

From Counter-Insurgency to Post-LWE Stabilisation: State Consolidation and the Risk of Resurgence in India

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Abstract

Ministry of Home Affairs data record a fall in LWE-related violent incidents from 1,936 in 2010 to 234 in 2025, and the number of districts officially classified as LWE-affected fell to zero in March-April 2026, although 38 districts remain under continuing support categories. This article asks how the contraction of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has changed India's counter-insurgency challenge, particularly with regard to post-LWE stabilisation, state consolidation and the prevention of resurgence. Using qualitative document analysis and descriptive longitudinal evidence, it treats India as the macro-case and Chhattisgarh's Bastar division as the principal illustration. The article distinguishes three dimensions of state presence: security reach, infrastructure and connectivity, and civilian institutional consolidation. It finds that the first two have expanded substantially, while civilian institutional consolidation is less clearly demonstrated: evidence on functioning civilian institutions in former core areas is limited and uneven, and some services are delivered through security camps. The article argues that the central challenge has shifted from suppressing insurgent capacity to converting security gains into durable civilian institutions, and treats resurgence as a conditional analytical risk rather than a prediction. Its contribution is a framework that separates stabilisation from state consolidation in analysing India's post-LWE phase.

Keywords: Left-Wing Extremism, counter-insurgency, stabilisation, state consolidation, resurgence, India.

1. Introduction

For much of the period after 2005, the insurgency led by the Communist Party of India (Maoist), officially described as Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), was treated by the Indian state as its most serious internal-security problem. At its height, Maoist violence affected large parts of the forested, predominantly Adivasi regions of central and eastern India, in 2010, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recorded 1,936 incidents of LWE violence and 1,005 deaths of civilians and security-force personnel (Ministry of Home Affairs [MHA], 2025a). The picture in 2026 is very different. No district is now officially classified as LWE-affected, although the MHA recorded 33 incidents of Maoist violence between 1 January and 21 July 2026 (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2026b). This change raises a question that the literature has not fully addressed. Much scholarship on LWE, written while the insurgency was expanding or at its peak,

asked why it emerged, why it took root among Adivasi communities and whether the state relied too heavily on force (Guha, 2007; Harriss, 2011; Kennedy & Purushotham, 2012; Shah & Jain, 2017). Official statements, meanwhile, now describe India as free of LWE (PIB, 2026a, 2026b). Between these positions lies a question that needs closer attention, what kind of problem does the state face after an insurgency has contracted, but before the areas it once influenced have become ordinary, civilian-governed parts of the state?

This article therefore asks, How has the contraction of Left-Wing Extremism changed India's counter-insurgency challenge, particularly with regard to post-LWE stabilisation, state consolidation and the prevention of resurgence? The central argument is that the substantial contraction of LWE has changed the nature of India's internal-security challenge. The challenge is no longer only the suppression of active insurgent capacity. It increasingly involves maintaining security gains while consolidating durable civilian institutions and governance in areas where insurgent influence has contracted. The argument rests on a distinction between three dimensions of state presence: security reach, infrastructure and connectivity, and civilian institutional consolidation. The first two have expanded substantially in former core areas, especially Bastar, evidence on the third is thinner and more uneven. Security reach and infrastructure can facilitate civilian consolidation, but they do not themselves demonstrate that it has occurred. Resurgence is accordingly treated as a conditional analytical risk, not as a prediction.

Methodologically, the study uses qualitative policy and document analysis supported by descriptive longitudinal evidence. Its principal sources are MHA replies to parliamentary questions and Press Information Bureau (PIB) releases issued on behalf of the MHA, with data covering 2010 to July 2026. These are read alongside peer-reviewed scholarship on counter-insurgency, conflict termination and recurrence, and the Maoist movement. Press Trust of India (PTI) reports are used only for specific events in Bastar, or Chhattisgarh government statements, for which no primary document could be located. India is the macro-case. Chhattisgarh, and particularly the Bastar division, is the principal empirical illustration, since it accounted for most recorded LWE violence in recent years (PIB, 2026b). Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra are mentioned selectively. No interviews, fieldwork or original datasets are used. Much of the quantitative record is produced by the state, itself a party to the conflict, and could not be independently verified, official figures are therefore used to describe trends as the state records them, and official explanations are treated as claims rather than settled findings.

