The Pull of the Center

The Mobilizational Roots of Transformation in Social Revolution

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Abstract

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

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

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1 Introduction

When are revolutions socially transformative and when do revolutionary regimes instead only form thin veneers on resilient societies? Even after intense violence and centrally planned policy aimed at social transformation, path-breaking work focused on the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe shows that old forms of social stratification and identity continue to reproduce themselves culturally, within families, and through intrinsic demands for human capital in administration.[1] The most visible forms of post-revolutionary change, through top-down policies and institutions, have thus often failed to bring enduring transformations to political hierarchies and patterns of social inequality.[2]

However, not all revolutions have been so ineffective at creating social change. Especially in places with historically weak states and rural populations, revolutions mattered because they led to the intensive mobilization of large numbers of previously marginalized people. Social transformation then progressed from changes to skills, social networks, and culture rooted in mobilization in the course of revolutionary conflict. Systematic long-run microstudies of revolutions in rural places, which are essential to understanding such transformation, are scarce, perhaps because revolutionary centers in the developing world remain difficult to access. Using unique intergenerational data on families and individuals, I analyze the impact and externalities of revolutionary mobilization as a neglected microprocess of transformation in social revolutions.

Large numbers of rural people who were previously excluded from formal politics were mobilized into political organizations over the course of the social revolutions of the twentieth century. For instance, 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.[3] Further afield, from Burmese

[1] Janos, 1994;Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Pop-Eleches, 2007; Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Lankina; 2022. Lankina (2022, p. xv) argues that the Soviet Union fell not only because of economic failures, but also "when it was forced to shed the façade that concealed the organic, self-reproducing, and resilient society of pre-Bolshevik Russia."

[2] cf. Migdal, 1988; Scott, 1998.

[3] Goscha 2022, p. 259-262.

highlands to Malayan jungles, to the mountains of Dhofar in Oman, to the borderlands of Colombia, Mozambique, Mexico, and El Salvador, places where state authority was historically weak and governance highly localized, became centers of violent revolutionary movements. Analyzing the case of Laos, a country that saw significant revolutionary mobilization during the Indochina Wars of the mid-twentieth century, I find intergenerationally resilient shifts in political participation, social networks, human capital, and cultural norms that are rooted in revolutionary mobilization.

The case of Laos highlights underlying social transformation even where top-down policies for social change, although attempted for a time, have been weakly implemented. In Laos, the revolutionary centers in the remote uplands were composed of small villages, often only connected by mountainous foot tracks, inhabited by subsistence agriculturalists from diverse ethnicities.[4] Loose pre-revolutionary orders were profoundly disrupted by the Laotian Civil War, which involved hundreds of thousands of soldiers across the opposing communist Pathet Lao and Royal Lao Government (RLG) sides. It drew in the extensive participation of North Vietnam, which at times had over 100,000 troops and cadres in Laos, and the U.S., which supported the RLG and dropped 260 million bombs on the country.

After the revolution, the typical communist policies of agricultural collectivization and industrial modernization were not effectively carried out for long.[5] Politics in Laos has since been characterized by a paradox of strong one-party hegemony over society on the one hand and weak and uneven state capacity on the other.[6] These factors together make Laos a baseline for studying the long-run impact of revolutionary mobilization: if social transformation rooted in revolutionary mobilization is identifiable anywhere, it should be identifiable in Laos given the country's relative lack of pre-revolutionary development and subsequent challenges with top-down policy change.

To study the transformative effects of revolutionary mobilization over the long-run,

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

[5]Evans, 1990, p. 44-64. Resettlement of mountain villages to lowland areas (Evrard & Goudineau, 2004), especially since the mid 1980s, is one notable area of state-led change, but even this has been largely managed by local authorities and is thus arguably endogenous to the local penetration of state power.

[6]Creak & Barney, 2018.

I collected a unique dataset from rural areas of northern Laos that traces the ancestors, descendants, and extended family members of individuals who were mobilized into the Communist Party during the Laotian Civil War in the 1960s-1970s as well as those of similar, nearby people who were not mobilized. This data, covering approximately 1000 individuals across three generations, was collected in nine villages that experienced large-scale communist mobilization during the war, which led to a communist takeover of the country. It is precisely such remote rural areas, still largely unstudied, that were the centers of revolutionary movements in many parts of the world. Such genealogical 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.[7]

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

The central methodological challenge is to convincingly separate the impact of mobilization from prior factors. I address this endogeneity problem in three steps. First, the communities under study were economically underdeveloped and highly disconnected from political and economic centers in pre-revolutionary times.[8] As a result, social differ-

[7] Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

[8] Scott, 2009; Evans, 1990; Halpern, 1961a.

entiation, whether in terms of occupation, class, or education was minimal. Second, the process of revolutionary mobilization occurred under conditions of low information, where most mobilization happened through conscription during periods of intensive nearby fighting. Some families were thus less exposed to mobilization simply because of the gender and ages of family members at the time when drafts took place. Accordingly, there is balance across a range of individual-level covariates between mobilized and unmobilized people. The data shows balance on attributes that are rarely measured, covering family structure, pre-revolutionary family social status, networks, and human capital. Finally, a state-of-the-art sensitivity analysis shows that, given these contextual factors, selection bias would have to be implausibly high to nullify the observed results.[9] As a further robustness check, results hold in an instrumental variables analysis leveraging the specific dynamics of revolutionary conscription in these communities.

The analysis provides empirical microfoundations and theoretical extensions for the classic idea that communist revolutions represented a distinct path of modernization, expanding on the Huntingtonian argument that the process of mobilization into revolutionary political parties was key to communist politics.[10] This has implications also for the study of state-society relations and authoritarianism. Building on path-breaking work by Wood,[11] I explicate a core, but still underappreciated, area of post-revolutionary transformation: the creation of new interests and identities after revolutionary mobilization. The transformation of human capital endowments, social networks, and even cultural norms that occurred among only the mobilized families go beyond what Skocpol, for instance, conceptualizes as only an "alliance" between the peasantry and the state.[12] Relatedly, there are few empirical studies in political science of social stratification and inequality in revolutionary autocracies, those regimes that emerge after social revolutions.[13] Along with the literature on pre-revolutionary continuities, contrasting work in sociology on China shows a post-revolutionary change in class hierarchies as well as eco-

[9] Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.
[10] Moore, 1966; Huntington, 1968, p. 334-343; Skocpol, 1979.
[11] Wood, 2003.
[12] Skocpol, 1979, p. 279-280.
[13] Levitsky & Way, 2022.

nomic advantages to cadre households that are resilient to liberalizing reforms.[14] A way forward in interpreting these contradictory results is to take seriously the idea that the specific patterns and methods of revolutionary mobilization, which differed from place to place, have enduring effects on social stratification in revolutionary autocracies.

