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Insurgent-populace relations in Nepal: an analysis of attitudinal and behavioural support

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The first objective of this article is to provide conceptual clarity regarding the term ‘support’ in the context of insurgent campaigns. While it is commonly claimed that insurgent and counterinsurgent forces compete for the support of the populace, there is often ambiguity as to whether this refers to a voluntary preference for a group of armed actors (attitudinal support), or a set of actions that provide direct benefits to one of these groups (behavioural support or collaboration). Furthermore, while a number of academics and practitioners focus upon the former on the assumption that it translates into the latter with sufficient consistency (Lawrence ‘of Arabia’, Mao, etc.), others maintain a contradictory stance (Kilcullen, Kalyvas, etc.). The findings from research undertaken into the 1996–2006 conflict in Nepal suggest a more complex reality in that certain forms of collaboration (e.g. provisions of information) seemingly necessitate supportive attitudes to a greater extent than others (e.g. supplies of food). The second objective is to evaluate the various approaches used by the Maoist insurgents to generate these distinct forms of support. While their ideology largely failed to resonate with the populace, attitudinal support was obtained through various ‘popular appeals’, including land reform, an opposition to an increasingly repressive monarchy, and campaigns to empower certain marginalised sectors of society. In contrast, the development initiatives of the Maoists, and their nationalist rhetoric in opposition to US and Indian influence were substantially less effective. Each of these initiatives were undertaken to obtain collaboration via attitudinal support, but the former was also generated directly through the use of coercion against specific non-combatants.

**Keywords:** Nepal; Mao; Maoist; Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist); insurgent; insurgency; support; coercion
considerable disagreement as to the extent to which the former translates into the latter, and this leads to a lack of consensus among academics and practitioners as to whether attitudes or behaviours should be placed at the centre of analysis. While the focus of this article is upon insurgency, these issues are perhaps most apparent in the confused attempts to operationalise the *hearts and minds* counterinsurgency doctrine.

The second objective is to evaluate the various approaches used by the Maoist insurgents to gain these two forms of support during the 1996–2006 conflict in Nepal. It is often reported that leftist ideologies promoted by the insurgent leadership largely fail to resonate at the ‘support base’. Or, as expressed in more generic terms by Stathis Kalyvas, ‘conflicts and violence “on the ground” often seem more related to local issues rather than the “master cleavage” that drives the civil war at the national level.’ More specifically, insurgent organisations generate support through coercive methods and a variety of ‘popular campaigns’, for instance, promoting nationalism, gender equality, ethnic empowerment, republicanism, and land reform. In 1937 Mao Tse-tung famously stated that the relationship between insurgents and the populace should be comparable to ‘fish in the sea’, yet over 70 years later there have been no widely acknowledged empirical studies focusing upon the comparative importance of these themes.

The field research for this article took place in 11 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the Nepali districts of Dang, Gorkha, and Pyuthan in 2008. These locations were selected on the grounds that they experienced comparatively high levels of Maoist influence during the campaign. The research involved over 100 interviews with subject matter experts, key informants (including political leaders, teachers, and other individuals of elevated status), and ‘ordinary residents’. A quantitative component was added through the collection of over 700 questionnaire responses. While the central emphasis of this article is upon the conflict in Nepal, a secondary stress is placed upon analogous historical campaigns, including those occurring in China, Vietnam, Peru, and El Salvador. Aside from enabling comparative analysis, this makes it possible to benefit from the insights in more ‘mature’ bodies of literature.

Following an initial focus upon the interrelationship between attitudinal and behavioural support, the structure of this article loosely mirrors the historical evolution of academic explanations for these two variables. Thus, in the second section the emphasis is upon the extent to which contextual factors may ‘predispose’ a populace towards supporting insurgents. The analysis in sections three and four is centred upon rational choice frameworks that respectively privilege economic and security-based considerations. More specifically, the stress in the former is upon land reform, payments to cadre, and the embezzlement of funds that were supposedly collected for the ‘People’s War’, and in the latter the focus is upon the use of coercion by the insurgents, and their ability to protect the populace from state violence. The final section assesses the relative importance of various ‘popular appeals’, including the anti-palace stance of the Maoists, their nationalist rhetoric, and their campaigns to empower the marginalised ethnic
minorities, subordinate castes, and women. It is argued that from a theoretical perspective these themes are united by the need for psychological insights to explain how supportive attitudes translate into collaboration.

**Attitudinal and behavioural support**

As previously observed, in the context of internal conflict the concept of support may refer either to a voluntary preference for a specific group of armed actors over their competitors (attitudinal support), or a set of actions that directly benefit one of these organisations (behavioural support or collaboration). The latter encompasses the supply of a range of goods (finances, food, medical equipment, clothing, etc.), and services (withholding information, running errands, providing shelter, etc.). While the act of enlistment is also a form of collaboration, it is beneficial to treat this specific activity independently as it is commonly driven by very specific motives, as discussed shortly. The concepts of attitudinal and behavioural opposition are derived from the above terms, respectively referring to an aversion to a group of armed actors and to behaviours that have a deleterious impact upon the organisation in question.

