

Numbers in India's Periphery

Over the past two centuries, the deep and multifaceted relation between statistics and statecraft has emerged as a defining feature of modern states across the world. Governments increasingly depend upon statistics for planning and evaluation of interventions as well as self-representation. *Numbers in India's Periphery* examines systematic and deliberate errors in government statistics. Using field interviews, archival sources and secondary data, the book explores the shifting relations between various kinds of government statistics and charts their political career in Nagaland, a state located in India's landlocked ethno-geographic periphery stretching from Mizoram to Jammu and Kashmir.

This book examines the area (1951–2018), population (1951–2011) and National Sample Survey statistics (1973–2014) of Nagaland, treating them as part of a larger family of mutually constitutive statistics embedded in a shared context. It shows that Nagaland's government statistics suffer from sustained and large errors and examines the impact of inadequacies in the data generating processes on statistics of interest to policymakers. It argues that statistics are shaped by a combination of factors, including discontent with colonial borders, competition over resource-rich territories, political unrest, competition for government spending and contests over the delimitation of administrative units and electoral constituencies in the context of weak institutions and dominance of the state in the economy. It also engages with the shared experience of other states of India, including Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur, and other countries in Africa and Asia and non-governmental statistics such as church membership data.

Numbers in India's Periphery uncovers a mutually constitutive relationship between data, development and democracy deficits and offers an exciting account of how statistics are social artefacts dynamically shaped over their life cycle by political and economic factors. It contributes to the under-researched field of the political economy of statistics in developing countries.

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The Political Economy of Government Statistics

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Abbreviations

AFSPA	Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958
ASA	Assam State Archives
CAGR	compound annual growth rate
CBR	crude birth rate
CDR	crude death rate
CPO	Chakhesang Public Organization
DCHB	<i>District Census Handbook</i>
DCI	Delimitation Commission of India
DCO	director of census operations
ECI	Election Commission of India
ENPO	Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation
FFC	Fourteenth Finance Commission
FSU	First Stage Units
GHC	Gauhati High Court
GoI	Government of India
GoN	Government of Nagaland
<i>GPT</i>	<i>General Population Tables</i>
GSE	gross school enrolment
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ILP	Inner Line Permit
IPS	Indian Police Service
<i>ME</i>	<i>Morung Express</i>
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
MOSPI	Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
MPCE	monthly per capita consumer expenditure
NBCC	Nagaland Baptist Church Council
NEFA	North Eastern Frontier Agency
NFHS	National Family Health Survey

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NGISRSC	Nagaland GIS & Remote Sensing Centre, Department of Planning & Coordination, Government of Nagaland
NGR	natural growth rate
NHBCC	Naga Hills Baptist Church Council
NHTA	Naga Hills-Tuensang Area
NNC	Naga National Council
NSA	Nagaland State Archives
NSCN-IM	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak Muivah)
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
NSS	National Sample Survey
NSSO	National Sample Survey Office (formerly National Sample Survey Organisation)
NTC	Nagaland Tribes Council
ORGI	Office of the Registrar General of India
ORGI&CC	Office of the Registrar General of India & Census Commissioner
PCA	Primary Census Abstract
PCI	per capita income
PES	Post-Enumeration Survey (formerly Post-Enumeration Check)
PPF	Pochury Public Forum
<i>PPT</i>	<i>Provisional Population Totals</i>
RGCCI	Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India
RGI&CC	Registrar General of India & Census Commissioner
RGI	Registrar General of India
RSZ	Rengma Selo Zi
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal
SCO	superintendent of census operations
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCS	Special Category States
SCI	Supreme Court of India
SoI	Survey of India
SRS	Sample Registration System
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TFR	total fertility rate
UFS	Urban Frame Survey
UoI	Union of India
UT	union territories
VDB	Village Development Board

Preface

The long, sporadic prehistory of this book began when Vikas read former Chief Minister of Manipur Radhabinod Kojiam's op-ed on the Naga peace process in the *Hindu* after finishing his undergraduate studies. Writing a few months after the 2001 Census, Kojiam drew attention towards, among other things, the discrepancies between different estimates of Nagaland's area and population. An interview of Nagaland's Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio by Sanjoy Hazarika published in the *Statesman* in December 2005, when Vikas was back in the academe, briefly revived the interest in Nagaland's statistics. In the interview, Rio admitted that his state's headcount was flawed. This study though had to wait until 2011, when Ankush came across a news report on the 'contraction' of Nagaland's population between 2001 and 2011.