At the end, the article makes two contributions. First, it applies the literature on stabilisation, state consolidation and conflict recurrence to the Indian case at the point of insurgent contraction, a phase that has received less attention than the insurgency's causes and peak. Second, it offers a simple distinction that separates claims about security, infrastructure and governance, which policy discussion often merges.

2. Conceptualising the Transition from Counter-Insurgency to Post-LWE Stabilisation

The argument depends on keeping six related ideas apart: counter-insurgency, insurgent contraction, insurgency termination, post-insurgency stabilisation, state consolidation and resurgence prevention. They are often used loosely in policy language, although each implies a different judgement about where a conflict stands.

Counter-Insurgency

Classical counter-insurgency theory treats the population, rather than territory alone, as the object of the contest. Galula (1964) argued that the counter-insurgent must separate insurgents from the population and then build political structures through which the population can support the government. Kilcullen (2010)

similarly treats it as a combination of security, political and developmental effort in which the population's experience of effective government is central. Kalyvas (2006) adds that civilian collaboration during civil war tends to follow control, people cooperate with whichever actor can protect or punish them locally. Behaviour shaped by control, however, is not the same as durable acceptance of civilian institutions. Counter-insurgency theory is used here for the active phase, it is less helpful for what follows, because its central question is how to defeat an armed challenger, not how to govern once that challenger has declined.

Insurgent Contraction and Termination

Insurgent contraction refers to a measurable reduction in an insurgent organisation's violence, territorial presence, leadership, cadre strength and recruitment. Termination is a stronger claim. It implies that organised armed conflict has ended, whether through military defeat, negotiated settlement or the dissolution of the insurgent organisation. A RAND study of 89 insurgencies found that modern insurgencies have typically lasted about a decade, and identified changes in desertions, defections and the flow of information to the counter-insurgent as indicators of tipping points (Connable & Libicki, 2010). Cross-national data also show that conflicts more often end under unclear circumstances, with fighting simply ceasing, than through decisive victory or peace agreement (Kreutz, 2010). A decline in violence is therefore consistent with termination, but does not by itself establish it.

Post-Insurgency Stabilisation

Stabilisation is the transitional phase in which the state secures areas from which insurgent influence has receded, prevents the return of armed groups and creates conditions for regular administration. It remains security-heavy, relying on police and paramilitary forces, fortified infrastructure, intelligence networks and physical access to remote areas. It is necessary, but the state's presence still depends on extraordinary arrangements.

State Consolidation

Consolidation refers to a deeper and slower process in which the state's authority comes to rest on the regular functioning of civilian institutions. Its markers include regularly staffed schools, functioning health facilities, local administration accessible without security escorts, justice through ordinary police stations and courts, and welfare delivered through routine channels. Studies of post-conflict peacebuilding have argued that effective institutions need to be established if peace is to be durable (Paris, 2004). Research on rebel governance adds that insurgents often perform administrative functions (Mampilly, 2011), and that wartime political orders between states and armed groups take varied forms rather than simple control or absence (Staniland, 2012). Where insurgents have governed, their withdrawal leaves functions that the state must take on, consolidation is the process through which this happens.

Resurgence Prevention

Resurgence prevention links these concepts to the risk of renewed armed mobilisation. Relapse is common after a conflict. Collier et al. (2008) report that nearly half of all civil wars are post-conflict relapses, while Walter (2015) finds that repeat civil war is significantly less likely where political and legal institutions constrain governments and make them accountable. The same literature is not uniform, Kreutz (2010) finds that intrastate conflicts are less likely to recur after government victories, which cautions against treating institutional weakness as the only relevant factor. These studies concern national civil wars and cannot be transferred directly to a subnational insurgency in a long-established democracy such as India. They are used here analogically, to direct attention to institutional quality after violence declines. In this article, resurgence prevention means identifying and addressing conditions, such as incomplete

stabilisation, weak institutions or unresolved grievances, that could in some circumstances allow renewed insurgent mobilisation. It does not assume that resurgence will occur.