Drawing upon the quantitative data collected during the research, Figure 1 demonstrates that a minority of the respondents claimed that the populace was attitudinally supportive of the Maoists, with a statistically greater proportion of Gorkha residents answering in the affirmative compared to the other districts in combination and individually. Figure 2 indicates a perception in the three locations that locals were more likely to provide food, shelter, and finances than they were to supply information or to transport materiel across all possible comparisons. Again, the residents from Gorkha were statistically more likely

![Figure 1. Attitudinal support for the Maoists in three research districts.](image-url)
maintain that the latter two services were provided (*** compared to the other two districts in combination and individually). Rather than focusing upon these forms of support in isolation, however, a central purpose of this article is to consider the interaction between these variables. Attempts to comprehend this relationship begin with the observation that the former commonly occurs in the absence of the latter, and vice versa. It is possible to locate each individual on a continuous scale according to their degree of attitudinal support (Individuals C and D) or opposition (Individuals A and B) to a specific insurgent organisation, as demonstrated schematically in Figure 3. In contrast, individuals may simultaneously provide both behavioural support and opposition to one organisation (Individuals A and C).

The top-right quadrant in Figure 3 is seemingly an intuitive position in which the behaviours of individuals reflect their attitudes. However, it is necessary to place a considerable focus upon how attitudinal support is converted into collaboration given the obstacles provided by Mancur Olson’s free-rider problem. As discussed in greater detail below, this paradox leads ‘rational’ individuals to avoid participation in collective activities on the grounds that benefits can be gained irrespective of their actions. Evidence from the field research indicated that individuals may be located in the bottom-right quadrant (providing attitudinal support but behavioural opposition to the insurgents), inter alia, if they (a) fear punishment from the state security forces as a result of non-compliance, (b) believe that the insurgents are likely to lose, (c) possess insufficient resources, or (d) lack contact with the insurgents. In contrast, individuals may occupy the
top-left quadrant (providing attitudinal opposition but behavioural support), for instance, if they (a) fear punishment from the insurgents in response to non-compliance, (b) believe that the insurgents are likely to win, or (c) feel obliged to provide resources to ‘guests’ (i.e. the insurgents) on the basis of cultural norms.

Accounts that emphasise the need to gain attitudinal support rest upon an assumption that sufficient levels of behavioural support (or, at least, a lack of behavioural opposition) can be generated through developing attitudes that are supportive, sympathetic, or, at least, non-hostile. For instance, Chalmers Johnson argues that ‘the mounting of a guerrilla movement as well as the possibility of guerrilla victory depends upon the loyalties of civilians in the area of operations.’ And, Walker Connor makes the link to behavioural support more explicit in claiming that:

... the passivity of the local people is the irreducible requirement. If the people do not love you more, they must at least despise you less than they do your enemy. This minimum attitude guarantees (1) that the local people will not violently resist your presence; (2) that they will not furnish information on your movements or otherwise cooperate with your enemy; and (3) that food and other essential needs can be acquired locally without excessive coercion.

Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm maintains that.
... the guerrilla’s major asset is non-military and without it he is helpless: he must have the sympathy and support, active and passive, of the local population. Any Robin Hood who loses it is dead, and so is any guerrilla. Every textbook of guerrilla warfare begins by pointing this out.20

This perspective is also apparent among insurgent practitioners, including T.E. Lawrence (‘of Arabia’), who argued that insurgent organisations ‘must have a friendly population, not actively friendly, but sympathetic to the point of not betraying rebel movements to the enemy’.21 And, in a similar manner, Mao Tsetung maintained that ‘because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.’22

By contrast, a number of prominent academic studies focus directly upon the behaviours of individuals on the assumption that, in the words of Timothy Wickham-Crowley, “warm feelings” are of precious little value to a social movement.23 Indeed, Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf Jr specifically state that the attitudes of individuals ‘affect behaviour but are not identical with it; nor in most cases are they the primary influence on it’.24 These accounts stress the extent to which behavioural support can be generated from unsympathetic or hostile populations, typically through placing an emphasis upon the role of coercion and authority. For instance, David Kilcullen claims that:

Field experience in both Afghanistan and Iraq… have shown that insurgent intimidation easily overcomes any residual gratitude effect, while historical studies have shown that in civil wars and insurgencies, popular support tends to accrue to locally powerful actors rather than to those actors the population sees as more congenial: the more organized, locally present, and better armed a group is, the more likely it is to be able to enforce a system of rules and sanctions.25

And, focusing more directly upon the relevance of territorial control, Stathis Kalyvas and Matthew Kocher maintain that:

Contrary to a widespread perception that irregular wars are merely contests for ‘hearts and minds’, they can be seen primarily as a competition for territorial control, where violence is used to challenge and to create order. To be sure, both incumbents and insurgent actors must generate popular ‘collaboration’ and deter ‘defection’. However, the extent of collaboration they can achieve hinges largely on the degree of control they are able to exercise.26

Returning to the findings from Nepal, it is possible to take the analysis one step further through focusing upon the relationship between the two forms of support at the VDC level. Figure 4 demonstrates that the insurgents were seemingly able to obtain food largely irrespective of whether or not the populace were attitudinally supportive, but that this was not the case with information.27 This apparently supports Elisabeth Jean Wood’s assertion (relating to the Salvadoran case) that ‘sustained flows of high-quality information [were] much more difficult to extract coercively than tortillas or water’.28 It also provides indicative evidence that the contradictory stances adopted by Lawrence, Mao, and Hobsbawm on one side of the debate, and Kilcullen and Kalyvas and Kocher on the other, are equally
deficient as a result of their failure to distinguish between different forms of collaboration.

Having considered the complex interrelationship between these forms of support, the remainder of this essay is focused upon the factors that drive these variables.

