The Pull of the Center
Mobilization and State Formation in Communist Revolution

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Abstract

I study how revolutionary mobilization forges enduring ties between remote localities and the state. Using a unique intergenerational and genealogical dataset from Laos, I test a historically influential view of communist revolutions, which sees individual-level mobilization into revolutionary political parties as central to the establishment of political order. In Laos, revolutionary mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s pulled in individuals from marginalized communities into positions of power. I find that descendants of such people were then more likely to work for the party-state than people from similar, unmobilized families. I also find differences in social networks and human capital. The mechanism of persistence involved family, and I find that mobilization impacted family socialization and conferred self-sustaining advantages, beyond "pork" from the state. I argue for a causal interpretation based on the dynamics of revolutionary conscription in these communities. Results are robust to an instrumental variables specification and sensitivity analysis.

Word count: 9,991

1950: Born to an ethnic minority family of farmers and gatherers in a remote village.

1967: Soldier, cook, animal handler.

1969: Military team leader, student medic.

1973: Medic, squadron leader, full party member.

1975: District party secretary, district military command, head of district court.

1976: Student in an allied country.

1987: Major.

1994: Lieutenant colonel.

2008: Colonel.

2014: Brigadier general.

Promotion history of a Laotian revolutionary

1 Introduction

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

Prominent accounts have understood communist revolutions through a sociological lens, as the rebellion of a mass peasantry overburdened by demands from strong landlords and state bureaucracies (Moore, 1966, p. xxii). I argue instead for a mobilizational path to revolutionary state formation and social transformation. According to this view, the existence of class conflict or other particular socioeconomic conditions does not spon-

taneously lead to revolution; such conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for revolution. Rather, the mobilization of new revolutionaries into political organizations is a critical and contingent moment that is central to long-run societal change (cf. Lenin, 1929; Huntington, 1968).[1] Through mass mobilization in violent revolutions—where rural communities were suddenly pressed into military, administrative, and political work—communists built the powerful political parties that, where they prevailed, empower the state and structure political participation over the long run. Despite the world-historical significance of this view, which guided prominent revolutionaries, a rigorously empirical, micro-level analysis of whether and how revolutionary mobilization itself created enduring connections between previously decentralized communities and emerging communist party-states is missing in existing work.

Addressing this gap, I collected a unique dataset from rural, upland areas of Laos that traces the ancestors, descendants, and extended family members of individuals who were mobilized into various wings of the Communist Party during the Laotian Civil War in the 1960s-1970s as well as those of similar, nearby people who were not mobilized. This data, covering approximately 1000 individuals across three generations, was collected in nine villages in a remote area of northern Laos that experienced large-scale communist mobilization during the war, which led to a communist takeover of the country. Such genealogical data is used in a study by Wantchekon and coauthors (2015) on the long-run impact of colonial education in Benin but is otherwise missing in studies of political and economic development, including the study of revolutions. This data allows for a uniquely granular view into how revolutionary, centralizing states come to control communities that were previously governed in more localized ways. By allowing for hypothesis tests and quantitative tests of mechanisms of persistence at the individual-level, this intergenerational, genealogical data makes a unique contribution to the large literature on the long-run legacies of violence and war (eg. Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Wang, 2021; Barceló, 2021; Liu, 2024).

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[1] For Huntington (1968, p. 335), who identifies this view with Lenin, "the political function of communism is not to overthrow authority but to fill the vacuum of authority" with revolutionary political parties.

In operationalizing party-state formation, I take a micro-level view, focused on how family histories of revolutionary mobilization impact individual-level connections to the party-state intergenerationally. In Laos, I find that the nature of conflict and mobilization itself caused a deep social realignment, creating new political hierarchies, binding new social networks, and shaping patterns of economic development. During and after the Laotian Civil War, newly mobilized people from isolated communities with minimal involvement with the state under the old regime became local agents of the emerging communist party-state. Community connections to the state persisted into the subsequent generation, as local individuals in the post-war generation continued to work for the party-state and reach leadership positions. Results show that a key mechanism of persistence in these state-society connections involved the family. In fact, a deeper social differentiation—reflected in differences in status, education, migration, and marriage patterns, in addition to livelihoods—emerged between the descendants and close relations of mobilized revolutionaries and non-mobilized families. I further probe mechanisms both using the quantitative data as well as qualitative family histories.

Empirically, I first present meaningful correlations between historical revolutionary mobilization and party-state involvement in the post-war generation, using data at a level of granularity that is unavailable in existing work on revolutions, state formation, or historical persistence. The data allows for control on possible individual-level confounders, addressing family structure, historical family social status, and other aspects of deep family histories. As evidence for causality, I examine and leverage the process of mobilization. In this case, as has likely been true globally in many revolutions (cf. Moran & Waldron, 2003; Goscha, 2022), most revolutionary mobilization happened through wartime conscription. In the remote setting of the borderlands of Laos, conscription was imposed inconsistently; interviews suggest that it was most intensive when there was active fighting nearby. Some families were thus less exposed to mobilization simply because of the gender and ages of family members at the time when drafts took place.

Accordingly, I show balance across a range of individual-level covariates between mobilized and unmobilized people. As robustness checks, I conduct sensitivity analysis as

well as an instrumental variables analysis. The IV analysis relies on the exogeneity of the timing of nearby fighting and the fact that commanders targeted young men for mobilization most intensively during such periods, leaving families with exogenous variation in exposure to mobilization based on the ages and genders of their children.

