

THE STRUCTURE OF RELIGION, ETHNICITY, AND INSURGENT MOBILIZATION

Evidence from India

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ABSTRACT

This article problematizes the social structure of ethnic groups to account for variation in insurgent mobilization within and across ethnic groups. Relying on network-based approaches to social structure, it argues that insurgent mobilization is constrained by the structural connectivity of the ethnic group, a measure of the extent to which sub-ethnic communities—neighborhoods, villages, clans, and tribes—are socially connected internally and with each other. In agrarian societies, structural connectivity is traced to religion. On the basis of unique data on rebel recruitment from the Mizo insurgency in India and microlevel variations in changes associated with the spread of Christianity among Mizos, the author demonstrates that enhanced structural connectivity resulting from a network of highly centralized churches and institutions under the Welsh Presbyterian Mission significantly bolstered insurgent recruitment. Semistructured interviews of Mizo insurgents and ethnographic evidence from the neighboring Meitei and Naga ethnic insurgencies further support the argument and the casual mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

DURING the past half millennium, colonization and conquest brought organized religion to myriad communities around the globe. Across the developing world, this period witnessed a significant expansion of Christianity, which engineered momentous societal transformations.¹ Scholars have investigated the long-lasting political effects of these interventions, primarily through their effect on education,² but the discussion largely overlooks that these effects came in various forms. They were molded by the religious doctrine, practices, and organization of the churches, sects, and missions leading them.³ For example, the Baptist missions generally emphasized congregational autonomy

¹Wilson 1971; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991.

²Woodberry 2012; Lankina and Getachew 2012; Wantchekon, Klačnja, and Novta 2015.

³Scholars distinguish between the Protestant and Catholic denominations, but the differences across various Protestant denominations remain understudied. See Trejo 2009; Woodberry 2012.

and decentralized churches, whereas the Welsh Presbyterian missions preferred a highly centralized network of churches.⁴ In this article, I argue that the operation of religious missions left their distinct imprints on the targeted societies. By structuring a network of social ties, these interventions affected the sociostructural context in ways that shaped ethnicity and subsequent ethnopolitical mobilization.

In recent years, scholars including Ashutosh Varshney and Deborah Yashar have examined the role of religion-based associational ties in determining political action.⁵ My work follows the lead of these scholars but, like Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, contends that the role of religion goes deeper and is more foundational.⁶ Norris and Inglehart argue that religious traditions have distinctive worldviews and value systems that affect the culture and politics of nations in an enduring fashion. I extend this argument and look past ideational factors to posit that through doctrine and practices, religious traditions give their distinctive shape to the social structure of a group.⁷ Using evidence from Northeast India, I demonstrate that peculiarities in the social networks associated with religious denominations and sects can be used to understand the process of mobilization in the context of ethnic rebellions in postcolonial agrarian communities.

My work also focuses on the internal sociostructural constitution of ethnic groups, rather than their external environment,⁸ in understanding political outcomes. Scholars have consistently argued that shared ethnicity is a powerful facilitator of political violence.⁹ But not all ethnic groups are readily politicized and mobilized, and even fewer turn to violent rebellion.¹⁰ For ethnic groups who do experience organized rebellions, mobilization varies both across and within them.¹¹ I advance a structural argument that relies on network-based approaches to social structure and focuses on the social networks of ethnic groups to account for the variation.¹²

⁴Newman [1894] 1898, 7; Williams 1884, 26–30.

⁵Varshney 2003; Yashar 2005.

⁶Norris and Inglehart 2004.

⁷The resulting social structure is shaped by the theological tradition and not political mobilization. It precedes any religion-based associations that may emerge in response to interethnic interactions and ethnic mobilization.

⁸Hechter 1975; Gurr 1993; Posner 2005.

⁹Olzak 1994; Fearon and Laitin 1996.

¹⁰Hechter, Friedman, and Appelbaum 1982; Minorities at Risk Project 2009; Fearon 2006; Koter 2016. For instance, the Minorities at Risk data set lists 284 ethnic groups as at risk in 2006. Of these, 222 groups faced some form of discrimination, but only 107 carried out organized protests. The number of these groups that actually resorted to organized violence is significantly lower, at 42. These figures are only suggestive because the data set significantly underreports the number of ethnic groups. See Minorities at Risk Project 2009.

¹¹Stoll 1993; Hart 1997; Reinares 2004; Sadan 2013.

¹²White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976; Burt 1982; Centola and Macy 2007.

The dominant set of explanations for greater cooperation among co-ethnics centers on the assumption that ethnically homogeneous populations allow for better information flow.¹³ Recent pathbreaking work by Jennifer Larson and Janet Lewis underscores the need for further research into ethnic networks to better understand the process of information flow and collective action.¹⁴ I argue that some ethnic networks and parts thereof are more conducive to information flow and collective action than others.¹⁵ Ethnic groups are invariably characterized by subethnic communities, such as families, neighborhoods, villages, clans, and tribes, all of which have denser and often stronger ties with their members than with other coethnics. The ability of an ethnic group to coordinate collective action is determined by the network of social ties within subethnic communities and links between such communities across an ethnic group. This ability is reflected in the structural connectivity of an ethnic group, the principal variable of interest in this article, which encapsulates the extent to which subethnic units are socially connected. The differences in structural connectivity across ethnic groups are manifested in distinct network patterns that hold the key to unlocking the process of mobilization. Importantly, in the absence of structural connectivity, the internal homogeneity of an ethnic group is not sufficient to ensure mobilization.

Not all social ties are conducive to high-risk activities.¹⁶ The nature of ties across subethnic communities should be such that they facilitate the transition of these communities into purveyors of rebellion. This transition requires the existence of “bridges” with multiple ties spanning subethnic communities.¹⁷ These are wide but not diverse bridging ties, unlike those discussed by Varshney and Yashar.¹⁸ They reflect the congruity of preferences across the bridged communities.¹⁹ Wide bridges facilitate the dissemination, reinforcement, and reassurance necessary for participation in high-risk rebellions. I further argue that in agrarian societies, religion plays an instrumental role in determining whether an ethnic group includes wide bridges across subethnic communities.

I use evidence from Northeast India to demonstrate the importance of structural connectivity and the role of religion in shaping this connectivity. The region, which is inhabited by numerous geograph-

¹³ See Habyarimana et al. 2009.

¹⁴ Larson and Lewis 2016.

¹⁵ Other scholars have also alluded to similar variation across ethnic groups. Andreas Wimmer, for instance, suggests that “degrees of communitarian solidarity” vary across ethnic groups; Wimmer 2013, 25.

¹⁶ McAdam and Paulsen 1993.

¹⁷ Centola 2018.

¹⁸ Varshney 2003; Yashar 2005.

¹⁹ Blau 1977.

ically concentrated indigenous groups, has experienced several ethnic insurgencies since India's independence in 1947. This article involves village-level quantitative analysis using unique microlevel insurgent recruitment data from the Mizo insurgency (1966–1986).²⁰ These data provide information about the individuals who entered and exited the Mizo National Front (MNF), which spearheaded the insurgency. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of rebel mobilization that relies on the entire body of insurgents in a rebel group. Constrained by the absence of reliable data on participants, recent works like those by Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein, and Güneş Tezcür,²¹ while insightful, rely on subsets of participants, which could bias their findings.²² I use microlevel data obtained through a combination of archival research, semistructured interviews, and satellite-imagery-based thematic maps to examine the effect of structural connectivity associated with the spread of Christianity against a range of possible explanations.

In the Mizo-inhabited areas, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission set up an expansive network of highly centralized and well-integrated churches and civil society organizations. The result was a structurally integrated society with wide bridges that transcended subethnic identities, which facilitated the insurgent mobilization.²³ I demonstrate this effect of structurally integrated society on the insurgent mobilization with a range of measures of the structural connectivity of the Mizo society at various points during the first half of the twentieth century, all directly related to the spread of Christianity. I also employ semistructured interviews of seventy-seven individuals from all districts in the territory to further show that the causal mechanism is neither religiosity nor interpersonal ties, but is instead the overall structural environment. I supplement this analysis with ethnographic evidence from the neighboring Meitei and Naga ethnic insurgencies.

The article is organized as follows. I first outline the theoretical argument, including the role of organized religion in shaping structural connectivity. The next section presents empirical analyses, beginning with a discussion of the scope boundary followed by an account, including historical background, of the Mizo insurgency. I then present

²⁰The goal of the insurgency was to secede from India and create an independent state of Zoram encompassing the Mizo-inhabited areas of India and Myanmar. It was triggered by the response of the Indian state to a major famine but was rooted in widely shared disenchantment among a sizeable and influential section of the Mizo political elite with their marginal and disregarded status within the Indian Union.

²¹Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Tezcür 2016.

²²Blattman and Miguel 2010.

²³The Mizo church had no involvement in rebel mobilization and played a central role in securing peace.

evidence based on regression analysis, semistructured interviews, ethnographic work in Nagaland and Manipur, and secondary accounts of other insurgencies. Last, I conclude.

SOCIOSTRUCTURAL CONTEXT, RELIGION, AND INSURGENT MOBILIZATION

The resource mobilization approach has put sociostructural context at the forefront of the study of social movements and contentious politics.²⁴ Influenced by this approach, a number of recent works on ethnicity and political violence emphasize the importance of structural variables like strong community, associational ties, transcommunity networks, social endowment, quotidian networks, social embeddedness, and politicized networks.²⁵ I build on these studies with a specific focus on ethnic rebellions. I examine the internal sociostructural characteristics of the targeted ethnic population that either facilitate or constrain mass mobilization and participation in high-risk activities. The core of my theoretical argument rests on the idea that mobilization in an ethnic group is a reflection of its social structure. I rely on the explication of social structure by Siegfried Nadel that was further developed by Harrison White and his colleagues as “the pattern or network (or ‘system’) of relationships.”²⁶ The network of relationships composing an ethnic group manifests in distinct patterns that can help us to map and to understand rebel mobilization and recruitment. Some of these patterns are more favorable than others for mobilizing rebels.

Scholars largely agree that shared ethnicity facilitates collective action. They have specified a range of mechanisms linking the two variables, but a common theme underlying many of the arguments is that ethnically homogeneous networks facilitate better information flow and are more conducive for collective action. Recent work has begun to unravel the puzzle of coethnicity by testing the mechanisms and assumptions underlying these arguments.²⁷ Larson and Lewis use experimental data from two Ugandan villages to demonstrate that ethnically homogeneous networks are more conducive to information flow than ethnically heterogeneous networks.²⁸ My argument seeks to account for variations within and across ethnic groups; the focus is not only on net-

²⁴ McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1986.

²⁵ Petersen 2001; Varshney 2003; Yashar 2005; Weinstein 2007; Parkinson 2013; Sarbahi 2014; Staniland 2014.

²⁶ Nadel 1957, 12; Lorrain and White 1971; White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976.

²⁷ See Habyarimana et al. 2009; Larson and Lewis 2016.

²⁸ Larson and Lewis 2016.

works within smaller, subethnic communities, such as villages, but also on their larger context.²⁹ The ability of a subethnic community to cooperate and to coordinate collective action depends on its position within the larger network of an ethnic group.