The structuralist perspective

For many years the field of contentious politics (of which insurgency forms a radical subset) was dominated by structure-centric accounts. In other words, prominent studies tended to overlook actors and organisations in favour of a focus upon the macro-structural conditions in which they operated. While a review of the extensive range of factors considered within the literature is beyond the scope of this thesis, according to David Romano these included (but were not limited to):

- modes of production; class conflict; state fiscal and economic crises; subsistence crises and absolute deprivation; relative deprivation; improvements in social and economic conditions after prolonged oppression; improvements in socio-economic conditions followed by stagnation or a sharp reversal; rigid institutions unable to keep pace with societal demands and changes; cleavages within a society’s elite and ruling classes; loss of a government’s effective coercive capacity; the nature and organization of peasant communities; transnational relations; urbanisation and demographic growth; modernization; internal colonialism and a cultural division of labour; and finally, the mere existence of different ethnic groups in a competitive political milieu.

The most influential account within this tradition arguably continues to be Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions*, published in 1979. Among the most resolutely structuralist works within the genre, Skocpol maintained that:
... revolutionary organizations and ideologies have helped to cement the solidarity of radical vanguards before and / or during revolutionary crises... But in no sense did such vanguards – let alone vanguards with large, mobilized, and ideologically imbued mass followings – ever create the revolutionary crises they exploited... As far as the causes of historical social revolutions go, Wendell Phillips was quite correct when he once declared: ‘Revolutions are not made; they come.’31

While the comparative scarcity of information relating to the principal actors undoubtedly contributed to this bias, certain proponents of this stance also sought to justify their structure-centric focus on theoretical grounds. For instance, Cynthia McClintock argues that:

... there is no set of criteria for an ‘effective’ revolutionary organization that can be determined by social scientists... [This] undermines voluntarist interpretations of revolution by emphasizing that what matters is not the organization, but the fit between the organization and its context.32

And, furthermore:

To a considerable degree arguments are tautological: revolutionary victory is the independent variable to be explained by a strong and effective revolutionary organization, but the strength and effectiveness of the organisation are measured by its victory... In other words, in the terminology of political science, the independent and dependent variables are the same.33

This stance cannot be sustained, however, as the broader objective of the theory is not to recognise ‘effective’ organisations, but to identify characteristics that demonstrate ‘effectiveness’ across a wide range of circumstances.34 The implications of this latter approach become apparent through comparing the relative ‘success’ (however defined) of the Maoist doctrine to the universal failure of the foco theory advocated by Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara and Régis Debray. The former seemingly encapsulate tenets that provide an increased probability of attaining ‘success’ across a variety of contexts. Thus, it is necessary to elevate agent-based variables to a level previously reserved for structural factors. Indeed, in the aftermath of States and Social Revolutions an increasing number of voices argued in favour of ‘bringing the actors back in’, for instance, with Gordon McCormick claiming that:

... organizations matter in the success or failure of revolutionary enterprises. With few exceptions, the successful revolutionary takeover has not been the result of an ‘eruption’ of the masses, but of the careful and time-consuming efforts of a revolutionary elite to build a countervailing institution to the state. Revolution, in short, is a deliberative act, involving a gradual process of undermining the authority structure of the state and replacing that structure with the revolutionary alternative. As a deliberative act, such an enterprise’s success or failure will hinge in part on the way in which it is conducted and the vitality of the revolution’s organizing agent.35

Shifting the focus to the case of Nepal, Lauren Leve observes that an emphasis is commonly placed upon the following structural ‘causes’ of support for the Maoists:

(1) disillusionment with the failure of the Nepali state to deliver the expected democratization of local social relations and political authority after... the
establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990; (2) continuing poverty and a widening gap between rural and urban quality of life despite decades of intensive development; (3) widespread frustration with corruption at all levels of government; and (4) a backlash against the brutality of the police, and later army, counter-insurgency campaigns.36

While these factors undoubtedly provided favourable objective conditions for the insurgents, an explanation of how the latter channelled these factors is absent in many cases. Indeed, narrowing the focus to economic matters, George Graham correctly observes that ‘many people throughout the world suffer poverty or inequality, but only some of these have engaged in conflict.’37 And, as expressed by Saubhagya Shah, ‘a holistic analysis of the Maoist insurgency must therefore move beyond simplistic economic causality and engage with the other processes and forces that are at work; the economic context can only be a point of departure, not the analytical conclusion.’38 While the themes considered in the subsequent sections incorporate an emphasis upon structural conditions, each is more immediately focused upon the activities of the insurgents.

**Economic motives underpinning support**

The shift away from structural variables was led by analysts from the rationalist school through their emphasis upon the role of self-interested, utilitarian actors. At the heart of this approach is Mancur Olson’s free-rider problem, which is summed up succinctly by James DeNardo.

