

PART I

THEORY

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## I

## Colonial Institutions and Civil War

*As the British imperialists had kept intact hundreds of feudal ties in order to ensure their own survival and decided the model of production in India to serve their own country's industrial needs, some regions were developed while some other regions remained backwards. . . . As Andhra, Telangana regions were living as separate units for centuries, there is a vast difference in development in the economic, political and social spheres of these two regions. Andhra region is more advanced in these spheres. . . . The important factors which had facilitated the development are: the people's struggles against the Zamindari system in Madras Presidency and Andhra regions, the Ryotwari system introduced by the British, irrigation facilities.*

– Central Committee, CPI-ML People's War, pp. 1–2

### I INTRODUCTION

#### I.1 Do Current Insurgencies Have Deep Roots in History?

With the end of World War II and decolonization since the 1950s, civil war and insurgencies have replaced interstate wars as the main form of conflict. However, a fundamental question remains unanswered by theorists of civil war – do historical institutions play a role in creating conditions for civil wars and insurgencies? Are there deeper processes of state formation, so far ignored by scholars of civil war, that have created structural and ethnic fault lines within states that have erupted into ethnic conflict and rebellion in recent years? In contrast to the scholarship on civil wars that tends to focus on proximate causes of insurgency and rebellion, this book proposes that many insurgencies around the world have origins in deep historical institutions and processes.

For example, once the NATO/US forces started defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban migrated to bordering areas in Pakistan. They emerged as different groups as part of the umbrella Tehrik-e-Taliban in Pakistan in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), which were previously under an indirect form of governance by the British, and where a relatively weaker state with

a different set of laws had persisted. They were not as successful in neighboring districts in the NWFP that was formerly part of British direct rule. This suggests that while the timing of the onset of this insurgency in Pakistan was in response to international intervention and conflict across the border, once the Taliban insurgency emerged in Pakistan, it found more fertile ground in areas formerly under British indirect rule.

One of the longest insurgencies that recently negotiated a peace agreement is the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia; FARC) insurgency in Colombia, which started in the 1960s. This insurgency was initially located in areas of historically low state penetration (Robinson 2013). Zukerman-Daly (2012) shows how the La Violencia conflict from the past left organizational legacies that led to the FARC insurgency. This leads one to suspect that while proximate geographic factors, ethnic grievances, and natural resources like cocaine have spurred recent conflict, institutional and organizational legacies from the past may have played some role in the emergence and persistence of the FARC insurgency in the areas where it succeeded.

Some African countries like Sierra Leone did not abolish colonial indirect rule systems, and this created grievances that led to ethnic insurgencies. Others like Uganda were able to reduce the powers of pre-colonial-era chiefs and avoid such problems (Acemoglu et al. 2013). Studies have noted the role of British indirect rule in allowing the Islamic caliphate and sharia law to continue in the north of Nigeria, and more direct rule creating a Western secular Christian/animist culture in the south, thus creating conditions for Islamic movements since 1980s and more recently the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's north (Babalola, 2013: 13–16; Sampson 2014: 312–15).

Many of the ethnic secessionist insurgencies in India's northeastern states including Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Manipur can be traced back to discontent and identity formation emerging from policies of indirect rule and the chieftaincy system set up by the British (Baruah 2005), and such long-term effects need to be investigated further. While studies focus on the role of ethnic grievances and endemic rebellion in Burma's peripheral regions, what has been less analyzed is that the multiple ethnic secessionist insurgencies in Kachin, Shan, Karen, and other provinces occur in what were formerly "frontier areas" under British indirect rule (Smith 1999). The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) "sons of the soil" insurgency in Bangladesh beginning in the 1970s saw indigenous tribal people who considered themselves original inhabitants of the Hill Tracts region oppose immigration by Bengali settlers into their homeland. Colonial indirect rule policies under the British that declared the CHT to be an Excluded Area with autonomy for the Hill tribes helped create a distinct tribal ethnic identity, which persisted and was later mobilized against the majority Bengali ethnic group (Mohsin 2003; Qanungo 1998).

