

# The Pull of the Center

The Mobilizational Roots of Transformation in Social Revolution

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## Abstract

Millions of ordinary people, many from rural hinterlands, were mobilized into political organizations during violent revolutionary conflicts throughout the twentieth century. Yet the micro-level consequences of this intensive and uneven mobilization are poorly understood. Using a unique genealogical dataset from Laos, I test for the intergenerational effects of wartime mobilization into a revolutionary political party. Results show that descendants of mobilized revolutionaries were over twice as likely to work for the party-state as 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 forged new social and even kinship networks and conferred abilities and opportunities for advancement, leading to durable political and economic benefits, transmitted within reconstituted families. Revolutionary mobilization is a critical and undertheorized driver of post-revolutionary social stratification and state-society relations in revolutionary autocracies.

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

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# 1 Introduction

Soviet premier Nikita Krushchev, Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas, Vietnamese general secretary Le Duan, and Iranian general Qasem Soleimani: people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds—farmhands, laborers, and clerks—rose to the pinnacles of political power because of revolutions. While some such stories are well known, the micro-level impact of revolutionary mobilization has rarely been analyzed as constitutive to broader social transformation over the long-run.<sup>1</sup> Millions of common people were pulled in as participants in new political organizations during violent revolutionary conflicts throughout the twentieth century. What were the consequences of revolutionary mobilization on the political lives of these people and their descendants?

In this paper, I advance a view of post-revolutionary politics that centers legacies of revolutionary mobilization. Revolutionary mobilization is full-time participation in an organization engaged in violent conflict aimed at social revolution. This results in durable social transformation because it directly alters individual skills, social networks, and cultural norms at scale.<sup>2</sup> These “conversions” allow previously marginalized people and their descendants to reach and retain positions of power. Families, conduits for the persistence of pre-revolutionary culture and human capital,<sup>3</sup> 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.

I study the case of Laos, which represents one paradigm of twentieth century social revolution: intensive conflict and mobilization centered on rural areas followed by communist one-party rule. Laos also highlights underlying social transformation even

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Wood, 2003, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Lankina, 2022.

where top-down policies for social change, although attempted for a time, have been weakly implemented.<sup>4</sup> In Laos, the revolutionary centers in the uplands were composed of small villages, often only connected by mountainous foot tracks, largely inhabited by subsistence agriculturalists from diverse ethnicities.<sup>5</sup> Loose pre-revolutionary orders were profoundly disrupted by the Laotian Civil War in the mid twentieth century, 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 through infrastructural aid and training, 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 life stories of 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 includes histories of those who have died or moved away, recovered through the accounts of their family members who are still present. This data, covering approximately 900 individuals across three generations, was collected in nine villages that experienced large-scale communist mobilization during the war. It is precisely such rural hinterlands that were the centers of revolutionary movements in many parts of the world, ranging from Mozambique to El Salvador to Oman, in the 20th century. This genealogical data<sup>6</sup> allows me to uncover key mechanisms of durable change, against tendencies towards persistence in pre-revolutionary hierarchies emphasized in other work.<sup>7</sup>

Results show that newly mobilized people from communities with minimal involve-

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<sup>4</sup>Evans, 1990, p. 44-64. Resettlement of mountain villages to lowland areas, especially since the mid 1980s, is one notable area of state-led change—although planned and initiated from the top, even here, local state-society connections have been central to the implementation and outcomes of these efforts, Evrard & Goudineau, 2004.

<sup>5</sup>Evans, 1990, p. 27-31; cf. Scott, 2009.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>eg. Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Alesina *et al.*, 2020; Lankina, 2022.

ment with the state under the old regime became agents of the emerging communist party-state. New community connections to the state then persisted as locals in the post-war generation—especially the descendants of the mobilized—continued to work for the party-state and reach leadership positions. Key mechanisms of persistence in these state-society connections involved the family. In fact, a deeper social differentiation—reflected in education, migration, and marriage patterns, in addition to livelihoods—emerged between the descendants and close relations of mobilized revolutionaries and non-mobilized families. This was the result of individuals becoming embedded in new social networks centered on the party-state after mobilization: in the process, kinship networks were transformed as were the skills, values, and connections transmitted within these reconstituted families. Probing aggregate implications of these results, a second empirical analysis using a unique national dataset also finds that spatial inequalities along a range of political and economic variables across upland Laos are correlated with markers of revolutionary mobilization.

Methodologically, I separate the impact of mobilization from prior factors in three steps. First, I study communities where prior differences in occupation, class, and education were minimal.<sup>8</sup> 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, sensitivity analysis shows that, given these contextual factors, selection bias would have to be implausibly high to nullify the observed results.<sup>9</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup>Communities were geographically remote from political and economic centers. Izikowitz, 1951; Halpern, 1961a; Evans, 1990.

<sup>9</sup>Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.

authoritarianism. Results provide valuable microfoundations extending classic ideas of social class formation and modernization after communist revolutions.<sup>10</sup> 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 transformation by revolutionary regimes.<sup>11</sup> 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.

Against accounts that emphasize only a top-down, coercive role for states shaping their societies, I present a view where interactions, negotiation, and voice, although limited, are central to state-society relations.<sup>12</sup> James C. Scott, for instance, explains state formation in Zomia, a mountainous area spanning parts of South and Southeast Asia including much of Laos, after the mid twentieth century as a process rooted in repression and technological change, which allowed lowlanders affiliated with the state to colonize highland communities.<sup>13</sup> Instead, I show how local highlanders themselves have been central to forging enduring state-society linkages after conversions through revolutionary mobilization. Results shed light on the puzzle of the rapidity with which even poorly resourced states have come to control previously distant and decentralized areas, often with surprisingly little resistance.

Finally, I illustrate how revolutionary autocracies have embedded themselves in local communities. This perspective has been neglected in the recent literature on authoritarianism, which focuses instead on elite-level dynamics, repression, and institutional manipulation by dictators.<sup>14</sup> The focus on mobilization itself, and mechanisms of persistence, is also distinct from older work that emphasized class-based alliances between regimes and segments of society.<sup>15</sup> Mobilizational post-conflict autocracies benefit from

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<sup>10</sup>Djilas, 1957; Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1979; Fitzpatrick 1981, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup>Janos, 1994;Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Pop-Eleches, 2007; Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Alesina *et al.*, 2020; Lankina; 2022.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Barkey, 1994; Zhang & Lee, 2020; Nathan, 2023.

<sup>13</sup>Scott, 2009, p. xii, 282.

<sup>14</sup>Gandhi, 2008; Slater, 2010; Svolik, 2012; Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; Meng & Paine, 2022.

<sup>15</sup>Skocpol, 1979, p. 279-280.

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

I first theorize the mechanisms through which revolutionary mobilization creates durable social transformation. The idea that revolutionary mobilization itself is personally transformative was central to the thinking of communist revolutionaries like Lenin, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh.<sup>16</sup> Revolutionary leaders saw warfare as a way to politicize the peasantry and reconstitute the state by forcibly drawing in large numbers of marginalized people into the organs of an emerging party-state. Focusing on a case where revolutionaries were victorious, 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 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.<sup>17</sup> This is the key independent variable in my analysis. 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.<sup>18</sup> These factors, moreover, often all work at once; for instance, land reform, which might be naturally seen as a policy concession,<sup>19</sup> is also a direct way to politicize the peasantry, since it is implemented by marginalized people who are specifically mobilized for this purpose.<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>16</sup>Huntington, 1968, p. 337; Fitzpatrick, 1981; Goscha, 2012, 2022.

<sup>17</sup>This follows Skocpol's (1979) definition of revolution without imposing a social class structure on the patterns of revolutionary mobilization.

<sup>18</sup>Zasloff, 1973, p. 79; Moran & Waldron, 2003; Goscha, 2022, p. 262-263.

<sup>19</sup>Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020, p. 565; Stewart, 2021, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup>Walder, 2015, p. 45-49; Goscha, 2022, p. 412-413.

party-state: an organization that both amalgamates political, administrative, and military functions and monopolizes political participation in areas under its control.

Revolutionary mobilization is a critical moment of individual transformation.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> In addition to political, military, and administrative training and ideological 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 and world view.<sup>23</sup> After the conflict, 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 their communities. This rests on the fact that their parents and other relatives are generally left home—while new connections are built, old connections carry a cultural and emotional weight preventing them from breaking. When revolutionaries are drawn unevenly from previously marginalized social backgrounds, patterns of social stratification are transformed relative to the pre-revolutionary situation. Here, canonical accounts of civil war are consistent with the possibility that patterns of mobilization in many cases do not simply carry over old social divides: participation and factionalization respond to local and contingent processes internal to the conflict itself, like past local histories, proximity to armed forces, or the timing and sequencing of episodes of fighting.<sup>24</sup> While this often involves strategic choices and pre-revolutionary networks, there is space for new networks

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

<sup>22</sup>By “human capital” I mean specifically the organizational and administrative skills and habits necessary for more formalized labor, whether in government bureaucracies or private organizations.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. McAdam, 1989, p. 745-746; also Goscha (2004), who compares revolutionary mobilization to missionary work. These effects come with more political content than military mobilization—mobilizing further recruits and organizing civilian support—and they involve wider networks, cohered by an integrated political party, cf. Pholsena, 2012, 2017.

<sup>24</sup>Kalyvas, 2003, p. 480; Wood, 2003, p. 226-229, 237-240; Walder & Chu, 2020.

and factions to emerge in highly contingent ways through mobilization.

