FAR: No			
	Model: 1		Model: 3	
Village	Family mobilized	Unmobilized	Only parent mobilized	No close family mobilized
3	0.253	0.065	0.154	0.083
7	0.2	0.049	0.186	0.102
8	0.092	0.021	0.066	0.034

a lowland Lao ethnicity; of course, this assimilative component of marriage might be different in other contexts. In this case, the specific relationship to the mobilized does not seem to matter as much, but having any mobilized relative still has a substantial impact. This suggests that more distant relatives, not just the direct descendants and siblings of the mobilized are also affected by shifts in social networks.

5.5   Mechanisms

"My dream when I was a child was to be a nurse. My uncle [who was a colonel] told me that if I studied hard, he would take me with him to be a military nurse."

Interviewee

Examples of inter-generational family-level clustering into government work are easy to find in the family histories. Such families seem to have become deeply attached to a culture of military service since the time of revolutionary mobilization, even tending to marry into other similar families. In several cases, people described how government workers from the mobilized generation pulled in their relatives, through a mix of encouragement and leveraging social networks and influence, to find and secure government jobs. A testament to the strength of these family connections are several cases where FAR soldiers, after undergoing years in re-education camps (*semana* in Laos—"seminar"), joined their siblings in working for local government. Descendants of those mobilized by the royalists in this area are in many cases integrated into the party-state through marriage and family connections.[11] Equally, those in mobilized families had nearby role models and examples tied to the party-state, who then shaped their ambitions, as was evident from interviews. Families, not just through patronage and connections, but also perhaps through deeper processes of socialization, have been a key component in how the incorporative effects of mobilization have persisted in these localities. In addition to rates of government work, these factors might help explain the divergent patterns in educational attainment, migration, and participation in non-governmental skilled work between descendants of mobilized and unmobilized families (table 5).

The cultural impacts of mobilization are tightly bound together with political and economic factors. Mobilization itself, and the experiences working in national political organizations, largely led by ethnic Lao, had a culturally assimilative effect. In some cases, for instance, Khmu revolutionaries adopted lowland Lao names, complete with last names, which are not traditionally used by the Khmu, in the process of mobilization

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[11]Interestingly, the coefficients on the FAR control are positive across specifications in the above regressions (see appendix).

(Sommai, 2019). Party-state involvement then took many Khmu people on educational and administrative "pilgrimages," which in their assimilative effect echoed those of colonial elites as described by Anderson (1983), as far as Vietnam and the USSR, but more commonly to Vientiane and regional centers, where they lived and worked in a dominantly lowland Lao cultural context with other revolutionaries from different backgrounds. Some of these people met spouses from other ethnic groups among their new colleagues and classmates. A shift in social networks, education (which was in Lao, the Khmu language has no written script), and indoctrination contributed to cultural assimilation, which was further reified through inter-ethnic marriages. Beyond families, culturally integrative effects have involved the creation of a new official Khmu national festival (Petit, 2013), Khmu media (Badenoch, 2018), and the relocation of villages closer to rivers and roads, which often involves changes in livelihoods and belief systems. Some of these processes also involve aspects of Khmu culture gaining prominence. I discuss these aspects in greater detail in an appendix. Overall, Khmu people themselves—specifically, those with strong revolutionary credentials—have been central to cultural transformations; it has not simply been imposed by outsiders. Though this is outside the scope of this study, such processes might matter for authoritarian resilience insofar as they reduce the salience of minority ethnic identity as a point of contention, and they do this in a way that is accepted by large segments of the minority community.

Altogether, findings support the key hypotheses; they illustrate ways in which the specific dynamics of violent conflict can themselves have deep societal repercussions, transforming interests and identities. These results identify family connections as an important pathway for the inter-generational, persistent incorporation of some peripheral communities in Laos, rooted in individual experiences of wartime mobilization.