3. The Changing LWE Landscape

The longitudinal evidence shows a substantial contraction of LWE violence, though not a steady one. According to the MHA, incidents of LWE violence peaked at 1,936 in 2010, when 1,005 civilians and security-force personnel were killed. By 2024, according to the same reply, these figures had fallen to 374 incidents and 150 deaths, reductions of 81% and 85%, respectively (MHA, 2025a). The most recent official series, presented to the Rajya Sabha in July 2026, records 234 incidents of violence perpetrated by Maoists in 2025, with 64 civilian and 36 security-force deaths, and 33 incidents with 11 deaths between 1 January and 21 July 2026 (PIB, 2026b). Against the 2010 baseline, the 2025 figures are about 88% lower for incidents and 90% lower for deaths. Table 1 summarises the data. The trajectory was not linear. Incidents rose from 361 in 2021 to 486 in 2023 before falling, with Chhattisgarh accounting for most of the increase (PIB, 2026b).

Table 1 Recorded LWE Violence in India, 2010 and 2021-2026 (Civilian and Security-Force Deaths Only)

Year	Incidents	Civilian deaths	Security force personnel KIA *	Total deaths
2010	1,936	720	-	1,005
2021	361	97	50	147
2022	413	82	16	98
2023	486	107	32	139
2024	375	132	19	151
2025	234	64	36	100
2026 (to 21 July)	33	6	5	11

Note: Data for 2010 are from MHA (2025a) and PIB (2026c), which report incidents and combined civilian and security-force deaths only, data for 2021-2026 are from the annexure in PIB (2026b), which records “violence perpetrated by Maoists.” Total deaths for 2021-2026 are the sum of the two reported categories. Deaths exclude Maoist cadres. 2026 covers 1 January to 21 July only. Earlier releases give slightly different values for some years (2023 deaths: 138 [PIB, 2024a]; 2024: 374 incidents and 150 deaths [MHA, 2025a]); the most recent release is used here. (KIA* = Killed in action).

Three cautions are important. First, official figures may be revised over time. For example, a December 2025 reply reported 222 incidents and 95 deaths for part of 2025 (MHA, 2025b). This article uses the most recent figures available. Second, the death figures include only civilians and security-force personnel. They do not include Maoist cadres killed during operations. By mid-October 2025, the MHA reported that 312 cadres had been eliminated, 836 arrested, and 1,639 surrendered (PIB, 2025d). Thus, the decline in reported deaths occurred alongside increased state operations. Third, the 2026 figures cover only 1 January

to 21 July. The published data do not show how many incidents occurred before or after the district classification reached zero in March-April 2026.

The geographical contraction is equally marked. The number of districts officially classified as LWE-affected fell from 126 to 90 in April 2018, 70 in July 2021, 38 in April 2024, eight in December 2025 and zero in March-April 2026 (PIB, 2026b). The baseline of 126 is described inconsistently, a December 2024 release calls it the number of LWE-affected districts in 2013, an October 2025 release the number of districts reporting Naxal-related violence in 2013 (PIB, 2024b, 2025d). It is treated here only as the earliest point in the classification series. The number of police stations reporting LWE violence fell from 465 in 96 districts in 2010 to 171 in 42 districts in 2023 (PIB, 2024a). In April 2025, the number of “most affected” districts had fallen from 12 to six, four of them in Chhattisgarh (PIB, 2025a), by October 2025, only Bijapur, Sukma and Narayanpur remained in that category, and the total number of affected districts had fallen from 18 to 11 (PIB, 2025d). The eight districts still classified as affected in December 2025 comprised six in Chhattisgarh, West Singhbhum in Jharkhand and Kandhamal in Odisha (PIB, 2026b).

Chhattisgarh followed the national trend, but more slowly. The MHA recorded 499 incidents and 343 deaths in the state in 2010 and 267 incidents and 122 deaths in 2024 (MHA, 2025a), the July 2026 annexure gives 268 and 123 for 2024, and 144 incidents and 79 deaths for 2025 (PIB, 2026b). In 2024, the state accounted for about seven in ten recorded incidents nationally, and the districts that remained “most affected” longest were in the southern part of the Bastar division. Recorded violence had become concentrated in a small area rather than a multi-state belt, although Jharkhand still accounted for 13 of the 33 incidents recorded in 2026 (PIB, 2026b).