Notably, several influential works highlight the importance of face-to-face communities in political violence.³⁰ But because such communities are by definition small and distributed across the target population, the argument is better suited for explaining the emergence of smaller terrorist cells than of larger or mass-based rebellions. Moreover, face-to-face kinship, friendship, and even neighborhood networks are common across societies, but rebel mobilization varies. To account for large rebellions, the activation of and coordination among face-to-face networks scattered across a population needs to be explained. This requires the analysis to be scaled up and the focus to be turned to the larger structural context of these communities.

I conceptualize ethnic groups as networks of small subethnic communities like families, neighborhoods, villages, clans, and tribes. These networks involve denser and often stronger ties among members than among other coethnics. Drawing on the social network literature, I argue that the key to understanding rebel mobilization and recruitment is to comprehend the overall structure of social relations constituting the targeted population.³¹ This focus includes not only the network of social ties within subethnic communities, but also ties between such communities across an ethnic group. I use the concept of structural connectivity to capture this dimension. Structural connectivity measures the extent to which individual households, the basic face-to-face social units constituting an ethnic group, are socially connected to each other within the group network.³² Essentially, it reflects the extent to which subethnic communities are socially connected internally and with each other.³³ Ethnic groups with high structural connectivity are more conducive to collective action because social connectivity across the group is not dependent on a small number of actors.³⁴

High-risk activities, such as armed rebellion, require wide bridges

²⁹ I ignore ties to out-groups and to internal social hierarchy for the sake of parsimony. This approach is justifiable given that the focus of this work is on predominantly agrarian, relatively egalitarian, geographically concentrated ethnic groups with relatively high insularity.

³⁰ Della Porta 1988; Petersen 2001.

³¹ Moody and White 2003; Centola and Macy 2007.

³² Turnbull et al. 2018.

³³ Subethnic communities by definition involve households with denser ties among themselves than among those outside the group.

³⁴ Moody and White 2003.

across subethnic communities.³⁵ Such bridges signify the existence of multiple ties across the communities and reflect a homogeneity of preferences among them.³⁶ They facilitate not only dissemination, but also the social reinforcement and the social reassurance necessary for participation in high-risk rebellion.³⁷ Reinforcement ensures that contradictory pressures on actors are minimized, nudging them in one direction. Reassurance enhances their sense of security by ensuring support and reducing their chances of being compromised.

Figure 1 presents schematic social networks of three ethnic groups, A, B, and C, each comprising twenty households. The spatial locations of these households are kept constant across the subfigures to facilitate easy comparison. Panels (a) and (b) are structurally identical and represent the same ethnic group A, except that (b) identifies three distinct subethnic groups, or modules, within the network, characterized by “densely connected groups of vertices [households], with only sparser connections between groups.”³⁸ These subethnic groups could be tribes, villages, or clans. The three subethnic groups composing group B are identical to those of group A; they have the same internal connectivity measured in terms of the density of ties between constituent households. But while the bridges across the constituent parts are wider in group A and the group is structurally well connected, they are significantly narrower in group B and heavily dependent on a few ties to maintain connectivity across the modules, as shown in panel (c). For example, in group B, the module comprising households 1 through 6 is connected to the module comprising households 16 through 20 only by the tie between households 6 and 16. Seven such ties (2–16, 3–16, 6–16, 5–17, 3–18, 6–19, 5–20) are present in group A. By comparison, group C is significantly fragmented, with smaller modules and fewer ties bridging them, as shown in panel (d).

When compared to groups B and C, the high structural connectivity of group A implies a higher degree of reinforcement and reassurance, which should facilitate insurgent mobilization.³⁹ High structural connectivity enables rapid diffusion of preferences across group A. The wide bridges across the subgroups in group A help to amplify the message and lend it the credibility necessary for high-risk mobilization.

³⁵ Centola 2018.

³⁶ Blau 1977; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001.

³⁷ Wide bridges are conceptually and functionally different from the bridging ties or transcommunity networks discussed in Varshney 2003 and Yashar 2005, in which the emphasis is on diversity of information either to dispel rumors or to enhance organizational capacity.

³⁸ Newman 2006, 8577.

³⁹ This may impede mobilization if the insurgent agenda does not resonate with the population.

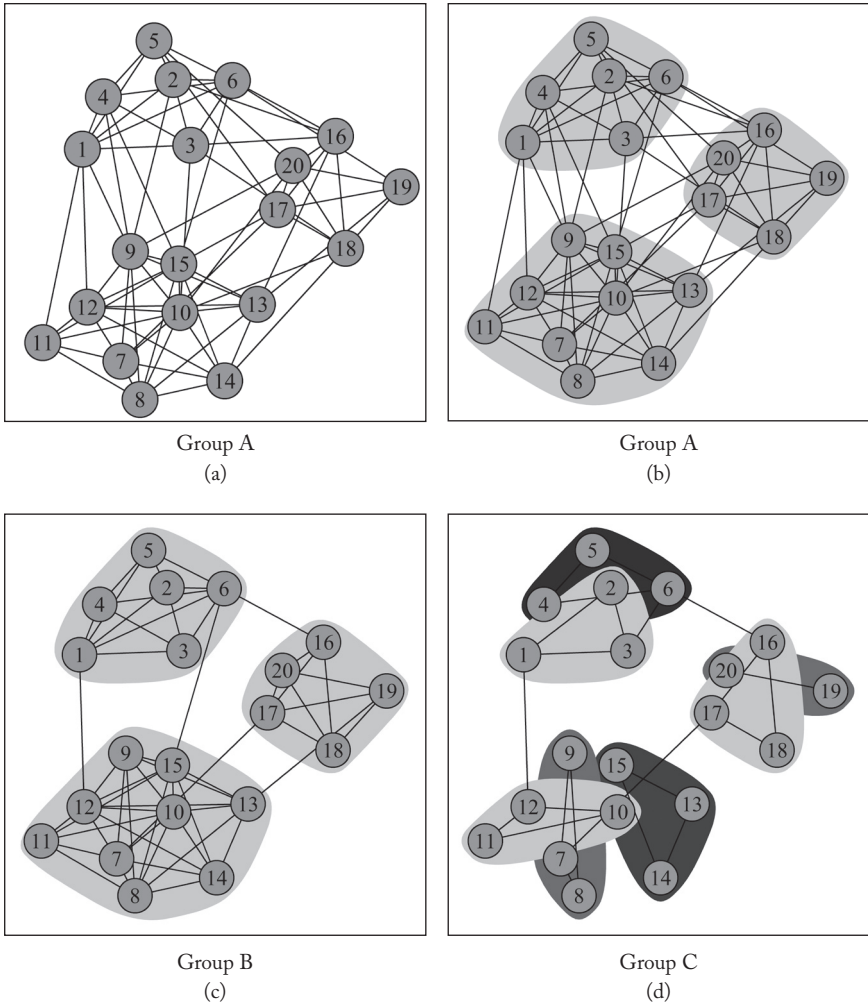


FIGURE 1
SOCIAL NETWORKS OF ETHNIC GROUPS

They also make the group better able to enforce compliance and to ensure support and protection for coethnic rebels. Notably, the few actors ensuring connections across the subgroups in group B could act as gatekeepers to prevent the spread of mobilization. Such an action would be challenging for group A because it requires coordination among a larger number of actors. The options before rebel entrepreneurs seeking

to mobilize group B are to either rely on narrow bridges across subgroups or to bypass these bridges and to mobilize the population directly. Either way, the mobilization of group B is more challenging and more costly than for group A. Group C presents the most challenging structure for the insurgents to mobilize because wide bridges are almost absent beyond small cliques represented by the seven insular modules highlighted in shades of gray. A lack of bridges usually implies heterogeneity of preferences across subgroups, which should render insurgent mobilization difficult and costly. Being surrounded by diverse actors increases uncertainty and ambivalence,⁴⁰ which is not conducive for rebellion.

The argument advanced in this section gives rise to two important predictions. First, we should expect ethnic groups with high structural connectivity to be more conducive to insurgent mobilization (hypothesis 1). Second, we should also expect the subethnic communities within an ethnic group that are better integrated with the larger ethnic group to be more responsive to insurgent mobilization, all else being equal (hypothesis 2). The people in such communities experience the reinforcement and reassurances necessary for participation in high-risk activities.

In agrarian economies that have not yet experienced sufficient industrialization and market penetration to affect social structure, I trace the existence of wide bridges in the network of social relations constituting an ethnic group, and its structural connectivity, to religion.⁴¹ Religious sects and denominations, influenced by their worldviews and doctrine, are accompanied by distinct institutions and practices that impart particular characteristics to the social structures of ethnic groups.⁴² Institutions and practices associated with traditional religions, such as animism and nature worship, are largely confined to a narrow segment of the population, for example, clan, village, or group of villages, which is not conducive to mass mobilization.⁴³ Unlike traditional religions, the effect of mass or world religions, both Western and non-Western, on structural connectivity varies significantly. They generally help to differentiate ethnic groups from each other, but their effect on internal differences across subethnic communities varies.

⁴⁰Visser and Mirabile 2004.

⁴¹These networks may change as a group transitions from an agrarian society, with shifts in the role of religion and social interactions within and outside of the group. But evidence from the industrialized world suggests the persistence of ethnic networks. See Parenti 1967; Waldinger 1999.

⁴²On the enduring effects of religious traditions, see Norris and Inglehart 2004.

⁴³For instance, Wilson associates them with “small-scale societies”; Wilson 1971, 7. Nida calls them “particularistic” because “the deities are strictly those of the particular tribe”; Nida 1954, 140.

Some religious interventions result in new institutions and organizations that span an ethnic group.⁴⁴ These institutions provide for greater coordination of messages, liturgy, activities, and practices across the population. In the process, they facilitate wide bridges accompanied by regular and frequent interactions between different segments of the population, as in the case of group A. The bridged communities are characterized by a number of commonly shared attributes, including language, traditions, cultural practices and values, and worldview, which manifest in the homogeneity of preferences. Other interventions function in a more decentralized manner, allowing greater independence for individuals and groups within the population. In cases in which the new faith places a higher emphasis on personal experience and salvation, the emergence of expansive institutions and organizations may not be observed, as in the case of group C. Where autonomy is extended to local communities and groups, new institutions and organizations may not extend beyond the local segments of the population, as in group B.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

SCOPE BOUNDARY: ETHNIC INSURGENCIES IN ZOMIA, NORTHEAST INDIA

The context for my research is ethnic rebellions in Northeast India. Of the twelve ethnic rebellions that India experienced postindependence, ten have been in this region.⁴⁵ The region, inhabited by India's *adivasi* (indigenous groups), forms part of a vast stretch of land known as Zomia, which extends across Southeast Asia and has endured numerous protracted ethnic insurgencies since 1945 (Figure 2).⁴⁶ These sons-of-

⁴⁴ Within mass religions, some religious traditions have been more transformative of the targeted society than others. Scholars have suggested that older, or pre-Reformation, mass religions, such as Catholicism and Islam, largely worked around the existing social context; Geertz 1971; González and González 2007. González and González 2007, for example, argue that “the faith in Latin America was decidedly different from that on the Iberian Peninsula. And certainly one of the factors that altered the church was the continuation of old ways of the Indians” (42). But the efforts of many colonial-era missions led by post-Reformation denominations were more intrusive and aimed at significant transformation of native societies (Merriam 1900; González 1984). They acted to replace institutions and practices that were viewed either as abhorrent to the new faith or as compromising the continued adherence of recent converts to Christianity. Writing about Protestant missions, Edward Storrow of the London Missionary Society highlights the difficulty of persuading nonbelievers to become Christians as it involved “a change of heart and life, moral and social revolution and innovation”; Storrow 1888, 141.