6   Supplementary Results

Can the kinds of processes described above help explain political and economic inequalities throughout upland Laos more broadly? Testing hypothesis 2, I now move to an

analysis connecting wartime mobilization to subsequent economic and political outcomes across upland villages in Laos. This is a suggestive and correlational analysis that lends support to the idea that wartime legacies help explain subsequent patterns of spatial inequality across upland Laos. At the same time, these correlations are valuable because, as I show, they cannot be easily accounted for by alternate explanations or continuity with some deeper historical factors. The unit of analysis here is the village. The treatment variables are described below and attempt to capture intensive wartime mobilization at the village level. The key outcome variables are (i) poverty rate in 2015, (ii) post-revolutionary school construction between 1975-1990, and (iii) being the birthplace of member of the 9th Lao National Assembly (NA) in the post-revolutionary period. These variables speak to political and economic development and incorporation.

6.1 Measuring Mobilization

I focus on two wartime variables to capture mobilization: wartime school construction and birthplaces of National Assembly members who were revolutionaries.

Wartime schools

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

Information on the year of construction for every school in Laos that exists as of 2014 is publicly available through Open Development Mekong, a consortium of NGOs providing open access development-related data in the Mekong region. This is the best available

data, but there are imperfections due to the fact that details of how the data was collected are unavailable; missing data emanating from the extensive history of village relocation might be an issue. In order to identify wartime school construction by the Pathet Lao, I trace the evolution of areas of communist control using central intelligence bulletins and daily presidential briefs produced by the CIA and since declassified. I exclude Mekong lowland areas, since the focus here is on the uplands. I also exclude areas captured by the PL after 1973, since these places are unlikely to have seen much wartime mobilization by communists. The data and coding process is described in greater detail in an appendix.

Birthplaces of members of the 4th NA

A second, more direct, measure of mobilization is geocoded data on prominent revolutionaries who were mobilized. I use data on members of the Fourth National Assembly (1997-2002), since this is easily available from an official registry. Almost all members of the Fourth NA were mobilized into the war. The assumption is that places that were home to prominent revolutionaries had high levels of mobilization more generally. There are no signs that political leadership strives for geographical balance in the National Assembly; instead, famous revolutionary areas seem to be especially well represented. Figure 4 reveals a striking, though suggestive, correlation between 2015 poverty rates and wartime school building in the uplands as well as a clustering of wartime school building and birthplaces of National Assembly (NA) members in the Fourth and Ninth National Assemblies.

6.2   Identification and Model

Beyond geographic accessibility, there is no systematic accounting for why some villages had school-building while others did not; other reasons were likely local and idiosyncratic (see appendix). Though I do not make causal claims here, I attempt to account for a variety of observable and unobservable confounding factors. The empirical strategy is to structure highly local comparisons of villages through a district-level fixed effect. Districts are administrative units that include approximately 70 or 80 villages today, each typically within about 30 kilometers of one another. Thus, the idea is to compare

Figure 4: 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.