Because single individuals typically have a negligible impact on the outcome of large-scale collective activities, and because public goods cannot be withheld from those who do not join in their creation, it is argued that participation in strikes, elections, and revolutions is ‘irrational’ whenever personal sacrifice is required. Instead, the ‘rational’ person will take a free ride, first allowing others to absorb the cost and then sharing freely in the benefits.39

In other words, rather than explaining acts of behavioural support, Olson’s contribution leads to the conclusion that ‘rational’ individuals tend to avoid involvement in collective movements. As a result the rationalist literature is primarily focused upon identifying suitable solutions to the free-rider paradox.40 The most prominent of these solutions, originally proposed by Olson himself, emphasises the role of material enticements that are contingent upon the actions of individuals. A prime example of these selective incentives comes in the form of land provisions. As Jeffrey Race observes with regard to the Vietnamese case:

The policies relating to economic redistribution offered an incentive which was contingent from the point of view of the individual’s behaviour in that each beneficiary of land redistribution retained his land only as long as he did not oppose the revolutionary movement, and indeed only as long as he assisted in required ways. Should he serve as a government spy or fail to pay his taxes, or should his son desert from the movement’s military, then his land would be forfeited.41
However, it should not be assumed that this is a standard approach for all leftist insurgents. As specified by Elisabeth Jean Wood:

From about 1984 to the end of the [Salvadoran] war, it was possible for campesinos in contested areas to remain in the vicinity and farm abandoned land whether or not they participated in the insurgency . . . the material benefits of the insurgency – access to abandoned land and a degree of autonomy from the daily authority of landlords and the security forces – were available to everyone (nonparticipants and participants) who remained in these contested areas whenever they were available to participants, and thus did not have the requisite selective structure required to overcome the obstacles to collective action. In short, ‘free-riding’ on the insurgency was possible . . .

In the case of Nepal it is widely acknowledged (even by the Maoist leaders) that the emphasis upon land reform was minimal in most hilly districts, including the field research locations of Gorkha and Pyuthan, due to the relative scarcity of ‘large landlords’. However, even in the low-lying terai districts, such as Dang, this campaign was limited to rhetoric in many locations. Nevertheless, there was an overwhelming consensus among Dang residents that this theme generated considerable attitudinal support for the Maoists. The interview evidence with regard to the use of selective incentives was contradictory, possibly revealing regional variations in the policies of the Maoists. While it appears that access to land was used to promote enlistment in certain instances, it was consistently observed that contingent benefits were not applied to encourage the broader forms of behavioural support (providing funds, withholding intelligence, etc.). As discussed in detail below, this does not indicate that the Maoists failed to generate collaboration through their land reform campaign, but that any linkage between these variables was not based upon economic motives. The odds were further stacked against collaboration using a narrow economic calculus as the costs of contributing finances and food to the ‘People’s War’ were relatively high given the scarcity of resources in Nepal.

The land issue aside, two further material selective incentives may also partially explain the specific act of enlistment. Firstly, the cadres reportedly earned 300 or 500 Nepali rupees per month, with the former figure being provided by three Maoist officials interviewed in the Party office in Kalunga (Pyuthan district), and the latter by party leaders in the VDCs of Narayanpur (Dang district) and Dharmapani (Pyuthan district). A number of respondents also claimed that the Maoists specifically publicised this allowance as part of their recruitment drive. Secondly, it was often asserted by representatives of the opposing political parties and apparently unaffiliated respondents that embezzlement was prevalent in the insurgent movement, with references often being made to specific individuals and events. Of course, given that low-risk economic opportunities existed to most recruits through migratory labour in India, for instance, it seems likely that the impact of these factors was limited. And, at a broader level it is possible to conclude that the Nepali case does not conform to the stereotype of ‘criminal insurgency’ as portrayed in many contemporary accounts.
Security motives underpinning support

Shifting the focus of the analysis to the security sphere, a second frequently cited solution to the free-rider problem arises as a result of counterinsurgent violence. The central argument is that the cost of remaining in a specific location, rather than absconding with the insurgents, increases as a result of state targeting. Alternatively, it is also often maintained that state violence leads to collaboration with the insurgents as a form of vengeance. With one or both of these explanations in mind, Arjun Karki and David Seddon claim that:

During Operation Romeo and the later Operation Kilo Sierra... the police was [sic] particularly violent and even barbaric in operations in the mid western hills. They treated everyone as a potential Maoist and many innocent people were arrested, ill-treated, tortured and killed almost randomly. The police actions resulted in a substantial proportion of the local population making common cause with the Maoists and the mid west was effectively confirmed as a Maoist heartland.

However, these two alternative explanations are incomplete as they fail to consider the extent to which the insurgents are capable of channelling these motives. Filling this gap, Jeremy Weinstein claims that ‘the most important collective good rebel groups provide is security’, and that ‘in particular, they offer protection from government forces.’ Of course, the extent to which such activities are within the realms of possibility is dependent upon the relative strengths of the competing organisations. With a specific temporal and geographical focus, Steven Levine claims that the Chinese Communist Party provided protection as it was a ‘well-organized and well-equipped military force’. In contrast, Elisabeth Jean Wood observes that in the Salvadoran case:

... the FMLN [Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional] offered little protection from government forces in the case-study areas. Even in their strongholds of northern Morazán and Chalatenango, the FMLN could not protect residents from aerial bombardments... Thus, protection per se does not explain the ongoing participation of those who continued to support the insurgency.

Indeed, in the Peruvian case it is commonly observed that an inability to provide protection against state violence had a negative repercussion upon the level of attitudinal support for Sendero Luminoso. For instance, Carlos Iván Degregori states that:

When the Armed Forces entered Ayacucho, Shining Path [Sendero Luminoso] retreated in order to protect its own cadres. But in doing so Sendero Luminoso clashed with the role of the traditional Andean patron who protects his clients. Thus, Shining Path’s retreat left many sectors of the population feeling that they had been greatly deceived.