⁴⁵ Petterson and Wallensteen 2015.

⁴⁶ Schendel 2002. The term is derived from the Mizo-Kuki-Chin word *Zomi*, which means “mountain people.” Figure 2 maps thirty-one ethnic minority groups that have waged armed rebellions across South and Southeast Asia since 1945.

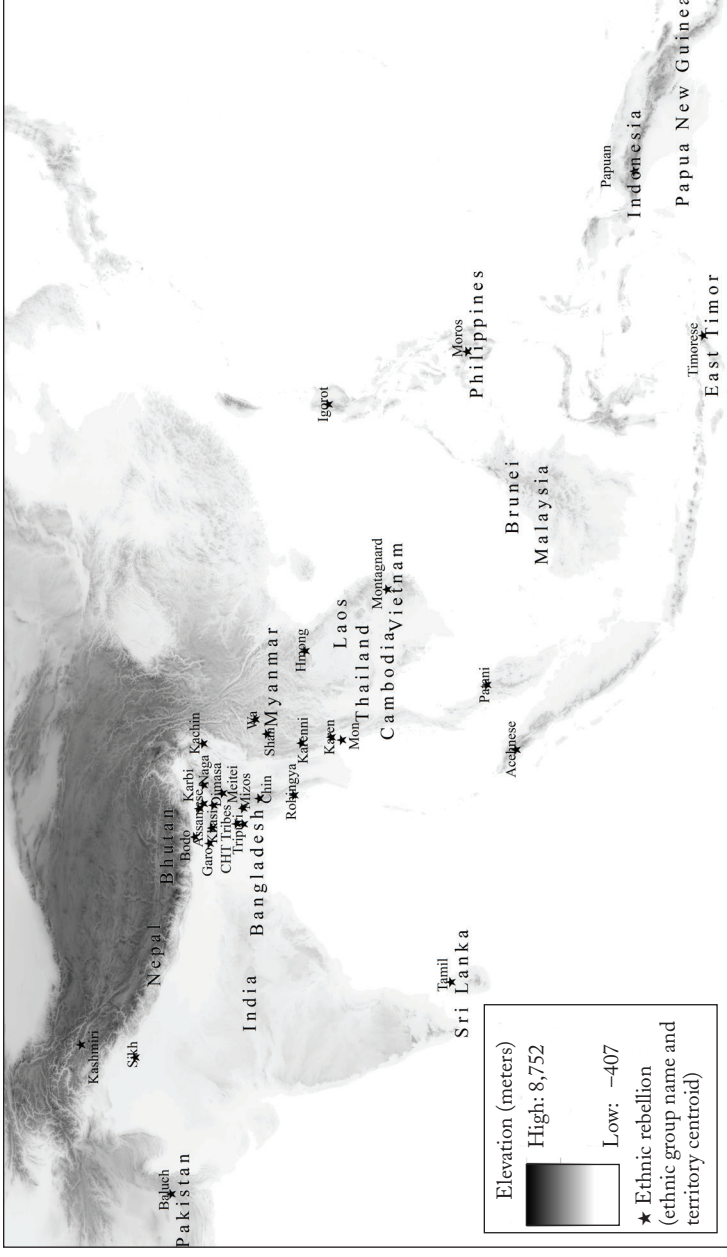


FIGURE 2
ETHNIC MINORITY REBELLIONS IN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA SINCE 1945

the-soil insurgencies, which involve geographically concentrated ethnic minorities challenging more powerful states, remain underrepresented in the existing scholarship, especially in ethnographic research, even though they constitute a sizable proportion of civil wars and tend to last longer.⁴⁷ The ethnic groups of Zomia are similarly situated with respect to the state of which they are a part, but they stand out agroecologically, culturally, linguistically, socioeconomically, and ethnohistorically within their country. Similarities across these cases become more pronounced for those located within a region of a country, such as North-east India.

James Scott has persuasively argued that the inhabitants of Zomia constitute “runaways” who have escaped the state.⁴⁸ But the past two hundred years have been marked by their progressive, often forced, assimilation into their larger neighboring states. Historically, Northeast India had little interaction with the rest of the country.⁴⁹ The expansion of British colonial possessions into neighboring India and Burma during the nineteenth century led to conquest, even though the territory was largely seen as financially unrewarding.⁵⁰ There was pressure from the home government to minimize expenses on the frontier.⁵¹ The inhabitants of the region did not present an existential threat to British rule, but because they were causing a significant loss of British and native lives, they were more than mere nuisance.⁵² The British sought to minimize the cost of administration by implementing indirect rule and relying on “the missionary of the cross” to “pacify” indigenous groups.⁵³

⁴⁷ If we exclude military coups, these civil wars, also referred to as peripheral civil wars, constitute nearly half of civil war cases since 1946; Sarbahi 2014. These conflicts are still underrepresented in the existing civil war data sets either due to their low intensity or to underreporting about these cases. Frequently, they drop out of the data set prematurely while the armed conflict is still ongoing. For instance, the Mizo case is coded as an armed conflict only for three years, 1966–1968, in the UCDP/PRIO (Uppsala Conflict Data Program/Peace Research Institute Oslo) Armed Conflict Dataset even though the conflict lasted for more than two decades. See Gleditsch et al. 2002.

⁴⁸ Scott 2009.

⁴⁹ Blochmann 1873.

⁵⁰ For instance, John Butler, an early colonial official in the region, questioned “if any advantage would accrue to the British Government from . . . immense tracts of unprofitable wastes or dense jungles thinly inhabited”; Butler 1847, 152.

⁵¹ See Government of India (Frontier Policy)—Resolution, 323 Parl. Deb. (3rd ser.) (March 13, 1888) cols. 1093–180.

⁵² See “India—The Chin-Lushai Expedition,” 341 Parl. Deb. (3rd ser.) (February 11, 1890) cols. 41–42.

⁵³ Reid 1944; Carey 1919, 28. The “pious clauses” of the East Indian Company (Charter Act) of 1813 allowed Christian missions to operate in India (Kaye 1853, 643). In 1828, the governor-general in council authorized missionary activities in Northeast India. The rebellion of 1857 resulted in restrictions on missionary activities, except among adivasi communities, including those in India’s northeast; Frykenberge 2008, 421. Indigenous groups were deemed “more likely to be converted than races further advanced, like the Hindoos and Mohamedans”; Watson 1832, 27–28. The role of the missions was

Although recent studies on political violence in South Asia examine the long-term effects of colonial political institutions, the role of religious interventions has received little attention.⁵⁴ Importantly, while colonial political institutions were similar across ethnic groups and involved indirect rule, the nature of religious intervention varied because the region was exposed to different religious traditions.⁵⁵ The British curbed competition among missions by giving them exclusive jurisdiction over specific areas.⁵⁶ The foreign missions also avoided competition to ensure “mutual benefits and economics of scale.”⁵⁷ The absence of competition among missions in the region, unlike what Guillermo Trejo observed in post-Vatican II Mexico, enabled them to leave distinctive marks on ethnic societies.⁵⁸

Sons-of-the-soil insurgencies have some particular characteristics. The low intensity of these conflicts may make social structure more influential because social networks are usually frayed by high intensity. But we should expect the behavior of coethnics to be affected by the group’s preconflict social structure, that is, current behavior should reflect past interactions. In other words, it will be easier to mobilize members of group A than those of groups B and C, *ceteris paribus*. The role of religion in determining social structure may change as societies transition out of subsistence agriculture and their interactions with out-groups increase. A decline in the salience of religion, at least in shaping social ties if not beliefs, or increased religious competition may engender changes in social structure.⁵⁹ Moreover, as an ethnic group becomes geographically dispersed, the social structure may become more complex and analytically less tractable. Yet such changes do not undermine the role of structural connectivity and wide bridges in determining high-risk activities. Notably, my argument is probabilistic and acknowledges that individuals within the same insurgency could be recruited through multiple mechanisms.⁶⁰

viewed strategically to create a population of fellow believers “and make them in that way a source of strength”; Johnston 1896, 43. Missionaries were invited to the region with promises of “protection and assistance”; Brown 1890, 100. Victor Sword asserts, “Paradoxical as it may seem, Christianity has often invaded new territory hand-in-hand with military forces. This was the case in Assam”; Sword 1835, 41.

⁵⁴ Naseemullah 2014; Sarbahi 2016; Mukherjee 2018. For an exception, see Lankina and Getachew 2012.

⁵⁵ Phillips 1887.

⁵⁶ Bardoloi 1947, 39–40.

⁵⁷ May 2012, 51.

⁵⁸ Trejo 2009.

⁵⁹ Green 1996; Trejo 2009.

⁶⁰ Viterna 2013.

ORGANIZED RELIGION, SOCIOSTRUCTURAL CHANGES, AND THE MIZO INSURGENCY

Mizos inhabit the Indian state of Mizoram, which borders Bangladesh and Myanmar (Figure 3).⁶¹ The state has a population of around 1.1 million and an area roughly the size of New Jersey. Perched in an inhospitable and unenviable terrain, the Mizos had been largely independent of external control until the late nineteenth century.⁶² The British established direct control over the territory to ensure protection for their more lucrative assets, especially tea plantations, along and occasionally in Mizo-inhabited areas.⁶³ The colonial policy, driven by the desire to maintain security with minimal investment, involved relying on Christian missionaries to “civilize” and “pacify” the native population.⁶⁴

Christian missionaries began working in the territory in 1893, and by the second quarter of the twentieth century, almost half of the Mizo population had accepted Christianity. The arrival of Christianity marked the culmination of bitter intragroup rivalries that were frequently occasioned by headhunting.⁶⁵ The Mizo clans were scattered across the territory in communities “as numerous in dialect and designation as the villages in which they live, owning no central authority.”⁶⁶ The territory fell under the influence of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission.⁶⁷ The Welsh missionaries brought with them their distinctive religious institutions, which gradually restructured Mizo society by eroding village- (*khua*) and clan- (*chi*) based divisions. The new faith strengthened ties within these subethnic communities and forged wide bridges, rooted in a common faith and worldview, between them.⁶⁸

The spread of Christianity helped to connect subethnic communities as missionaries began to traverse the territory frequently. The role of native leaders—preachers, teachers, deacons, and *kraws sipais* (soldiers of the cross)—educated and trained by the mission was particularly in-

⁶¹ Figure 3 was created with raster data from the Global Land Survey (GLS) 2000 from Tucker, Grant, and Dykstra 2004. The GLS data has been reclassified to represent only three classes of land cover—forest, bodies of water, and all other land cover. The GLS land classification includes fourteen types of land cover. See Tucker, Grant, and Dykstra 2004.

⁶² Blochmann 1873.

⁶³ Lewin 1885.

⁶⁴ Reid 1893, 2–4.

⁶⁵ Shakespear and Stanton 1895. Mizo villages are invariably located on ridges and spurs to afford a natural defense in the face of frequent internecine warfare.

⁶⁶ Reid 1893, 2.

⁶⁷ The Welsh mission established influence over the dominant segment of the population, but it encouraged the Baptist Missionary Society to evangelize in the south because the Welsh mission lacked resources. The two missions worked in close coordination, and the Baptist mission also adopted the Presbyterian system of church government (Baptist Missionary Society 1914).