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

After the revolution, the typical communist policies of agricultural collectivization and industrial modernization were not effectively carried out in much of the country for long (Evans, 1990, p. 44-64). Politics in Laos has since been characterized by a paradox of strong one-party hegemony over society on the one hand and weak state capacity on the other (Creak & Barney, 2018). These factors together make Laos a crucial case, and a baseline, for studying the mobilizational path to revolutionary state formation; if such effects are identifiable anywhere, they should be identifiable in Laos given its relative lack of pre-revolutionary modernization and subsequent challenges with top-down policy change.[2]

In the study of revolutions, this paper builds on ideas that lasting post-revolutionary transformations are rooted in war itself (Wood, 2001, 2008; Gaikwad *et al.*, 2023). Relatedly, although the connection between war and state-making is well known (Tilly, 1990),

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

prior work has not brought systematically collected and fine-grained data covering generations of people to bear on studying this process. Results speak to Liu's (2022) findings that the microdynamics of conflict determined different strategies of state building in Zimbabwe. Results also speak to Koss's (2018) findings that the Chinese Communist Party continues to be strongest in the areas where they fought the Sino-Japanese War (also cf. Johnson, 1962). Furthermore, by studying deeper layers of society, I push a recent literature on revolutionary autocracies (Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020; Levitsky & Way, 2022) beyond its current focus on elites. Results also follow recent work by Lankina (2022) on Russia in showing how families have been an important pathway of persistence in political and economic outcomes even in communist contexts. However, unlike Lankina (2022), who shows persistence of old regime social hierarchies despite the Russian Revolution, I detail a process of revolutionary transformation that then ossifies in the post-revolutionary period.

The study also contributes to a large body of research on the legacies of violent conflict through its use of genealogical data. Thus far, this literature has not addressed the idea that individual effects and spillovers from revolutionary mobilization into a political party can actually be constitutive to post-revolutionary change, though studies have looked at the long-run impact of armed conflict on political organizations in democracies (Jha & Wilkinson, 2012; Costalli & Ruggeri, 2019) and on individual political preferences (Kalyvas, 2006; Balcells, 2012; Rozenas *et al.*, 2017; Villamil, 2021). The unique dataset allows me to analyze socialization along different familial relationships and study the role of social networks as mechanisms for the intergenerational persistence of effects originating in the wartime shock.

In Section 2, I outline the key mechanisms in my theory connecting revolutionary mobilization to state formation and specify hypotheses. Section 3 introduce the Laos case, Section 4 describes my data sources, and Sections 5 and 6 present empirical results. The main results are based on the collected family histories. I also conduct a macro-level analysis comparing villages across upland Laos to trace infrastructural, political, and economic legacies of mobilization across Laos. This uses a dataset drawn from a host of

both official and originally collected sources, covering wartime school-construction, the birthplaces of revolutionaries across Laos, and historical settlement patterns. Results suggest that variation in revolutionary mobilization helps explain political and economic differentiation, which emanates from state formation, across upland Laos even today.

2 Argument and Mechanisms

I study how revolutionary mobilization into a political party can be transformative on an individual level and enduringly forge connections to the party-state, where revolutionaries prevail. I focus on revolutionary mobilization through wartime conscription; large numbers of people globally have likely been brought into communist party organizations through conscription during revolutionary conflict.[3] Even in such coercive cases, mobilization comes with training and indoctrination; it exposes individuals to leadership experiences and socializes them to administrative work; it also reshapes social networks by connecting individuals to party networks. Some such effects might also be present in cases of purely military mobilization, or revolutionary mobilization in the absence of strong political organizations. But communist parties provide an organizational structure, integrated across branches of government, to channel work experiences in the course of revolution into further participation in politics and administration; indeed, the explicit project of state-building through revolutionary mobilization has been predominantly a communist undertaking in the twentieth century.

Intensive violent conflict in the course of revolution creates uniquely existential pressures to pull-in large numbers of people, regardless of their backgrounds, and promote them in meritocratic ways (Jha & Wilkinson, 2012, p. 883). In communist revolutions, violent conflict has provided the impetus for party-building through mass mobilization drives (Koss, 2018, p. 167-173; Goscha, 2022, p. 249). War exposes revolutionaries to intense leadership and organizational experiences, and binds them to their compatriots in ways that are not possible in peacetime. After the conflict, where revolutionaries succeed,

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[3]Much communist revolutionary mobilization, at least in Laos and Vietnam, involved a mix of coercion and persuasion, even when conscription was instituted (Zasloff, 1973, p 78; Goscha, 2022, p. 262-263).

mobilization both equips revolutionary veterans with the necessary skills and also gives them strong moral claims for pursuing political and material benefits within the emerging party-state. The rise of such people creates a connection between the central state and the communities from where they come. I consider scope conditions and mechanisms of persistence, which together detail the circumstances in which such connections endure.

Where revolutionaries are victorious, enduring connections to the state depend on a balance of power and incentives between new revolutionary veterans and the larger party-state: veterans should not have an interest in rebelling against the party-state, but they should not be so weak as to be easily removable. This balance was more likely to be maintained in cases of rural communist revolutions than in other wartime contexts for at least two reasons. First, in many such cases, revolutionaries were mobilized from remote, economically underdeveloped localities where competing political organizations and identities under the old regime were weak or nonexistent (Huntington, 1968, p. 342); in such cases, veterans had no strong competing allegiances that threatened to drive a rebellion. Second, rural revolutions often alienated skilled groups, who held privileged positions in urban centers under the old regime.[4] Especially where human capital was scarce after revolutionary victory, trusted revolutionary veterans, now armed with practical administrative experience, were unlikely to be removed from positions of power in the party-state, which now needed to administer a peacetime polity.