The impact of revolutionary mobilization goes beyond top-down cooptation or pure patronage in at least two ways. First, it is not ascriptive categories in themselves—for example, ethnicity or lineage—that determine the reach of benefits and broader transformations, but rather embeddedness in revolutionary networks, originating in contingent patterns of mobilization. Ideological attachment is also a function of social ties according to a large literature on the sociology of political participation;<sup>25</sup> therefore, the strength of ideological ties covaries with network embeddedness, especially given a party-state that consistently injects ideological indoctrination. Second, transformation extends beyond the scope and control of the state. It is not just the flow of benefits but the capacity of locals to utilize benefits and adapt to new conditions that is directly affected by the uneven “shock” of mobilization: mobilization causes changes to networks, human capital, and norms and aspirations, which then spread within families.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Mechanisms of durable transformation

Mobilization creates durable spillover effects on families and communities contingently through two closely related mechanisms. First is network embeddedness: veterans become durably embedded in new networks centered on the party-state; they and their descendants then (1) form new kinds of families reflecting these connections and (2) use their connections, skills, and influence to draw benefits to their communities. The second mechanism is within-family socialization: veterans socialize new values and norms within their families, sustaining these norms, skills, and aspirations, which are rooted in revolutionary mobilization, across generations.<sup>27</sup>

After the end of conflict, where these mechanisms do not operate, positions of power or wealth that came into the hands of previously marginalized groups will tend to revert. This happens because old elite groups often manage to culturally preserve advantages

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<sup>25</sup>Eg. McAdam, 1989; Wood, 2003.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Zhang & Lee, 2020. Also cf. Nathan’s (2023) account of rural state-society relations in non-revolutionary African contexts, where resource shocks from the state alone—delivered on a thin elite selected through ethnic criteria—determine paths of social stratification.

<sup>27</sup>Bisin & Verdier, 2001; Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Carnes & Lupu, 2025.

in human capital, eventually outcompeting others for positions of power or wealth.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, if network embeddedness is insufficient, new networks formed through revolutionary mobilization also decay or fracture as individuals prioritize old identities, like ethnicity or ancestral social class, in associating with one another.<sup>29</sup>

A concrete illustration of reversion in hierarchies 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.<sup>30</sup> 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 a pattern of colonization by dominant groups who monopolize the state, and old legacies prevailed.

Where the human capital shock, along with both mechanisms of continued network embeddedness and family socialization, reinforce each other, downstream effects are more durable. 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.<sup>31</sup> Changes in not just professional or social networks but also familial networks are more likely to be resilient due to the cultural primacy of family ties. In turn, new kinds of families centered on revolutionary networks

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<sup>28</sup>Lankina, 2022.

<sup>29</sup>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. Mobilization might even seed future violent contention if it happens in ways where marginalized groups gain skills and combat experience without a parallel process of integration that breaks down old social, cultural, and political divides through changes in social and kinship networks, cf. Jha & Wilkinson, 2012; Talibova, 2023.

<sup>30</sup>Baird, 2020.

<sup>31</sup>Kuipers 2025 highlights the tension between performance-related pressures towards meritocracy, which favor historically privileged groups, and politically rooted representational pressures in state bureaucracies. This tension should be less acute when historically marginalized groups have built human capital through mobilization.

become the vehicle through which mobilization's effects persist intergenerationally.<sup>32</sup> In the simultaneous movement in a range of social factors, durable change after mobilization resembles a selective process of modernization, concentrated on mobilized individuals and those close to them.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, expansion in human capital endowments and social networks allows veterans and their descendants to productively engage and interact with the party-state.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.3 Expectations

From common pre-revolutionary livelihoods in marginalized communities in Laos, I test whether revolutionary mobilization created new kinds of stratification, where mobilized people and their descendants built durably higher human capital, wider social networks, stronger connections to the party-state, and weaker adherence to traditional cultural norms. These outcomes address the key mechanisms of network embeddedness and family socialization. The operation of these mechanisms affects even factors—like marriage patterns—outside of the purview of the state; it leads to persistent and uneven shifts in both locals' ability to engage the state and adapt to new political and economic conditions. I expect to see a durable rise of some peripheral people and communities due to revolution that varies with exposure to 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. In the context of closed economies and low development, access to state jobs represents a real shift in hierarchies due to the resources and prestige it brings.<sup>35</sup> 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

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<sup>32</sup>In several cases of rural communist revolution, such effects have also been accompanied by the large-scale exodus and elimination of incumbent skilled groups, Lary, 2012, p. 124-125; Goscha, 2016, p. 385-386.

<sup>33</sup>Providing a different view of the idea that communism represented a distinct path of modernization, cf. Moore, 1966; Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1979.

<sup>34</sup>Zhang & Lee, 2020; Wood, 2003, p. 235-236.

<sup>35</sup>Nathan, 2023; Kuipers, 2025.

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.<sup>36</sup>

The second hypothesis then speaks to deeper societal transformations: 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, I home in on family socialization as a key mechanism in social persistence. Revolutionary mobilization creates a disjuncture because it ruptures and then reconstitutes families, thus breaking old continuities before new skills and culture are socialized. By studying inter-ethnic marriage, I test whether mobilization transformed kinship relations from a baseline of virtually exclusive endogamy—an important finding in its own right. This also illustrates network embeddedness: new cross-ethnic bonds forged in mobilization and sustained through subsequent participation in the party-state are entrenched because they shape new kinds of family connections. I complement quantitative tests with qualitative illustrations further probing and characterizing the mechanisms of network embeddedness and family socialization. As an implication of these micro-level transformations, I expect revolutionary mobilization to help explain spatial stratification across a range of political and economic outcomes in aggregate.

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<sup>36</sup>While policy aimed at equalization has been the explicit aim of many revolutionary governments, implementation has often proven to be challenging, cf. Martin, 2001, p. 125-181.

## 2.4 Scope

Scope conditions follow from the central mechanisms. First, there must be a significant initial shock to human capital endowments and social networks through mobilization. Second, transformation is then sustained intergenerationally as a strong party-state maintains power, families reproduce skills and norms, and revolutionary network ties are reified into familial ties. Connections to parents and relatives at home are still maintained, allowing transformations to spread more broadly. The key mechanisms are most likely to operate in autocratic contexts in heavily mobilized rural “hinterland” areas, where the relative impact of the initial shock is greater. Where pre-existing human capital allocations are thin and modern political organizations, like bureaucracies and political parties, are weak, competitive pressures from pre-existing elite groups and forms of identity are likely to be less.<sup>37</sup> Even where preexisting inequalities are more significant, widespread and intense mobilization might still yield the changes to social and kinship networks theorized here, grounding the formation of new groups and identities.

Communism—especially Maoism—is relevant here because it presents an explicit theory of politics centered on mobilizing marginalized populations into strong party organizations, building human capital, and destroying old social linkages and hierarchies. However, this ideology is neither necessary nor sufficient: similar impacts might be more likely in Iran, for instance, especially after the Iran-Iraq War because of the strength and coherence of revolutionary organizations than in Khmer Rouge Cambodia, where rapid and weakly organized mobilization led to a heavily factionalized organization characterized by catastrophic internal conflict.<sup>38</sup> Other areas with similar impacts to those found here 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 Caucasus, and perhaps parts of post-revolutionary Mexico.<sup>39</sup> Importantly, places where communism, or other regimes claiming to advance revolutionary social transformation, have been imposed entirely from the outside or through military coups are excluded from

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Nathan 2023, p. 9-14.

<sup>38</sup>Kiernan, 1996.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Pipes, 1964, p. 195-199 on the U.S.S.R and Koss, 2018 on China.

the scope of the theory.

Another way to think about scope here is in terms of the method and perspective. Cases of revolutionary defeat are a relevant area of extension in this sense, where post-conflict outcomes can be fruitfully analyzed through the same micro and long-run perspective on revolutions, centering the individual impact of mobilization. In places like Thailand, Colombia, Oman, and Philippines—among many others—post-conflict paths have been very different from where revolutionaries succeeded, but the key mechanisms involving family socialization and network effects after mobilization might still be important for post-conflict politics.<sup>40</sup>

### 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 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, while the average village had fewer than 100 residents; locals were largely subsistence farmers.<sup>41</sup> Conflict over land was thus not salient. There were active trade networks in opium and forest products and, in some communities, largely temporary labor migrations to Siam and Burma.<sup>42</sup> Buddhist monastic networks extended into some upland communities, while Christian missionary activity was minimal.<sup>43</sup> Roads, telecommunications, and schooling infrastructure was virtually nonexistent. By and large, there

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<sup>40</sup>See Takriti, 2013 on Oman.

<sup>41</sup>Izikowitz, 1951; Halpern, 1961b.

<sup>42</sup>Evrard, 2016.

<sup>43</sup>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.

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.<sup>44</sup>

Laos is made up of people who speak a variety of unrelated languages and follow diverse cultural traditions, brought together by colonial-era conflicts in southern China and between France and Siam that set borders and caused migrations.<sup>45</sup> Borders, to some extent, correspond to the historical reach of the Lan Xang Kingdom, which ruled from Vientiane and Luang Prabang between the 14th and early 18th centuries. 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%.<sup>46</sup>

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.<sup>47</sup> 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. 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.”

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.<sup>48</sup> Subse-

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<sup>44</sup>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.

<sup>45</sup>Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 24-33.