⁶⁸ Their old religion was significantly localized and lacked the infrastructure of Presbyterian Christianity. This is reflected by the Mizo term for religion, *Sakbua*, which means village (*khua*) spirit (*sa*).

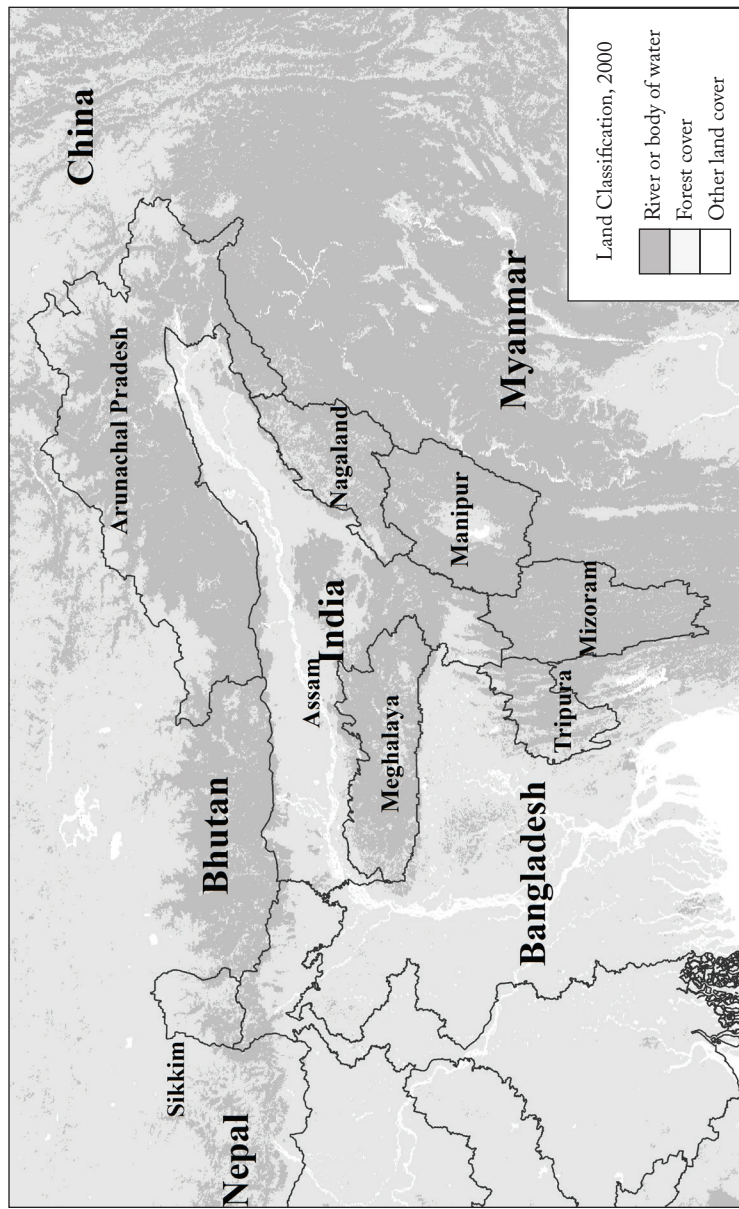


FIGURE 3
NORTHEAST INDIA: STATES, NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, AND LAND COVER

Source: Global Land Survey (Tucker, Grant, and Dykstra 2004).

fluent and they served as bridges across communities dispersed over a mountainous and densely forested territory with nonexistent roads.⁶⁹ This process was accompanied and furthered by the spread of a common language. Early missionaries gave only one of the many local dialects—Lushei (or Duhlian)—writing, translated key portions of the Bible in it, and began providing education, including reading and writing, to the natives.⁷⁰

As the Christian population increased, the bridges across subethnic communities were institutionalized by a well-integrated and centralized body of churches, including village-level churches, and church districts and presbyteries, with the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod at the center. These churches were staffed by a permanent cadre of pastors and other personnel. The institutional practice of transferring pastors and church officials every few years and close coordination on church-related activities helped to sustain interactions across communities. In 1935, the mission helped to establish the Young Mizo Association (YMA), a social organization, to leverage the power of youth in the service of the church and to “uphold Christian practices and virtues.”⁷¹ The YMA was organized in the image of the Presbyterian church, with a well-integrated network of branches, sub-headquarters, and headquarters. The organization provided another layer of connection between Mizo villages and clans.

The precolonial Mizo villages were probably already internally well connected, given their small size, which facilitated physical proximity among constituent households and a relatively homogeneous population.⁷² But the spread of Christianity changed the existing social structure by undermining the hierarchy, strengthening social ties, and bolstering shared beliefs and way of life.⁷³ The mission attacked traditional institutions, such as the *zawlbuk* (bachelors’ quarters) and *bawi* (obligatory labor), which were sources of power for native chiefs.⁷⁴ The centrality of the Mizo chiefs in the network of social relations was undercut and gradually replaced by churches that placed an emphasis on

⁶⁹ Lloyd 1956, 27.

⁷⁰ Lewis 1907. The Linguistic Survey of India lists Zahao, Lakher, Hmar, Paite, Lai, and Ralte as other dialects. See Grierson 1904.

⁷¹ Dothansanga 1991, 32.

⁷² Lewin 1885. Social homogeneity by itself does not ensure structural connectivity. The small size of precolonial Mizo villages implied physical proximity of households located within villages, which is more conducive to a higher density of social ties. The group as a whole lacked structural connectivity because Mizo villages were dispersed across a large territory and lacked institutions connecting them.

⁷³ Social hierarchy in the pre-Christianity Mizo society was rooted in the authority and functions of individuals—the Mizo chiefs—who controlled one or more villages. This hierarchy differed from hierarchies rooted in class- and caste-based differences prevalent in other parts of India.

⁷⁴ Sangkima 1992.

the community of believers without a social hierarchy. Mizo society is largely devoid of the social stratification rooted in wealth, birth, education, and occupation that is so visible in other parts of India. During my fieldwork, I witnessed a high level of trust in the way people, regardless of their socioeconomic stature, responded to and welcomed coethnic strangers “loitering” through their villages and knocking on their doors.

The new faith also served to strengthen ties within villages. The growth and endurance of Christianity was deemed as contingent upon a transformation of Mizo society and weaning Mizos from their old animist ways.⁷⁵ Consistent with this vision, the Mizo church began to govern every aspect of people’s day-to-day lives, from personal hygiene and dietary habits to birth, marriage, and death ceremonies. The mission viewed a strong community as critical to preventing backsliding and to ensuring that people adhere to new norms of behavior. Consequently, the social practice of meeting multiple times a week was institutionalized through church-related activities. Even today, much of daily life revolves around church-related activities, and there is strong societal pressure on individuals to follow the established norms.⁷⁶ The day starts with the church bell at six o’clock for the daily prayer meeting. In addition, there’s the Sunday service and people meet four times a week for evening services. To inculcate a unified belief system and worldview, preaching and sermons are coordinated across the churches.

THE MIZO INSURGENCY

By the middle of the twentieth century, the Mizo population resembled group A. The Mizos were structurally integrated and therefore more conducive for insurgent mobilization. As Mizos began to debate their political future, their high structural connectivity, rooted in a common faith, manifested in a strong sense of community and shared ethnic identity.⁷⁷ Unlike in the precolonial era, the out-group was not constituted by the neighboring villages or clans, but by non-Mizos.⁷⁸ A significant section of the postcolonial political elite was not reconciled to the integration of their territory with India for fear of being dominated by *vais* (outsiders). The famine, or *mautam*, of 1959 and the poor re-

⁷⁵ Mendus 1956, 34.

⁷⁶ Author interview with MZ015, Mizoram, January 27, 2013. The church instituted practices like *bnarwh chhuab* (expulsion) and *phuar* (denial of communion) to punish or discipline individuals. Out of a concern for the safety of the interviewees, they are anonymized in this article and only identified by a randomly generated three digit number preceded by a two letter code (MT, MZ, and NL for the Meitei, Mizo, and Naga insurgencies, respectively).

⁷⁷ Zorema 2007.

⁷⁸ Samuelson 1985, 28–44.

sponse to it by the state triggered the formation of the proindependence MNF. It began mobilizing public opinion, resources, and recruits, and on February 28, 1966, launched a rebellion that lasted for two decades, ending with a peace settlement in 1986.

The MNF succeeded in mobilizing a wide segment of the Mizo population, which even its opponents acknowledge. For instance, a nonagenarian Mizo elder, who was highly critical of MNF founder Laldenga, and advised him against any misadventure, contended that the support for the MNF in villages was very high and that most of the youth were MNF volunteers.⁷⁹ MNF recruitment data suggest that MNF mobilization varied significantly across the territory (Figure 4).⁸⁰ Although the immediate trigger for the insurgent mobilization was a famine, Figure 4 suggests that recruitment was higher in areas not affected by the famine. Interestingly, the areas of higher recruitment appear to correlate with the areas of Christian revival that led to the rapid expansion of Christianity during the first quarter of the twentieth century, suggesting support for my argument.⁸¹ I investigate this relationship in the next subsection, relying on village-level data.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA

The core of my empirical approach involves regression analysis employing rare village-level data on rebel recruitment. I examine how village-level variation in structural connectivity affects insurgent mobilization (hypothesis 2). My expectation is that villages that are structurally well connected by religion-based wide bridges within the Mizo society will be more conducive to insurgent mobilization. This analysis is conducted across 689 census villages based on the 1961 Census of India, the last census before the launch of the insurgency in 1966.⁸² I also leverage information collected during the course of my fieldwork in the region between 2009 and 2016 in support of my argument, including the causal mechanism. This research includes semistructured interviews with seventy-seven ex-insurgents from across fifteen community development (CD) blocks, or subdistricts, covering all eight districts of Mizoram between June 2014 and July 2016. In addition, I present ethnographic evidence from the neighboring Naga and Meitei insurgencies in support

⁷⁹ Author interview with MZ372, Mizoram, April 16, 2009.

⁸⁰ The raster data on the distribution of *Melocanna baccifera* in Mizoram that are used in Figure 4 are from the Mizoram Remote Sensing Application Center 2009. For more information on the data, see Lallianthanga and Lalchhanhima 2012.

⁸¹ Lalsawma 1994.

⁸² Government of India 1964.