There may be "top-down" and "bottom-up" mechanisms behind the further intergenerational persistence of party-state connections forged during revolutionary mobilization. Top-down persistence arises from forms of cooptation where benefits from the center are strategically exchanged for local support (Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006). Family histories of mobilization are considered important by party leaders or seen as signals of trustworthiness, and benefits would thus accrue to such families as they are coopted by the party through a kind of pork-barrel politics. Areas that saw particularly heavy mobilization might receive more public goods following a similiar logic of top-down cooptation.

Alternatively, or concurrently, persistence can occur through bottom-up mechanisms,

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[4]The exodus of intelligentsia after communist takeovers in places like China and Vietnam is well known (Lary, 2012, p. 124-125; Goscha, 2016, p. 385-386).

where revolutionary veterans use advantages that are self-sustaining, and do not depend on strategic decisions made in the post-revolutionary center, to durably attach their communities to the party-state. For instance, such people might transfer skills and aspirations to their descendants through family socialization (Bisin & Verdier, 2001; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017), leaving these descendants well placed for party-state work on purely meritocratic grounds. Other bottom-up pathways rely on mobilized individuals valuing family and community connections and using their advantages to help those close to them. Veterans might use their larger social networks to help relatives and community members gain access to resources and jobs; they might also use their positions of authority in the party-state to secure enduring benefits and positions of power for those close to them. In these ways, state-building could happen, to some extent epiphenomenally, through local revolutionary veterans rather than through continual top-down investments from the center and coercion applied by external authorities (cf. Barkey, 1994).

Hypotheses

Where revolutionaries succeed, achieve stability in the critical post-revolutionary moment, and banish or significantly weaken incumbent elite groups, wartime mobilization drives enduring connections to the emerging party-state. My first hypothesis is that long-run connections between localities and the party-state are rooted in histories of revolutionary mobilization. I operationalize this at two levels of aggregation. At the individual-level, I focus on within-family continuity in connections to the party-state; thus, this already speaks to the mechanism of persistence by focusing on processes centered on the family. I expect that individuals with mobilized ancestors will be more likely to hold party-state jobs than those from families that did not experience revolutionary mobilization. In a national analysis, I also test for correlations between mobilization histories and outcomes at the village level. I expect that villages that saw heavy wartime revolutionary mobilization will be more likely to have national-level political leaders in the future; after the revolution, I expect public goods provision to be better in such places than in similar but less mobilized places; I also expect rates of poverty to be lower.

Using the genealogical data and qualitative family histories, I probe the mechanisms

of intergenerational persistence. I cannot rule out top-down mechanisms, indeed communist parties are by their nature hierarchical and top-down, and qualitative evidence suggests that party leaders privileged trusted revolutionary veterans. In this context, the possibility of bottom-up mechanisms is more theoretically interesting because it sheds new light on how party-states penetrate localities through the efforts of local revolutionaries. My second hypothesis, on mechanism, is that revolutionary mobilization caused a shift in social networks, skills, and norms, which have been transmitted within families and which continually support party-state engagement.

Operationalizing this, as a sign of expansive social networks, I expect rates of inter-ethnic marriage to be higher in mobilized families than in unmobilized ones; I also expect rates of higher education, skilled work, and urban migration to be higher in mobilized families than in unmobilized ones. In conjunction with qualitative knowledge, the genealogical data also allows me to probe family socialization as a mechanism of transmission through testing for differences in the salience of relevant traditional cultural norms involving family roles and responsibiities between mobilized and unmobilized families in the communities under study. If true, these results would show that since the time of wartime revolutionary mobilization there has been a broad social differentiation that promotes the agency of mobilized families; connections between the party-state and the locality are preserved partly through the efforts of these families.

3 Historical Context

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

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

In line with this condition of sparse, subsistence economies and weak state power (cf. Scott, 2010), cultural identities were diverse and diffuse. Laos is made up of people who speak a variety of unrelated languages and follow diverse cultural traditions. To this day, many people belonging to minority cultures live in ethnically homogeneous villages in upland areas of the country. Out of 50 officially recognized ethnicities, the ethnic Lao make up a bare majority of the population across the country, while the broader category of Tai ethnic groups (*Lao Loum* or "lowland" Lao), which includes the Lao, make up around 60% (Statistics Bureau, 2015a, p. 37). Historically, the Lao-Tai have been politically dominant in Laos, ruling over towns (*meuang*) in many of the arterial valleys of present-day Laos by the early 1300s (eg. Stuart-Fox, 1997, p. 8; Lieberman, 2003, p. 241). The Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, older inhabitants of the area, have traditionally occupied mountainous locales and were historically given the pejorative label of *Kha*, or slave, by the Lao-Tai, reflecting the perceived backwardness associated with highlanders. These people are also sometimes referred to as the *Lao Theung* or "upland" Lao. The third most populous group after the Khmu, the Hmong—categorized as *Lao Soung*, "highland" Lao—arrived fleeing unrest in southern China in the 1800s to settle in the mountains of northern Laos. I refer to all groups outside of the Lao-Tai as "ethnic minorities" or "upland ethnic minorities."