Another point of departure for this paper is James C. Scott's canonical work on Zomia, a mountainous area spanning parts of South and Southeast Asia, including much of Laos, that has been removed from state control until recently. Scott explains state formation in Zomia after the mid twentieth century as a process facilitated by technological change, which allowed privileged lowlanders affiliated with the state to colonize the traditional zones of the egalitarian and "stateless" highlanders.[15] I detail an alternative path of state penetration, which sheds light on the puzzle of the rapidity with which states have come to control even previously recalcitrant areas, often with surprisingly little resistance. In parts of Laos, local Zomians themselves have been central to forging enduring state-society linkages after transformation through revolutionary mobilization. Results emphasize a perspective where interactions, negotiation, and voice, although limited, rather than only coercion from the top-down, are central to state-society relations.[16]

Finally, the paper contributes to the study of authoritarianism by illustrating how revolutionary autocracies embed themselves in local communities. This is a distinct perspective from existing work on authoritarianism that focuses on elite-level dynamics, repression, and various forms of strategic institutional manipulation by dictators.[17] The focus on mobilization itself and micro-level mechanisms is also distinct from older work that emphasized class-based alliances between regimes and segments of society. The basis of power for such regimes is not only in strategies of manipulation and repression; rather, such regimes benefit from durable connections to even far-flung localities within their borders, which have been forged in transformative processes of revolutionary mobilization.

[14]Gerber, 2000; Lankina *et al.*, 2016; Lankina, 2022. Walder, 2002; Xie & Zhang, 2019. In contrast, Alesina *et al.* (2020) find a persistence result in China, where old regime patterns of inequality re-emerge one generation after revolution.

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

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

[17]Gandhi, 2008; Slater, 2010; Svolik, 2012; Lachapelle *et al.*, 2020.

2 Revolutionary mobilization and its downstream effects

2.1 Revolutionary mobilization

The idea that revolutionary mobilization itself is personally transformative was central to the thinking of communist revolutionaries like Lenin, Mao, and Ho Chi Minh.[18] This is a vision that sees warfare instrumentally to some extent, as a tool in accomplishing the critical project of politicizing the peasantry and reconstituting the state by forcibly drawing in large numbers of marginalized people. I test whether revolutionary mobilization really led to durable social transformation along a range of dependent variables: these include employment by the state, education, social networks, and the salience of traditional cultural norms.

Revolutionary mobilization, considered broadly, is full-time participation in an organization engaged in violent conflict aimed at social revolution, which is a rapid change in the social hierarchies and state organizations of a given polity.[19] The touchstone 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.[20] These factors, moreover, often all work at once: for instance, land reform, which might be naturally seen as a policy concession, is also a direct way to politicize the peasantry, since it is implemented by marginalized people who are specifically mobilized for this purpose.[21] Education involves literacy as an inducement, but also propaganda, new hero worship, and emulation drives; it often begins or ends with coercive conscription. One thus cannot cleanly separate different "types" of mobilization, since individual motivations cannot be reliably parsed in such contexts. The Maoist model also assumes a party-state: an organization that both amalgamates political, administrative, and military functions and monopolizes political participation in areas under its control, retaining this monopoly after the conclusion of fighting.

[18] Huntington, 1968, p. 337; Goscha, 2012, 2022.

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

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

[21] Walder, 2015, p. 45-49; Goscha, 2022, p. 412-413.

Revolutionary mobilization is a critical moment of individual transformation, which then has broader spillovers. Mobilization happens unevenly since not everyone in each locality is drawn into the organization of the party-state. It causes shifts in human capital and social networks. In addition to political, military, and administrative training and indoctrination, war exposes revolutionaries to intense leadership and organizational experiences; it removes them from their families and binds them to their compatriots in ways that are typically not seen in peacetime. After the conflict, where revolutionaries succeed, wartime experiences both equip revolutionary veterans with the necessary skills and also give them strong moral claims for pursuing political and material benefits within the emerging party-state. The rise of such people creates a connection between the state and the communities from where they come.

When such people are drawn unevenly from different, especially previously marginalized, social backgrounds, it also creates a change in patterns of social stratification relative to the pre-revolutionary situation. The impact of mobilization has spillovers on families and communities when revolutionary veterans socialize their families in different ways and use their networks, skills, and influence to draw benefits to their communities. The question I then examine is how, and under what conditions, revolutionary transformation is intergenerationally durable, against the motivating findings of pre-revolutionary persistence.

This theory of social change based in revolutionary mobilization in a way bridges literatures on the legacies of violence and rebel governance. The legacies of violence literature typically progresses from psychological theories connecting experiences of violence to, often pro-social or oppositional, political behavior.[22] Meanwhile, the rebel governance literature takes a top-down view, focusing on the logics of institutions, governance, and policy-making by rebel authorities during and after conflict.[23] In contrast to both literatures, I focus on revolutionary mobilization, which definitionally operates at the intersection of the individual and institutional levels. The party-state coheres new networks and represents a system of incentives that further directs the individual-level

[22]Blattman, 2009; Balcells, 2012; Gilligan *et al.*, 2014; Berman *et al.*, 2024.
[23]Stewart, 2021; Liu, 2022; Thaler, 2025.

transformation of capacities and connections, which is rooted in wartime experiences.[24]

2.2 Mechanisms of durable transformation

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

A key finding of a large existing literature on mobilization in civil wars is that participation in civil wars is often the result of subtle processes that do not simply reflect pre-existing social cleavages. Civil wars aggregate local conflicts, at the level of family or even individual-level feuding, and participation and factionalization respond to contingent processes internal to the conflict itself, like past local histories, proximity to armed forces, or the timing and sequencing of episodes of fighting.[25] While these factors often involve strategic choices and pre-revolutionary networks, the key point is that there is space for new networks and factions to emerge in highly contingent ways through mobilization.[26] Local decisions, often made under great uncertainty, aggregate to the creation of new groups and networks. Canonical accounts are thus consistent with the possibility that patterns of mobilization in many cases do not simply carry over old social divides. The extent to which this happens in any given case is an important empirical question, which I systematically analyze in section 4 below in the context of the communities under study.