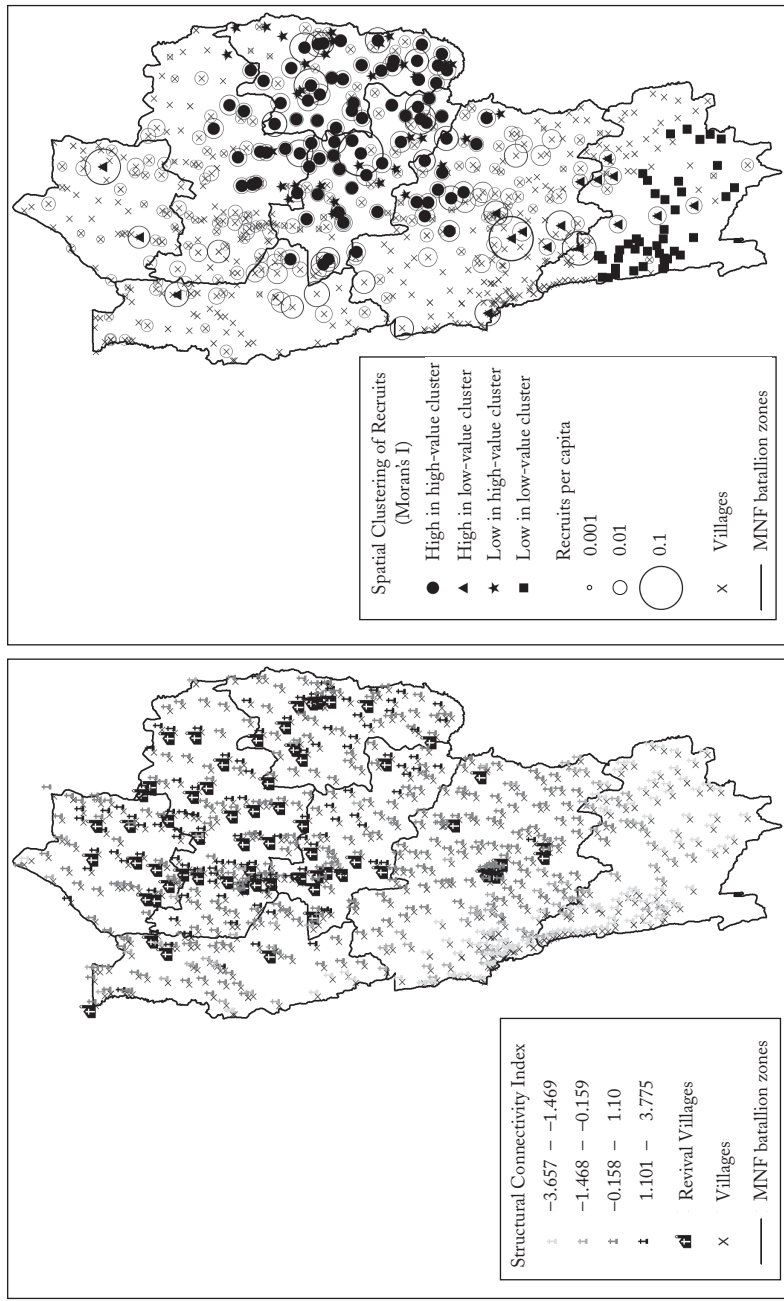


FIGURE 4
 SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF STRUCTURAL CONNECTIVITY, MNF RECRUITS, AND *MELOCANNA BACCIFERA*

of hypothesis 1 that insurgent mobilization is constrained by the structural connectivity of an ethnic group.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: MNF REBEL RECRUITMENT

My dependent variable, a measure of insurgent mobilization, is the number of MNF recruits per unit village population. The MNF established an organization that was designed for the long-term objective of transitioning into a ruling party. It was meticulous about maintaining its internal records on a wide range of matters including parliamentary deliberations, finances, military and intelligence operations, personnel, and administrative decisions. The recruitment records were systematically compiled over the course of the MNF's existence.⁸³

The absence of reliable data on participants explains a general lack of attention to mobilization and recruitment in recent quantitative studies of political violence.⁸⁴ Even for ethnographers who spend a sizable amount of time in dangerous and inhospitable environments, getting a reliable sense of rebel recruitment is challenging. Incumbents and insurgents are invariably unwilling to share such information.⁸⁵ This gap makes the MNF data remarkable. They enable me to avoid a serious pitfall faced by studies that rely on subsets of participants, such as demobilized, arrested, and deceased insurgents.⁸⁶ Although these works provide valuable insight into recruitment and mobilization processes, the findings could be biased because of the absence of information on rebels lost to attrition.⁸⁷

The MNF collected badge number, name, father's name, native place, date of recruitment, education, rank, battalion, and date and manner of exit, but the organization redacted identifying information—name and father's name—from the records. The MNF recruited 2,356 rebel soldiers, including 1,940 ordinary recruits and 416 so-called commis-

⁸³The records included only badge numbers of recruits between 1970 and 1972, the rest of the information is missing. This was the period when a sizable segment of the MNF, including the top leadership, was forced to escape to East Pakistan, where it was caught in the turmoil of Bangladesh's war of independence.

⁸⁴It is common for scholars to use readily available measures of rebel activities, such as violent incidents, to test their argument relating to recruitment. See Dube and Vargas 2013.

⁸⁵The age of volumes, details of recruits, manner of data entry, and the MNF's penchant for record keeping make it highly unlikely that the data were manipulated. The data were maintained in seven leather-bound volumes, now aged and worn, that were written in multiple handwriting styles with different color ballpoint pens. It took me several extended research trips to the region to gain the trust and confidence of the MNF needed to acquire access to its recruitment records.

⁸⁶Humphreys and Weinstein 2008; Lee 2011; Tezcür 2016.

⁸⁷The results presented in Table A-10 in the supplementary material caution us to be careful when relying on information on a subset of participants to generalize about a conflict; Sarbahi 2020b. The estimates in this table are derived from analyses done separately on three subsets of rebel recruits—arrested, surrendered, and demobilized rebels, commonly used in the existing body of research. These results differ significantly from the main estimates presented in Table 3. They strongly suggest that the three samples of rebels are not randomly drawn and do not represent the true population of recruits.

sioned officers, until the end of 1969.⁸⁸ This period coincided with the most intense phase of warfare.⁸⁹ Information about the native place, date of recruitment, and the rank is the most complete. The recruitment date of a large number of the recruits is listed as January 1, 1967, when the Mizo National Army (MNA) was officially inaugurated.⁹⁰

Of the 2,356 recruits, I was able to identify the native place of 2,091 of them. Although this information is not available for 161 recruits, the native place of thirty-seven other rebels could not be positively identified.⁹¹ Sixty-seven recruits were from the ethnic Mizo-inhabited areas adjacent to the Mizo Hills: Myanmar and the neighboring Indian states. The MNF records provide the educational background of only 685 recruits. The mean number of school years completed by this cohort is 6.55 (median is 6). The average age of a recruit at the time of joining, based on 590 observations for which it is available, is approximately 20.5 years. The youngest recruit was 15.5 years old and the oldest was 47.5, with the median age being 19.4. Of the 2,356 recruits, eventually 552 surrendered, 375 died, 159 were arrested, 136 deserted, and 44 were injured.

The MNA comprised seven regionally based battalions: Chawngbawla (CH), Khuangchera (K), Lamlira (L), Saizahawla (S), Taitesena (T), Vanapa (V), and Zampuimanga (Z). These were grouped into two brigades—the Dagger Brigade (K, T, and Z) and the Lion Brigade (CH, L, S, and V)—operating in the south and north of the territory, respectively. The geographical boundaries of the battalion areas and the spatial distribution of the dependent variable—recruits per unit village population—are displayed in Figure 4. Luc Anselin Local Moran's I statistics indicate the existence of clusters of high values (circles) of recruits per unit population in the mid-north and east.⁹² Similarly, clus-

⁸⁸The focus on this period is driven by three factors. First, as mentioned above, much of the information on recruits between 1970 and 1972 is missing. Second, a focus on the early and more intense phase of fighting enables me to control for the dynamics of conflict, which changed post-1969. Third, much of the recruitment took place before 1970.

⁸⁹The conflict is coded as a civil war only during these three years in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. See Gleditsch et al. 2002.

⁹⁰The absence of information about the actual date of recruitment for a large number of recruits who were recruited before January 1, 1967, prevents a time-series analysis.

⁹¹The missing information on native place does not seem to be driven by geography and other correlates that may affect the findings in this article. It seems more likely that the bookkeeper at the time made an error or was not able to decipher the handwritten forms for the main record; author interviews with MZ051, MZ024, and MZ043, Mizoram, January 25, 2013. The findings are not sensitive to this missing information, as is illustrated by Table A-8 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b. In Table A-8, models 5–7, I randomly assign recruits with missing native village information to the villages that constitute the bottom 5 percent in terms of the square of their deviance residuals based on Table 3, model 1. This assignment should bias the distribution of recruits against my key findings, but the coefficients for various measures of structural connectivity remain largely unchanged.

⁹²Anselin 1995. Moran's I is perhaps the most commonly used measure of spatial autocorrelation. This measure identifies statistically significant spatial clustering of similar values around an observa-

ters of low values of the dependent variables are located in the south (squares).

EXPLANATORY VARIABLE: MEASURES OF STRUCTURAL CONNECTIVITY

I use village-level membership in the YMA normalized by village population as the primary measure of structural connectivity among the Mizos. The YMA has played a predominant role in the social life of Mizos since its foundation and works in close association with the church.⁹³ It was established to provide community to Christians and to help uphold Christian values and practices to prevent reversion to traditional religion.⁹⁴ The YMA preceded the earliest political organization in the territory by more than a decade and did not emerge in response to interethnic (Mizo–non-Mizo) interactions. The earliest village-level YMA membership data compiled by the organization is for 1965. These data are the best available measure of the width of bridges across Mizo villages. The larger the proportion of a village population in the YMA, the wider the bridge of social ties connecting the village to the larger Mizo community. I test the sensitivity of the results to a binary version of this variable, which marks the presence of a YMA branch in a village.

I employ three other measures of structural connectivity for robustness tests. The first measure is a binary variable identifying whether a village has a church and a YMA branch, which in essence captures the width of ties across villages. The highly integrated organization of Mizo churches implies that village communities with churches are structurally better connected than others. The church location data is from the annual reports of the Mizo churches for 1957.⁹⁵ I also test the effect of the presence of church separately. The second measure is the distance to the nearest revival village. These villages were centers of intensified religious activity during the first quarter of the twentieth century and spurred the expansion of Christianity.⁹⁶ They were hot spots of socio-

tion, which enables me to graphically display the variation in the intensity of insurgent recruitment across Mizoram in Figure 4. This measure is used to determine the distance for the spatial lag of the dependent variable used in the analysis below, as well as to identify locations for semistructured interviews. Positive spatial autocorrelation suggests that an observation is surrounded by observations of similar values—high or low values. Negative spatial autocorrelation suggests that an observation is surrounded by dissimilar values.

⁹³ A number of other mass-based civil society organizations exist, but they emerged in the 1970s.

⁹⁴ Enoch L. Mendus, who headed the Welsh mission in the territory from 1921 to 1944, highlights the issue of backsliding in a judgmental tone reflective of the attitude of colonial administrators and many missionaries toward indigenous groups: “The prospects of these poor animistic people becoming enlightened Christians are not at all bright, especially as they are nine or ten days’ journey away from our mission station.” Mendus 1956, 88.

⁹⁵ Village-level church membership data are not available.

⁹⁶ See Lloyd 1956; Hminga 1987. I discuss Christian revivals (or *harna*) in early twentieth-century Mizoram in section A-1 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

religious mobilization in the region and emerged as influential nodes—with especially dense connections to the neighboring villages—in the network of social relationships within the territory. I expect recruitment to decline with distance from revival villages. The list of revival villages is from Reverend Lalsawma's work on revival in Mizoram.⁹⁷ The last measure is an index of structural connectivity, which is constructed using principal component analysis of three variables: YMA membership, church presence, and distance to the nearest revival village.