Most studies of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal find that factors like poverty (Do & Iyer 2010) or ethnic inequality explain why the insurgency occurred. While the timing of onset of the Maoist insurgency in 1996 may have been due to election results in 1995, longer-term effects may have been due to historical legacies of indirect land tenure through *zamindars* or landlords that created land inequalities that persisted and created conditions that were later exploited by the Maoist leaders in Nepal (Joshi & Mason 2010; Regmi 1976). Similarly, in a recent study, Boone (2017) analyzes how land tenure systems in Africa may have created conditions for land-related conflict, but there could be long-term effects of colonial-era land tenure on the possibility of sons of the soil conflicts in Africa that need to be investigated.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) insurgency in Sri Lanka occurred because of Tamil grievances against Sinhalese dominance and ethnic exclusion (Fearon & Laitin 2011). However, this conflict may have had deeper historical roots that scholars of insurgency ignore. Schools set up by American missionaries in northeastern Sri Lanka during British colonialism made the Tamils more educated than the Sinhalese and set the conditions for future ethnic riots and insurgency (Horowitz 1985: 156). Similarly, while most studies point to the role of exploitation of natural resources by the Indian state and the emergence of Assamese nationalism as the cause for the emergence of the United Liberation Front of Asom-led insurgency in Assam in India, colonial era migration into the tea estates in the state of Assam also set up ethnic competition and created conditions for sons of the soil-type insurgency (Weiner 1978).

Even though the effects of past institutions influenced many of these insurgencies, scholars have not adequately explored the long-term legacies of historical institutions on postcolonial insurgency. In this book, I show that both opportunity to rebel and ethnic grievances are endogenous to colonial patterns of state building. Bringing history back into the study of civil wars can provide a deeper understanding of the roots of some insurgencies. It can also explain the persistence and recurrence of civil conflict (Besley & Reynal Querol 2014; Jha & Wilkinson 2012), which existing theories of civil war that focus on more proximate determinants cannot explain. I do this by analyzing the important case of the Maoist insurgency in India, the world's largest democracy, which reveals that different forms of colonial indirect rule created structural conditions for insurgency. Following this, I outline how colonial institutions can create conditions for insurgency in other cases beyond India, which need to be explored in future research.

## 1.2 Analyzing Subnational Variation within the Case of the Maoist Insurgency in India

I analyze the case of the Maoist insurgency in India, which exemplifies how different forms of colonial indirect rule and indirect revenue collection created land and ethnic inequalities that persisted and created the conditions for

rebellion. Thinking more broadly beyond the Maoist conflict, India has experienced several ethnic secessionist insurgencies, whether in Kashmir, the various northeastern states like Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura, and in Punjab. Except for Punjab, which was annexed into direct rule around 1848 soon after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, all these states with ethnic insurgency also historically experienced some form of British indirect rule. The northeastern states like Manipur and Tripura were small frontier-type states, while Kashmir was a large princely state with a ruler from a different ethnic-religious group than majority of subjects.

Why focus on the Maoist insurgency, which is an ideological, center-seeking insurgency that wants to overthrow the Indian state, and not on the other secessionist insurgencies?<sup>1</sup> One reason is methodological. Unlike the secessionist insurgencies that are concentrated in one province, the Maoist conflict during its expansionist phase from 2005 to 2012 spread to almost ten provinces and developed some level of influence in almost 25 percent to 30 percent of districts in India. This allows us to exploit subnational variation across different provinces and districts within India, which studying the secessionist insurgencies located in one province would not.

Another reason for studying the Maoist insurgency is that it has high policy importance and was considered to be the most important internal security threat by the former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, as the conflict started escalating beginning in 2005.<sup>2</sup> The Maoist conflict represents an attempt by armed violent groups to fight for the rights of lower castes, tribes, and other subaltern groups that were historically neglected by the state and points to a schism in the rural political economy of the world's largest democracy. Unlike ethnic secessionist insurgencies like those in Kashmir and Punjab that are localized in their province and do not pose a threat to the very fabric of Indian democracy (Varshney 1998), the Maoist insurgency mobilizes lower castes and tribes that are spread across different states of India and thus becomes an important internal threat to the very idea of a stable and "substantive" democracy (Kohli 2001).