After the end of conflict, positions of power or wealth that came into the hands of previously marginalized groups can revert for at least two reasons. Old elite groups often manage to culturally preserve advantages in human capital, eventually outcompeting

[24] cf. Jha & Wilkinson, 2012; Gaikwad *et al.*, 2023.
[25] Kalyvas, 2003, p. 480; Wood, 2003, p. 226-229, 237-240; Walder & Chu, 2020.
[26] Wood, 2003; Walder & Chu, 2020.

others for positions of power or wealth.[27] New networks formed through revolutionary mobilization also decay when individuals retain and prioritize old identities and social affinities.[28] A concrete illustration of such processes comes from Baird's account of the Brao, a historically marginalized ethnic minority group in Cambodia that gained positions of power in parts of the country after the Vietnamese invasion in 1978.[29] 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 were eventually outcompeted for administrative and political jobs by the Khmer, the historically dominant ethnic group of Cambodia. The social networks of the Brao also never came to intersect more powerful, ethnic-Khmer networks. Thus, despite efforts to the contrary, state-society relations ultimately came to follow Scott's account of Zomian state-formation: colonization by dominant lowland groups who monopolize the state, and pre-communist legacies prevailed.[30]

Important mechanisms of durable revolutionary transformation are rooted in the dynamics of revolutionary mobilization itself. Threats from competition are less when mobilization endows human capital in widespread and sufficiently intensive ways among previously marginalized individuals, relative to historically privileged groups. In some cases, as I will show below, relationships built during revolution lead to changes in familial networks through marriage across class, ethnic, or group lines. Changes that involve not just professional or social networks but also familial networks are more likely to be resilient due to the cultural primacy of family ties. Entirely new identities and interests emerge in the process. In turn, families play a primary role in shaping the beliefs, skills, and ambitions of the subsequent generation, causing revolutionary changes to persist intergenerationally.[31] In several cases of rural communist revolution, such effects have also been accompanied by the large-scale exodus and elimination of incumbent skilled groups, further intensifying the need for the human capital of trusted revolutionary veterans and

[27] Lankina, 2022.

[28] 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).

[29] Baird, 2020.

[30] Scott, 2009.

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

further securing them positions of power.[32]

Where mobilization goes beyond the thin cooptation of a strata of people and seeds deeper social changes, transformations in political hierarchies are thus likely to be more durable. In the collinearity in shifts to different social dimensions, durable change after mobilization resembles a selective process of modernization. Changes to political hierarchies, human capital, social networks, and cultural norms come to reinforce each other. Moreover, expansion in human capital endowments and social networks allows veterans and their communities to productively engage and interact with the party-state.[33] People seek out the party-state to a greater extent when they can use it to pursue and implement goals, not just those relevant to private benefits, but also those related to the wealth and culture of their communities and even the perceived good of their new nation.[34]

2.3 An illustrative example

The life story of an ethnic minority man who ended his career as a brigadier general (naiphon chattava) in the Lao Peoples' Liberation Army (LPLA) helps solidify these ideas.[35] Naiphon Chan was born in an upland village in northern Laos to a family that lived by subsistence agriculture and the gathering of forest products. He was drafted into the communist army as a child and taught to read and write by party staff. At first a cook and animal handler, after fighting against the opposing Royal Lao Government (RLG), he was promoted and selected to receive training to be an army doctor. As hostilities subsided in 1975, when he was in his mid-twenties, he was a party member, involved in district-level administration of the military and youth union, and was also the chief of the district-level court.

He continued education in Vietnam, married inter-ethnically, something that was exceedingly rare under the old regime, to someone he met through his work, and became assimilated into the dominant lowland ethnic Lao, Buddhist culture. By the mid 1980s,

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

[33]Zhang & Lee, 2020.

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

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

he had become a senior officer in the LPLA. He pulled in his children, some nephews and nieces, and others from his birth village into party-state work, while people in other neighboring villages continued traditional ways of life to a greater extent. In his community, he embodied the diligence and industriousness that was celebrated in the propaganda of the party-state. He brought investments in roads and temples to his village. He was thus integral to the broader social rise of a peripheral community and an enduring incorporation of local networks into party-state networks.

2.4 Expectations and scope

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

As a baseline, my first hypothesis is that descendants, including in the extended family, of mobilized revolutionaries are more likely to hold positions in the party-state than the descendants of nearby, similar people who were not mobilized. Two alternate hypotheses here are, first, the hypothesis of reversion: where after initial revolutionary mobilization, locals are ultimately outcompeted for government positions by historically more privileged groups from outside. A second alternate hypothesis is the hypothesis of absorption or assimilation, where differences rooted in individual histories of mobilization cease to matter because of effective top-down provision of education and other public goods, flattening the individual and familial impacts of revolutionary mobilization. While policy aimed at equalization has been the explicit aim of many revolutionary as well as counter-revolutionary governments, implementation has often proven to be challenging.[36]

The second hypothesis then speaks to deeper societal transformations, rooted in revolutionary mobilization, that support these state-society connections: those from his-

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

torically 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, migration, and certain observable consequences of traditional cultural norms, described in greater detail below. By distinguishing individual-level outcomes according to family histories of mobilization and explicitly studying the transmission of cultural norms, these hypotheses speak to family socialization as a key mechanism in the persistence of social transformation and state-society connections after revolution. In the course of revolutionary mobilization, families are ruptured and then reconstituted. In aggregate, I expect revolutionary mobilization to help explain spatial stratification across a range of political and economic outcomes across upland Laos.

I believe that this analysis has broad implications. Studies from countries as diverse as the U.S., El Salvador, and Oman, point to durable changes in political culture being rooted in participation in social revolutions.[37] However, existing work, much of it in history and area studies, does not provide a theory of revolutionary mobilization as constitutive to social transformation, nor does it bring systematic data to bear on analysis.