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

Fighting between the Royal Lao Government (RLG), now supported by the US, and communists continued sporadically. Communist control gradually expanded from their original strongholds in the northeast to include much of eastern and upland Laos. At the same time, boundaries were fluid and frequently changing, front lines were highly fractured and both sides came to hold areas behind enemy lines at various times. People from virtually all major ethnic groups were involved on both sides of the conflict.[5] The 1962 Geneva Conference instituted a ceasefire, though no official demarcating line between the factions was ever established (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 110). Fighting continued and intensified immediately after and subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975.

Post-revolutionary Changes

In this historical context, early Lao nationalists, who were part of the small ethnic Lao elite under French colonialism, looked to their ethnicity as the basis of political community (Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002). Leadership positions at the district level and above under the old regime were almost always held by Lao-Tai aristocrats. The communists, who were based in upland areas bordering Vietnam during much of the war, have claimed to represent a multi-ethnic Lao people and to champion the interests of

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

Table 1: Ethnic diversity in party leadership

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

minorities since the wartime period (Neo Lao Haksat, 1970, 1980). While such proclamations are typical in communist contexts and often hollow, wartime US sources also noted that the PL leadership structure and ethnic policy "appear[ed] to live up to these principles" (Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 133-134), despite the fact that the core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese, who provided much of the military manpower. Many from the educated, elite classes under the old regime fled the country after the war, while others—especially those in RLG leadership positions who chose to stay—perished in Pathet Lao prison camps (cf. Baird, 2021).

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

Unevenness also characterizes the economic situation of upland people in Laos. In aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates between the majority Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman, and Hmong communities (Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170). However, these aggregates mask a significant amount of variation across geographical areas and within the state-sanctioned broad ethnolinguistic categories (table

A.1). In making sense of this differentiation, I build on work by scholars of Laos who have highlighted the importance of revolutionary histories as an important source of political capital in Laos (Goudineau, 1997; Baird & Le Billon, 2012; Dwyer, 2022).

4 Family Histories

With the aid of local partners, a sample of family histories was gathered from nine ethnic Khmu villages in northern Laos. This was done using a backward sampling procedure, where enumerators systematically sampled from individuals living in these communities today, asking these people about their ancestors and other family members in face-to-face interviews (cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015). These communities, about whom little is known in any academic field, were very heavily mobilized by the communists during the Laotian Civil War while also being historically remote and peripheral to state power.[6] Thus they provide a good setting for studying the impact of mobilization on state formation.

These histories recover the stories of approximately 1000 people across three generations, providing relational data as well as data on professions, education, and migration during the old regime, during the time of intensive revolutionary conflict, and in the subsequent generation. This includes information on family members who have moved or reside in other places. A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted.[7] Historically similar villages were selected for data collection, and households were randomly sampled within each village. There are significant data constraints in identifying historically similar villages, since no pre-war data exists at the village level. As an alternative, local elders with deep knowledge and first-hand experience of the area going back to the 1950s were enlisted to help with village selection. This process is described in detail in Appendix B.

Like similar historical studies, especially of contentious histories, where official records are unavailable, this study relies on truthful and accurate recall by interviewees (Blattman, 2009; Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017; Sánchez De La Sierra, 2020).

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

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

In studying the impacts of revolutionary mobilization on remote, rural communities anywhere in the world, there is simply no way around this. With regards to recall, the histories in question here are far more recent than those analyzed in other retrospective work (Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015; Lupu & Peisakhin, 2017), and the majority of interviewees had directly lived through the war and were often able to give detailed accounts of their experiences as well as those of their relatives.[8]

While I cannot guarantee that all data is accurate, several steps were taken to ensure good data quality. Data was collected by two enumerators, both of whom are themselves Khmu, have professional training and over a decade of experience in survey research, and also have familial ties to the surveyed communities. Due to the insider status of the enumerators, interviews were conducted as semi-structured conversations among community insiders in the Khmu language. During interviews, information on family histories was often verified, corrected, or sharpened through discussions among multiple community members. The villages under study have only between 15 and 20 unrelated households, and families are well-informed about each others' histories.[9] In all but one village, follow-up conversations, sometimes with original respondents and sometimes with their close relations, for clarifying and verifying information were also conducted over phone, social media, and in person over the course of six months for all families.[10] While it cannot be fully ruled out, I believe that the unique nature of the interviews, conducted as conversations among trusted community insiders, represents an unusually high safeguard against social desirability bias. A sign of this is the fact that respondents reported historical participation on the royalist side at rates that exceeded prior expectations based on knowledge of this area.

Other concerns with retrospective data might involve the possibility of differences

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

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

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

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

Revolutionary Mobilization and Selection

I identify individuals as mobilized into the communist revolution only if they had a military, political, or administrative position in support of the war on the communist side at the district (*meuang*) level or higher. This is because at lower levels of work, the day-to-day life of the person would not have significantly shifted away from those of a local farmer, and my theory of state-societal transformation rooted in individual mobilization into a revolutionary political party should not apply. Individuals in the post-war generation (notated generation 2) are considered treated if they are a grandchild, child, niece or nephew, or younger sibling of someone who was mobilized.

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

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

Table 2: Mobilized and unmobilized balance

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

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

many other cases, siblings or family members were forced into opposing sides.[11] 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. 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.