<sup>46</sup>Statistics Bureau, 2015a, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup>eg. Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup>Stuart-Fox, 1997.

quently, splits emerged among the Lao elite between those willing to support French rule and those siding with the Viet Minh's anti-French insurgency in Indochina; this faction developed into the communist Pathet Lao (PL), heavily supported by North Vietnam.<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> Fighting subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975. Between 1964 and 1973, the U.S. dropped over two million tons of ordnance over Laos, heavily concentrated on areas bordering Vietnam in southern and eastern Laos.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.1 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.<sup>53</sup> Leadership positions at the district level and above under the old regime were almost always held by Lao-Tai aristocrats. The communists, who were based in upland areas bordering Vietnam during much of the war, have claimed to represent a multi-ethnic Lao people and to champion the interests of minorities since the wartime period.<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

Today, a diversity of ethnic groups are represented at all levels of the party-state,

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<sup>49</sup>Goscha, 2004.

<sup>50</sup>Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 73-79.

<sup>51</sup>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; Lee, 2015; Naotoayang, 2014; Baird, 2021b. See Goudineau, 1997, p. 23 for examples of local geographical splits among and within Khmu subgroups.

<sup>52</sup>Pholsena, 2010.

<sup>53</sup>Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002.

<sup>54</sup>Neo Lao Haksat, 1970; Neo Lao Haksat, 1980. The core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese.

<sup>55</sup>Baird, 2021a.

**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 Assembly                                   | 2006 | 115        | 20%               |
| 4th National Assembly                                   | 1997 | 99         | 32.32%            |
| LPRP, 4th Politburo                                     | 1986 | 13         | 7.69%             |
| LPRP, 2nd Politburo                                     | 1972 | 7          | 0%                |

including in the Politburo and Central Committee, which are the primary policy-making bodies (Table 1). 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. Originally compiled data on the National Assembly of Laos—a one-party legislature—gives some sense of the extent to which the deeper ranks of the party-state encompass underlying social groups (see Appendix A). At the same time, many of the poorest and most isolated communities in the country are ethnic minority communities.<sup>56</sup> In making sense of this differentiation, I build on work by scholars of Laos who highlight the importance of revolutionary histories as a source of political capital.<sup>57</sup>

### 3.2 An illustrative biography

The life story of an ethnic minority Khmu man who ended his career as a brigadier general (naiphon chattava)—the fourth highest rank—in the Lao Peoples’ Liberation Army (LPLA) helps connect the theory to the context.<sup>58</sup> Naiphon Chan was born in an upland village in northern Laos in around 1950 to a family that lived by subsistence agriculture and the gathering of forest products. He was taught to read and write by

<sup>56</sup>In aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates by ethnicity, with significant variation across geographical areas and within the broad ethnolinguistic categories (Table A.1). Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170.

<sup>57</sup>Goudineau, 1997; Evrard, 2011; Pholsena, 2012; Baird & Le Billon, 2012; Dwyer, 2022.

<sup>58</sup>This information is based on a biographical manuscript provided by the family. Chan is a pseudonym, as are all names of respondents used in this paper. Evrard (2011) provides a similar biography of the rise of an ethnic Khmu man from humble beginning to provincial governorship in a different part of northern Laos.

party staff and drafted into the communist army as a child. At first a cook and animal handler, after fighting against the Royal Lao Government (RLG), he was promoted and selected to receive training to be an army doctor. As hostilities subsided in 1975, when he was in his mid-twenties, he was a party member, involved in district-level administration of the military and youth union, and was also the chief of the district-level court.

He continued education in Vietnam in 1976, 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 but also retained connections to his community, rooted in the fact that his parents remained there. 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.

## 4 Family histories

With the aid of local partners, a sample of family histories was gathered from nine ethnic Khmu villages in northern Laos.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> These communities, belonging to the Khmu Ou subgroup, were heavily mobilized by the communists during the Laotian Civil War while also being historically distant from centers of state power.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>The bulk of the data was collected in 2023 and 2024.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

<sup>61</sup>Geographical details are omitted in order to ensure anonymity of respondents. Existing work on the Khmu is exclusively conducted by anthropologists and focuses on different Khmu subgroups in northwestern Laos, Evrard, 2006; Stolz, 2021. The areas under study are both much farther from Thailand and Burma and closer to Pathet Lao and Vietnamese revolutionary centers than those studied in this existing literature.

These histories recover the stories of approximately 900 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.<sup>62</sup> A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted.<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup>

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

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<sup>62</sup>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.

<sup>63</sup>The collected family histories should only be seen as representative for Khmu in the specific area under study.

<sup>64</sup>Blattman, 2009; Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Finkel, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Sánchez De La Sierra, 2020.

<sup>65</sup>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.

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.<sup>66</sup> In all but one village, follow-up conversations with original respondents and 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. While it cannot be fully ruled out, 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—the most sensitive aspect of family history—at rates that exceeded prior expectations.

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 displaced or have migrated away is typically available, since family members who have remained in the surveyed villages know the histories of such people. Based on interviews where we directly asked local elders about 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**

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

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<sup>66</sup>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.

idea behind the treatment.<sup>67</sup> At lower levels of work, the day-to-day life of the person did not significantly shift away from that of a local farmer.<sup>68</sup> This coding particularly excludes many women who contributed to the revolution through labor or even as local mobilizing cadres but were never formally integrated into the revolutionary organization beyond very local levels.<sup>69</sup>

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 controlled for in the regression 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.

In the area under study, beyond its intensiveness, the local dynamics of mobilization were haphazard and do not map on to pre-revolutionary interests. In the words of one local man,<sup>70</sup> “Others made the war where we lived. We didn’t know anything—people were pulled one way and another and were just looking for safety.” 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

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<sup>67</sup>A more detailed qualitative account of local mobilization and pre-revolutionary society, based on fieldwork and interviews conducted over several years, is available in an Appendix D.

<sup>68</sup>Similar coding decisions are made, for instance, in Walder’s (2002) study of cadre households in rural China.

<sup>69</sup>Appendix D.4 details several stories of women during the revolution. I leave a more thorough treatment of the impact of revolution on gender for future work.

<sup>70</sup>The son of a royalist soldier, who also had family on the communist side.

**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* (sub-district) head, trader, or important spiritual figure based on reported data.

|                    | Mobilized |       |       | Unmobilized |       |       | Diff.  | p-value  |
|--------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|--------|----------|
|                    | N         | Mean  | Sd.   | N           | Mean  | Sd.   |        |          |
| Female             | 63        | 0.079 | 0.272 | 166         | 0.518 | 0.501 | -0.439 | 0.000*** |
| Ave. no. siblings  | 52        | 4.981 | 1.831 | 111         | 5.261 | 2.012 | -0.280 | 0.379    |
| Monk (males)       | 55        | 0.255 | 0.440 | 79          | 0.266 | 0.445 | -0.011 | 0.885    |
| From area 1        | 63        | 0.333 | 0.475 | 166         | 0.283 | 0.452 | 0.050  | 0.471    |
| Other family mob.  | 60        | 0.700 | 0.462 | 156         | 0.545 | 0.500 | 0.155  | 0.033**  |
| Notable prior gen. | 51        | 0.412 | 0.497 | 117         | 0.333 | 0.473 | 0.078  | 0.343    |

p-values from standard two-sided t-test based on CLT,  $H_0$ : difference in means is 0.  
 $*p < 0.1$ ;  $**p < 0.05$ ;  $***p < 0.01$

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 and labor are captured by the “notable prior generation” variable, on which there is balance.<sup>71</sup>

A particularly important pre-revolutionary societal network was the Buddhist priesthood.<sup>72</sup> Temples were the only source of education in this area in pre-revolutionary times, which was limited to young boys who became monks.<sup>73</sup> There is evidence of clustering by family, though this effect disappears in a regression analysis of the determinants of mobilization controlling for village (Table A.2).<sup>74</sup> Overall, there is strong evidence that

<sup>71</sup>This combines different notable histories because there are so few (one or two) cases in each category.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. Hansen, 2007; Zaw, 2024.

<sup>73</sup>Work on Russia suggests education was an important factor in mobilization, Lankina *et al.*, 2016.

<sup>74</sup>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 interviews with locals who experienced the war, the result on number of siblings is likely because people were able to avoid conscription when their siblings had already been conscripted.

mobilization did not simply replicate existing patterns of social stratification. A significant exception is gender, reflecting the military dimensions of mobilization and biases in recruitment, as well as gender norms and responsibilities maintained by local families (Appendix D.4).

## 5 Main results

### 5.1 Local trends: Connections to the state

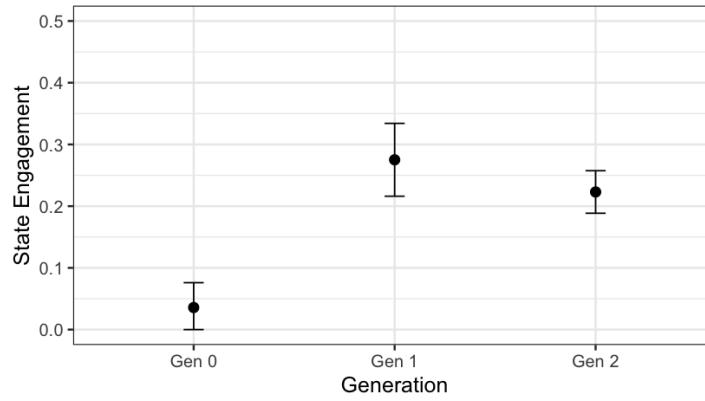
This section presents sample trends in participation in state organizations. The remainder of Section 5 then tests the key hypotheses, drawing the analytic connection between historical mobilization of family members and subsequent individual-level shifts in livelihoods, networks, human capital, and norms through regression analysis and qualitative materials.