While revolutionary mobilization is transformative at the individual and community levels, the further political implication of this depends on macro-level factors involving the post-conflict institutionalization of politics, which of course differs greatly between cases like Laos, El Salvador, Oman, and the United States. The specific dynamics of mobilization in the area of study in Laos, the total victory of the communists, which placed all formal politics under the purview of a single party, and the lack of post-revolutionary economic development, make this a relatively simple context for cleanly identifying individual-level impacts of mobilization over the long run. I would expect revolutionary mobilization to have had a similar impact in other revolutionary autocracies that heavily mobilized rural areas. This might include parts of Vietnam, China, North Korea, Eritrea, and Mozambique, peripheral parts of the U.S.S.R. that were directly

[37] Breen, 2019; Wood, 1991; Wood, 2003, p. 18; Takriti, 2013.

mobilized, like the North Caucuses,[38] and perhaps parts of post-revolutionary Mexico.

Importantly, this would exclude places where communism, or other regimes claiming to advance revolutionary social transformation, have been imposed from the outside or through military coups. Communist cases are most relevant because, whatever their later failings, members of such movements often had deep ideological commitments to social equality, which were unusual in many of the contexts where they operated. One would expect this to provide an impetus towards inclusion and capacity-building in mobilization. Studies of other historical trajectories—for instance, cases of failed revolution or post-revolutionary electoral politics—are left for future work.

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 itself 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 almost exclusively subsistence farmers.[39] Conflict over land was thus not salient. There were active trade networks in opium and forest products, and Buddhist monastic networks extended into some upland communities, while Christian missionary activity was minimal.[40] By and large, there were few large landlords, capitalists, or state bureaucracies, and modern political identities, such as those between "left" and "right," did not

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

[39] Halpern, 1961b.

[40] 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.

exist among the general upland population under the old regime.[41]

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%.[42] Historically, the Lao-Tai have been politically dominant in Laos, ruling over towns (*meuang*) in many of the arterial valleys of present-day Laos by the early 1300s.[43] The Khmu and other Mon-Khmer groups, older inhabitants of the area, have traditionally occupied mountainous locales and were historically given the label of *Kha*, or slave, by the Lao-Tai, reflecting the perceived backwardness associated with highlanders. These people are also sometimes referred to as the *Lao Theung* or "upland" Lao. The third most populous group after the Khmu, the Hmong—categorized as *Lao Soung*, "highland" Lao—arrived fleeing unrest in southern China in the 1800s to settle in the mountains of northern Laos. I refer to all groups outside of the Lao-Tai as "ethnic minorities."

In this context, the Laotian Civil War, or Laotian Revolution, was rooted in political instability following decades of French colonialism, Japanese occupation during World War 2, and then a return of French rule after a brief period of independence.[44] Subsequently, splits emerged among the Lao elite between those who wanted French rule and those supporting the Viet Minh's anti-French insurgency in Indochina; this faction developed into the communist Pathet Lao (PL), heavily supported by North Vietnam. Laos gained independence, as a constitutional monarchy, from the French in 1954. At this time, the PL were active in many areas of Laos and retained full control of two upland, northeastern provinces bordering Vietnam: Sam Neua and Phongsaly.[45]

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

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

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

[44] Stuart-Fox, 1997.

[45] Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 73-79.

Fighting between the Royal Lao Government (RLG), supported by the U.S., and communists continued sporadically. Communist control gradually expanded from their original strongholds in the northeast to include much of eastern and upland Laos. At the same time, boundaries were fluid and frequently changing. People from virtually all major ethnic groups were involved on both sides of the conflict.[46] The 1962 Geneva Conference instituted a ceasefire, though no official demarcating line between the factions was ever established.[47] Fighting continued and intensified immediately after and subsided only after the communist takeover of the country in 1975.

Post-revolutionary changes

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.[48] Leadership positions at the district level and above under the old regime were almost always held by Lao-Tai aristocrats. The communists, who were based in upland areas bordering Vietnam during much of the war, have claimed to represent a multi-ethnic Lao people and to champion the interests of minorities since the wartime period.[49] While such proclamations are typical in communist contexts and often hollow, wartime U.S. sources also noted that the PL leadership structure and ethnic policy "appear[ed] to live up to these principles,"[50] despite the fact that the core leadership was made up of lowland Lao, heavily supported by the Vietnamese. 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.[51]

Today, a diversity of ethnic groups are represented at all levels of the party-state, including in the Politburo and Central Committee, which are the primary policy-making bodies (Table 1). At the same time, many of the poorest and most isolated communities in the country are ethnic minority communities. Outside of the very highest echelons

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

[47]Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 110

[48]Ivarsson & Goscha, 2007; Pholsena, 2002.

[49]Neo Lao Haksat , 1970; Neo Lao Haksat, 1980.

[50]Langer & Zasloff, 1969, p. 133-134.

[51]Baird, 2021.

Table 1: Ethnic diversity in party leadership

See Appendix A on data sources.

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

of the party-state, many ethnically non-Lao people also hold positions at all levels of the military and bureaucracy. Since information on party membership is not publicly available, data on the National Assembly of Laos gives some sense of the extent to which the deeper ranks of the party-state encompass underlying social groups.

Unevenness also characterizes the economic situation of upland people in Laos. In aggregate, there are major and persistent gaps in poverty rates by ethnicity.[52] 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.[53]

4 Family histories

With the aid of local partners, a sample of family histories was gathered from nine ethnic Khmu villages in northern Laos. This was done using a backward sampling procedure, where enumerators systematically sampled from individuals living in these communities today, asking these people about their ancestors and all extended family members in face-to-face interviews.[54] 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.

[52]Statistics Bureau, 2015b, p. 170.
[53]Goudineau, 1997; Baird & Le Billon,2012; Dwyer, 2022.
[54]cf. Wantchekon *et al.*, 2015.

These histories recover the stories of approximately 1000 people across three generations, providing relational data as well as data on professions, education, and migration during the old regime, during the time of intensive revolutionary conflict, and in the subsequent generation. Since it covers all extended family members, this includes information on family members who have died, have moved to other places, and some who were royalist soldiers and went to reeducation camp (*semana*, "seminar" in Lao). Although Laos is well known as the most bombed country in the world, this area faced few instances of aerial bombardment, and the impacts of bombing are not significant locally.[55] A total of 72 initial interviews were conducted.[56] 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.[57] In studying the impacts of revolutionary mobilization on remote, rural communities anywhere in the world, there is simply no way around this. The histories in question here are more recent than those analyzed in other retrospective work, and the majority of interviewees lived through the war and were able to give detailed accounts of their experiences as well as those of their relatives.[58]

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

[55]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.