(a) Poverty rates and wartime schools   **(b)** Politician birthplaces and wartime schools
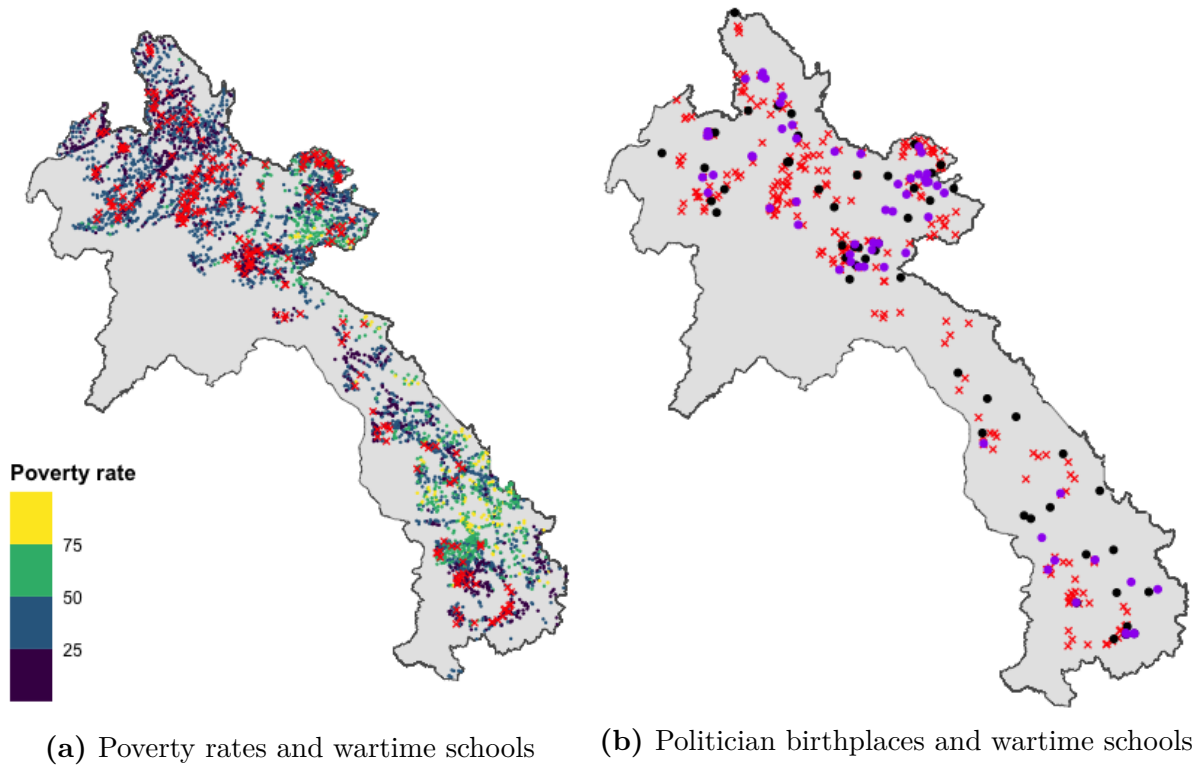
neighboring villages, which are likely to be similar across many unobservables. Given the entirely agricultural economies and basic state of economic development in pre-war times, there is also good reason to believe that unobservables that vary within districts are highly correlated with geography and climate, for which I also control (cf. Huillery, 2009).

A particularly important concern is that even within district, and after controlling for a range of geographical covariates, there might still be some villages that were already more developed before they received a wartime school. To address this concern, working with research assistants, I compiled a data set of pre-war settlement patterns. This dataset was hand-coded from American maps from the 1950s and 1960s. This then gives a measure of local settlement density, which likely correlates with economic development. It also provides info on which settlements were district and provincial capitals. Finally, as an

Table 10: 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

imperfect control for pre-war ethnicity, I coded a variable that indicates whether a village has a non Lao language name. The analysis can be interpreted causally if one believes that mobilization—as measured by wartime schools and birthplaces of revolutionaries— was "as if" random conditional on the district fixed effect and geographical and historical controls. Otherwise, table 10 shows that villages in more built-up areas, near district capitals and rivers, were more likely to see wartime school construction. A balance table for the NA birthplaces variable is available in an appendix.

Model

Estimating standard regression models, I consider three outcome variables that are indicative of benefits and connections emanating from the post-revolutionary party-state. These are: (1) poverty rate in 2015, measured as the percentage of people in the village below a common poverty threshold, (2) the number of schools built within five kilometers of the village in the immediate post-revolutionary period in 1976-1990, and (3) whether a candidate from the 9th National Assembly was born within 5 kilometers of the given village. The unit of analysis is the village. The treatment variables are (1) a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 if a school was constructed within five kilometers of the centroid of village i and (2) a similar variable that takes the value of 1 if a member of the 4th NA was born within 5 kilometers of the centroid of the village. I include a district-specific intercept for each district, so that effects are within-district. Additionally, I control for altitude, terrain roughness, river access, distance to the nearest international border, a dummy for being on an international border, and mean annual precipitation. I also use data from the Theater History of Operations Report (THOR), released by

the US Department of Defense, which includes information on all US air operations conducted during the course of the Vietnam War. To get a measure of the local intensity of bombing for each village, I count the number of airstrikes flown within five kilometers of each village according to THOR. I also control for several historical factors: (1) the number of named settlements within 5km of the village according to the historical maps, (2) whether the village is within 5km of a historical district or provincial capital, and (3) the number of settlements within 5km in 1965 that had non-Lao names.