Focusing upon Nepal, not a single one of the 29 interviewees questioned on the subject claimed that the Maoists shielded the population from the violence of the security forces. At best, it was stated that the insurgents indirectly ‘protected’ the populace through offering information on the whereabouts of the police and the Royal Nepalese Army, or through providing training in self-defence. It is
conceivable (or, even, likely) that the Maoists were able to offer direct protection in their ‘stronghold’ districts of Rolpa and Rukum. But the failure of this potential explanatory variable in Dang, Gorkha and Pyuthan is particularly revealing given that these three locations were selected on the grounds that they experienced relatively high levels of Maoist influence.

Also within the sphere of security, a third prominent solution to Olson’s paradox arises through the application of selective disincentives by the insurgent forces in the form of coercion. This refers to personalised violence, or the threat of such acts, undertaken with the objective of changing the behavioural patterns of non-combatants. Considering the elements of this definition in turn: firstly, the term personalised violence broadly refers to the range of actions undertaken with the intent of causing physical or psychological damage to individuals, associated second parties (family, friends, colleagues), or material damage to the economic assets of these individuals. Secondly, this concept specifically incorporates the threat of violence on the grounds that this is often sufficient to alter behavioural patterns. And, thirdly, while identifying non-combatants during internal conflicts is problematic, for the current purposes this term simply refers to individuals outside of the state security forces and the Maoist political and military wings. Of course, it should be immediately apparent that the purpose of coercive practices is distinct from the numerous ‘popular approaches’ discussed in this article (land reform, republicanism, gender equality, ethnic empowerment, etc.). The former is intended to gain collaboration directly through provoking fear, as opposed to indirectly via attitudinal support.

Seeking to add resolution to the analysis of this theme Stathis Kalyvas distinguishes between violence that is selective and indiscriminate. The former refers to that perpetrated by insurgents (and counterinsurgents) in response to specific actions of the targets, whereas the latter is based upon ‘guilt by association’. Or, as expressed by Kalyvas:

"Violence is selective or discriminant when individuals are targeted based upon personalised information about their actions; it is indiscriminate when individuals are targeted solely on the basis of their membership in a group perceived to be connected with the opposition and irrespective of their individual actions (groups may be based on ties of kinship, location, class, ethnicity, etc.)."  

While this binary distinction has become the cornerstone of much of the contemporary analysis, further detail can also be added through focusing upon the political, economic, and social characteristics of the victims. In the Nepali case, it was often reported that the local landlords, civil servants, and political opponents of the Maoists were disproportionately targeted. And, while the ‘official’ justifications for violence were undoubtedly contrived in many instances, it seems that these activities were highly selective. For example, numerous interviewees maintained that specific landlords were targeted on the grounds that they refused to fund the ‘People’s War’ or as they were deemed to be particularly ‘exploitative’ or ‘feudal’ in their relations with tenant farmers. The violence against selected moneylenders was also reportedly based upon their lack
of ‘contributions’, and the extent to which their rates of interest were ‘excessive’. Similarly, it was claimed that the coercive acts against political opponents were based upon their refusal to become politically inactive, their provisions of intelligence to the security forces, and their acts of corruption.59

Approximately half of the interviewees claimed that Maoist coercion led to collaboration among the ‘ordinary residents’ that comprised the bulk of the population. These findings largely agree with the questionnaire data, as indicated in Figure 5. Spatial variations were apparent in the latter, with the residents of Gorkha being statistically less likely to claim that support was provided through fear than individuals from the districts of Dang (*), and Pyuthan (**). This seemingly corresponds to the elevated levels of attitudinal support in Gorkha (see Figure 1).60 Focusing again upon the entire sample of interviewees, the opinions were almost evenly divided when they were specifically asked whether collaboration was primarily voluntary or coerced. Thus, while coercion was of greater relevance than either material contingent incentives or the provisions of protection against state violence, much of the collaboration for the Maoists remains as yet unexplained.

‘Popular appeals’ and the expansion of the rationalist framework

It was previously observed that in many locations the Maoists’ land reform campaign amounted to little more than rhetoric, but that there was an overwhelming consensus among the Dang residents that this generated considerable attitudinal support. The remainder of this article focuses upon additional ‘popular appeal’ that also successfully gained attitudinal support, including campaigns to empower

Figure 5. Support gained through coercion.
marginalised ethnic minorities, subordinate castes and women, and an opposition to the repressive palace rule. As discussed shortly, in the absence of selective incentives it is necessary to move beyond ‘thin’ variants of the rational choice framework to explain how supportive attitudes may convert into collaboration.

Firstly, the Maoists sought to empower the ethnic communities of Nepal (known locally as janjatis) through establishing ethnically based united front organisations, ensuring that these minorities were represented within the layers of parallel governance, and subdividing the state territory into nine Autonomous People’s Governments, of which six corresponded to the ‘homelands’ of the local minorities. Of course, these policies were partly motivated by expedience, as is indicated by the relative lack of mobility for janjatis within the insurgent structure. Nevertheless, the field research revealed that considerable attitudinal support was generated through this campaign. Indeed, there was a widespread belief among the interviewees that janjatis were more likely to provide attitudinal support to the insurgents than individuals from the dominant Hindu community.

Even greater levels of attitudinal support were arguably generated through appeals to the Dalit communities. While Marxist class identities are defined according to the relationship between sectors of society and the means of production (capital and labour), caste affiliations relate to the employment opportunities available to specific sub-populations, with the Dalit castes in the Indian subcontinent traditionally being responsible for a range of menial tasks. This campaign is discussed in surprisingly little detail in the literature, but the research revealed that non-Dalit Maoists breached the social conventions of ‘untouchability’ through eating with Dalits, entering Dalit homes, and through ‘encouraging’ other non-Dalits to enter these homes. Conversely, the Dalit Maoists entered the homes of non-Dalit residents, and ‘encouraged’ others from the Dalit community to undertake this act. It was also reported during the interviews that the insurgents broke with social norms through allowing inter-caste marriages within their ranks. While a number of respondents observed that the campaign amounted to few concrete actions in their locality, it was also frequently specified that support was generated through rhetoric alone.