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

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

[58]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.

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.[59] 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.[60] While it cannot be fully ruled out, I believe that the unique nature of the interviews, conducted as conversations among trusted community insiders, represents an unusually high safeguard against social desirability bias. A sign of this is the fact that respondents reported historical participation on the royalist side at rates that exceeded prior expectations based on knowledge of this area.

Other concerns with retrospective data might involve the possibility of differences in migrations, death rates, and birth rates between mobilized and unmobilized families, leading to biased results. Based on available evidence, detailed further in Appendix C, I do not believe that these are high risks in the given context. Data on people who were 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 (Tables 2 and 6 below) provides no evidence for differential birth or death rates.

Revolutionary mobilization and selection

A detailed qualitative account of local mobilization and pre-revolutionary society, based on extensive fieldwork and interviews conducted over several years, is available in an appendix. Individuals are considered mobilized into the communist revolution only if

[59] 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.

[60] 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.

they had a military, political, or administrative position in support of the war on the communist side at the district (*meuang*) level or higher. Given that the area underwent mass mobilization, with many people contributing to the war effort in different ways, this is simply meant to capture a threshold of integration into the Communist Party, which is the core theoretical idea behind the treatment, following Huntington. At lower levels of work, the day-to-day life of the person would not have significantly shifted away from that of a local farmer.[61] Individuals in the post-war generation (notated generation 2) are considered to be from a mobilized family if they are a grandchild, child, niece or nephew, or younger sibling of someone who was mobilized.

The "unmobilized," or control, group includes a few different types of people, all of whom remained, to varying extents, remote from the Communist Party: those who worked for the communists at the village or sub-district level at times, those who were mostly uninvolved in the conflict, and those who were mobilized into the Royal Lao Army (FAR). Some of the villages under study were actively contested during the war and came under royalist control for some time. Family histories of royalist 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 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

[61] The particular operation of a Leninist party structure in these localities also leads to a situation where many local people are affiliated with mass organizations during certain periods of their life without this concretely impacting their skills, social networks, livelihoods, or political power. Similar coding decisions are made, for instance, in Walder's (2002) study of cadre households in rural China.

Table 2: Mobilized and unmobilized balance

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

	Mobilized			Unmobilized			
	N	Mean	Sd.	N	Mean	Sd.	Diff.
Female	62	0.081	0.275	167	0.515	0.501	−0.434
Ave. no. siblings	51	4.941	1.827	112	5.277	2.001	−0.335
Monk (males)	54	0.241	0.432	80	0.275	0.449	−0.034
Other family mob.	59	0.695	0.464	157	0.548	0.499	0.147
From area 1	62	0.339	0.477	167	0.281	0.451	0.057
Notable prior gen.	50	0.4	0.495	118	0.339	0.475	0.061

not well informed about the capacity of draftees and faced significant manpower pressure from ongoing conflict.

Despite the prevalence of conscription, I do not make strong claims about the randomness of recruitment, since it is impossible to recover the precise motivations, and the mix between coercion, inducements, and indoctrination, in the process of mobilization writ large. However, Table 2 shows balance across several individual-level covariates for which data was collected and which might confound results to come. Family size might correlate with economic status and thus is an important variable for balance. Prior connections to the state, which were exclusively through military service or attaining village and sub-district head positions, as well as connections to supra-local trade are captured by the "notable prior generation" variable, on which there is balance.[62] A particularly important pre-revolutionary societal network was the Buddhist priesthood.[63] Temples were the only source of education in this area in pre-revolutionary times, which was limited to young boys who became monks.[64] Overall, there is strong evidence that mobilization did not simply replicate existing patterns of social stratification.[65]

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

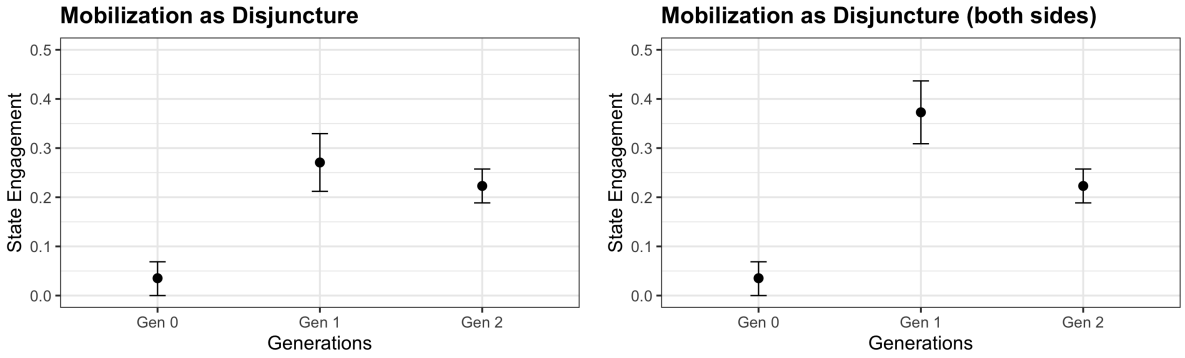
[63]cf. Hansen, 2007; Zaw, 2024.

[64]Existing work on Russia suggests education has been an important factor in mobilization.Lankina *et al.*, 2016.

[65]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). Based on information gathered through qualitative interviews, the result on number of siblings is likely because some people were able to avoid conscription because their siblings had already been conscripted.

5 Main results

5.1 Intergenerational connections to the state



(a) **(b)**

Figure 1: A mobilization shock

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

Table 3: Sample characteristics across three generations

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

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

Involvement with the state increased during the wartime generation and remained at a significantly higher level in the post-war generation. "State engagement" in Figure 1 and Table 3 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 at the district level or above on both sides, with about 27% being mobilized by the communists.[66] Much of this involvement came from

[66]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.

military mobilization of young men and boys, though people also worked as teachers, administrators, and other political staff (Table 3). Distinction between political, administrative, and military roles was not sharply drawn, with the same individuals often serving in all three capacities. Mobilization into teaching and administrative positions typically also involved conscription of very young people who initially provided labor or military support and were given basic education by the party.