Official statements now present this contraction as an ending. In replying to a Lok Sabha debate in March 2026, the Home Minister described a Naxal-free India as one of the government’s major achievements, and the July 2026 reply stated that the country had become free from LWE (PIB, 2026a, 2026b). Analytically, however, the evidence supports a finding of substantial contraction more securely than one of termination, and the official record itself points in this direction. First, violence had not ceased, between 1 January and 21 July 2026, incidents were recorded in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Telangana, and deaths in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Maharashtra (PIB, 2026b). Second, the figure of zero refers to an administrative classification. The same reply places 37 districts in a Legacy and Thrust category, described as no longer LWE-affected but still requiring security and development support to consolidate the position, and one district in a District of Concern category, described as a district where LWE violence has been contained and the organisational structure dismantled (PIB, 2026b). The last label has shifted in meaning: in April 2025, Districts of Concern were a sub-category within the officially affected districts (PIB, 2025a), whereas in July 2026 the label denotes a district outside that classification. Zero districts officially classified as LWE-affected is a statement about categorisation, it does not by itself mean zero LWE activity or the complete disappearance of the Maoist organisation. Third, the MHA states that security surveillance and developmental interventions will continue in these districts to preclude any possibility of relapse (PIB, 2026b). Whether the CPI (Maoist) retains a capacity that could be rebuilt cannot be established from public evidence, and this article does not claim that it does, what can be said is that termination, in the sense set out in the conceptual discussion above, has not been demonstrated.

4. Explaining the Contraction of LWE

No single factor can be shown to have caused the contraction of LWE. Several processes coincided with the decline and are plausibly connected to it. The discussion separates what the data show, what official

sources claim and what academic research suggests. Official accounts attribute the decline to the National Policy and Action Plan adopted in 2015, described as a whole of government approach combining security measures, development interventions and the protection of the rights and entitlements of local communities (PIB, 2026b). In April 2025, the MHA attributed the rapid improvement of the preceding year primarily to new security camps in core areas and to development works such as roads, water, electricity and welfare schemes (PIB, 2025a). In March 2026, the Home Minister also presented the insurgency as primarily a product of ideology rather than underdevelopment (PIB, 2026a). Much of the academic literature instead locates the roots of the insurgency in the historical marginalisation of Adivasi communities, land and forest dispossession, and the weakness of state institutions in the central Indian tribal belt (Guha, 2007; Harriss, 2011; Kennedy & Purushotham, 2012; Mukherjee, 2018). The difference matters, because explanations of why the insurgency arose shape judgements about what would prevent its return.

Security Operations and Coordination

The data are consistent with the view that sustained security operations were a central contributor to contraction. Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) have operated alongside state units such as Chhattisgarh's District Reserve Guard (DRG), with Union support for intelligence sharing, helicopters, police modernisation and fortified police stations (PIB, 2026b). The MHA reported in 2025 that the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) had established more than 400 forward operating bases in LWE-affected areas over the previous five years, and linked these to the decline in violence (PIB, 2025e). This is an official attribution rather than a tested causal finding. Operational tempo rose markedly in 2025, with major operations in the Karreguttalu hills on the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border and in the Abujhmad forests of Narayanpur (PIB, 2025c, 2025e). The timing is close, but the separate effect of each measure cannot be estimated from the public record.

Leadership and Cadre Attrition

Leadership attrition appears to have been particularly significant in the final phase. In May 2025, security forces killed Nambala Keshav Rao, alias Basavaraju, the general secretary of the CPI (Maoist), in Narayanpur district, the MHA described this as the first killing of a general-secretary-ranked leader in three decades (PIB, 2025c). By mid-October 2025, the MHA counted the general secretary and eight other Politburo or Central Committee members among the cadres killed that year, and one Politburo member and one Central Committee member among those who had surrendered (PIB, 2025d). The killings included two Central Committee members in Abujhmad in September 2025 and a Central Committee member in Jharkhand's Bokaro district in the same month, in October 2025, 258 cadres, including a Central Committee member, surrendered in Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra (PIB, 2025e). It is reasonable to infer that these losses weakened strategic direction and cohesion, but this is an inference rather than a demonstrated causal finding.