An argument for a causal interpretation of the results to come builds on two key contextual assumptions, which are both qualitatively and quantitatively backed up in this setting. First, mobilization largely happened through conscription, where local communist leaders conducted drafts in response to the intensity of local conflict. These commanders were not well informed about the capacity of draftees and faced significant manpower pressure from ongoing conflict; rather, key determinants of being drafted were simply being the right age and gender (male) when conflict happened to intensify nearby. These factors are plausibly exogenous to the outcome of interest, which involves connections to the party-state *in the subsequent generation.* Second, due to the lack of prior state capacity and the very low level of economic modernization in the area, baseline economic and political differentiation was locally minimal in pre-war times.

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

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

economic status and thus is an important variable for balance (although economic and political differentiation was minimal in pre-war times). The Buddhist priesthood was the only available source of education in pre-war times, and thus a history of being a monk signifies greater pre-mobilization human capital. Descendants of local, old regime notables were roughly just as likely to be mobilized as those from non-notable families.[12] In assessing covariate balance, data at this level of granularity, speaking to deep family histories, is rare in existing work. To further address the issue of selection bias (either selection by the party-state or by mobilized people according to some unobserved capacity), I conduct sensitivity analysis of the key results to come. I also conduct an instrumental variables analysis, where I use the ages and genders of family members in 1967-1968 as instruments for mobilization.

5 Main Results

5.1 Intergenerational Connections to the State
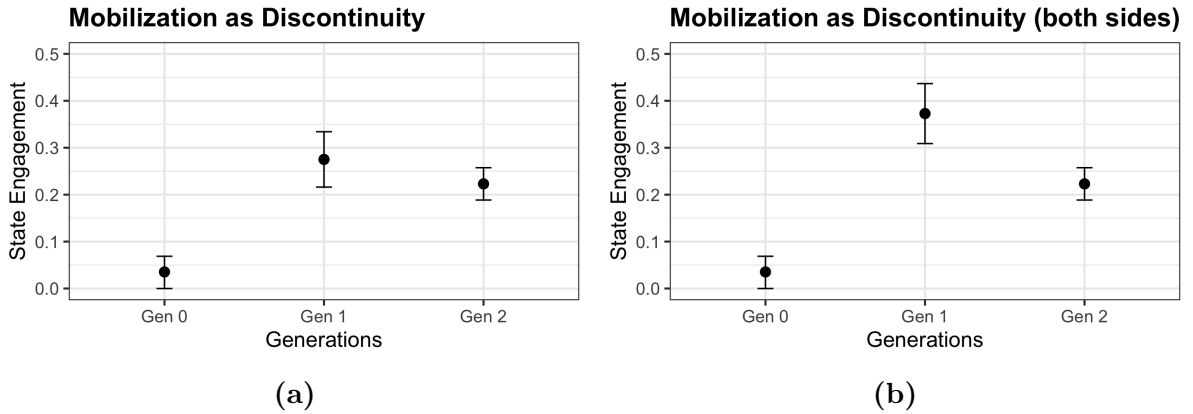
Figure 1: A mobilization shock

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

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

Involvement with the state increased during the wartime generation and remained at a significantly higher level in the post-war generation. Remarkably, over 37% of the sample was involved in the war effort at the district level or above on both sides, with about 27% being mobilized by the communists.[13] Much of this involvement came from military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff (see table A.2). Individuals were counted as reaching high positions if they had a leadership position at the district level or higher and/or they attained a senior officer rank in the military or police (*nai phan* or higher—command of a battalion or higher). In the sample, 35 individuals reached high positions across generations 1 and 2. In generation 1, this includes a former district governor (*jao meuang*), a former deputy district governor (*hong jao meuang*), a former member of the National Assembly of Laos, a military general, and several other senior soldiers and police.

5.2   Families and State Formation

To test if party-state work in generation 2 is rooted in histories of revolutionary mobilization, I consider correlations between histories of family-level mobilization and connections to the party-state in the subsequent generation. The unit of analysis is the individual. This analysis speaks to the mechanism of persistence insofar as it focuses on mechanisms involving the family in transmission.

I conduct regression analysis, with the outcome variable being individual-level work for the party-state at the district level or higher in generation 2 and the treatment variables being various indicators of familial revolutionary mobilization in the prior generation. I control for gender, birth-year cohorts, number of siblings, and family history of royalist mobilization, since these factors might independently affect the outcome variable. An important baseline level of control, including on unobservables, is achieved through

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[13]Royalist involvement is driven entirely by mobilization into the armed forces (FAR). All data on FAR involvement is tentative, since this is still a sensitive history. Women are consistently underrepresented in the sample, though the problem improves across generations. Estimated rates of state involvement are thus likely biased upwards. This issue should not disrupt the basic picture that wartime mobilization was a sharp discontinuity, and involvement in the party-state has continued in the post-war generation.

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

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

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

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

	Model: 3, Village: 7, Birth cohort: 1975-1990, FAR: No, Siblings: 5		
	Only parent mobilized	Only aunt/uncle mobilized	No close family mobilized
Male	0.483	0.357	0.205
Female	0.202	0.131	0.065

sample selection. All individuals come from the same ethnic community, with family histories in upland villages that have historically occupied essentially the same ecological and economic niches. I also control for the specific village, further accounting for village histories that might have been pertinent to mobilization.