Our preliminary analysis of the census data suggested that conventional factors could not explain Nagaland's abnormal demographic trajectory. While it became clear that non-demographic factors were key to understanding changes in Nagaland's population and that fieldwork and archival research were indispensable, the scope of the study remained ill-defined until after we visited the state to obtain a first-hand idea of the scale and nature of the statistical 'mess'. Our conversations through the second half of 2011 coalesced into short-term project proposals at our respective institutions, Institute of Economic Growth and Azim Premji University. Little did we know then that Nagaland's statistics would engage us for the better part of the following decade and take us through the length and breadth of the state.

Studying maps was not part of our original plan. During our visits to Nagaland, we found a great diversity of maps on the walls of government offices and private establishments. Discussions with government officials and civil society leaders complicated the picture further. Finally, after a senior bureaucrat effectively told us that the estimate of the state's area was a state secret, we decided to examine maps and area statistics and realised that they were essential for conducting population censuses and sample surveys.

While examining our preliminary findings, we needed information on socio-economic and developmental indicators. We found that the incidence of poverty in

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Nagaland was the lowest in the whole of the country in several years, which did not agree with our field observations. We then turned to the National Sample Surveys (NSSs), the source of data for government-appointed expert groups on the estimation of poverty.

So, two years into the project on Nagaland's demographic puzzle, we found ourselves working on three different types of statistics – area (and maps), census population and survey statistics. It took a while for us to realise that the seemingly parallel streams of work would converge. As our fieldwork unfolded, the significance of political and economic contexts as well as the interconnectedness of different statistics slowly became clearer. The logical sequence in which the material is presented in the book emerged midway when we began to put together the pieces of the puzzle to figure out the big picture. In other words, we have presented the chapters in the sequence we ought to have thought through the problem rather than the sequence that was actually followed.

We were still not sure whether the three strands should be presented together, let alone in the form of a book. Several factors pushed us in that direction, including acontextual debates on statistical reforms amidst the steady decline in India's statistical system and the growing clamour for evidence-based public policy. Also, while teaching courses at the interface of politics, statistics and policymaking, we found a dearth of material on the quality of data in India and, particularly, on the life cycle of data, interconnectedness of different types of data and context-dependence of data. Furthermore, we felt that government statistics, a key ingredient of public policy, do not receive sufficient attention in textbooks.

In the existing literature, most contributions deal with a particular type of statistics for a limited period, which impedes the emergence of a comprehensive understanding of the quality of data. Econometrics textbooks take students directly to techniques without introducing them to how the context shapes and is shaped by statistics or, at least, alerting them to the relevant literature in the social sciences. The discussion on the impact of data quality on econometric analyses is often limited to ex post robustness checks. The context of data is discussed in other social sciences, but those discussions are mostly theoretical and often happen in isolation from real data and, hence, do not directly challenge the complacency within economics. Unsurprisingly, most economists continue to work with the 'available' data without examining their quality. We believe that analyses of various statistics for the same territory over a long period informed by perspectives from different disciplines are needed to improve our understanding of the context-dependence of data.

This book begins with a brief survey of the problem of data deficit across countries and then takes readers to the context within which numbers are produced and consumed in Nagaland before introducing them to area, population and survey statistics, in that order. Each chapter emphasises the need to understand the context of

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data by supplementing statistical analyses with field interviews and, wherever possible, archival research. The concluding chapter explores the larger context of data deficit and extends the discussion on Nagaland to other states. While this book is focused on India, it might help illuminate the predicament facing other developing countries and trigger further research on the quality of data that is often circumscribed by a mutually constitutive relation among data, development and democracy deficits.

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We have incurred many debts during our work on the book. If this book contributes to the understanding of the broader context within which statistics are produced and consumed in developing countries, we would have succeeded in repaying part of those debts.

As students of economics at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai (IGIDR), we were fortunate to sit through M. H. Suryanarayana's lectures on introductory econometrics that sowed seeds of doubt about the infallibility of statistics and P. G. Babu's lectures on advanced microeconomics that emphasised the embeddedness of phenomena.

Nearly a decade ago when we began exploring the census, Nagaland was just a name and a bunch of inconsistent statistics for us. The fieldwork for this project could not have been conceived without the support of C. M. Chang, R. N. Chhipa and Sanjoy Hazarika. They put us in touch with Charles Chasie, Visakono Sakhrie, Theja Therieh, Toshi Wungtung, V. Hekali Zhimomi and Lungsang Zeliang, who in turn introduced us to Nagaland. And, then we snowballed our way through the hills and plains of the state. Sanjoy Hazarika and K. Sreedhar Rao played a similar role in Assam. Rajesh Thapa and, for shorter periods, Akong, Ajay Lama, Chandra Limbo and Robin Swargiary provided invaluable travel support.

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To all of the above we offer the following line from *Aabhaar*, a poem by Shivmangal Singh 'Suman'.

जिस-जिस से पथ पर स्नेह मिला, उस-उस राही को धन्यवाद।