KEY ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS AND CONTROLS

I test my argument against a range of explanations and present them in Table 1.⁹⁸ These include two factors frequently associated with the Mizo insurgency: the 1959 famine and World War II. The famine was triggered by the mass flowering of the bamboo *Melocanna baccifera*, which caused the rat population to explode and then to feed on crops and graneries. The subsequent famine led to the formation of the MNF.⁹⁹ I therefore use the distribution of *Melocanna baccifera* as a measure of the impact of famine in Mizoram.¹⁰⁰

Some scholars attribute ethnic insurgencies in the region to the militarization associated with World War II.¹⁰¹ The prospect of a Japanese invasion of India via Burma led to a larger involvement of locals in the British war effort.¹⁰² There were close to three thousand Mizos enlisted in the British Indian Army during the war and some of the key leaders of the MNF, including two founding members, Laldenga and Manliana, were veterans of the Second World War. I use village-level archival data on World War II recruits in the British Indian Army to test the effect of the war.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

My identification approach involves the use of the method suggested by Joseph Altonji, Todd Elder, and Christopher Taber to alleviate concerns about the influence of unobservable factors.¹⁰³ I also use subdistrict fixed effects for the twenty-nine CD blocks to control for unobserved heterogeneity. The CD blocks, called circles during the British era, are

⁹⁷ Lalsawma 1994.

⁹⁸ See section A-2, Table A-1, and Table A-2 in the supplementary material for details on the control variables, summary statistics, and correlation matrix, respectively; Sarbahi 2020b.

⁹⁹ See sections A-2 and A-3 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹⁰⁰ The earliest available data for the distribution of *Melocanna baccifera* is from 2006. I do not expect the spatial distribution of this species to have changed significantly since the 1950s. I address concerns arising out of this issue in section A-3 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹⁰¹ Taylor 1987.

¹⁰² Bayly and Harper 2005.

¹⁰³ Altonji, Elder, and Taber 2005.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTION OF CONTROL VARIABLES

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Measure</i>	<i>Source</i>
<i>Famine of 1959</i>		
<i>Melocanna baccifera</i> ^a	area under <i>Melocanna baccifera</i> within five kilometers	Mizoram Remote Sensing Application Centre 2009
<i>Mobilization during World War II</i>	number of recruits per 1951 village population	Government of India 1943; Government of India 1952
Mizos in the British Indian Army		
<i>Religiosity</i>		
Religious contributions	tithe contributions per unit village population	Presbyterian Church of Mizoram 1961; Baptist Church of Mizoram 1961
<i>Material Incentives</i>		
Forest resources	tree volume per unit forest division area	Government of India 1990
<i>Economic Conditions</i>		
Size of nonagriculture sector	proportion of population employed in manufacturing and services	Government of India 1964
Village economic prosperity	index developed using principal component analysis of amenities present in villages	author's calculations based on Government of India 1964
Agriculture surplus	area under paddy fields within five kilometers	National Remote Sensing Center 2006
<i>State Capacity</i>		
Distance to security post	distance to the nearest police station or Assam Rifles post	author's calculations; location data from Government of India 1964 and Hluna and Toichhawng 2012
Postal service	distance to the nearest post office	Government of India 1964
<i>Remoteness and Terrain</i>		
Distance to border	distance to the international border	author's calculations
Nature of terrain	mean elevation of areas within five kilometers	United States Geological Survey 1997
Accessibility	(1) distance to a motorable road (2) distance to the nearest village	road network map, Government of India 1964 author's calculations
<i>Education</i>		
Literacy rate	proportion literate population	Government of India 1964

^a The famine was triggered by the flowering of this species of bamboo. See section A-2 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

clusters of villages. They are the administrative units immediately above villages and constitute microunits for socioeconomic planning.¹⁰⁴ The list of controls is extensive, but not exhaustive. The region did not have a written language until the late nineteenth century. My substantial fieldwork and archival research in the region did not always yield the desired village-level measures. It is not possible to control for historical factors like internecine warfare among neighboring villages and chieftains. The inclusion of block fixed effects should alleviate some of the concerns. I also examine the sensitivity of my findings to a range of measures of structural connectivity.

Because the dependent variable is bounded between 0 and 1, use of the ordinary least square (OLS) regression is not advisable. First, we expect the conditional expectation of the dependent variable to have a nonlinear distribution. Second, we expect heteroskedasticity because the variance for the observations close to the extremities is likely to be different from the rest of the population and approach zero. Moreover, the predicted values from OLS estimates may not fall within the bounds. I use the fractional regression model proposed by Leslie Papke and Jeffrey Wooldridge.¹⁰⁵ The model is a generalized linear model (GLM) with a logit link function, and the distribution of Y is binomial.¹⁰⁶ I use a spatial lag of the dependent variable to account for the spatial autocorrelation. This is the mean value of the dependent variable for the villages within a six-kilometer radius from a given village.¹⁰⁷ The GLM model takes the following form:

$$E(Y_i|X_i) = \mu_i, Y_i \sim \text{Binomial}, \quad (1)$$

where μ_i is the expectation of the dependent variable, Y_i , given the vector of explanatory variables, X_i , for village i . Equation (1) is estimated using a logit model:

$$\mu_i = 1/(1 + \exp(-\eta_i)), \quad (2)$$

where η_i is the linear function of regressors:

$$\eta_i = \alpha_i + \rho \sum_{j \neq i} w_{ij} Y_j + \beta X_i, \quad (3)$$

¹⁰⁴ CD block boundaries are determined by the physical proximity of constituent villages to allow for the ease of travel to these villages by block-level government officials. Frequently, block boundaries follow natural features and coincide with watershed boundaries.

¹⁰⁵ Papke and Wooldridge 1996.

¹⁰⁶ The OLS estimates are consistent with the GLM estimates and are presented in Table A-6 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹⁰⁷ The spatial autocorrelation dissipates rapidly beyond six kilometers, as illustrated in Figure A-1 in the supplementary material. The results remain unchanged by gradually varying the radius. These estimates are presented in Table A-7 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

where ρ is the spatial autoregressive coefficient, which measures the general strength of spatial dependence, w_{ij} is an element of the spatial weight matrix reflecting the degree of connection between two villages i and j , coded one for villages falling within six kilometers and zero for others; Y_j is the measure of rebel recruitment for the neighboring village j ; and α_i are unobserved block fixed effects.

The bivariate estimates of key variables presented in Table 2 are consistent with hypothesis 2.¹⁰⁸ All of the measures of structural connectivity have the expected signs and are statistically significant. These findings hold in the multivariate regressions presented in Table 3.¹⁰⁹ The main findings are presented in Table 3, model 1. The results provide strong support for hypothesis 2 and are robust to a range of additional controls and specifications.¹¹⁰ The Mizo villages that are structurally well connected by means of wide religion-based bridging ties contribute more recruits to the insurgent army than those that are not. The coefficient of membership in the YMA is positive and statistically significant. The two explanations frequently associated with the Mizo insurgency—the famine of 1959 and World War II—did not affect recruitment. The results also demonstrate that education, material incentives, accessibility, and state capacity had no effect on recruitment.

Substantively, the effect of structural connectivity on recruitment is large. An increase in YMA membership from its 25th percentile to the 95th percentile increases rebel recruitment by more than 46 percent—from fifty-four recruits per ten thousand population to seventy-nine recruits per ten thousand. Notably, the findings are robust to alternative measures of structural connectivity: the presence of both a church and a YMA branch, the distance to a revival village, and structural connectivity index (Table 3, models 2–6). Recruitment is positively associated with villages with both a YMA branch and a church, and with the structural connectivity index. Recruitment declines with distance from revival villages. The results are unchanged with the presence of a church as a measure of structural connectivity (model 3). The effect of structural connectivity improves if the sample is restricted to the erstwhile North Lushai Hills subdivision, where the Welsh Presbyterian Mission was first established and which was its core area of influence (model 7).¹¹¹ These findings strongly suggest that the sociostructural changes

¹⁰⁸The bivariate estimates of all of the other variables are presented in Table A-3 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹⁰⁹ Full estimates are presented in Table A-4 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹¹⁰ See the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹¹¹ All alternative measures of structural connectivity are statistically significant with the restricted sample. See Table A-5 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

TABLE 2
REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF REBEL RECRUITMENT: BIVARIATE ESTIMATES^a

	<i>Recruits per Unit Population</i>							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Structural</i>								
<i>Connectivity</i>								
Proportion	1.478***							
YMA	(0.463)							
members								
YMA branch		0.473***						
(dummy)		(0.136)						
Church			1.552***					
			(0.476)					
Church and				0.479***				
YMA				(0.136)				
branch								
(dummy)								
Distance to					-0.0533**			
the nearest					(0.0224)			
revival								
village								
Structural						0.560***		
connectivity						(0.131)		
index								
<i>Famine</i>								
Proportion							-0.322	
bamboo area							(0.598)	
<i>World War II</i>								
Proportion								5.424***
World War II								(2.054)
recruits								
Spatial lag	22.41	24.46**	20.87	24.60**	10.24	18.44	20.67	21.37
	(11.61)	(11.81)	(12.01)	(11.81)	(16.62)	(12.19)	(11.96)	(11.90)
Constant	-7.534***	-7.534***	-7.696***	-7.534***	-4.911***	-5.982***	-7.479***	-7.534***
	(0.00116)	(0.00119)	(0.0902)	(0.00119)	(1.075)	(0.353)	(0.0990)	(0.00119)
Observations	689	689	689	689	689	689	689	689
AIC	45.96	45.94	45.62	45.94	43.79	43.50	44.08	46.04
BIC	59.57	59.55	59.23	59.54	52.86	52.57	53.15	59.65

** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at administrative block level (subdistrict or level 4)

^a All estimates include administrative block fixed effects and a spatial lag of the dependent variable. Distance in kilometers.

TABLE 3
REGRESSION ESTIMATES OF REBEL RECRUITMENT^a

	<i>Rebels per Unit Population</i>							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
<i>Structural</i>								
<i>Connectivity</i>								
Proportion	1.307**						1.354**	1.307**
YMA members	(0.531)						(0.542)	(0.529)
YMA branch (dummy)		0.366**						
		(0.151)						
Church (dummy)			1.062**					
			(0.445)					
Church and YMA branch (dummy)				0.368**				
				(0.151)				
Distance to the nearest revival village					-0.036**			
					(0.018)			
Structural connectivity index						0.436***		
						(0.120)		
<i>Religiosity</i>								
Tithe per capita								-0.027**
								(0.012)
<i>Key Competing Explanations</i>								
<i>Famine</i>								
Proportion bamboo area	-0.863	-0.774	-0.751	-0.772	-0.851	-0.891	-0.001	-0.922
	(0.585)	(0.569)	(0.607)	(0.570)	(0.523)	(0.573)	(0.476)	(0.623)
<i>World War II</i>								
Proportion World War II recruits	1.516	1.305	2.096	1.295	2.572	0.686	0.795	1.214
	(3.229)	(3.204)	(3.165)	(3.199)	(3.329)	(3.314)	(2.961)	(3.278)
Constant	-12.419***	-12.418***	-11.573***	-12.417***	-9.453***	-9.988***	-12.950	-12.404***
	(2.683)	(2.668)	(2.607)	(2.668)	(2.100)	(2.530)	(2.019)	(2.667)
Observations	689	689	689	689	689	689	377	689
R-squared	0.232	0.228	0.226	0.228	0.218	0.246	0.267	0.233
AIC	69.291	69.296	69.203	69.295	69.292	69.107	58.120	69.321
BIC	137.320	137.325	137.232	137.324	137.321	137.136	121.000	137.350**

** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$; robust standard errors in parentheses, clustered at administrative block level (subdistrict or level 4)

^a All estimates include administrative block fixed effects and a spatial lag of the dependent variable. Distance in kilometers.