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

5.2 Mobilization, kinship, and the state

To directly test if party-state work in generation 2 is rooted in histories of revolutionary mobilization, I consider correlations between histories of family-level mobilization and being employed full-time by the party-state in the subsequent generation. According to the hypothesis of mobilizational transformation, there should be a durable shift wherein local individuals retain connections to the state over the long-run but that this happens selectively, according to proximity to revolutionary mobilization. The alternate hypothesis of reversion would hold if state jobs returned to historically more privileged Lao-Tai groups, who previously monopolized these positions. Figure 1 already provides evidence that this has not been the case, since state employment in these Khmu communities, even in leadership positions, has not dropped back to its pre-revolutionary levels. Finally, if the alternative hypothesis of absorption is true, we should see no difference according to family histories, since in this scenario, state policy should flatten such inherited inequalities by providing broad public services like education.

I conduct regression analysis, with the outcome variable being full-time employment by the party-state in generation 2 and the treatment variables being various indicators of familial revolutionary mobilization in the prior generation. This controls for gender, birth-year cohorts, number of siblings, and family history of royalist mobilization, since these factors might independently affect the outcome variable. An important baseline level of control, including on unobservables, is achieved through sample selection. All individuals come from the same ethnic community, with family histories in upland villages that have historically occupied essentially the same ecological and economic niches. I also control for the specific village (or "area" encompassing a sampling cluster, see Appendix B), further accounting for village histories that might have been pertinent to mobilization.

Results suggest that revolutionary mobilization, including among extended family (uncles and aunts), led to a significantly greater likelihood of party-state employment among family members in the subsequent generation (Tables 4 and 5). Almost all employees of the party-state in the sample worked at local and provincial levels as bureaucrats, doctors, teachers, soldiers, or police, while several reached national-level positions. Presumably, working for the party-state also inculcates ideological loyalty, though it is impossible to explicitly ask about this in Laos. The incorporative effects of mobilization spread, through families, beyond those directly mobilized, causing these effects to persist, against findings of pre-revolutionary persistence in other contexts. The fact that the results hold even among extended family is important because it helps specify the extent and nature of spillovers from mobilization. Insofar as extended family members do not share common last names and households and might thus not be easily identified as descendants of revolutionaries, this also suggests that the intergenerational effect is not simply rooted in top-down directives to target the trusted descendants of revolutionaries for benefits. More evidence against such a patronage story emerges through tests of the second hypothesis.

Sensitivity analysis provides strong evidence that these results are meaningful. Most mobilization happened through conscription in a low-information environment, in response to the intensity of nearby fighting; selection by draftees or communist comman-

Table 4: Generation 2, determinants of party-state work

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

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

Table 5: Predicted probabilities of party-state involvement in generation 2

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

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

ders was minimal, and pre-war social differentiation was also minimal. Sensitivity analysis results, following Cinelli & Hazlett,[67] show that in order for results to lose statistical significance at the 95% level, all of the following would have to be true: (1) a very high level of selection on an unobserved ability during a chaotic process of mobilization, (2) an independent intergenerational transfer of this underlying ability, and (3) this underlying ability influencing participation in state work at rates even higher than having male gender, which is the strongest measured predictor of party-state work (Appendix D.1).[68] This chain of effects is highly implausible given the context under study. Results also hold robustly in an instrumental variables specification (table A.5), which uses the

[67]Cinelli & Hazlett, 2020.

[68]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.

ages and genders of children in the family in 1967-1968 as exogenous sources of variation in exposure to mobilization, under the assumption that mobilization—primarily conscription—responded to nearby conflict.

5.3 Social networks and human capital

In addressing the second hypothesis, I first test how mobilization has transformed the social networks and skills of families and individuals in the long-run. This gets to the broader argument about "the communist path to modernization" as a process involving changes to patterns of social stratification that have been rooted in revolutionary mobilization. Human capital and social networks also provide the foundation from which locals are able to maintain connections to the state and productively engage it.

Table 6: 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	Capital	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]

Table 6 provides further evidence that the incorporation of mobilized families has not only been a thin, top-down cooptation by party leaders or an alliance between peasants and the state, where interests and identities are stable. Rather, mobilized families saw self-sustaining advantages and fundamental changes along a range of social variables that speak to identity and economic and political interests, including education, migration,

Table 7: Regression results, marriage and education

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

livelihoods, and marriage patterns.

Changes in education and marriage patterns especially speak to the durability of revolutionary changes. Human capital accumulation, through education and participation in skilled labor,[69] allows people to better adapt to subsequent political and economic changes in a way that cooptative exchanges involving money or limited access to positions of power by themselves do not. Changes to kinship networks, beyond changes to professional and friendship networks only, are likely to be more resilient because of the cultural primacy of family ties. Inter-ethnic marriages brought Khmu people into familial relationships with people from historically more privileged Lao-Tai communities as well as other minority groups.[70] Based on qualitative fieldwork, it is clear that in some cases, such families are more linguistically and culturally assimilated into ethnic Lao identity, while in others they maintain mixed forms of identity.

Few people from this area spoke the Lao language in pre-war times, literacy was minimal, and there were virtually no cross-ethnic marriages. Trends in table 5 thus represent a revolutionary social transformation. These trends started with revolutionary mobilization itself, which first separated locals from their traditional family lives, brought them into large multi-ethnic networks centered on the party, and gave them formal education along with political and organizational experience. In turn, benefits from broader social networks and education reinforced local party-state connections. Regression anal-

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

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

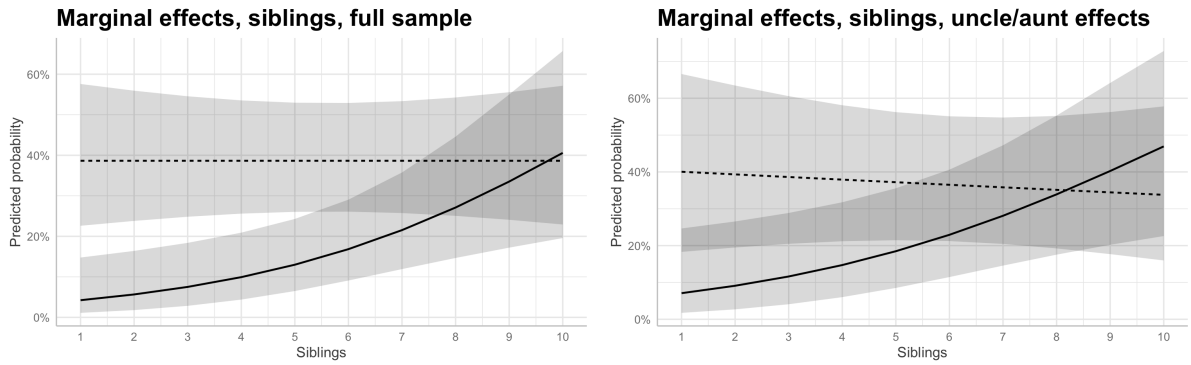
ysis provides further evidence that a family history of mobilization led to higher rates of inter-ethnic marriage and higher rates of tertiary education in the post-revolutionary generation (Table 7).