Involvement with the state increased during the wartime generation and remained at a significantly higher level in the post-war generation. The pre-war generation is denoted generation 0, generation 1 is the wartime generation, and generation 2 is the immediate post-war generation. “State engagement” in Figure 1 measures those who were mobilized in generation 1 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 on either side, with about 27% being mobilized by the communists.<sup>75</sup> Much of this involvement came from military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff.

During the war, distinction between political, administrative, and military roles was not always sharply drawn, with the same individuals sometimes 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. Even in generation 2, which largely includes

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<sup>75</sup>Royalist involvement is driven entirely by mobilization into the armed forces (FAR). 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.



| Generation         | N   | Female | State Engagement | Military | High Positions |
|--------------------|-----|--------|------------------|----------|----------------|
| 0                  | 85  | 0.447  | 0.036            | 0.036    | 0              |
| 1                  | 229 | 0.397  | 0.275            | 0.188    | 0.057          |
| 1 (incl. royalist) |     |        | (0.377)          | (0.297)  |                |
| 2                  | 584 | 0.491  | 0.223            | 0.144    | 0.038          |

**Figure 1: Local trends and sample characteristics**

The graph shows proportions of the sample who worked for the state across three generations. Gen 0 is the pre-war generation; gen 1 is the wartime generation (born between 1940 and 1960); gen 2 are the children, nieces, nephews, and younger siblings of gen 1 born after 1960. Error bars indicate two standard error intervals. The elevated rate in gen 1 reflects wartime mobilization. The table shows proportions of sample who were women, worked for the state, worked for the military, and attained high positions for each generation. The parenthetical row for gen 1 takes the sum of the proportions of royalist and communist mobilization in the sample.

people born from the 1960s to the 1980s,<sup>76</sup> working for the party-state remained the predominant form of formal employment in this area, also providing economic benefits and further access to training. Even positions like teachers and policemen (officers of the Ministry of Public Security) were sought after for economic benefits and prestige.<sup>77</sup>

Individuals are 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

<sup>76</sup>193 people in generation 2 were born between 1961-1975, 269 between 1975-1990, and 116 after 1990. The variation in birth-year cohorts is controlled for in analysis and reflects the fact that the generation is relationally defined.

<sup>77</sup>Though somewhat diminished in contemporary times, one piece of evidence that government jobs remain desirable is the large numbers of people working as volunteers without pay in government bureaucracies in rural Laos.

senior soldiers and police. Two out of 229 people in the sample died on the battlefield, while two more became permanently disabled.<sup>78</sup> 63 out of 229 people were mobilized in the revolution, while 130 out of 584 people in generation 2 worked full-time for the party-state.

## 5.2 Mobilization, kinship, and the state

To directly test if party-state work in generation 2 is rooted in histories of revolutionary mobilization, 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 distinguishing family histories of revolutionary mobilization in the prior generation. The model is estimated on the sample of 584 individuals in generation 2.<sup>79</sup> 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 further account for village histories by controlling for the specific village (or “area” encompassing a sampling cluster, see Appendix B). In Table 3, column 1, individuals 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.

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 (Table 3).<sup>80</sup> Predicted probabilities of working for the party-state are highest for children of revolutionary veterans—in some cases, reaching close to 50%—but also remain significantly elevated for nephews and

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<sup>78</sup>Conservatively assuming that an equal number of people were injured but not permanently, this amounts to a casualty rate among soldiers of about 12%. Samples are too small to reliably analyze variation in casualty rates. Mostly, the civilian population was not directly exposed to bombing and combat in this area. Through conversations over multiple years with local elders on wartime histories, I am not aware of cases where entire families were killed due to fighting—this is consistent with the fact that the area did not see the same levels of heavy aerial bombardment as other parts of Laos.

<sup>79</sup>After accounting for areas of missing data,  $N = 568$ .

<sup>80</sup>Results are robust to inference using wild cluster bootstrap (Appendix E.4).

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

|                                                                       | (1)                 | (2)                 | (3)                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| DV                                                                    | Govt. work          | Govt. work          | Govt. work          |
| Model                                                                 | Logit               | Logit               | Logit               |
| family mobilized                                                      | 1.164***<br>(0.224) |                     |                     |
| parent                                                                |                     | 1.289***<br>(0.2)   | 1.289***<br>(0.222) |
| aunt/uncle                                                            |                     | 0.903***<br>(0.302) | 0.765**<br>(0.325)  |
| sibling                                                               |                     | 1.142***<br>(0.219) | 0.984***<br>(0.25)  |
| area1                                                                 | -0.084<br>(0.376)   | 0.015<br>(0.34)     |                     |
| individual controls                                                   | ✓                   | ✓                   | ✓                   |
| village dummies                                                       |                     |                     | ✓                   |
| N                                                                     | 568                 | 568                 | 568                 |
| Standard errors clustered by village, Bonferroni corrected $\alpha$ . |                     |                     |                     |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$                          |                     |                     |                     |

**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                     |

nieces of veterans. 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. 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.<sup>81</sup> A supplementary subgroup analysis shows that effects are strongest among the family members of mobilized soldiers and those who attained high ranks (Table A.3); these are arguably the people most deeply embedded in revolutionary networks—in the case of soldiers, because of shared combat experiences and living for extended periods away from home, embedded in military units.

Sensitivity analysis, following Cinelli & Hazlett,<sup>82</sup> shows that in order for results to

<sup>81</sup>The coefficient on FAR is close to 0 and not statistically significant.

<sup>82</sup>Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.

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).<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

### **Revolutionary network embeddedness**

Qualitative histories illustrate the key mechanism of network embeddedness in this transformation. Some families have become deeply embedded in party-state networks after mobilization, with the majority of marriages even occurring within these networks. For instance, consider the family of Nang and Vieng, both born in the 1940s. Although both Nang and Vieng have been farmers all of their lives, Nang’s older brother was mobilized as a teacher and political cadre during the war, while one of her younger brothers was an army medic; although neither reached high positions, both were integrated into party-state networks, with her younger brother even meeting his wife—a teacher in a different province—through revolutionary mobilization.

Nang and Vieng’s children were encouraged and helped by their uncles, who drew on their connections in the government system, in entering party-state jobs and networks. Through ancestral connections to revolutionaries, they have also become embedded in party-state networks. Out of their six children, one holds a senior rank in the Ministry of Public Security and is married to another senior policeman from a different ethnicity: the relationship was formed through party-state networks. Another is a farmer married to

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<sup>83</sup>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.

<sup>84</sup>The instrument, in practice, separates those families whose young men were just too young or too old to be targeted for conscription at this time from those who had young men in their teens and early twenties. The exclusion restriction plausibly holds; potential threats are discussed in Appendix E.3.

a soldier; yet another attained a tertiary education in the capital of Laos and married a district-level doctor. The youngest is a secondary school teacher married to a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education from a *Lao Soung* ethnic background, who was educated in Vietnam.<sup>85</sup>

While local families were almost always rooted in shared traditional cultures under the old regime,<sup>86</sup> mobilized families have since often grown from and further solidified party-state networks, which span ethnic lines. No such process of shifting familial patterns has applied to families with weaker connections to the revolutionary organization. Though I cannot directly measure ideological attachment due to political constraints in collecting such data in Laos, the strength of these new networks, reified in family connections, shows that post-mobilization changes go beyond purely instrumental calculations: the changes are even embodied in the identities of family members.

### 5.3 Social networks and human capital

Table 4 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. Many areas of change are not controlled by the state, illustrating how the story is not simply one of a favored group receiving state benefits.

Changes in education and marriage patterns especially speak to the durability of revolutionary changes. Human capital accumulation 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.<sup>87</sup> Although skilled jobs outside of government were minimal in this rural sample, which mostly includes people born prior to 1990, this adaptability arguably shows up in the fact that those

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<sup>85</sup>This information was collected during surveying in December 2023 from individual 9.526.

<sup>86</sup>See Stolz (2021) on the intricacies of kinship and marriage in a Khmu community from a different subgroup.

<sup>87</sup>The missing data on diplomas largely comes from the fact that relatives of mobilized people who have moved away were unsure about the educational attainment of these people. The differences are thus likely biased downwards, since mobilized people who have moved away are the most likely group to attain tertiary education.