^b Sample is restricted to the villages located in the erstwhile North Lushai Hills subdivision of the territory.

brought about by the spread of Christianity under the Welsh Presbyterian Mission had a direct effect on MNF mobilization.

Some scholars, including Robert Woodberry and Tomila Lankina and Lullit Getachew, suggest that Christian missions can affect mobilization by engendering mass education and communication.¹¹² My findings do not support the human capital mechanism that links missions with mobilization. The estimate of literacy is positive but statistically insignificant. The contribution of the mission to literacy in Mizoram is undeniable, but the literacy rate significantly lagged behind the percentage of Christians in the population—44 percent of the population was literate and 87 percent was Christian in 1961.¹¹³ Eighty-three percent of the literate Mizos had no formal education, and a paltry 0.41 percent went beyond tenth grade.¹¹⁴ The MNF records provide the educational background of only about one-third of the recruits. It would be reasonable to assume that the rest of the recruits were not literate because education determined an individual's rank and responsibilities in the MNA.¹¹⁵ It is no surprise, therefore, that much of the MNF mobilization was through face-to-face contact or public meetings, as I discovered in my interviews. Christianity did facilitate greater communication across Mizo villages, but only partly as a result of education and common language. A major contribution came from the mission-induced structural changes, which preceded, and in turn promoted, education and common language.

A legitimate concern is that the mechanism linking rebel recruitment with the measures of structural connectivity is religiosity—that religious fervor, as opposed to structural connectivity, drove individuals to join the MNF. It is true that the MNF agenda was couched in religious terms. I use a crude proxy for religiosity: religious contributions or tithe per capita collected by a village church (Table 3, model 8). This measure suggests that village religiosity suppresses participation in the MNF, which is consistent with the role of the Mizo churches as facilitators of peace during the conflict. Notably, because I have included three measures of economic conditions that are not statistically significant, this measure does not capture only economic conditions. The robustness of findings to alternative measures of structural connectivity should also allay concerns that the findings simply reflect the role of associational ties. The underlying dimension shared by these measures and encapsu-

¹¹² Woodberry 2012; Lankina and Getachew 2012.

¹¹³ See Figure A-3 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹¹⁴ Government of India 1964.

¹¹⁵ Author interview with MZ417, Mizoram, May 5, 2008.

lated by the structural connectivity index is that they constitute a network of reinforcement and reassurance across the Mizo villages.

It is still possible that the results are driven by unobserved factors and that their inclusion may eliminate the effect of structural connectivity. I rely on the approach advanced by Altonji, Elder, and Taber to examine whether this is probably the case.¹¹⁶ The routine entails estimating how large the influence of unobserved variables is relative to observed variables for the positive effect of structural connectivity on insurgent recruitment to hold. Table 4 presents the ratio of the effect of omitted variables relative to observed variables that would result in eliminating the effect of structural connectivity. The ratio values are very high and range between 7.7 and 366, which strongly indicates that the effect of structural connectivity cannot be explained by unobserved factors and that additional controls are highly unlikely to affect the coefficient.

One concern is that the YMA membership figures are from the year before the onset of rebellion and could be endogenous to the conflict. There are several reasons that undercut this possibility. First, the YMA is a nonpartisan organization and has steadfastly avoided involvement in politics. The organization's centrality in Mizoram derives from its strong nonpartisan credentials. It had no reason to shun that approach, especially since the MNF was divided over the issue of rebellion and the Mizo church was staunchly opposed to violence.¹¹⁷

Second, the decision to expand the number of branches was centralized, slow, and made annually. I do not expect the number of branches to expand suddenly in response to political mobilization. The results do not change if I use a dummy for the presence of a YMA branch in a village instead of YMA membership per person.

Third, the decision to launch the insurgency was sudden and caught many by surprise. The adverse effects of conflict in terms of the destruction of lives, livelihood, freedom, and property were not apparent before the insurgency; hence, it is unlikely that people increased their participation in the YMA in response to increased suffering.

Last, the estimates using alternative measures of structural connectivity, which capture the structure of the Mizo society at various points during the first half of the twentieth century, yield similar findings. It is unlikely that these measures are endogenous to the conflict process. The data on the location of churches is from the mid-1950s. Impor-

¹¹⁶ Altonji, Elder, and Taber 2005.

¹¹⁷ The leader of the MNF, Laldenga, campaigned on securing independence for the Mizos without violence (Author interview with MZ056, Mizoram, June 2014). The decision to launch rebellion was sudden and was opposed by influential leaders within the MNF; author interview with MZ806, Mizoram, April 22, 2009.

TABLE 4
SELECTION ON UNOBSERVED VARIABLES RELATIVE TO OBSERVED VARIABLES^a

<i>Full Model = Table 3, Model 1</i>	
<i>Variables Included in Restricted Model</i>	<i>Ratio Needed to Explain the Effect of Structural Connectivity</i>
Proportion YMA members	7.663
Proportion YMA members and key competing explanations	13.727
Proportion YMA members, key competing explanations, economic conditions, and education	210.26
Proportion YMA members, key competing explanations, economic conditions, education, and material incentive	85.851
Proportion YMA members, key competing explanations, economic conditions, education, material incentive, and remoteness and terrain	366.077

tantly, the Presbyterian church was always neutral, was steadfast in its opposition to violence, launched a powerful peace initiative soon after the outbreak of violence, and played a central role in the settlement. Additionally, the revival villages emerged decades before the formation of any political organization, including the MNF.

EVIDENCE FROM SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Turning to individual-level data to further validate my argument, I conducted semistructured interviews in the native language, Lushei, with seventy-seven ex-insurgents from across fifteen CD blocks to understand the recruitment process.¹¹⁸ The surviving ex-insurgents, given their small number, constitute a hard-to-reach population, so random sampling was not feasible. My sampling strategy aimed to (1) diversify the sample in the hope of making it more representative, and (2) interview a sizable number of ex-insurgents. I selected CD blocks to maximize the variation on both recruitment and structural connectivity and to include both high- and low-value clusters. Within the selected blocks, I interviewed people in the block headquarters and then randomly selected a village from among the remaining villages. People were interviewed in the selected village and in villages along the way.¹¹⁹ Once we were in a locality or village, we asked households from different parts of the village to prepare a list of former MNF members

¹¹⁸ See Figure A-4 in the supplementary material; Sarbahi 2020b.

¹¹⁹ I was not always able to find ex-insurgents in the targeted villages.

to interview. We purposefully avoided snowball sampling. Those we were able to interview included forty-three rural and thirty-four urban residents—including seven women.¹²⁰ None of the individuals that we connected with, either at their home or farm, declined to be interviewed.¹²¹ We conducted interviews primarily during mornings and evenings when people were at home. The information presented is from interviews with people who joined the organization before 1969.

Recruits from central and eastern Mizoram, an area with high structural connectivity and recruitment, reported experiencing positive reinforcement and reassurance when they contemplated joining the MNF. An ex-insurgent affirmed, “We knew them [MNF members] very well. . . . They came from neighboring villages. We had very close connections with them—Tlangsam, Zote, Ruantlang [villages], and the surrounding areas.”¹²² People were open about discussing their interest in joining the MNF with others, including their family and friends, who were generally supportive. The MNF moved freely through these areas and held public meetings. In the words of an ex-insurgent, “During those days, almost all of the youth were influenced by the movement. The MNF people used to come to my village. They were cheered and celebrated as heroes. . . . Once I made a decision [to join], I told my parents. My father was fully supportive, saying that unlike Indians I will be fighting my enemy on my own soil. My mother was reluctant and fearful, but she still offered a prayer for me.”¹²³ Ex-insurgents recounted similar stories: their parents asked them to “follow the Word of God”¹²⁴ or to “behave well as a soldier.”¹²⁵

Ex-insurgents frequently attributed their participation to shared collective enthusiasm for the movement—a political wave (*thiltleh*) or “movement’s spirit” pushing them toward rebellion. “Every youth wanted to support the MNF, but not everyone wanted to fight. . . . A few young men joined the MNF underground. . . . The rest remained overground and supported the group [MNF]. It was embarrassing for young

¹²⁰The recruitment of women in the MNF was limited.

¹²¹Now that a significant amount of time has passed, the Mizos are open about discussing their experiences during the insurgency.

¹²²Author interview with MZ033, Mizoram, June 21, 2014. Importantly, this is not attributable to accessibility or geographical proximity. In Table A-9 in the supplementary material, I test the role of geographical proximity using multiple measures of physical proximity—number of neighboring villages, density of villages in the vicinity, and distance to the nearest village; Sarbahi 2020b. None of these measures have a positive effect on recruitment.

¹²³Author interview with MZ011, Mizoram, July 7, 2015.

¹²⁴Author interview with MZ023, Mizoram, June 28, 2016.

¹²⁵Author interview with MZ032, Mizoram, July 4, 2015.

men to not support the MNF. . . . I did not support the MNF wholeheartedly, but still joined [the group].”¹²⁶ A female ex-insurgent noted that “the movement was so strong that everyone—every boy and girl—wanted to join as a volunteer. I did not even think twice about it.”¹²⁷ The ex-insurgents from high structural-connectivity areas showed little fear of being compromised or targeted. “We were moving around freely. We were dressed simply yet people were able to identify us. We were treated as national workers not terrorists. This was a source of our strength and explains our survival. Ninety percent of the people were with us, even when the army entered their villages.”¹²⁸

The experiences of insurgents from low structural-connectivity clusters were different. They did not feel secure or supported and were subjected to contradictory pulls. One participant explained, “We didn’t discuss with anyone. . . . [We] didn’t want to reveal that we were volunteers to anybody including our family, friends and villagers.”¹²⁹ MZ024 declined to answer whether his villagers supported him, but quickly added, “Families were against it. . . . We escaped to join against their wishes.”¹³⁰ Another participant complained that he was harassed by his villagers. “I didn’t get any support from my villagers. When I was underground I never stayed in my native village. . . . If any crime occurred in my village, I was quickly blamed for it.”¹³¹ MZ062 bemoaned, “People did not understand the [MNF] movement. . . . It was not easy [to join the MNF].” He underscored the lack of communication and understanding across villages in low-structural-connectivity areas. “People [from neighboring villages] were afraid to visit Cheural and Lungtian because some of us were from these villages.”¹³² This distrust was reflected in a more thorough vetting process for people interested in joining the MNF.¹³³ In response to my question about whether people were on their side, MZ043 quipped, “The Mizo army killed [a couple of] informers and after that we did not have any problems.”¹³⁴ He stated that he feared of being victimized if he quit the MNF.

These interviews undermine the possibility that the YMA acted as a forum for organizing rebellion. The YMA members among the ex-insurgents

¹²⁶ Author interview with MZ083, Mizoram, June 6, 2014.

¹²⁷ Author interview with MZ054, Mizoram, June 30, 2016.

¹²⁸ Author interview with MZ028, Mizoram, July 3, 2015.

¹²⁹ Author interview with MZ046, Mizoram, July 6, 2015.

¹³⁰ Author interview with MZ024, Mizoram, June 27, 2016.

¹³¹ Author interview with MZ045, Mizoram, July 1, 2015.

¹³² Author interview with MZ062, Mizoram, July 3, 2016.

¹³³ Author interview with MZ043, Mizoram, July 5, 2016.