5.4 Cultural norms

The results above point to families being important in sustaining revolutionary changes. I find further evidence of a selective change to traditional cultural norms, passed down within families, according to mobilization histories. Anecdotally, ambitions of children in generation 2 were affected by family mobilization histories through socialization, even across extended families. For instance, in one case, a woman who attained higher education and skilled non-governmental work in the national capital mentioned that her uncle, a senior soldier, had encouraged her to study hard from her childhood, promising her a job as an army doctor if she did so. To test the salience of differences in socialization more systematically, I focus on the observable implications of a cultural norm that places responsibilities on individuals that make it difficult to pursue careers in the party-state.

Traditionally, in the studied communities, at least one male child was expected to stay with his parents and support the parental household throughout his life. This would 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, there are positive marginal effects of the number of siblings on party-state employment at the individual level, suggesting the maintenance of this cultural norm. However, no such effect exists for mobilized families, for whom the number of siblings has no impact on the probability of party-state employment.

Furthermore, this effect holds when comparing nieces and nephews, but not children, of revolutionary veterans with children from unmobilized families (Figure 2b). The cultural norm thus appears to not apply even in families where the parents are farmers but an uncle or aunt was mobilized during the revolution. While alternative explanations



(a) **(b)**

Figure 2: Heterogeneous effects: siblings

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

cannot be ruled out, this provides suggestive evidence that revolutionary mobilization shifted parents' preferences on traditional family roles for their children; parents in historically mobilized families encouraged their children to pursue opportunities with the party-state even at the expense of traditional familial responsibilities.[71]

In the area of study, three related social shifts were rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself. First, social—and kinship—networks expanded and intersected more privileged groups. Second, relevant skills were built through formal education, even at the highest available level. Finally, there is evidence of shifts in preferences and ambitions regarding family roles that would allow individuals to pursue party-state work even at the expense of traditional family duties. The within-family effects show that such transformations have not been based on development and industrialization or broad top-down investments by the state, since such change would apply broadly through these communities. Rather, they are rooted in revolutionary mobilization itself. They also show that transformations were intergenerationally durable, against the alternate hypothesis of a reversion to pre-revolutionary patterns. I now turn to important implications of these

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

results at higher levels of aggregation. Two such implications involve macro-processes of cultural recognition and spatial stratification across a range of political and economic variables.

6 Voice and negotiated cultural change

One important macro-level outcome arising directly from the intensive mobilization of some groups of ethnic minority Khmu people has been the creation of *Boun Greh*, a constructed national festival based on certain older Khmu rituals. Though unable to identify its exact origins among competing stories, Petit notes that the festival "was created on the initiative of some [Khmu] elites with a view to giving voice to [Khmu] claims vis-à-vis the state and Laotian society in general."[72] Of course, as shown for the area under study, the reason there were any Khmu elites at all who were able to take such initiative at a national level is because of the impact of wartime mobilization. In addition to the origin stories given by Petit, I heard one where *Boun Greh* supposedly 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. Today, school textbooks place *Boun Greh* alongside the Lao and Hmong New Years as a nationally recognized holiday of the Khmu and a part of Lao national identity.[73]

This history builds on the micro-results above in two important ways. First, it shows that local transformations in political hierarchies and state-society connections had emergent national-level implications, which go beyond an aggregation of the direct effects of mobilization on individuals and families. Second, this provides direct evidence that mobilized people from marginalized backgrounds had some voice, however limited, in policy-making; concurrently, they used the skills and networks described above to productively engage with the state. Even people not directly involved recognized that *Boun Greh* was the creation of people like them—in some cases, their direct relatives or relatives of their

[72]Petit, 2013, p. 483.
[73]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2009, p. 30-31.

friends. The utility received through simply exercising this agency, what Wood refers to as "pleasure in agency,"[74] further binds these communities to the party-state and helps explain why they have not returned to traditional ways of life.

7 Histories of mobilization and spatial patterns of stratification

A final empirical analysis, marshaling the broadest possible range of data at a national level, provides evidence that revolutionary mobilization was a disjuncture in patterns of social stratification across upland Laos. This analysis uses an extensive range of originally collected data on local pre-war covariates. My suggestion is that these aggregate results are, in part, due to the micro-processes detailed more locally above.