Surrender and Rehabilitation

The Union government reimburses states for rehabilitation packages that include immediate grants of ₹5 lakh for higher-ranked cadres and ₹2.5 lakh for others, and vocational training with a monthly stipend of ₹10,000 for three years (PIB, 2026b). The MHA reported that more than 8,000 cadres had given up violence over the preceding decade (PIB, 2025b). Surrender figures do not distinguish armed combatants from members of support networks, and the official record does not show how durably surrendered cadres have been reintegrated. Surrenders nevertheless reduce the organisation's personnel, and Connable and

Libicki (2010) treat rising desertions and defections as indicators of insurgent decline. Senior surrenders in 2025 suggest that exit had become a realistic option even at higher levels.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

Official accounts present roads and telecommunications as both development measures and enablers of security operations. Some 15,189 km of roads have been built under two LWE-specific road schemes and 9,497 mobile towers commissioned (PIB, 2026b). A contribution is plausible, since insurgencies are suited to rural terrain and depend on sanctuary (Connable & Libicki, 2010), and roads and communications reduce isolation. But roads and towers serve security forces as well as civilians, and their specific effect has not been isolated.

Academic research on development and violence in the Maoist conflict is mixed and conditional. Dasgupta et al. (2017) find that the roll-out of India's rural employment guarantee produced a large long-run reduction in Maoist violence, concentrated in districts with sufficient pre-existing state capacity to implement the programme. Khanna and Zimmermann (2017), using a different research design on the same programme, find short-run increases in insurgency-related violence, including police-initiated attacks. Development spending does not reduce violence automatically, its effect appears to depend on the institutions that deliver it.

Recruitment, Organisation and Local Conditions

Shah's (2018) ethnography in Jharkhand suggests that people joined for a range of reasons, many of them personal and local rather than purely ideological, and that relations between leaders and cadres were marked by tension. Kennedy and Purushotham (2012) argue that coercive state responses have historically pushed Maoist insurgency to the margins without addressing the grievances that sustained it. Direct public evidence on recent recruitment is limited, it is plausible that expanding state presence, leadership losses and the availability of surrender options together made recruitment more difficult, but this remains an inference. The most defensible conclusion is that contraction resulted from several reinforcing processes, with sustained security pressure prominent among them, rather than any single intervention.

5. Post-LWE Stabilisation and State Consolidation

The key question is what kind of state presence has replaced insurgent influence in former core areas. This section separates security forces, roads and civilian services, which policy discussion often treats as interchangeable signs that the state has arrived.

Security Reach

Security reach is the best-documented dimension of state expansion, and camps and forward operating bases have been the main instrument of territorial access in Bastar. In February 2024, for example, a joint force set up a camp at Puvarti in Sukma district, a village associated with the Maoists' military leadership, in an area where the Maoists had operated local Janatana Sarkar (people's government) units, at least 14 new camps had been established in the Bastar region in the preceding months (Press Trust of India [PTI], 2024). Official figures record 663 fortified police stations built in LWE-affected states (PIB, 2026b), and a PTI report in early 2025 stated that nearly 40,000 CRPF personnel were deployed in south Bastar (PTI, 2025a). These are measures of security reach; they say nothing directly about civilian institutions.

In Kalyvas's (2006) terms, this expansion has shifted control towards the state, and with it the incentives of residents to cooperate. But security reach and state consolidation are different things. A CAPF camp provides access and protection, not regular civilian policing, investigation, prosecution or courts, nor the everyday relationship between citizens and a civilian administration. The history of Bastar also shows that

the manner in which security is provided can affect legitimacy. The Salwa Judum campaign that began in 2005 was associated with large-scale displacement of Adivasis into camps (Sundar, 2016), and in 2011 the Supreme Court held that the state's use of tribal youths as special police officers in counter-insurgency was unconstitutional (*Nandini Sundar v. State of Chhattisgarh*, 2011). The evidence reviewed here does not suggest that current operations repeat that experience; the point is that the conduct of security shapes the relationship on which consolidation must later build.