Results suggest that revolutionary mobilization, including among extended family (uncles and aunts), led to a significantly greater likelihood of party-state employment among family members in the subsequent generation. I argue for a causal interpretation based on the control strategy as well as the assumption, detailed above, that conscription happened in a low-information environment, in response to the intensity of nearby fighting; selection by draftees or communist commanders was minimal, and pre-war social differentiation was also minimal.

I further probe causality through an instrumental variables specification and sensi-

tivity analysis. Results hold in the IV specification (table A.5), which uses the ages and genders of children in the family in 1967-1968 as exogenous sources of variation in exposure to mobilization, under the assumption that mobilization responded to nearby conflict. There is strong evidence that the instrument is both relevant and exogenous. Sensitivity analysis results, following Cinelli & Hazlett (2020), imply that meaningful confounding would require all of the following: (1) a very high level of selection on an unobserved ability during a chaotic process of mobilization,[14] (2) an independent inter-generational transfer of this underlying ability, and (3) this underlying ability influencing participation in state work at rates even higher than having male gender (Appendix E.2). These analyses are presented as robustness checks in Appendix E.

5.3   Mechanisms

In testing my second hypothesis, on the mechanism of persistence in connections be-tween families and localities on the one hand and the party-state on the other, I consider: (1) the ways in which ambitions, norms, and connections have been transmitted within families and (2) how mobilization has transformed the social networks and skills of fam-ilies and individuals in the long-run, giving them advantages in seeking connections to the state. I find suggestive evidence that family socialization in mobilized families, by shifting ambitions and norms surrounding work, facilitated party-state work. I also find evidence for an expansion of social networks and accumulation of human capital rooted in mobilization histories, thus creating conditions where mobilized families were well placed for state jobs.

Results in tables 5 and 6 above suggest that the extended family—not just parents but also uncles and aunts—mattered for connections to the party-state. Thus the effects of revolutionary mobilization on connections to the state have spread farther than would be the case under a parent-child transfer alone. Three, perhaps related, processes, flowing from the salience of kinship ties, could explain these extended-family effects: first, social-ization effects could extend to nephews and nieces, who might be directly influenced by

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[14]Selection into mobilization on this unobserved ability would have to be over half as strong as the observed selection into mobilization on gender in order for results to lose significance.

their uncles and aunts; second, uncles and aunts could actively help their nephews and nieces get party-state jobs; finally, party higher-ups could count the nephews and nieces of veterans as among a trusted core of revolutionary families to be coopted. The third pathway, though I do not rule it out, is complicated by the prevalence of mobilization on opposing sides within the same family: out of 38 families that saw communist mobilization, 11 also saw FAR mobilization or married into families with FAR mobilization.

Family Socialization

Anecdotally, ambitions of children in generation 2 were affected by family mobilization histories through socialization, even across extended families. For instance, in one case, a woman who attained higher education and skilled non-governmental work in the national capital mentioned that her uncle, a senior soldier, had encouraged her to study hard from her childhood, promising her a job as an army doctor if she did so. More systematically, I find evidence that preferences on traditional family roles diverged between mobilized and unmobilized families. This speaks to socialization insofar as it suggests that parents encouraged their children in different directions depending on family mobilization history (cf. Bisin & Verdier, 2001).

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

Accordingly, in unmobilized families, I find positive marginal effects of the number of siblings on party-state employment at the individual level, suggesting the maintenance of this cultural norm. However, no such effect exists for mobilized families, for whom the number of siblings has no impact on the probability of party-state employment. Furthermore, this effect is not simply driven by children whose parents are government
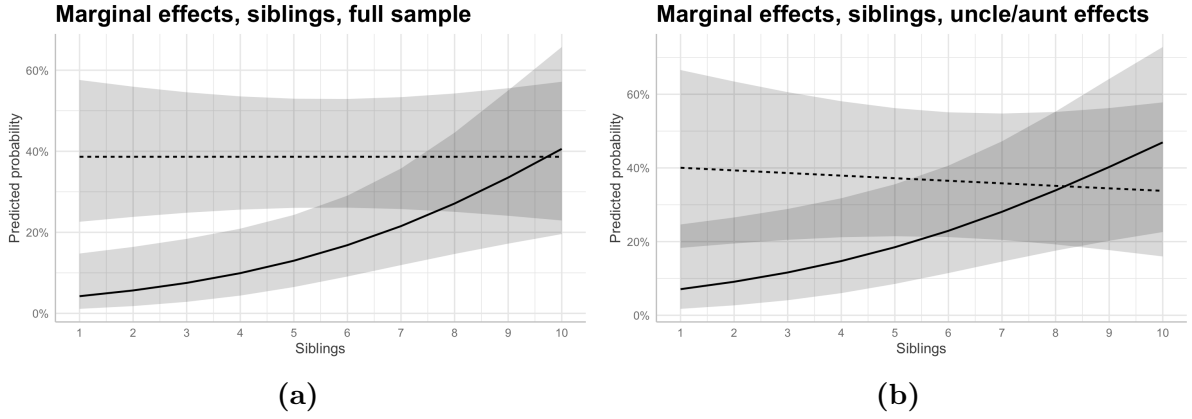
Figure 2: Heterogeneous effects: siblings

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

employees, and who might thus not be needed at home; a similar heterogeneity exists when comparing nieces and nephews, but not children, of revolutionary veterans with children from unmobilized families (figure 2b). In other words, the cultural norm appears to not apply even in families where the parents are farmers but an uncle or aunt was mobilized during the revolution. While I cannot rule out alternative explanations, this result provides suggestive evidence that revolutionary mobilization shifted parents' preferences on traditional family roles for their children; parents in historically mobilized families encouraged their children to pursue opportunities with the party-state even at the expense of traditional familial responsibilities.[15]

Social networks and human capital

I further probe the mechanism of persistence by analyzing changes in social networks and human capital that came with mobilization. These changes are important because they provide advantages that reinforce connections to the state, helping members of mobilized families out-compete others locally and nationally for positions of power in the party-state. Furthermore, these are sources of power that are self-sustaining, or "bottom-up,"

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

Table 5: Generation 2, sample characteristics by mobilization history

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

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

in the sense that they do not depend on continual transfers from the state.