**Table 4: Generation 2, sample characteristics by mobilization history**

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

| Mobilization      | Leader                    | Diploma                   | Inter-ethnic              | Skilled                   | Migr. to capital          | Sibs.                     |
|-------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| None              | 0.016<br>(0.006)<br>[190] | 0.017<br>(0.009)<br>[176] | 0.038<br>(0.01)<br>[182]  | 0.037<br>(0.014)<br>[190] | 0.053<br>(0.011)<br>[190] | 5.426<br>(0.166)<br>[183] |
| Family            | 0.048<br>(0.016)<br>[393] | 0.142<br>(0.018)<br>[310] | 0.197<br>(0.029)<br>[365] | 0.077<br>(0.013)<br>[391] | 0.118<br>(0.023)<br>[391] | 5.561<br>(0.107)<br>[392] |
| Parent/sibling    | 0.073<br>(0.02)<br>[177]  | 0.162<br>(0.028)<br>[136] | 0.203<br>(0.03)<br>[158]  | 0.073<br>(0.037)<br>[176] | 0.114<br>(0.02)<br>[176]  | 5.77<br>(0.151)<br>[177]  |
| No parent/sibling | 0.022<br>(0.007)<br>[405] | 0.071<br>(0.013)<br>[350] | 0.121<br>(0.016)<br>[388] | 0.059<br>(0.012)<br>[404] | 0.089<br>(0.014)<br>[404] | 5.406<br>(0.111)<br>[397] |

**Table 5: Regression results, inter-ethnic marriage and education**

|                                                                                       | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| DV                                                                                    | Inter-ethnic marriage | Inter-ethnic marriage | Diploma         |
| Model                                                                                 | Logit                 | Logit                 | Logit           |
| family mobilized                                                                      | 1.571***<br>(0.571)   | 1.300**<br>(0.524)    | 2.3*<br>(1.198) |
| govt. work                                                                            |                       | 2.022***<br>(0.396)   |                 |
| individual controls                                                                   | ✓                     | ✓                     | ✓               |
| village dummies                                                                       | ✓                     | ✓                     | ✓               |
| N                                                                                     | 534                   | 534                   | 471             |
| Standard errors clustered by village.<br>* $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                       |                       |                 |

from mobilized families participate in non-governmental skilled labor at roughly twice the rate as those from unmobilized families.<sup>88</sup>

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. Like in the case of the family described above, inter-ethnic marriages brought Khmu people into familial relationships with people from historically more privileged Lao-Tai communities

<sup>88</sup>Working in an office setting, owning or operating a business, working in a technical trade, and working in the arts are skilled jobs.

as well as other minority groups, all brought together in revolutionary networks.<sup>89</sup> Regression analysis (Table 5) provides further evidence that a family history of mobilization led to higher rates of inter-ethnic marriage and tertiary education in the post-revolutionary generation, after controlling for village and individual factors as above. Further probing mechanisms, column 2 shows that a significant effect on marriage patterns persists even after controlling for government employment of the generation 2 individual, suggesting that the marriage effect is not fully explained by direct network access through state work—though this is also important—and thus involves a within-family transmission of networks, norms, or both. This suggests that both the network embeddedness and family socialization mechanisms are behind the change in kinship patterns tied to histories of revolutionary mobilization.<sup>90</sup>

## 5.4 Disaggregating mechanisms

The two key mechanisms, though often operating together, have distinct effects. Network connections open-up a social world centered on the party-state, yielding benefits and transformations that neither family socialization nor ascriptive cooptation alone can provide. Meanwhile, family socialization leads to transformations that escape the bounds of the state and thus cannot be explained by network embeddedness or cooptation/patronage alone.

Qualitative cases further illustrate what these two mechanisms look like in practice. Under network embeddedness, benefits depend on active connections to people with decision-making power inside the party-state; it is not simply a matter of inherited status. When such connections fray, benefits also fray. A sharp illustration of the importance of

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<sup>89</sup>Across all 76 inter-ethnic marriages for which data on the partner’s ethnicity is clear (in 3 cases this data is missing), 8 married Tai Dam (a Lao-Tai group), 39 Lao, 6 Leu (a Lao-Tai group), 9 Phu Noi (a Tibeto-Burman speaking group), 4 Hmong or other *Lao Soung* groups, 3 Chinese, 3 Thai people from Thailand, 2 other *Lao Theung* groups, and 1 moved to France and married a French person. Five out of the seven people from the unmobilized group who married cross-ethnically worked for the party-state—the two that did not, met their spouses while working in Thailand. Section 5.4 includes further analysis.

<sup>90</sup>A supplementary analysis disaggregating types of mobilization finds that the inter-ethnic marriage effect is concentrated on the descendants of those who reached high positions as well as non-military cadre (Table A.3). This could reflect the fact that military service is both male-dominated and more removed from civilian populations, thus it is not conducive to new cross-gender relations and new norms on marriage taking hold.

this comes from the story of Sa, who was a high-level local cadre in the 1960s, but traveled to Vietnam, contracted leprosy, and was then exiled to the forest on his return, where he died. Sa's only son never attained any position with the party-state beyond the village level.<sup>91</sup> Any ascriptive status Sa's son derived from the revolutionary credentials of his father was evidently not enough to secure intergenerational benefits in the party-state; in particular, status in itself could not overcome the absence of active family participation in party-state networks.

In contrast, the family socialization mechanism is clearest in cases where individuals achieved success outside of the party-state. For instance, in one case a local woman who went on to a successful career in the NGO sector attributed her childhood ambitions partly to the teachings of a mobilized uncle, who encouraged her to study hard from a young age, with the promise that he would eventually bring her with him to be an army doctor. According to her, this early ambition and example—something lacking in many traditional farming families—set her on a path to economic success in a sphere entirely outside party-state influence: “Life might be very different for people who don’t have that encouragement at an early age,” she reflected.<sup>92</sup>

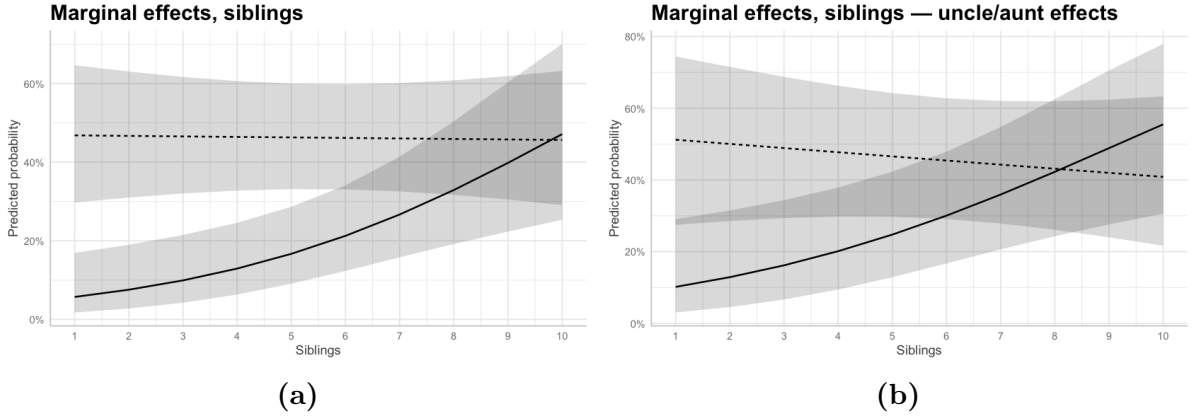
To more systematically test whether mobilization shifted cultural norms within families, I focus on the observable implications of a norm that places responsibilities on individuals that make it difficult to pursue formal skilled employment, whether in the party-state or outside. Traditionally, in the studied communities, at least one male child was expected to stay with his parents and support the parental household throughout his life. This would preclude the travels and training necessary for much formal skilled work.<sup>93</sup> To test the salience of this norm, I leverage the fact that skilled work 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. If the norm is operating, the probability of any given son pursuing skilled work should increase with the number of siblings, since larger families are more likely to have a son who is not the

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<sup>91</sup>This information was collected during surveying in December 2023 from individual 4.41.

<sup>92</sup>This information was collected during surveying in December 2023 from individual 9.72995.

<sup>93</sup>Skilled work here combined party-state work and non-governmental skilled work as captured by Table 4.



**Figure 2: Heterogeneous effects: siblings**

Results are from regressions where the dependent variable combines governmental and other skilled work and otherwise follows table 3, column 1, while including an additional interaction term between treatment and siblings (see table A.8). 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.

designated caretaker. Accordingly, in unmobilized families, there are positive marginal effects of the number of siblings on skilled 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 skilled employment.

Furthermore, this effect holds even when restricting the sample to nieces and nephews of veterans—those without a mobilized parent—compared 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. Essentially the same differential patterns shown in Figure 2 hold in a supplementary analysis dropping party-state work entirely and studying only the determinants of non-governmental skilled work—thus partly separating bottom-up norm transmission from the provision of state jobs—though the sample of individuals with non-governmental skilled jobs is too small for clear inferences (Figure A.1). This provides systematic evidence that revolutionary mobilization shifted behavior in ways consistent with changed parental preferences on traditional fam-

ily roles; parents in historically mobilized families encouraged their children to pursue formal skilled employment even at the expense of traditional familial responsibilities—something with a felt cultural value, unlikely to be easily abandoned.<sup>94</sup>

## 6 Revolutionary legacies and cultural construction

The micro-level transformations traced above had important consequences at higher levels of aggregation. One important macro-level outcome shaped by the intensive mobilization of some groups of Khmu people has been the creation of *Boun Greh*, a constructed national festival based on certain older Khmu rituals, which is today celebrated in official events across many Khmu communities in the country and taught to all school children in Laos.<sup>95</sup> Celebrations of *Boun Greh* often explicitly and prominently recognize Khmu contributions during the revolution and in the party-state afterwards. The creation of this festival, from the early 1990s onwards, illustrates how the transformations in connections and capacities, rooted in mobilization and sustained across generations, facilitated denser state-society interactions at the meso level: this allowed for policy feedback processes in the creation of a new nationally recognized cultural celebration.