6.3   Results

Table 11: Local economic and political legacies of wartime mobilization

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Poverty	N. Schools 76-90	9th NA
Model	OLS	Poisson	Logit
school	−3.018***	0.365***	1.09***
	(0.695)	(0.037)	(0.183)
4th NA birthplace	−1.797*	0.193***	0.044
	(0.856)	(0.047)	(0.024)
district dummies	✓	✓	✓
geographical controls & bombs	✓	✓	✓
historical controls	✓	✓	✓
adj. R^2	0.569		
N	4919	4919	4919

standard errors clustered by district, Bonferroni corrected α
$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$

Results from estimating these models support my hypothesis that patterns of benefits and state linkages are tied to histories of mobilization. Wartime school construction is associated with significant decreases in contemporary poverty rates, increases in subsequent 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. These results hold after structuring highly local comparisons and controlling for geographic and climactic factors, bombing histories, and pre-war settlement characteristics and patterns. This analysis, though suggestive, thus

points to a persistent social coalition in Laos emanating from wartime histories. 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.

6.4 Robustness Check

Table 12: Robustness check, post-war schools

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Poverty	Poverty	9th NA
Model	OLS	OLS	Logit
school 1975-1990	-1.282^{*}	-3.284^{***}	0.296
(no wartime school)	(0.719)	(0.842)	(0.376)
wartime school		-4.973^{***}	1.247^{***}
		(0.869)	(0.34)
4th NA birthplace		-1.648^{**}	0.441
		(0.820)	(0.66)
district dummies	✓	✓	✓
geographical controls & bombs	✓	✓	✓
historical controls	✓	✓	✓
adj. R^2	0.567	0.574	
N	4919	4919	4919

standard errors clustered by district
$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$

One concern with these results might be that they are consistent with a story of development leading to more development (cf. Huillery, 2009). The bottom-up mechanisms emanating from wartime mobilization that are central to my story thus might not be necessary for these results. The revolutionary birthplaces variable addresses this to some extent, since it captures areas that had prominent revolutionaries without having investments in schools. Here, 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 it does not predict contemporary National Assembly representation.

7 Conclusion

The specific dynamics of revolutionary conflict and mobilization can reshape social identities and define patterns of political and economic inequality in the post-conflict polity. Revolution is a break between old and new orders partly because the experiences of mobilization can transform individuals and, by extension, their families and broader communities. Patterns of mobilization then create new political hierarchies, impact long-run economic development, and influence paths of cultural change. I have shown these dynamics in the case of some communities in upland Laos, identifying families as a key conduit in the long-run persistence of incorporative effects rooted in mobilization. If revolution is a "rapid, fundamental, transformation of a society's class, state, ethnic or religious structures," (Skocpol, 1979), what are the drivers behind such transformations? How do we make sense of the balance between the inevitable continuities from the old order and the areas of durable, fundamental change? I have suggested that conflict and mobilization themselves are a fundamental driver of transformation.

The low levels of pre-conflict development and lack of strong prior political identities in upland Laos make it a useful baseline case for considering the incorporative effects of revolutionary mobilization. Additionally, the concept of a bottom-up "coalitional shock" rooted in mobilization, as opposed to cooptation of existing hierarchies, is a tool that allows for comparative traction, revealing alternative paths in the micro-dynamics of conflict and mobilization that might have come with significant downstream political and economic consequences. For instance, in contrast to Laos, in northwest Vietnam, not far from the areas under study here, Lentz (2019) argues that the communist coalition was based on an alliance between the majority Kinh and the Tai, who, as in Laos, were the incumbent elites in such areas. Thus, old regime hierarchies were preserved. Meanwhile

in the Dhufar region of Oman, another remote setting, revolutionary mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s, though unsuccessful in bringing about regime change, also led to significant shifts in local political hierarchies and political identities "from below" in a similar way to what I have described above (Takriti, 2013). An interesting question for further research involves the implications of revolutionary mobilization for political stability and regime resilience, building on the work of Levitsky & Way (2022) on revolutionary autocracies. This paper provides conceptual and empirical groundwork for considering the long-run societal effects of mobilization in diverse contexts.

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