I operationalize social networks by examining trends in inter-ethnic marriage and migration to the capital city, Vientiane; both inter-ethnic marriage and urban migration imply more varied social networks. In addition, many inter-ethnic marriages brought Khmu people into familial relationships with people from historically more privileged Lao-Tai communities.[16] I operationalize human capital using trends in educational attainment and participation in skilled labor.[17] Few people from this area spoke the Lao language in pre-war times, literacy was minimal, and there were virtually no cross-ethnic marriages. Trends in table 5 thus represent a revolutionary social transformation. These trends started with revolutionary mobilization itself, which first brought locals into large multi-ethnic networks centered on the party and gave them formal education. In turn, benefits from better social networks and education likely reinforced local party-state formation. Regression analysis provides further evidence that a family history of mobilization led to higher rates of inter-ethnic marriage and higher rates of tertiary education in the

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

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

Table 6: Regression results, marriage and education

	(1)	(2)
DV	Inter-ethnic marriage	Diploma
Model	Logit	Logit
family mobilized	1.571***	2.3*
	(0.571)	(1.198)
individual controls	✓	✓
village dummies	✓	✓
N	534	471

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

post-revolutionary generation.

I thus find evidence for three related shifts rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself that have supported persistent connections to the party-state by creating conditions where locals both seek out party-state work and are also well placed to progress in such careers. First, there is evidence of shifts in preferences and ambitions regarding family roles that would allow individuals to pursue party-state work even at the expense of traditional family duties. Second, social networks expanded and intersected more privileged groups. Finally, relevant skills were built through formal education, even at the highest available level. The within-family effects show that such transformations have not been based on development and industrialization (cf. Gellner, 1983), nor only on the revolutionary ideology, since such change would apply broadly through these communities. Rather, they are rooted in revolutionary mobilization.

6   Aggregate Results

I conclude with an analysis connecting wartime revolutionary mobilization to infrastructural, political, and economic facets of state formation across upland villages in Laos. This tests my first hypothesis on a larger scale, and it suggests that the processes detailed more locally above have important implications at higher levels of aggregation. This is a correlational analysis, but the presented correlations, between histories of revolutionary mobilization and subsequent economic, infrastructural, and political indicators

of state building, cannot be easily accounted for by alternate explanations or continuity with deeper historical factors.

6.1   Measuring Revolutionary Mobilization

I focus on two wartime variables to operationalize mobilization at the village level across upland Laos: (1) wartime school construction and (2) birthplaces of National Assembly members who were revolutionaries.
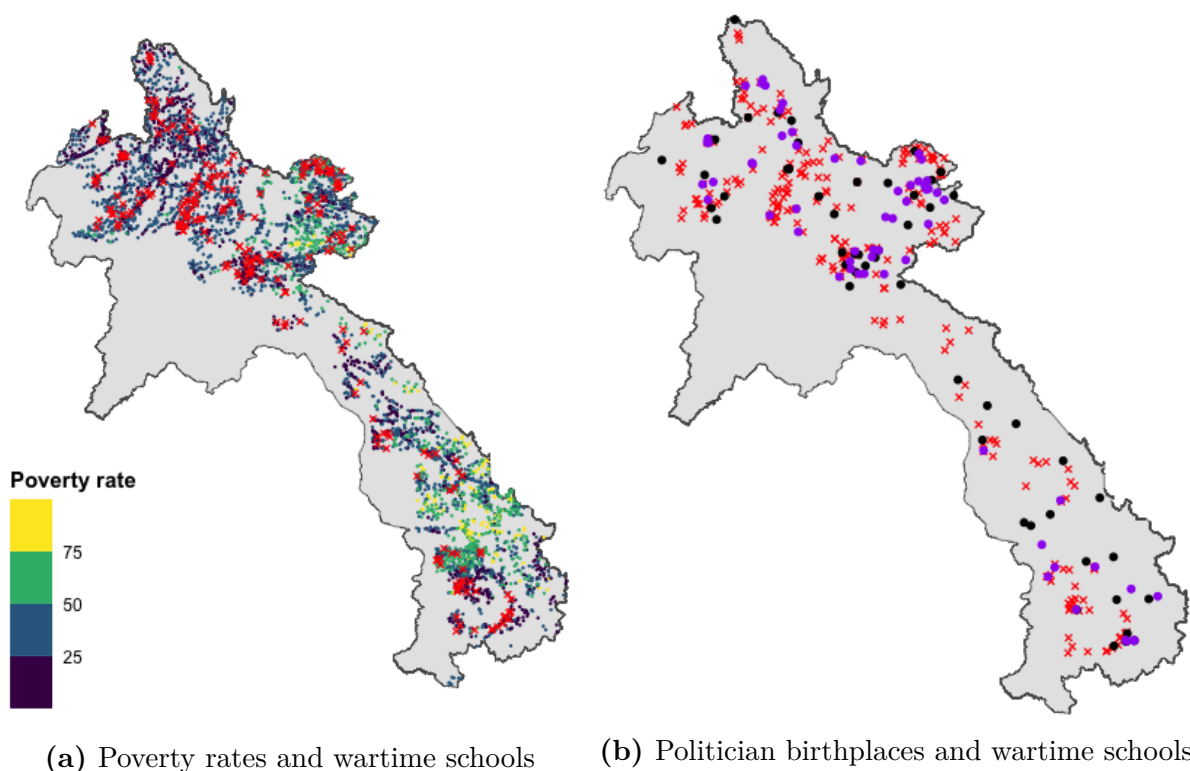
Wartime schools