Though unable to identify its exact origins among competing stories, the only existing study of this festival places its origins as a legacy of revolutionary participation.<sup>96</sup> Petit highlights origin stories where the festival was created due to lobbying by post-revolutionary Khmu elites within the party-state.<sup>97</sup> In addition to these, I heard one where *Boun Greh* arose from 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. While the origin of the festival is somewhat speculative given the lack of a definitive account, what is clear is the central role of Khmu people—working within the party-state after wartime mobilization—in creating and spreading this new cultural form.

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<sup>94</sup>This divergence in preferences could, in turn, have involved a second-order response to the increased availability of party-state work for mobilized families.

<sup>95</sup>Ministry of Education & Sports, 2009, p. 30-31.

<sup>96</sup>Petit, 2013, p. 476-477.

<sup>97</sup>Petit, 2013, p. 483. There were also no national-level Khmu elites under the old regime.

The most important account of this process in the areas under study comes from Kham, a Khmu revolutionary mobilized as a teenager during the war, who worked in a senior position locally in the Department of Media, Culture, and Tourism. After the adoption of the Lao Constitution in 1991, which formally recognized a right for all ethnic groups to preserve and promote their customs, Kham was deputized by the district governor at the time—himself Khmu—to visit the surrounding villages and collect information on Khmu cultural practices to be amalgamated into the new celebration. Kham noted that due to the extensive connections between the state and Khmu communities in the area going back to the revolution, this was one of the first areas in the country to actually celebrate *Boun Greh*. It spread to other areas only several years later.<sup>98</sup> The cultural festival needed to be rooted in real Khmu practices<sup>99</sup> such that it would actually be accepted by communities and celebrated across the country: the presence of a network of Khmu people within the party-state after mobilization facilitated this process.

This history builds on the micro-results above in two important ways. First, it shows that local transformations in 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 concrete evidence that mobilized people from marginalized backgrounds played important roles in policy-making and implementation.

## 7 Histories of mobilization and spatial patterns of stratification

### 7.1 Spatial measures of revolutionary mobilization

A final empirical analysis, conducted with 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

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<sup>98</sup>This information was collected during interviews with individual 9.716 in July 2024, July 2025, and May 2026.

<sup>99</sup>While sanitizing core aspects of this, like animal sacrifice and connections to animist belief systems, for an official national audience.

the village level, across upland Laos: (1) wartime school construction and (2) birthplaces of National Assembly members who were revolutionaries.

### **Wartime schools**

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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.2).

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.<sup>103</sup> 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

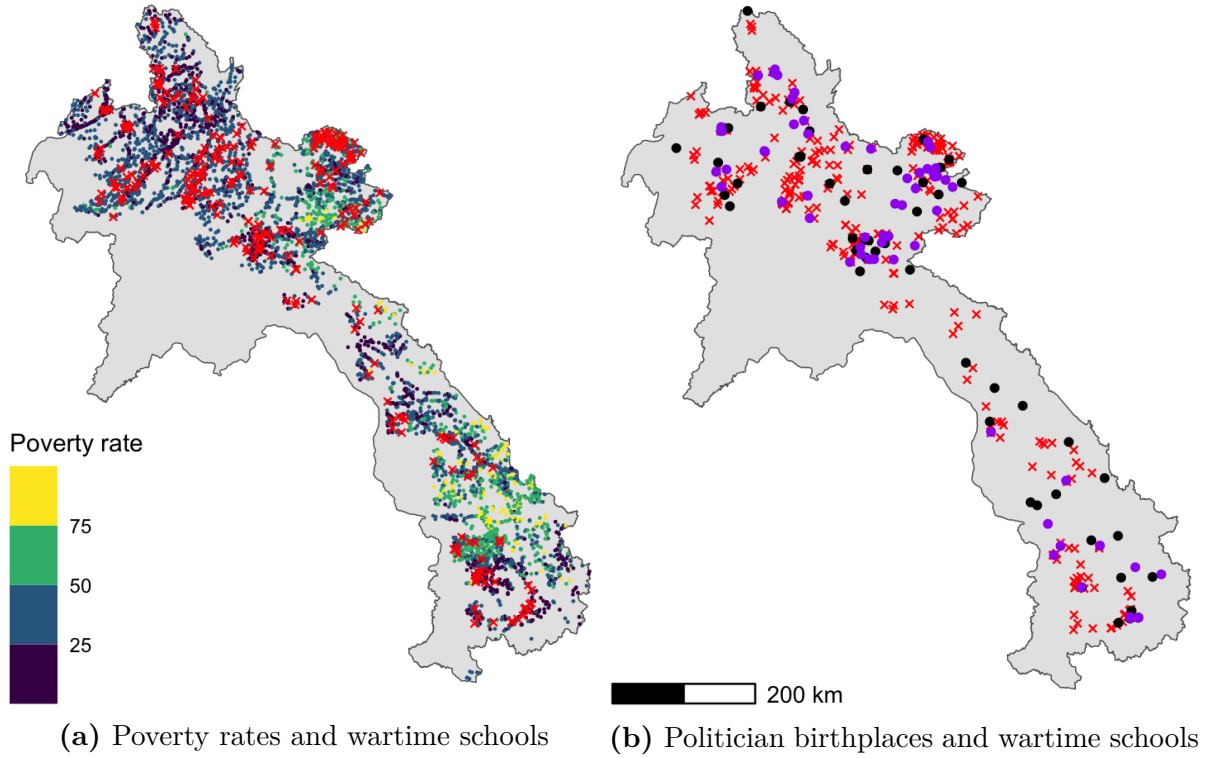
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<sup>100</sup>Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 102.

<sup>101</sup>Whitaker *et al.*, 1972, p. 102

<sup>102</sup>Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 58.

<sup>103</sup>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).



**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.

excluded from the analysis. The assumption is that places that were home to prominent revolutionaries had high levels of mobilization more generally.<sup>104</sup> Figure 3 reveals a striking, though suggestive, correlation between 2015 poverty rates and wartime school building in the uplands as well as a clustering of wartime school building and birthplaces of National Assembly members in the 4th and 9th National Assemblies.

## 7.2 Model and estimation

I estimate standard regression models on three outcome variables that 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

<sup>104</sup>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.

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.9). 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.<sup>105</sup>

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.<sup>106</sup> 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

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<sup>105</sup>Cf. Huillery, 2009, p. 188-189.

<sup>106</sup>This provides the best available approximation of spatial patterns in the early 1950s and prior, see Appendix F.4.

important history that needs to be accounted for.<sup>107</sup> 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 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.

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

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<sup>107</sup>Lin, 2022; Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024.

**Table 6: 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                               | -2.992***<br>(0.718) | 0.361***<br>(0.093) | 0.749**<br>(0.361)  |
| 4th NA birthplace                            | -1.804**<br>(0.850)  | 0.196<br>(0.151)    | -0.255<br>(0.664)   |
| pre-war temple                               | -2.594<br>(1.774)    | -0.068<br>(0.176)   | 0.822<br>(0.602)    |
| pre-war school                               | -2.579***<br>(0.922) | 0.071<br>(0.114)    | 1.671***<br>(0.579) |
| district dummies                             | ✓                    | ✓                   | ✓                   |
| geographical controls & bombs                | ✓                    | ✓                   | ✓                   |
| historical controls                          | ✓                    | ✓                   | ✓                   |
| adj. $R^2$                                   | 0.570                |                     |                     |
| N                                            | 4919                 | 4919                | 4919                |
| standard errors clustered by district        |                      |                     |                     |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                      |                     |                     |

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 only existed in the most important towns (Figure A.2).

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 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 revolu-

tionary 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 networks, identities, and even cultural forms emerged from revolutionary mobilization. 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 shed light on the politics of purges, as a backlash against new centers of power, born to some extent through the necessities and geographies of war, and of continuing violent mobilization, as a way to continually form and reform new social groups and remake connections between the state and society.

By analyzing social change in a revolutionary base area over the long-run and at a granular level of detail, I refine 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 communities that were previously distant from political centers, 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.

Revolutionary mobilization was a defining feature of politics in much of the developing world in the twentieth century. Further study of how the micro-level transformations analyzed here spread into subsequent generations and interact with institutional changes is one avenue for further research. Studying the impacts of such mobilization at a granular level in cases where revolutionaries were defeated, or where conflicts reached negotiated

resolutions, is a further 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 revolutionary 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

|          |                                                                 |           |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>A</b> | <b>Laos: History and context</b>                                | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>B</b> | <b>Family histories</b>                                         | <b>3</b>  |
| B.1      | Data collection . . . . .                                       | 3         |
| B.2      | Coding . . . . .                                                | 4         |
| B.3      | Missing data . . . . .                                          | 5         |
| <b>C</b> | <b>Backward sampling and bias</b>                               | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>D</b> | <b>Local histories and revolutionary mobilization</b>           | <b>7</b>  |
| D.1      | Pre-war society . . . . .                                       | 7         |
| D.2      | Determinants of mobilization . . . . .                          | 8         |
| D.3      | Narrative account of revolutionary mobilization . . . . .       | 8         |
| D.4      | Gender and mobilization . . . . .                               | 9         |
| <b>E</b> | <b>Individual level analysis</b>                                | <b>11</b> |
| E.1      | Disaggregation by type of revolutionary participation . . . . . | 11        |
| E.2      | Sensitivity analysis . . . . .                                  | 11        |
| E.3      | Robustness check: Instrumental variables . . . . .              | 12        |
| E.4      | Wild cluster bootstrap . . . . .                                | 14        |
| E.5      | Cultural norms: Heterogeneous effects . . . . .                 | 15        |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Village-level analysis</b>                                   | <b>16</b> |
| F.1      | School data . . . . .                                           | 16        |
| F.2      | Coding communist schools . . . . .                              | 16        |
| F.3      | Historical school construction . . . . .                        | 18        |
| F.4      | Wartime schools balance . . . . .                               | 18        |
| F.5      | Historical settlement patterns . . . . .                        | 19        |
| F.6      | Robustness check . . . . .                                      | 19        |
| <b>G</b> | <b>Research ethics</b>                                          | <b>20</b> |

## 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 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. 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup>National Assembly & United Nations, 2000.