Security reach also creates its own transition problem. The MHA has announced that one-third of security camps in LWE-free areas are being converted into Jan Suvidha Kendras (public service centres) offering livelihood support, access to government schemes, digital services and health care, the first has been set up at Netanar, near Jagdalpur (PIB, 2026b). This signals an intention to move from security to civilian service infrastructure, though the continued Legacy and Thrust classification implies that security support will remain for some time (PIB, 2026b). How and when responsibility passes from central forces to regular state police and civilian authorities is a central question for the post-LWE phase.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

Infrastructure and connectivity have expanded substantially on official figures. Besides the roads and towers noted above, the MHA reports 6,025 post offices with banking services, 1,804 bank branches and 1,321 ATMs opened in areas formerly affected by LWE, and approval for further critical roads and bridges in Chhattisgarh to be built by the Border Roads Organisation (PIB, 2026b). Around ₹4,289 crore has been released since 2017 under the Special Central Assistance scheme to fill critical gaps in public infrastructure in affected districts (PIB, 2026b). These changes lower the cost of state access, roads shorten travel to markets, hospitals and offices, and mobile networks make it easier to contact officials and receive welfare payments.

However, infrastructure is a means of access rather than a form of governance. A road allows a teacher, nurse or revenue official to reach a village; it does not ensure that a teacher is posted there, that a health sub-centre is staffed or that land records are maintained. Official reporting largely counts outputs, not the use or quality of the services they make possible. The Chhattisgarh government's Niyad Nellanar scheme, launched on 15 February 2024, illustrates both the connection and the gap. The state government's own statement acknowledges that the presence of security camps is not enough and that governance must also reach these areas. According to that statement, reported in July 2025, the scheme extends 52 schemes of 17 departments and 31 community facilities to about 327 villages within 10 km of 54 new security camps in five Bastar districts. The same statement reports that 43 of 119 planned mobile towers were operational and that of 173 planned road and bridge projects, 116 had been approved and 26 completed (PTI, 2025b). The figures are self-reported, but they indicate that planned connectivity in the former core remained incomplete in mid-2025. The scheme's design also means that, at least initially, access to civilian services is organised around security installations rather than independent civilian institutions.

Civilian Institutional Consolidation

Civilian institutional consolidation is where the evidence is weakest and caution most needed. The question is not whether services have been announced, but whether schools, health facilities, local administration, justice and welfare delivery function regularly without depending on extraordinary security arrangements.

Education in south Bastar shows the depth of the deficit that the state inherited. In 2022, around 400 government schools in insurgency-affected parts of the Bastar region were reported to have remained shut for about 15 years, and the state government decided that year to reopen 260 of them in Sukma,

Narayanpur, Dantewada and Bijapur (PTI, 2022). Reopening has often relied on locally recruited temporary teachers, known as shiksha doots, rather than regular teaching staff. The risks attached to this arrangement became evident in September 2024, when a shiksha doot in the Jagargunda area of Sukma was killed by Maoists, an incident that a CRPF officer later said had made local recruitment of teachers more difficult (PTI, 2025a). In four Sukma villages where camps were set up in 2024, primary schooling began in tin-shed classrooms established by the CRPF beside its camps, with a civilian teacher paid through the MHA's Civic Action Programme (PTI, 2025a). These initiatives bring education to places that had none, but in some core areas a basic civilian service is being delivered through the security apparatus rather than the regular education system.

The wider official picture is consistent with this. The MHA has commissioned an independent survey in seven formerly LWE-affected districts of Chhattisgarh to assess the saturation of welfare schemes and the availability of primary schools, anganwadi centres and secondary health facilities, and it is undertaking joint planning with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to strengthen local self-government (PIB, 2026b). Such steps indicate that the state itself regards civilian coverage as incomplete. The Niyad Nellanar statement points the same way: of the facilities sanctioned for camp-adjacent villages, 13 of 31 new primary schools, 107 of 185 anganwadi centres and 16 of 20 sub-health centres were reported to be functioning by mid-2025 (PTI, 2025b). The MHA's July 2026 reply also cites 2,126,268 forest-rights title deeds distributed, without specifying their geographical scope or period (PIB, 2026b). The figure is relevant to the land and forest grievances emphasised in the literature (Guha, 2007; Planning Commission, 2008), but it cannot be read as a measure of consolidation in former core areas. Local representative institutions may also matter. Milliff and Stommes (2023) find that reservations for Scheduled Tribes in local councils in Chhattisgarh reduced Maoist violence, apparently by bringing elected officials closer to security forces and improving the flow of information. The finding concerns the wartime period, however, not post-conflict institutional functioning. The public record does not yet provide systematic evidence on outcomes such as teacher attendance, the functioning of health facilities, the regularity of gram sabha meetings, or residents' ability to use police stations and courts for ordinary matters.