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

Information on the year of construction for every school in Laos that existed as of 2014 is publicly available through Open Development Mekong, a consortium of NGOs providing open access development-related data.[18] In order to identify wartime school construction by the Pathet Lao, I traced the evolution of areas of communist control using dozens of briefs produced by the CIA during the war (see Appendix F.2). I exclude Mekong lowland areas, since the focus here is on the historically remote uplands. I also exclude areas captured by the PL after 1973, since these places are unlikely to have seen much wartime mobilization by communists so late in the conflict, after lengthy prior royalist control.

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[18]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).

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

Figure 3: Wartime school building, poverty, and politics

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

Birthplaces of members of the 4th NA

I use geocoded data on prominent revolutionaries who were mobilized as a second, more direct, measure of mobilization. I identify prominent revolutionaries by using data on members of the 4th National Assembly (1997-2002), since this is easily available from an official registry. Almost all members of the 4th NA had personal histories of being mobilized into the war; the few that did not were excluded from the analysis. The assumption is that places that were home to prominent revolutionaries had high levels of mobilization more generally. There are no signs that political leadership strives for geographical balance in the National Assembly; instead, famous revolutionary areas seem to be especially well represented. Figure 3 reveals a striking, though suggestive, correlation between 2015 poverty rates and wartime school building in the uplands as well as a clustering of wartime school building and birthplaces of National Assembly members in the

4th and 9th National Assemblies.

6.2   Model and Estimation

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

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

Treated and control groups are not balanced across different types of localities: villages in more built-up areas, near district capitals and rivers, were more likely to see more revolutionary mobilization according to both measures (tables A.8 and A.9). However, the analysis can be interpreted causally if one believes that mobilization—as measured by wartime schools and birthplaces of revolutionaries—was "as if" random *within districts and across geographically and historically similar areas.* Substantively, the lack of localized pre-war social differentiation and the locally chaotic, low-information wartime environment provide some support for such an interpretation (cf. Walder & Chu, 2020).

Estimating standard regression models, I consider three outcome variables that are indicative of benefits and connections emanating from the post-revolutionary party-state.

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

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

6.3   Political and Economic Incorporation of Upland Villages

Results from estimating these models support my hypothesis that patterns of state linkages, and related benefits, map on to histories of mobilization, now at a higher level of aggregation. Wartime school construction is associated with significant decreases in contemporary poverty rates, increases in post-war school building, and increases in the probability of being the birthplace of a member of the 9th National Assembly. Villages that are near birthplaces of revolutionaries who were members of the 4th NA are also

Table 7: Local economic and political legacies of wartime mobilization

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

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

less poor than similar nearby villages and had greater subsequent school-building. These results hold after structuring highly local comparisons and controlling for geographic and climactic factors, bombing histories, and pre-war settlement characteristics and patterns. Possible alternative explanations are addressed through a robustness check in Appendix F.6.

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

7 Conclusion

A distinguishing characteristic of post-revolutionary communist governments has been their ability to incorporate even far flung communities into a party-state. I have pointed to revolutionary mobilization, at the origin of these party-states, as a critical moment in this process of state formation. If, as Huntington (1968, p. 335) argued, the political function of communism is to "fill the vacuum of authority," how precisely has this vac-

uum been filled, and how has post-revolutionary political order been maintained? I have provided a possible answer: First, the critical and contingent experience of revolutionary mobilization in wartime transforms individuals. Political parties integrate and channel these transformations into further participation in the state and party, shifting social networks, human capital, and social norms. Where revolutionaries succeed and displace old elites, enduring links between families and localities and the party-state grow from these individual transformations. Intergenerationally, these changes are transmitted within families, which socialize their children according to the networks, norms, and skills built through revolutionary mobilization.

In the case of communities in upland Laos, I have shown that revolutionary mobilization itself created long-run connections to the state. I have argued for a causal interpretation of this result based on the dynamics of conscription, showing balance along granular covariates pertaining to deep family histories. Instrumental variables analysis, leveraging the specific timing of nearby fighting, and sensitivity analysis provide further evidence of causality. Studying the mechanism of persistence, using genealogical data, I find evidence of enduring shifts in social networks, skills, and cultural norms rooted in revolutionary mobilization. These have been transmitted within families intergenerationally, and they continually support local party-state engagement. Thus, even in a communist setting, in a historically "stateless" part of the world, the old relationships and attachments of kinship, perhaps as much as Leninist vanguard organizations, have been at the helm of party-state building as revolutionary families have sought to preserve links to the state.

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