Facebook groups. Data on the 6th National Assembly is derived from available summaries.<sup>2</sup> 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**

In each village, researchers first introduced themselves to the village head and asked permission to conduct interviews for this project. This is a requirement for doing such work in Laos.<sup>3</sup> The village head then introduced researchers to all elderly inhabitants of the village for interviews. Subsequently, researchers also walked through the villages

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<sup>2</sup>Stuart-Fox, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>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.

and asked residents in alternate houses for interviews on local and family histories. 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). Interview citations in the text refer to unique identifiers in the dataset.

### **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.<sup>4</sup>

### **Coding mobilized families**

An individual in generation 2 is said to belong to a mobilized family if they have a parent, sibling, grandparent, spouse, or aunt or uncle who was mobilized. This is meant to capture a threshold of familial proximity to the mobilized individual.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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. 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 not 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 is not generally a problem since the cohort variables used as regression controls 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).

The threat here thus comes from cases where mobilized people from otherwise un-

mobilized families moved away and lost touch with their relatives at home to the extent that those left at home did not even know that they were mobilized. This is the least likely kind of missing data because those who moved away from the area were likely to be among the most prominent revolutionaries and thus least likely to have been forgotten. For this reason, I do not see this as a significant threat to results.

**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. 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.<sup>6</sup> 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. Immediate postwar migrations to Thailand and farther to France and the U.S. 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-

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<sup>6</sup>cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

bearing rates.<sup>7</sup> 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

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 a 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 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; the small number of notable cases in the sample is 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. Literate 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.

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<sup>7</sup>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.

## D.2 Determinants of mobilization

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

|                                              | (1)                 | (2)                | (3)                  |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| DV                                           | Mobilization        | Mobilization       | Mobilization         |
| Model                                        | Logit               | Logit              | Logit                |
| male                                         | 2.725***<br>(0.799) | 2.76***<br>(0.988) | 2.659***<br>(0.913)  |
| monk                                         | -0.111<br>(0.447)   | 0.03<br>(0.662)    | 0.06<br>(0.579)      |
| other family mobilized                       | 0.957<br>(0.627)    | 1.066*<br>(0.617)  | 1.048*<br>(0.654)    |
| prior generation notable                     |                     | -0.011<br>(0.449)  |                      |
| siblings                                     |                     |                    | -0.229***<br>(0.077) |
| village dummies                              | ✓                   | ✓                  | ✓                    |
| N                                            | 214                 | 163                | 163                  |
| standard errors clustered by village         |                     |                    |                      |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                     |                    |                      |

The only statistically significant determinants of mobilization were gender, village, and number of siblings. Some children were able to avoid drafts because their siblings had already been conscripted, according to several interviewees. The logic here is one of a “flat tax” on family contributions: all families contribute equally. If anything, assuming that larger families were better off, results show a slight proclivity for mobilization to select for less fortunate people.

## D.3 Narrative account of revolutionary mobilization

Most revolutionary mobilization in this area happened through conscription. 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.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Zasloff, 1973, p. 78-81.

Why did some communities become communist strongholds while other, sometimes nearby areas, did not? Given the lack of strong 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. 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 under study was so heavily mobilized.

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.

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.

## **D.4 Gender and mobilization**

This section describes the role of women in the revolution and the barriers they faced, which led to gendered patterns of mobilization in the sample. Several women in the sample were involved in the revolution through providing labor for constructing roads, building structures, and transporting food (*lam lieng*). These women were typically never incorporated into the party organization beyond very local levels. Women faced

challenges based on traditional gender roles and responsibilities at home as well as the militarized nature of mobilization.

For instance, Mod, a woman around 80 years old mentioned going to study in the forest at night (in an informal communist school) with her daughter on her back over several days during the war.<sup>9</sup> Neither she nor her children were explicitly rewarded for their support for the PL. In another case, Ly—today in her 70s—mentioned once secretly going to study with the communists in the forest only to be denied food by her family on her return home. Although not recognized in contemporary official accounts, the fear and reluctance of families to give up their young people to the party-state—exemplified in Ly’s story—is consistent with wartime accounts from U.S. sources.<sup>10</sup> This reluctance appears to have been most acute for girls, who families often sought to protect from militarized and male dominated revolutionary bases.<sup>11</sup> Although staying at home, Ly also participated in labor drives for road building, constructing storage depots, and supplying soldiers. Boui, who is around 86 years old, also mentioned gathering and delivering food for communist soldiers during the war.<sup>12</sup> Vieng, now in her 70s and the wife of a former deputy district governor, also participated in *lam lieng* and producing clothing during the war.<sup>13</sup>

Overall, very few women in the sample rose to more senior positions, either as army medics or political cadres. Those who did so were invariably also married to mobilized revolutionaries. The most senior woman in the party-state in this area was initially promoted to a leadership position during the war explicitly in recognition for the sacrifices of her husband, who was killed in the war.<sup>14</sup> These stories illustrate a range of mostly unrecognized contributions by women to the war effort as well as the deeply gendered nature of revolutionary mobilization—a result of both its militarized nature and the norms and responsibilities maintained by local families.

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<sup>9</sup>Interview conducted during surveying in December 2023.

<sup>10</sup>Zasloff, 1973, p. 79-81.

<sup>11</sup>Qualitatively, for instance individual 9.711, a local woman, explained that she was married off by her older brother during the war explicitly as a form of protection during the war. Many separate interviewees mentioned how families were reluctant to send their daughters to school even after the war because the school was located near a militarized area.

<sup>12</sup>Interview conducted during surveying in December 2023.

<sup>13</sup>Interview conducted during surveying in December 2023.

<sup>14</sup>This was relayed by individual 9.716 during interviews in July 2025.

## E Individual level analysis

### E.1 Disaggregation by type of revolutionary participation

Disaggregating the effects of the type of mobilization on party-state employment, inter-ethnic marriage, and tertiary education shows differential impacts. High rank and military mobilization are associated with party-state employment in generation 2. This is consistent with the network embeddedness mechanism, though other reasons cannot be ruled out. Meanwhile, rate of interethnic marriage for the descendants of soldiers are lower.

**Table A.3: Wartime role and generation 2 outcomes**

|                                              | Govt. employment<br>(1) | Inter-ethnic marriage<br>(2) | Diploma<br>(3)    |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| PL soldier                                   | 0.620**<br>(0.313)      | -0.295<br>(0.841)            | -0.087<br>(0.956) |
| PL other roles                               | 0.115<br>(0.305)        | 0.544<br>(0.339)             | 0.999<br>(1.030)  |
| PL high position                             | 0.653**<br>(0.305)      | 1.101***<br>(0.420)          | 1.281*<br>(0.757) |
| Individual covariates                        | ✓                       | ✓                            | ✓                 |
| Village fixed effects                        | ✓                       | ✓                            | ✓                 |
| N                                            | 568                     | 534                          | 471               |
| standard errors clustered by village         |                         |                              |                   |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                         |                              |                   |

### E.2 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. This was done using the “sensemakr” R package.<sup>15</sup> Regressions were estimated as linear probability models, using OLS, in order to apply the sensitivity analysis. Unobserved confounders would have to explain 10.3% of the residual variance of

<sup>15</sup>Cinelli *et al.*, 2024.

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. 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.<sup>16</sup>

**Table A.4: Cinelli-Hazlett sensitivity analysis**

| Outcome: <i>Govt. job</i> |                                                                                                |       |         |                             |            |                         |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Treatment:                | Est.                                                                                           | S.E.  | t-value | $R^2_{Y \sim D \mathbf{X}}$ | $RV_{q=1}$ | $RV_{q=1, \alpha=0.05}$ |
| <i>Family mobilized</i>   | 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.3 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.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>For this reason, partial  $R^2$  values from the key regression (table 3) as well as from the mobilization regressions presented in table A.2 above, are relevant points of comparison. Table A.4 is adjusted accordingly.

<sup>17</sup>While there was no strict age cut-off for 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:** The key question here is whether having a male born between 1941 and 1954 in the family impacts party-state connections for the subsequent generation of that family through any mechanism other than revolutionary mobilization. The ages of male children could determine allocations to different kinds of labor or investment, which then could independently affect key outcomes in the subsequent generation. For instance, families with male children might invest more in human capital than families with only female children. In practice, however, the instrument captures a kind of generational gradation (though not in the formal sense of the generations in the sample), where some families are excluded because they had male children who were just too young to participate in the war, while their father was too old to be in the target group. In other words, the relevant comparison is between families whose males happened to fall in the conscription window versus those whose males were slightly too old or too young at the time of peak nearby fighting; this distinction is unlikely to independently determine outcomes for the subsequent generation, particularly given the limited diversity in livelihoods and investment opportunities in this area. The exclusion restriction thus plausibly holds.

