

# Left-Wing Extremism From the Indian Perspective: An Econometric Interpretation

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Motivation from the Existing Literature

To put in simple words, Left-wing terrorism (also sometimes called as Marxist–Leninist forms of revolutionary terrorism) is an action of revolt undertaken “to overthrow conservative or capitalist systems and replace them with the Marxist–Leninist or socialist societies.” (Gupta et al., 2004). However, LWE activities are not only common to capitalist regimes but even socialistic regimes have seen LWE occurring within their domestic territory against the ruling government. It has taken vivid manifestations across the world and presented diverging dynamics and relationships (Aubrey, 2004) with national governments and political economies. India is no exception.

A force centric anti-LWE policy has gained ascendancy under the current regime in New Delhi. The government has attempted to focus on increasing the capacities of the forces, undertaking proactive operations to neutralize top extremist leadership. However, like its predecessor, even the government, at present, has struggled to implement such a policy that is wracked by a range of deficiencies. The problem still persists. One of the serious problems in this regard is the lack of coordination between the police force and the CRPF. Following the April 2017 Chhattisgarh attacks, reportedly, there were issues raised as to why the police force did not cooperate with the CRPF. The UPA government had created United Command (UC) structures in four different states - Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal - to establish coordination between the various forces who take part in these anti-LWE operations. It was later revealed that the UC structures did not meet every six months, as per the norms and guidelines laid down, but as per the convenience of the concerned authorities and mostly, after a major attack. It is to be noted that a meeting of the UC in Chhattisgarh took place in May 2017, after a gap of 15 months and was convened only after two major attacks by the extremists in March and April 2017 (Routray, 2017).

From the security force point of view, a popular theory has been around for a while prescribing a solution to the LWE problem. It says the CPI-Maoist can be defeated only by sustained deep penetrating operations into the core extremist stronghold areas. While this can certainly provide a solution to the military nuisance of the CPI-Maoist, somehow most state administrations have managed to elicit only a partial involvement of the civil administration whose role in these areas assumes critical importance. States over the years have indeed taken gradual steps to increase the writ of the state into the hitherto LWE dominated areas (Suneja, 2018). As Routray (2017) points out, in Chhattisgarh, there have been new security posts coming up in places like, Kistaram-Golapalli (Sukma) and Bhadrakali (Bijapur) and the Bastar range now has 14 helipads equipped for night landing of choppers used mostly for logistical duties. It is a matter of great pride that such moves have indeed been successful despite extremists at-

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tempts to mount repeated attacks on the security forces setting up such camps and also public relations campaigns urging tribals to undertake ‘*Police Camp Bhagao Andolan*’ (movement to chase away police camps). Also, other measures initiated by New Delhi for the LWE affected areas include road connectivity projects, mobile connectivity through installation of mobile towers, making education and skill education accessible by initiatives like Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), establishing Kendriya Vidyalaya (KVs) in the affected districts, opening up of banks, ATMs, etc. to be able to make inroads into the extremist dominated areas. Given such initiatives, the contribution of the paper lies in econometrically estimating the extent to which these developmental factors affect the occurrence of LWE activities.

Thus, Left Wing extremism (henceforth, referred to as LWE)<sup>1</sup> has emerged as one of the major security challenges that India faces. This cannot be a mere manifestation of the prolonged state-building process that the states within the region have been undergoing but rather a movement towards dismantling the existing disproportionate socio-economic and political structures established for catering to the interests of the upper strata of the society. The relative success that these groups have been able to achieve varies from place to place and group to group. Despite shrill assessments across the board and an enveloping sense of apprehension promoted by polarizing politics, the past year has been astonishingly peaceful in India in terms of terrorist and insurgent violence. Total terrorism/insurgency related fatalities across India at 411 (see Table 1), are at a dramatic low - certainly, the lowest since 1994. Indeed, since 2012, total fatalities across the country have remained below the ‘high intensity conflict’ threshold of a thousand fatalities per year. It is useful to recall that fatalities remained above 2,000 for 18 of these 22 years; out of which they were above 3,000 for 11 years; above 4,000 for five years; and just over 5,000 only in 2001. The cumulative totals of the multiple insurgencies in India’s **troubled Northeast**, similarly, remained above the ‘high intensity’ threshold in 2007 and 2008, but have declined enormously since then. As projected, the dramatic contraction of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) – in terms of geographical areas of influence and violence has primarily been the result of successful intelligence-based operations launched by the Security Forces (SFs) over the past years, which have helped neutralize top cadres among the rebels. According to the SATP database, between 2010 and 2016, at least 677 leadership elements of the Maoists have been neutralized (84 killed, 391 arrested and 202 surrendered). To name a few of the initiatives, according to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (UMHA) data, the total number of LWE cadres arrested between 2010 and 2015 stands at 11,608. At least 633 LWE cadres surrendered

*Table 1. Trend in deaths on account of LWE activities in the last 5 years*

Year	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorists/Insurgents/Extremists	Total
<b>2020 (E)</b>	101.8	62.8	275.6	437.8
<b>2019 (E)</b>	104.1	65.5	249.8	417.8
2018	106.0	75.0	230.0	411.0
2017	109.0	76.0	150.0	335.0
2016	123.0	61.0	251.0	435.0
2015	90.0	59.0	110.0	259.0
2014	127.0	97.0	121.0	349.0
<b>Total*</b>	<b>555.0</b>	<b>368.0</b>	<b>862.0</b>	<b>1789.0</b>

Source: Compiled from the South Asia Terrorism Portal

Note: E stands for estimated; A basic linear trend relationship of the form  $y_t = \alpha + \beta t$  has been used for forecasting.

\*: Total is only from the actual figures i.e. from 2014-2018

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