With the leftist FARC insurgency in Colombia negotiating a peace agreement in 2016, and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal having ended in 2006, the Maoist conflict in India remains one of the longest-running leftist insurgencies today and needs to be better analyzed and understood. Also, the long-term effects of colonial indirect rule are very visible in the Maoist insurgency case, since the descendants of *zamindars* (landlords) from colonial times in Bihar and Chhattisgarh started various vigilante groups like the Ranvir Sena and Salwa

<sup>1</sup> Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?" differentiates between secessionist insurgencies that want to separate or secede from the state and center-seeking insurgencies that want to overthrow the central state. He suggests that they may have different types of causes for onset.

<sup>2</sup> *The Economist*, "Ending the Red Terror."

Judum, which led to human rights violations against underprivileged ethnic groups like *Dalits* and *Adivasis*. The land inequality created through the *deshmukhs* who collected land revenue under the Nizam of Hyderabad was difficult for the postcolonial Indian government to reverse through land reforms and created ideal structural conditions for Maoist rebels. The direct policy significance of colonial indirect rule for the current Indian state is clear, both for counterinsurgency and land reform policies.

### 1.3 Brief History of the Maoist Conflict in India

While details of the political history and patterns of violence of the Maoist movement are discussed in Chapter 4, a brief outline follows.<sup>3</sup> The Maoist insurgency in India initially started in 1967 in a village called Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal, and the Marxist-Leninist ideology rapidly spread to various parts of India. The Indian government crushed this initial phase by 1973. Following this, the movement fractured, and it was in the late 1970s that different factions regrouped to reemerge in different parts of India, particularly in the states of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh.

Three main Maoist groups used violence and consolidated their control – the Maoist Communist Center (MCC) in Bihar, the People’s War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, and the People’s Unity (PU) operating mostly in Bihar/Jharkhand. In 2004, the PWG and MCC factions unified to form the Communist Party of India–Maoist (CPI-Maoist); since then, the level of guerrilla activities as well as the geographic zone of influence expanded rapidly, which prompted the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to repeatedly call it “India’s number one security threat.” By 2008–9, the insurgency had expanded to almost 150 or more of India’s 600-odd districts, and it represents both a serious security threat and a developmental challenge to India’s politicians. While the level of violence has declined since 2012, a cyclical pattern of violence has occurred every twenty years, and it is not clear if the insurgency is coming to an end or simply entering a dormant phase.<sup>4</sup> In fact, attacks in 2016 and early 2017 on Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) soldiers lend credence to the idea that the Maoists are only in a phase of “tactical retreat.”

### 1.4 A Puzzling Spatial Variation within India

As shown in the map in Figure 1.1, at its peak period in 2005–12, the long-lasting Maoist insurgency in India (1967–72 and 1980–ongoing) generates

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the Maoist insurgency in India, see Singh, *The Naxalite Movement in India*, and various articles in the *Economic and Political Weekly* especially by scholars such as Bela Bhatia, “The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”; K. Balagopal, “Maoist Movement in Andhra Pradesh”; Nandini Sundar, “Bastar, Maoism and Salwa Judum.”

<sup>4</sup> See Mukherjee, “Insurgencies in India – Origins and Causes.”