**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.

**Results:** IV results provide further evidence that revolutionary mobilization itself cre-

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

| DV                                           | Mobilization        |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Model                                        | OLS                 |
| IV (male born in 1941-1954)                  | 0.412***<br>(0.086) |
| N                                            | 123                 |
| F-stat                                       | 25.46               |
| Adj. $R^2$                                   | 0.167               |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                     |

**Table A.6: IV, Second stage**

| DV                                           | Govt. job      |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Model                                        | OLS            |
| Family mobilization (IV fitted)              | 0.457***       |
| 99% CI                                       | [0.176, 0.925] |
| individual controls                          | ✓              |
| N                                            | 244            |
| Bootstrap confidence interval                |                |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                |

ated family-level connections to the party-state in the subsequent generation.<sup>18</sup>

## E.4 Wild cluster bootstrap

**Table A.7: Wild cluster bootstrap robustness check**

|                                                                           | (1)        | (2)                   | (3)      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|----------|
| DV                                                                        | Govt. work | Inter-ethnic marriage | Diploma  |
| Model                                                                     | OLS        | OLS                   | OLS      |
| family mobilized                                                          | 0.151**    | 0.126**               | 0.103*** |
| Wild bootstrap $p$ -value                                                 | [0.035]    | [0.014]               | [0.003]  |
| individual controls                                                       | ✓          | ✓                     | ✓        |
| village dummies                                                           | ✓          | ✓                     | ✓        |
| N                                                                         | 568        | 534                   | 471      |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$                              |            |                       |          |
| Wild cluster bootstrap $p$ -values in brackets, $B = 9,999$ replications. |            |                       |          |
| LPM estimated to facilitate bootstrap procedure.                          |            |                       |          |

Given the small number of clusters (nine villages), standard asymptotic inference may be unreliable. As a robustness check, I implement wild cluster bootstrap inference, estimated

<sup>18</sup>I omit village and area controls due to the restricted sample in this case, which already omits most of area 2.

as linear probability models to facilitate the bootstrap procedure.<sup>19</sup> This is done for all three main outcomes—government work, inter-ethnic marriage, and tertiary education—and yields robust results.

## E.5 Cultural norms: Heterogeneous effects

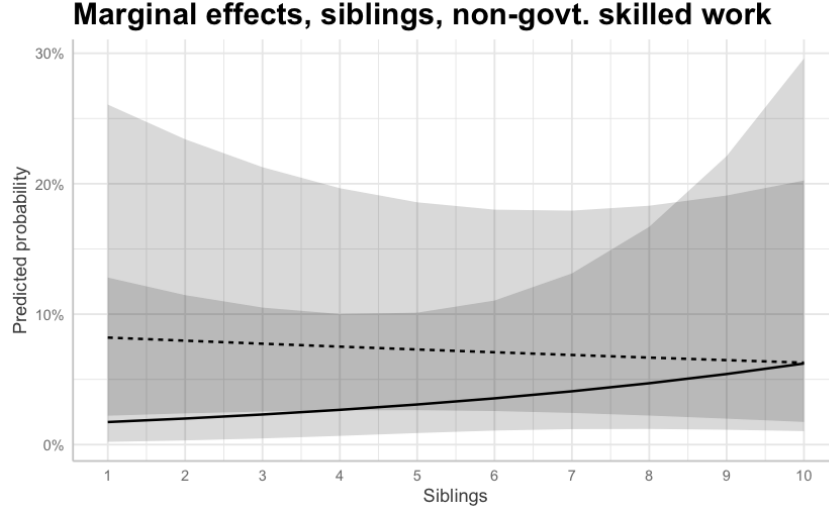
**Table A.8: Heterogeneous effects, siblings**

|                      | (1)                                          | (2)                        |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| DV                   | skilled work (incl. govt.)                   | skilled work (incl. govt.) |
| Model                | Logit                                        | Logit                      |
| family mobilized     | 2.979***<br>(0.717)                          |                            |
| aunt/uncle only      |                                              | 2.540***<br>(0.688)        |
| siblings             | 0.299***<br>(0.116)                          | 0.267**<br>(0.125)         |
| siblings × mobilized | −0.304***<br>(0.117)                         | −0.313***<br>(0.111)       |
| individual controls  | ✓                                            | ✓                          |
| area 1 control       | ✓                                            | ✓                          |
| N                    | 568                                          | 383                        |
|                      | standard errors clustered by village         |                            |
|                      | * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                            |

Marginal effects plots in figure 2 are based off of regressions in Table A.8.<sup>20</sup> I also estimate the same model as table A.8, column 2 but using only non-governmental skilled work as the outcome variable. This yields the same differential trend between mobilized and unmobilized families, although effects lose significance given the small number of people with non-governmental skilled jobs (Figure A.1).

<sup>19</sup>Cameron *et al.*, 2008.

<sup>20</sup>In column 2, the sample only includes generation 2 children who have only an uncle/aunt mobilized along with those with no mobilized family.



**Figure A.1: Marginal effects, siblings, non-governmental skilled work**

Results are from a regression where the dependent variable is non-governmental skilled work and otherwise follows Table A.8, column 1. 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.

## 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, 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.<sup>21</sup> To the extent that this is true, such villages, even after relocation, should tend to be near areas that saw wartime school-building.

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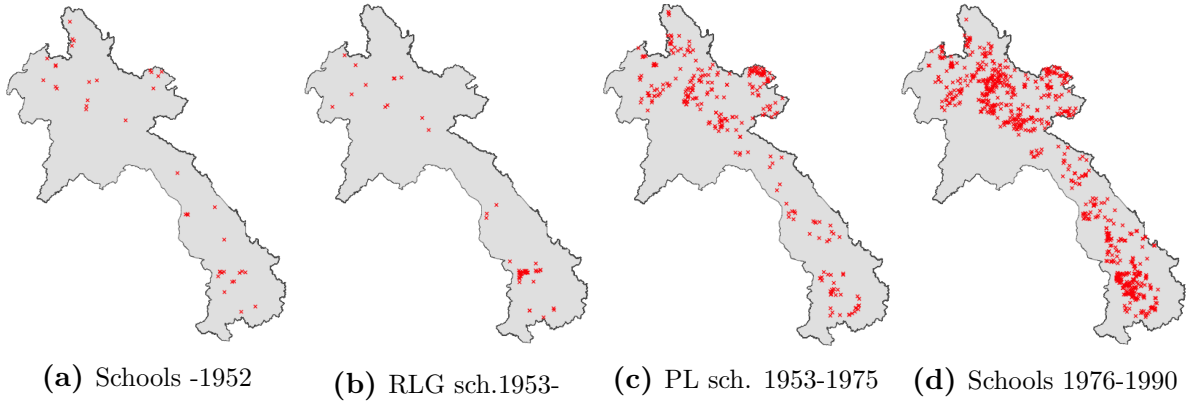
<sup>21</sup>Goudineau, 1997.

## 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



**Figure A.2: Historical school building**

Figure A.2 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.

### F.4 Wartime schools balance

**Table A.9: Villages with wartime schools and no schools, balance**

|                      | Schools, N=1166 |         | No schools, N=3770 |         |         |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------|
|                      | Mean            | Sd.     | Mean               | Sd.     | Diff.   |
| District capital     | 0.209           | 0.407   | 0.037              | 0.188   | 0.173   |
| Altitude (m)         | 604.028         | 369.860 | 619.266            | 369.368 | -15.238 |
| Sd. altitude (m)     | 23.676          | 19.448  | 27.687             | 21.424  | -4.011  |
| River                | 0.337           | 0.473   | 0.250              | 0.433   | 0.087   |
| Rainfall (m)         | 13.971          | 4.616   | 15.053             | 4.445   | -1.082  |
| N. historical vills. | 7.476           | 6.916   | 4.856              | 4.636   | 2.620   |
| N. minority vills.   | 0.924           | 1.594   | 1.217              | 2.133   | -0.293  |

Villages with wartime schools are more likely to be near historical district capitals and to have denser pre-war settlement, reflecting that schools were built in more accessible areas. Geographical controls and district fixed effects account for this in the regression analysis.

## F.5 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

## F.6 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).

I 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 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.

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<sup>22</sup>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 were 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.

<sup>23</sup>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.

**Table A.10: Robustness check, post-war schools**

|                                              | (1)                | (2)                  | (3)                 |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| DV                                           | Poverty            | Poverty              | 9th NA              |
| Model                                        | OLS                | OLS                  | Logit               |
| school 1975-1990<br>(no wartime school)      | -1.376*<br>(0.756) | -3.408***<br>(0.867) | 0.366<br>(0.333)    |
| wartime school                               |                    | -4.974***<br>(0.875) | 0.944***<br>(0.339) |
| 4th NA birthplace                            |                    | -1.689**<br>(0.818)  | -0.253<br>(0.658)   |
| district dummies                             | ✓                  | ✓                    | ✓                   |
| geographical controls & bombs                | ✓                  | ✓                    | ✓                   |
| historical controls                          | ✓                  | ✓                    | ✓                   |
| adj. $R^2$                                   | 0.567              | 0.574                |                     |
| N                                            | 4919               | 4919                 | 4919                |
| standard errors clustered by district        |                    |                      |                     |
| * $p < 0.1$ ; ** $p < 0.05$ ; *** $p < 0.01$ |                    |                      |                     |

## 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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