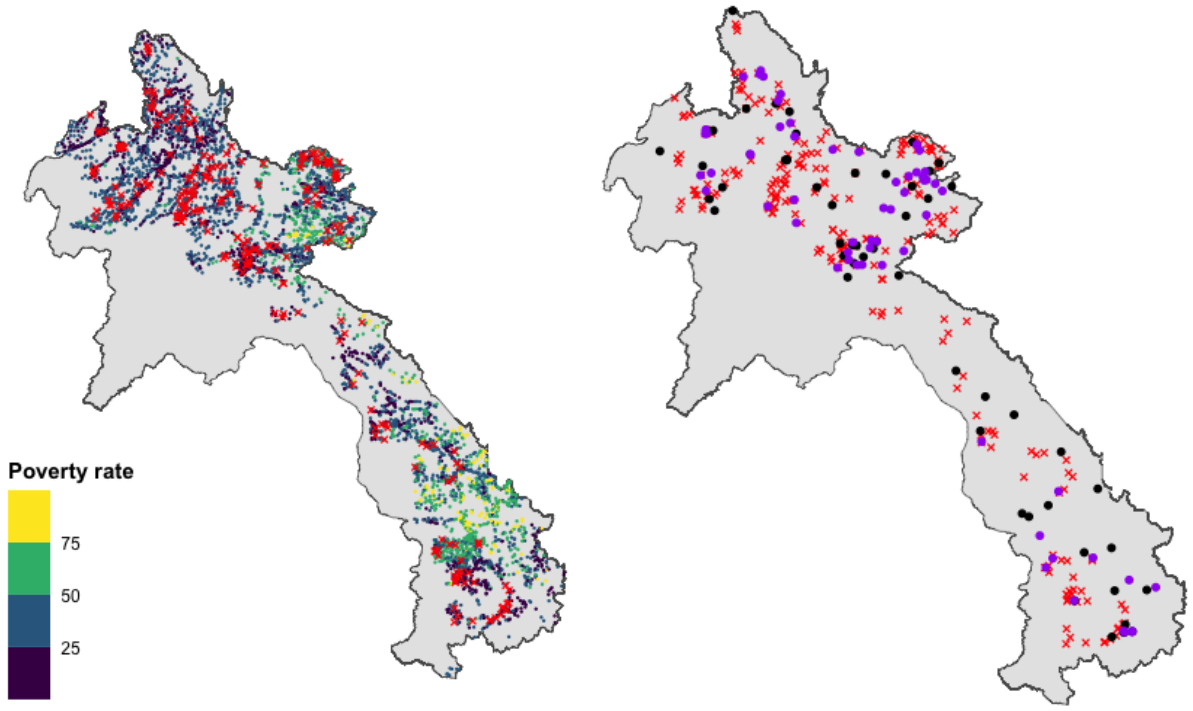
7.1 Measuring revolutionary mobilization

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

Wartime schools

One of the explicit goals of wartime education in the communist areas was to create and staff a unified party-state.[75] 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.[76]. 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.[77] Students learned basic literacy, were indoctrinated in anti-imperialist and communist ideas, and contributed la-

[74]Wood, 2003, p. 235-236.
[75]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 102.
[76]Whitaker *et al.*, 1972, p. 102
[77]Ministry of Education & Sports, 2020, p. 58.



(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.

bor during the school day to the war effort. Few schools were built by colonial authorities in upland Laos prior to the war (Figure A.1).

Information on the year of construction for every school in Laos that existed as of 2014 is publicly available through Open Development Mekong, a consortium of NGOs providing open access development-related data.[78] 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 pro-

[78] 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).

vide a second, more direct, measure of mobilization. Prominent revolutionaries are drawn from members of the 4th National Assembly (1997-2002), since this biographical information is easily available from an official registry. Almost all members of the 4th NA had personal histories of being mobilized into the war; the few that did not were excluded from the analysis. The assumption is that places that were home to prominent revolutionaries had high levels of mobilization more generally. 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.

7.2 Model and estimation

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

Though this is not a causal analysis, it accounts 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. 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, for which I also control.[79]

To further account for deeper historical factors, working with research assistants, I compiled a dataset of pre-war settlement patterns across all of upland Laos. This dataset was hand-coded from about 300 American maps from the 1950s and 1960s. 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. Finally, a measure of the historical density of nearby villages with non Lao language names provides a control for pre-war ethnicity.

Along with district specific intercepts, I control for altitude, terrain roughness, river access, distance to the nearest international border, a dummy for being on an international border, and mean annual precipitation. Wartime bombing is a particularly important history that needs to be accounted for.[80] 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. 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

[79] cf. Huillery, 2009, p. 188-189.
[80] Lin, 2022; Riano & Valencia Caicedo, 2024.

Table 8: Local economic and political legacies of wartime mobilization

	(1)	(2)	(3)
DV	Poverty 2015	N. Schools 76-90	9th NA
Model	OLS	Poisson	Logit
wartime school	-2.93^{***}	0.362^{***}	1.068^{***}
	(0.672)	(0.037)	(0.19)
4th NA birthplace	-1.86^{**}	0.188^{***}	0.333
	(0.861)	(0.047)	(0.244)
pre-war temple	−2.4	−0.08	0.911^{***}
	(1.767)	(0.07)	(0.327)
pre-war school	-2.594^{***}	0.06	2.118^{***}
	(0.948)	(0.05)	(0.297)
district dummies	✓	✓	✓
geographical controls & bombs	✓	✓	✓
historical controls	✓	✓	✓
adj. R^2	0.571		
N	4919	4919	4919
standard errors clustered by district			
$*p < 0.1$; $**p < 05$; $***p < 0.01$			

Assembly. Villages that are near birthplaces of revolutionaries who were members of the 4th NA are also less poor than similar nearby villages and had greater subsequent school-building. Moreover, with the exception of the third model, these effects are stronger than those associated with local pre-war sources of human capital: Buddhist temples and schools. The estimated impact of pre-war schools should also be contextualized in terms of the very limited number of such schools (Figure A.1).

In aggregate, although older legacies leave their mark, villages that saw wartime school construction continue to see greater benefits and stronger ties to the party-state, relative to similar nearby villages, even close to fifty years after the end of the Laotian Civil War.[81] 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.

[81] A further robustness check is available in Appendix F.6.

8 Conclusion

Some social revolutions have been more durably transformative than others because of the ways in which previously marginalized people were mobilized over the course of revolutionary conflict. Post-revolutionary political transformations are more likely to be durable where revolutionary mobilization reshaped social networks and patterns of human capital allocation; where families, the keepers of tradition, were separated and then reconstituted as their youths were pulled into a revolutionary party-state only to return as profoundly changed people. New interests and identities emerged from revolutionary mobilization as it brought together new networks of people and even led to the creation of new cultural forms.

Analyzing social change in a revolutionary base area over the long-run and at a granular level of detail adds theoretical and empirical microfoundations for 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 also allows revolutionary authoritarian regimes to embed themselves in even far-flung communities, not on the basis of social class alliance or institutional manipulation, but through transformative processes of revolutionary mobilization. Even in a part of the world famous for holding out against modern state control, state power has progressed not only through coercion and top-down investments, but also through the initiatives of locals seeking agency through the state, after the transformative experience of revolutionary mobilization.

Revolutionary mobilization was a defining feature of politics in much of the developing world in the twentieth century. Studying the impacts of such mobilization at a granular level in cases where revolutionaries were defeated, or where conflicts reached negotiated resolutions, is a natural area of future work. Indeed, even in earlier social revolutions, 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 worthy of further analysis.

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