In common with many Maoist-influenced insurgent organisations, a third popular appeal in Nepal was the empowerment of females. The wide range of gender-based activities included campaigns in support of female employment and inheritance rights, and against domestic violence (with the latter commonly being intertwined with a campaign against the consumption of alcohol). While certain accounts appear to romanticise reality, during the conflict there was also a partial breakdown in the ‘traditional’ roles as the burdens of work in the fields and homes were decreasingly divided by gender. This change was encouraged by the Maoists, but it also occurred out of a necessity imposed by the disproportionate outmigration of males during the conflict. The field research indicated an overwhelming consensus that the insurgents generated considerable attitudinal support through these appeals, even in the locations where concrete reforms were limited.
The final appeal that resonated with the populace was the Maoists’ opposition to monarchical rule. Despite a constant theoretical opposition, there were considerable fluctuations in the extent to which this stance was emphasised by the Maoists during the conflict. However, in the aftermath of the 2001 ‘royal massacre’ the republican demand became a central pillar of the campaign. According to the official version, Crown Prince Dipendra was responsible for the deaths of King Birendra (his father) and several other members of his family. By contrast, the Maoists attributed responsibility to various ‘reactionary’ and ‘imperialist’ elements in alliance with Birendra’s successor, Gyanendra. A series of democratic reversals under Gyanendra were also associated with the intensification of the Maoists’ anti-palace rhetoric. During the research it was reported by various interviewees that substantial degrees of attitudinal support were provided as a result of this theme as Gyanendra was considered to be dictatorial, repressive, corrupt, and indifferent towards the material well-being of the populace. Most notably, however, this support also arose because large sectors of the populace agreed that Gyanendra was responsible for the death of his predecessor.

Prior to focusing upon the theoretical link between these campaigns and behavioural support, it is necessary to observe that not all of the ‘popular appeals’ adopted by the insurgents were equally successful. For instance, unlike the equivalent campaigns in China against the Japanese occupation and Vietnam sequentially against French, Japanese, and US forces, the Maoist rhetoric against Indian ‘expansionism’ and US ‘imperialism’ largely failed to resonate with the populace. Undoubtedly this failure reflects the comparative absence of external threats to sovereignty in the Nepali case. Similarly, with their resources largely channelled towards matters of a more directly military nature, the Maoists also failed to gain significant degrees of attitudinal support through development initiatives in the three research locations. The literature suggests that there was a greater focus upon the construction of educational facilities, irrigations systems, roads, etc., in the ‘heartlands’ of Rolpa and Rukum, and it seems likely that the impact upon attitudinal support was elevated in these locations.

As indicated above, in overcoming the free-rider problem the use of coercion was of greater relevance than material contingent incentives, but much of the collaboration for the Maoists remains unexplained by these factors. Thus, it is necessary to draw upon broader variants of the rational choice framework to understand why attitudinal support converts into collaboration. It is notable that while rationalists tend to ‘gravitate towards materialist theories of preference and cognition’, Mancur Olson himself claimed that:

Social sanctions and social rewards are ‘selective incentives’; that is, they are among the kinds of incentives that may be used to mobilize a latent group. It is in the nature of social incentives that they can distinguish among individuals; the recalcitrant individual can be ostracised, and the cooperative individual can be invited into the centre of the charmed circle.

While it is commonly maintained that Olson implicitly denied this solution to the free-rider problem to insurgent organisations (except during their initial phases)
on the grounds that such factors only apply to small movements where face-to-face contact is maintained, this objection is of limited merit as insurgents tend to be embedded in local communities and are exposed to pressures exerted through familial, clan, tribal, and friendship linkages. A number of micro-level studies that focus upon the Nepal case touch upon these social ties, but this theme has yet to be systematically analysed. Of more immediate relevance, however, is the range of psychological variables that may provide motivation to individuals. According to Stathis Kalyvas these include:

... curiosity and the prospect of excitement and adventure, the lure of danger, the acquisition of a new and more rewarding individual identity or moral worldview, the pleasure of acting as one’s own agent... or simply the response to emotions such as anger, moral outrage caused by public humiliation, and the desire to take revenge.

Of course, this adds complexity to the analysis through introducing variables (revenge, friendship, guilt, camaraderie, etc.) from outside of the traditional realms of neoclassical economics that are comparatively difficult to define and measure. Yet, in the absence of such factors the empirical evidence from Nepal and numerous other case studies makes little sense. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of insurgent–populace relations requires a degree of interdisciplinary collaboration that is currently absent from the dispersed field of conflict studies.

Conclusion

In this article it was maintained that a comprehensive understanding of insurgent–populace relations (and, for that matter, counterinsurgent–populace relations) necessitates greater conceptual clarity in the distinction between attitudinal and behavioural support. A number of theorists and practitioners focus upon the former on the assumption that this asset translates into the latter with sufficient consistency. In contrast, other authorities stress the disjuncture between these two variables, commonly maintaining that behavioural support tends to be underpinned by the demonstration of authority, often supplemented by the use of coercive practices. However, indicative evidence from Nepal suggests that both of these contrasting stances are overly simplistic as a result of the failure to distinguish between different forms of collaboration. More specifically, it appears that the Maoists obtained food largely irrespective of whether or not the populace were attitudinally supportive, but that this was not the case with information.