¹³⁴ Author interview with MZ043, Mizoram, July 5, 2016.

were unanimous in their opinion that they never discussed the MNF agenda officially in the YMA. But “informally,” politics was “always discussed among like-minded people.”¹³⁵ This response is not different from the answers of interviewees who mentioned discussing the movement in other settings—schools, *jhums* (agriculture fields), and churches. As a participant explained, “Of course we discussed politics and independence. Everybody discussed it openly whenever we met and could find time whether in church or in the YMA. Male or female. . . . We even discussed in *jhum*. We would openly talk about independence.”¹³⁶ The YMA and the Mizo churches provided trustworthy channels for the flow of information across communities. An ex-insurgent recounted how as a YMA official on a trip to Aizawl, the state capital, he learned about the MNF agenda. On his return, he “tried to convince others and joined the underground [insurgency].”¹³⁷

The interviews further dispel the possibility that religiosity explains participation. Although ex-insurgents highlighted how their faith helped them to pull through a difficult phase, religion did not figure prominently in our discussions of their motivation to join the MNF. When asked about the motivation for joining the organization, an overwhelming majority of ex-insurgents (sixty-nine out of seventy-seven) did not make any reference to religion. Most of them (forty-nine out of seventy-seven) focused on either Mizo nationalism or self-determination without any reference to religion. A subset of these interviewees was even given the option of choosing between six different explanations, including religion. Only two out of thirteen individuals chose religion.

EVIDENCE FROM THE NAGA AND MEITEI INSURGENCIES

The absence of comparable recruitment data makes it impossible to conduct a similar analysis in other cases. I present evidence based on my ethnographic work among the Nagas in Nagaland and Meiteis in Manipur, in Northeast India (Figure 3) in support of hypothesis 1. The Nagas constitute a structurally segmented group, similar to group B in Figure 1, while the Meiteis represent a structurally fragmented group, like group C in Figure 1. They also illustrate the role of religion—Baptist Christianity among the Nagas and casteless Hinduism among the Meiteis—in shaping the structural connectivity of an ethnic group.

¹³⁵ Author interview with MZ016, Mizoram, July 7, 2015.

¹³⁶ Author interview with MZ038, Mizoram, July 4, 2015.

¹³⁷ Author interview with MZ064, Mizoram, June 30, 2016.

The Meitei insurgency also underscores that internal homogeneity without structural connectivity does not guarantee mobilization. The similarities across the three cases provide a controlled environment in which many of the contending explanations, including population size, economic circumstances, education, state capacity, access to coethnics across the border, agroclimatic conditions, presence of natural resources, and terrain, could be ruled out.

The Nagas were evangelized by the American Baptist Missionary Union. The Baptist emphasis on congregational autonomy and decentralized churches caused the Naga churches and polity to organize along subethnic identities. Gordon Pruett summarizes the relationship thus: “The Baptist polity meshes happily with Naga tribal polity. . . . Both polities are ‘congregational’ and solidly committed to the concept of local autonomy.”¹³⁸ The Baptists followed the tradition of connexionalism, or setting up associations of churches for “fellowship, encouragement and cooperative ministries,”¹³⁹ but these associations were also organized around subethnic divisions. The American Baptists also chose to evangelize in the dominant dialects of the targeted subethnic groups, so the linguistic homogenization that occurred among the Mizos did not take place among the Nagas. The resulting network of social relations in the Naga-inhabited areas was modular and characterized by segments embracing subethnic communities and sparse connections across subethnic groups (group B in Figure 1).

The segmented structure of the Nagas significantly constrained the mobilization undertaken by the Naga National Council (NNC). The NNC was forced to build the organization atop the prevalent tribal divisions and to rely on influential leaders within Naga tribes. The constituent units of the insurgent army were rooted in subethnic divisions and were invariably commanded by coethnic officers, and they controlled their own arms and ammunition. Moreover, the insurgent mobilization did not embrace all subethnic groups with the same vigor. The initial thrust of the mobilization for rebellion was in and around the territory inhabited by the Angamis, a Naga tribe. Mobilization subsequently spread to other subethnic groups, but the rebel network that emerged had denser links in some subethnic groups than in others. The groups that were the first to come under the influence of Christianity—Angami, Ao, Lotha, and Sema—exercised greater influence

¹³⁸ Pruett 1974, 60.

¹³⁹ Leonard 2005, 89.

on the rebel organization.¹⁴⁰ Two large subethnic groups, the Konyaks and the Tangkhuls, mobilized later. These groups are critical players in the current phase of the insurgency. The Tangkhuls dominate the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, or NSCN I-M, and the Konyaks lead the NSCN K. The staggered mobilization and a subethnically constituted rebel organization provided the basis for the future fragmentation of the Naga movement.

The spread of Hinduism among the Meiteis in the eighteenth century was less intrusive. The new religion adapted to many of the pre-Hinduism sociocultural practices among the Meiteis. As a result, the Meiteis developed their own peculiar caste system, which lacked the rigidity and hierarchy of the mainland version.¹⁴¹ Nearly the entire population was assigned to the warrior (*Kshatriya*) caste, an upper caste that constitutes a small minority in the mainland. The new religion placed less emphasis on the significance of community and more on personal experience and salvation. Meitei society is organized on a “self-sufficient economic paradigm” in which the social structure, economic production, provision of basic amenities, such as water, and even the structure of houses, are geared to promote a self-sufficient and independent life.¹⁴² Consequently, the Meiteis lack the societal groups and institutions that enhanced the structural connectivity among the Mizos and Nagas. Highly localized and smaller subethnic groups, which are based on clan or neighborhood ties, assume a greater significance among them.

The Meiteis have high social homogeneity yet low structural connectivity. Their social structure, which resembles group C in Figure 1, makes high-risk mass mobilization challenging. The Meitei insurgents failed to leverage widespread popular disenchantment with the merger of the territory with the Indian Union in 1948. The insurgents had to rely on close-knit kinship and friendship networks, typically rooted in the same neighborhood,¹⁴³ for recruits, which severely limited the scope of mobilization, since the social reinforcement and reassurance necessary for high-risk activities did not extend beyond these small, insular networks. As a former member of the United National Liberation Front, the oldest Meitei insurgent group, acknowledged, “We did try to mobilize. There was some groundwork [done]. We had a popular anti-merger agitation [opposition to the merger of Manipur with In-

¹⁴⁰ Author interview with NL018, Nagaland, May 21, 2009.

¹⁴¹ Parratt 1980.

¹⁴² Author interview with MT091, Manipur, December 7, 2017.

¹⁴³ Author interview with MT085, Manipur, December 9, 2017.

dia]. In 1964, anti-merger meant anti-India. . . . But we did not succeed.”¹⁴⁴

EVIDENCE BEYOND NORTHEAST INDIA

There is suggestive evidence in support of my argument from other cases in Zomia, but they require closer examination. Mandy Sadan, for instance, contends that the network of Kachin Baptist churches provided the structure that undergirds Kachin ethnonationalism and the protracted insurgency in northwest Myanmar. She argues that the Jinghpaw-language churches emerged as “the main network by which broadly distributed, dislocated and displaced [Kachin] communities were able to retain a sense of communication with each other.”¹⁴⁵ Her work also suggests that the emergence of divisions within the movement centered around communities, such as those around Patao and the Triangle region, which were not touched by the colonial Baptist mission. The Karen insurgency followed a pattern very similar to that of the Nagas. The Karen ethnonationalist movement emerged from the Baptist conventions with the Sgaw Karen Baptists—the first and the largest segment of the Karen population to be evangelized—and assumed the lead role.¹⁴⁶ But the segmented nature of the ethnic group constrained mobilization and caused the movement to fragment.¹⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Ethnic groups are widely considered to have a high potential for political mobilization, but ethnic rebels display significant differences in their ability to mobilize coethnics. In this article, I demonstrate that the structural connectivity of an ethnic group is a significant determinant of insurgent mobilization. I trace the structural connectivity of an ethnic group to the doctrine and practices associated with religion. Among myriad ethnic communities that experienced the advent of organized religion during the colonial period, the forms such religious interventions took are critically important to understanding postcolonial political mobilization. The emergence of a centralized network of churches and civil society organizations under the Welsh Presbyterian Mission among the Mizos helped to transform a geographically dispersed and isolated population into a socially integrated group with wide bridges across subethnic communities.

¹⁴⁴ Author interview with MT049, Manipur, April 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Sadan 2013, 403.

¹⁴⁶ South 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Dun 1980.

I leverage the variation in the expansion of Christianity across villages in Mizoram along with data on rebel recruitment to demonstrate that structural connectivity matters. Structural connectivity outperforms alternative explanations, including the famine of 1959 and the mobilization associated with World War II. These findings are robust to a wide range of specifications and controls and are not driven by omitted variables. Structural connectivity explains the variation in insurgent mobilization among socially homogeneous ethnic groups. Both the Mizos and Meiteis are remarkably homogeneous, but mobilization succeeded among the Mizos and failed among the Meiteis. The structure of the Meitei society forced insurgents to rely on kinship, friendship, and neighborhood ties, which hampered mobilization. The absence of wide bridging ties beyond subethnic tribes among the Nagas resulted in an insurgency marred by tribal divisions. Structural connectivity may also account for the fragmentation of insurgent movement among the Kachins and Karens.

Structural connectivity, at least *prima facie*, appears to be a strong predictor of the pattern of insurgent mobilization beyond Zomia. For instance, the failure of Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces to extend their core support beyond the Panjshiri Tajiks in Afghanistan in the 1990s makes sense from this perspective.¹⁴⁸ A disproportionate representation of certain castes from among similarly situated castes in the 1971 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna uprising in Sri Lanka can be reasonably interpreted as a result of the difference in their structural constitution.¹⁴⁹ But a conclusive claim would require additional research using fine-grained data. Beyond mobilization, the overall trajectory of the ethnic insurgencies in Northeast India suggests a link between structural connectivity and conflict outcome. The structurally integrated Mizos concluded a durable peace settlement; the Meitei insurgents, operating among a structurally fragmented ethnic group, have shown little interest in peace; and the structurally segmented Nagas have secured two prolonged ceasefires but without a peace agreement.

My work highlights the synergy between colonial states and religious missions in shaping ethnic communities. In highlighting the role of religion, it shifts focus from the ideational dimension—beliefs, values, and worldviews—to the sociostructural dimension—social interactions, institutions, and associations. The role of religion in shaping social structure may vary across societies. As an agrarian, ethnic society transitions toward a higher level of market penetration and socioeco-

¹⁴⁸ Roy 1994.

¹⁴⁹ Obeyesekere 1974

conomic development, including increased interactions with out-groups, the structure of an ethnic society, as well as the role of religion in shaping it, may change. The Basque society, for instance, experienced similar changes as a result of industrialization and the resulting influx of immigrants toward the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁰ These changes, which affected the structural connectivity of the Basque society and helped to forge denser ties and assimilation with the non-Basque population, were not conducive for insurgent mobilization in the mid-twentieth century. This article illuminates pathways to several interesting and rewarding lines of inquiry—on religion, ethnicity, political mobilization, and conflict outcome—for further investigation in future research.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887120000222>.

DATA

Replication files for this article are embargoed until April 1, 2022. They can be found at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/13P4YD>.

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¹⁵⁰ Gatti, Irazuzta, and Martínez de Albeniz. 2005.

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