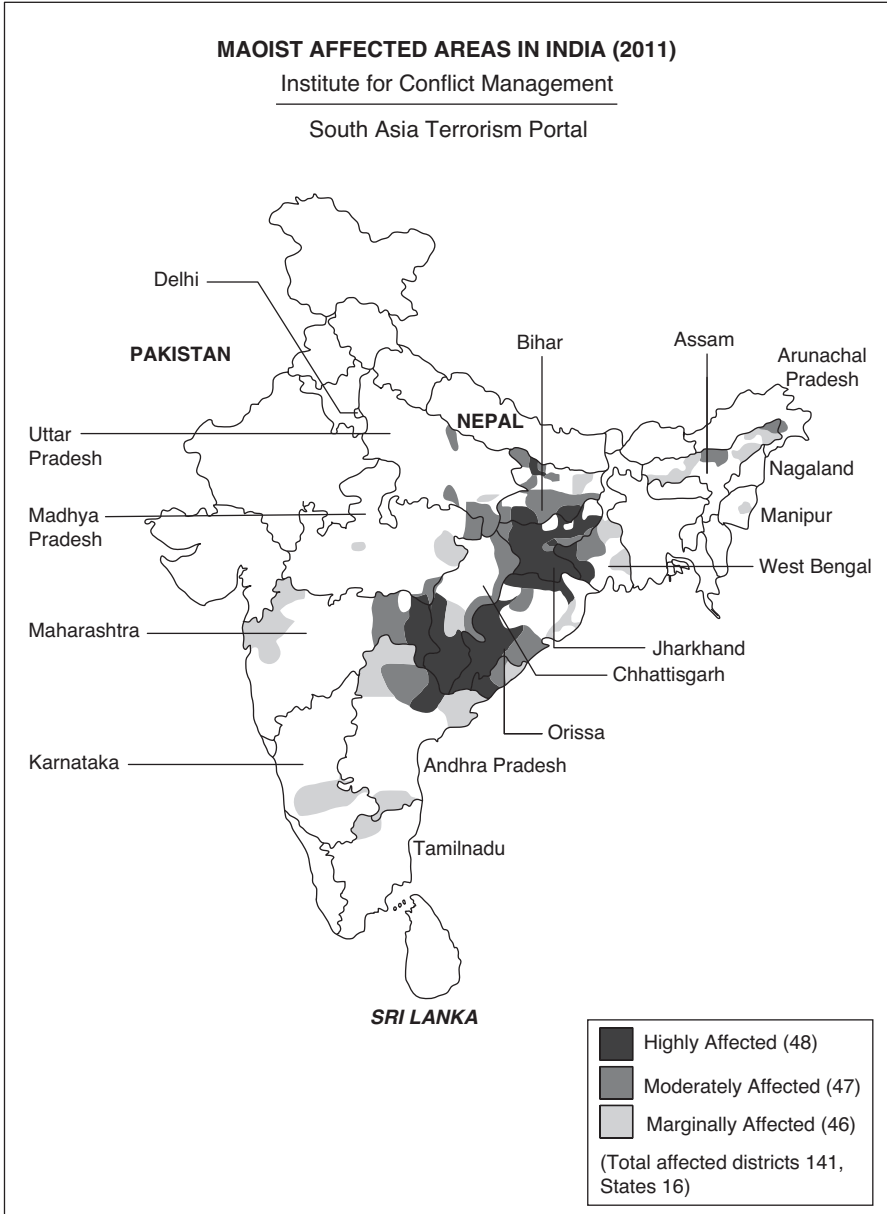


FIGURE 1.1 Map of Maoist insurgency in India, 2011–2012  
 Source: [www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/images/10\\_35/Maoist\\_2012map.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/images/10_35/Maoist_2012map.html)



a puzzle not easily solved by conventional theories of civil war – why did the insurgency emerge and consolidate along certain territories in the central-eastern part of India and not in other parts? Why are certain provinces and districts affected by the insurgency and not others? Is it, as Fearon and Laitin (2003) would argue, purely because opportunities for rebellion are present in some areas of India in the form of forest cover or hilly terrain or weak state presence? Is it because rebellious tribes or oppressed lower castes facing horizontal inequalities live there, as theorized by Murshed and Gates (2005), or because these tribes or lower castes have been excluded from political power (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min 2010)?

Yet, other areas of the country have similarly high forest cover, hilly terrains, poverty, and socioeconomically deprived ethnic groups like *Dalits* (lower castes) and *Adivasis* (tribal people), and yet no Maoist insurgency. For example, the Western Ghats areas in the state of Karnataka are ridged and hilly; Maoist documents show that they targeted these areas in 2005, but failed.<sup>5</sup> While it is true that in Chhattisgarh, the areas of highest Maoist control occur in the deeply forested Dandakaranya areas, there is dense forest cover in the neighboring state of Madhya Pradesh and famous tiger reserves, but no Maoist insurgency. While lower castes live in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (UP), these areas have not seen Maoist mobilization, except for a few districts like Gadchiroli in Maharashtra bordering neighboring Chhattisgarh and districts like Chandauli in UP bordering Bihar, which are highly affected, probably due to spillover effects.