Based upon this conceptual distinction this article sought to evaluate the relative importance of the approaches used by the Maoists to generate support during the 1996–2006 conflict. It was argued that considerable attitudinal support was generated through the land reform initiative, although this failed to translate directly into collaboration (perhaps other than in the form of enlistment) due to the absence of selective incentives. While considerable focus in the wider literature is placed upon the ability of insurgents to protect the populace from state violence,
this provision was lacking in the selected field locations. By contrast, considerable explanatory power was provided by the use of selective disincentives in the form of insurgent violence, or the threat of violence, against non-combatants. The Maoists also gained considerable attitudinal support through a number of ‘popular appeals’, including campaigns to empower the marginalised ethnic minorities, subordinated castes, and women, and their opposition to an increasingly repressive monarchy. While additional research is certainly required, it is argued that this converted into collaboration for the insurgents through psychological stimuli based upon social sanctions and rewards.

Notes
1. See, for instance, del Pino, ‘Family, Culture, and Revolution’, 158–9; Grenier, Emergence of Insurgency in El Salvador, 83; Kataoka, Resistance and Revolution in China, 300–1; Kessler, Rebellion and Repression in the Philippines, 48–50; Maranto and Tuchman, ‘Knowing the Rational Peasant’, 260; Pike, Viet Cong, 381–2; Taylor, Shining Path, 162; and Scott, ‘Revolution in the Revolution’, 97–134. Similar comments from the case of Nepal were provided by Graham, ‘People’s War’, 241; and Shneiderman, ‘The Formation of Political Consciousness in Rural Nepal’, 304. During the field research conducted for this article the local Nepali residents often reported that the ideological appeals of the Maoists were only understood by a minority, and that acts of collaboration were largely contingent upon rhetoric and actions of a less esoteric nature. It also emerged that the narrower concept of class was poorly understood, with locals tending to associate to a greater extent with their ‘traditional’ ethnic and caste identities.
2. Kalyvas, Logic of Violence in Civil War, 364.
3. While each of these themes is discussed to varying degrees in the case study literature, few accounts assess their comparative importance. Focusing upon the Chinese case, the following provide two prominent exceptions: Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power; and Selden, Yenan Way. There are no widely acknowledged studies that offer empirical evidence from the field.
5. See, for instance, Sharma, ‘The Maoist Movement’, 42.
6. A focus upon the issues faced while undertaking research in post-conflict environments is beyond the scope of this article, but see, for instance, Fujii, ‘Interpreting Truth and Lies’; Pettigrew et al., ‘Relationships, Complicity and Representation’; and Wood, Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War, 31–50.
7. On the advice of Kathmandu-based researchers the quantitative data was collected through distributing questionnaires to students aged 16 and upwards in schools for completion by their parents. This approach is common in rural Nepal as it enables researchers to overcome issues associated with a dispersed populace located in regions with a limited transport infrastructure. Using this method, the resultant sample was representative of the populace in terms of caste and ethnicity, but the respondents were disproportionately middle-aged males as the students tended to obtain responses from the ‘head of household’. As this bias was consistent between locations it does not undermine the comparative analysis between the districts.
8. Sendero Luminoso of Peru provided direct inspiration for the Nepali Maoists is arguably the most comprehensively studied insurgent organisation in history.
9. As interpreted, in particular, by McAdam et al., ‘Towards an Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution’.
10. The distinction between attitudinal and behavioural support is also made in Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 87–110. The extent to which ambiguities in the English-language usage of the term *support* undermine the comprehension of insurgent–populace relations is also observed in Marks, ‘Making Revolution’, 43.

11. Focusing upon a range of case studies, the issue of insurgent recruitment is more narrowly considered, for instance, in Eck, ‘Recruiting Rebels’; Florez-Morris, ‘Joining Guerrilla Groups in Colombia’; Henricksen and Vinci ‘Combat Motivation in Non-State Armed Groups’; and Ribetti, ‘The Unveiled Motivations of Violence in Intra-State Conflicts’.

12. Regarding the statistical information provided in the text: * = at a confidence level of 90%; ** = at a confidence level of 95%; and *** = at a confidence level of 99%. Throughout this article the error bars presented for the questionnaire data represent the margin of error at a confidence level of 95%.


14. While largely absent from the field of *conflict studies*, the relationship between attitudes and behaviours has long been a central theme of study in psychology. See, for instance, McGuire, ‘The Vicissitudes of Attitudes and Similar Representational Constructs in Twentieth Century Psychology’; and Terry et al., ‘Prejudices Attitudes, Group Norms, and Discriminatory Behaviour’.

15. Aside from being observed by interviewees during the field research, regarding other case studies this is also discussed in Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 93; and Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War*, 17.

16. Numerous respondents claimed that the Maoists often did not demand ‘contributions’ from the most impoverished families.


27. For instance in the VDC of Dharmapani, where there was little attitudinal support, the Maoists reportedly gained limited information but considerable food. By contrast, in the VDC of Darbhung the levels of attitudinal support were elevated and the insurgents reportedly gained considerable supplies of both assets. While not demonstrated here, the findings for the provisions of money and shelter largely
mirrored that for food supply, and the findings for materiel transportation reflected those for provision of information. These findings are indicative as they do not specifically demonstrate that the actual supply of food and information varied. Rather, they indicate a perception among local respondents that these provisions varied.

31. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 17. Wendell Phillips was a US abolitionist.
33. Ibid., 46.
34. A similar argument is made in DeNardo, *Power in Numbers*, 27–32.
40. A thorough consideration of the many solutions to the free-rider problem is beyond the scope of this thesis. Comprehensive accounts are available in Lichbach, *The Rebel’s Dilemma*; and Moore, ‘Rational Rebels’.
44. While the land reform initiative was the most obvious candidate, neither was it possible to identify selective material incentives to promote these broader forms of behavioural support in other Maoist campaigns. For instance, the benefits of their development initiatives (including the construction of roads, school buildings, irrigation systems, etc.) were not distributed in a manner that benefited collaboration.
45. This theme is also briefly discussed in Gersony, *Sowing the Wind*, 69.
46. This evidence is not sufficient to suggest that the Maoists conform to the ‘criminal insurgency’ portrayed in numerous contemporary accounts, and Maoist respondents often reported that they sought to limit such practices through internal monitoring systems and severe sanctions against the culprits.
47. This issue is also discussed in Graham, ‘People’s War’, 235.
48. See, for instance, Ibid., 243.
50. The first of these two explanations also overlooks the option of fleeing to secure locations.
52. While not applicable in the case of Nepal, in certain instances insurgents also provide protection against the violent excesses of competing non-state organisations, often including those with linkages to the security forces. The ongoing conflicts in Colombia and Sudan (Darfur) provide two recent examples.

57. As observed, for instance, in Lecomte-Tilouine ‘Terror in a Maoist Model Village’.

58. Kalyvas, ‘“New” and “Old” Civil Wars’, 101. Also see Kalyvas, Logic of Violence in Civil War, 141–5; and Weinstein, Inside Rebellion, 18.

59. While such acts generated behavioural support directly from the elite subsets of the populace, there was little evidence to suggest that this violence gained attitudinal support from ‘ordinary residents’ as a form of vengeance. As is often the case the greatest level of micro-level detail regarding this theme comes from the Peruvian case. See, for instance, Berg, ‘Peasant Responses to Shining Path in Andahuayas’, 114–15; Degregori, ‘Harvesting Storms’, 136–41; Starn, ‘Missing the Revolution’, 76; Taylor, Shining Path, 129, 164; and Weinstein, Inside Rebellion, 249.

60. Various causal mechanisms may underlie this inferred relationship. Most notably, a lack of attitudinal support may be a consequence of the coercive practices of the insurgents. Or, conversely, the insurgents may utilise elevated levels of violence against the populace in certain locations as a result of a local lack of attitudinal support.

61. It is worth briefly observing that a number of interviewees maintained that each of these themes provoked attitudinal opposition from certain individuals from the ‘traditional’ sectors of society, including the ‘dominant’ castes, elders, etc.


65. While beyond the scope of this article, it is necessary to observe that not all of the ethnic communities provided support to the insurgents in equal measure, as indicated in Gersony, Sowing the Wind; and Shneiderman and Turin, ‘The Path to Jan Sarkar in Dolakha District’, 87.

66. With regard to other leftist insurgent movements this issue is discussed, for instance, in Cordero, Women in War, 352; Lobao, ‘Women in Revolutionary Movements’; Reif, ‘Women in Latin American Guerrilla Movements’; and Wickham-Crowley, Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America, 21–3, 215–19.

67. Onesto, Dispatches from the People’s War, 174; Parvati, ‘Women’s Participation in the People’s War’, 169; and Pettigrew and Shneiderman, ‘Women and the Maobaadi’.

68. Gautam et al., ‘Where there are no Men’, 229; Gersony, Sowing the Wind, 58–60; Manchanda, ‘Maoist Insurgency in Nepal’, 249; Onesto, Dispatches from the People’s War, 175–7; Pettigrew and Shneiderman, ‘Women and the Maobaadi’; Sharma and Prasain, ‘Gender Dimensions of the People’s War’, 156–7.

69. Compare, for instance, Manchanda, ‘Maoist Insurgency in Nepal’, 253; Onesto, Dispatches from the People’s War, 168; and Pettigrew and Shneiderman, ‘Women and the Maobaadi’. Li Onesto is or was a correspondent for the Revolutionary Worker and provides an account that is highly sympathetic towards the Maoists.


72. This issue is discussed, for instance, in Connor, National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, 84–6; Fall, Two Viet-Nams, 112; Johnson, Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power, 4; Maranto and Tuchman, ‘Knowing the Rational Peasant’, 253; Popkin, Rational Peasant, 218; Selden, Yenan Way, 116; Thompson, No Exit from Vietnam, 22; and Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works, 245–50.
The former theme is considered in detail in Mishra, ‘India’s Role in Nepal’s Maoist Insurgency’.

See, for instance, Gersony, *Sowing the Wind*, 64; Onesto, *Dispatches from the People’s War*, 131; Seddon and Hussein, *Consequences of Conflict*, 32; and Thapa, *Kingdom under Siege*, 109.


Outside of the case of Nepal, a list of the studies that focus upon this issue is available in Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 95. Also see, for instance, Kerkvliet, *Huk Rebellion*, 33; Selden, *Yenan Way*, 53; Taylor, *Shining Path*, 180; and Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*, 257.


A very limited psychological treatment of the Nepali case is provided in Graham, ‘People’s War’, 243.


This is also the approach adopted by Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War*.

**Bibliography**