While these proximate measures of *rebel opportunity* and *grievances* are important parts of the causal chain, they are *neither necessary nor sufficient conditions* to explain Maoist insurgency. These existing theories of civil war and rebellion are part of the causal framework, but they cannot fully explain the entire spatial variation in Maoist insurgency in India. There must be some other omitted variable that is key to explaining this unusual spatial variation. Looking into the past, these same areas that have the Maoist insurgency today tended to have various kinds of agrarian and peasant rebellions and unrest during British colonial rule, and sometimes even during pre-colonial times (Gough 1974). Could it be some long-term lingering effect of past institutions, which makes these areas intrinsically more prone to peasant rebellion?

### 1.5 Answer to the Puzzle – Two Types of Colonial Indirect Rule Created Structural Conditions for Maoist Insurgency in India

To fully explain this puzzling spatial variation of initial areas of Maoist control in India, it is necessary to include a crucial omitted variable – colonial indirect rule. Using subnational qualitative and quantitative data from the Maoist insurgency in India, I demonstrate that different forms of colonial indirect

<sup>5</sup> CPI-ML (PW), “Karnataka: Social Conditions.”

rule, whether *informal indirect rule* through landlord-based *zamindari* land revenue system (see Dirks 2001; Kohli 2004: 225–26; Lange 2009) or more *formal indirect rule* through certain types of native princely states (Fisher 1991; Iyer 2010; Lee-Warner 1910), created long-term persistent and path-dependent effects conducive to leftist ideological insurgency in India.

These two forms of indirect British colonial rule coincided with two epicenters of Maoist insurgency, one in northeastern and another in south-central India. The northern epicenter of the insurgency was near the conjunction of the states of Bihar/Jharkhand/Bengal, where the MCC was the dominant rebel faction. In these areas, which were formerly part of the Bengal presidency during British rule, informal indirect rule through the *zamindari* land tenure system chosen by the colonizers created the mechanism of land and caste inequality, which became a structural cause for radical leftist mobilization. As Kohli (2004) points out in his analysis of effects of colonial institutions on development, the *zamindari* land revenue system based on local political elite like landlords (*zamindars*) required less expansion of the colonial bureaucracy than the *ryotwari* land revenue system in Bombay and Madras Presidencies in which the colonial state directly collected tax and revenue from the villagers or *ryots*.<sup>6</sup> Thus, using *zamindars* as local intermediaries to collect taxes and revenue led to the creation of both grievance and state weakness mechanisms that persisted over time.

The southern epicenter of the insurgency occurred near the borders of the states of Andhra Pradesh/Chhattisgarh/Maharashtra/Madhya Pradesh/southern Orissa, where the PWG was the dominant rebel faction. In this area, the more formal type of indirect rule was established through princes/native rulers in the form of the large princely state of Hyderabad and the smaller feudatory states of Chhattisgarh and Orissa and Eastern State Agencies. The areas in Chhattisgarh that were part of the former princely states of Bastar and Surguja had *Adivasi* or tribes staying there, which from pre-colonial times had not been part of the state formation process (Scott 2009). These areas saw the colonial state not providing sufficient levels of development, and only exploiting the region for land and natural resources, which continued into the postcolonial period. Also in the princely state of Hyderabad, which was one of the largest princely states in India besides Kashmir, the Nizam of Hyderabad depended on *deshmukhs* to collect land revenue on his behalf. This led to their behaving in a despotic manner like the *zamindars* in Bihar/Bengal areas and resulted in high levels of land/caste inequalities and created horizontal intergroup inequalities (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhang 2013). Maoist guerrillas later used these land/ethnic inequalities, ethnic grievances due to natural resource exploitation, and

<sup>6</sup> Lee, “Land, State Capacity, and Colonialism,” provides empirical support that the *zamindari*/landlord areas had lower tax and bureaucratic capacity than the *ryotwari*/non-landlord tenure areas.