Particular care is needed with claims about the core of Bastar, including Abujhmad. This area was among the last in which major operations took place, the killing of the CPI (Maoist) general secretary in May 2025 and of two Central Committee members in September 2025 both occurred there (PIB, 2025c, 2025e). The available evidence does not allow a judgement that civilian institutions in Abujhmad function regularly and independently of security support, and it would be premature to assume that they do. Nor does the evidence show that they have failed. The appropriate conclusion is that institutional consolidation in the former core is at an early stage and probably uneven, while districts that left the LWE classification earlier may be further along.

Therefore, the three dimensions show a sequence: security reach came first and is the most complete, infrastructure has followed, civilian institutional consolidation has begun but is uneven and, in some core areas, organised around the security presence. Security reach and infrastructure have made civilian consolidation possible, but they do not demonstrate it.

6. Discussion

The evidence clearly shows a substantial contraction of LWE in violence, geography, leadership and organisational capacity. Contraction, however, is not termination. The official declaration that India is free of LWE is expressed through an administrative classification. The continued support for 38 districts and

the stated aim of precluding relapse indicate that the state itself does not treat the matter as closed (PIB, 2026b). Such ambiguity is common: conflicts more often end with fighting simply ceasing than with a decisive outcome (Kreutz, 2010). India's own history adds a relevant caution. Kennedy and Purushotham (2012) identify three waves of Maoist insurgency since independence and argue that earlier counter-insurgency pushed the movement to the margins without eliminating it or addressing the grievances of Adivasi communities. This history does not predict another wave, but it shows that a decline in violence has not previously been sufficient evidence that the conditions for mobilisation had disappeared.

Security consolidation also differs from governance consolidation. The analysis of stabilisation and state consolidation above showed that the state's presence in former core areas has expanded mainly through camps, forces and physical infrastructure, and that some civilian services are delivered through or alongside the security apparatus. This is characteristic of a security-heavy stabilisation phase, and becomes a problem only if mistaken for the end state, as Kalyvas's (2006) argument implies, cooperation secured through control depends on that control continuing. Durable consolidation requires that routine dealings with the state, over schooling, health, land, disputes and welfare, take place through civilian institutions that function without a protective cordon.

A stabilisation and state-consolidation perspective is therefore better suited to the post-LWE phase than counter-insurgency alone. The questions now facing the state are different: how to reduce reliance on central forces without creating openings for armed groups, how to shift policing to regular state police, how to move service delivery from camps to civilian institutions, and how to make local self-government and justice institutions work in areas where they have long been weak. The MHA's own post-LWE agenda points in this direction (PIB, 2026b).

Institutional weaknesses in former core areas are best understood as potential vulnerabilities, not causes of resurgence. The cross-national literature associates the quality of post-conflict institutions with the risk of recurrence (Collier et al., 2008; Walter, 2015), but these findings come from different contexts and do not establish such a relationship for India's LWE. Scholars of the Indian case have linked the insurgency's original spread to the weakness of state institutions in Adivasi areas, land and forest dispossession, and the limited ability of democratic channels to address these grievances (Guha, 2007; Harriss, 2011; Mukherjee, 2018; Planning Commission, 2008). If such conditions persist where the security presence is eventually reduced, they may offer openings to surviving cadres or new actors. Whether they would be used depends on factors this evidence cannot assess, including the residual capacity of the CPI (Maoist), local attitudes and the state's own conduct.

Resurgence should therefore be treated as a conditional analytical risk associated with incomplete stabilisation, weak institutions or unresolved grievances. The evidence reviewed here does not show that resurgence is occurring, and this article does not establish that it will occur. It suggests that the durability of present gains depends partly on whether the transition from security reach to civilian consolidation is completed. Research on development programmes in the Maoist conflict is consistent with this, since their effects have depended on state capacity (Dasgupta et al., 2017; Khanna & Zimmermann, 2017). Security vigilance and institutional consolidation are thus complementary rather than sequential tasks.

7. Conclusion

This article asked how the contraction of Left-Wing Extremism has changed India's counter-insurgency challenge, particularly with regard to post-LWE stabilisation, state consolidation and the prevention of resurgence. The answer is that contraction has shifted the centre of the challenge. On the MHA's figures,

recorded LWE violence fell by about 88% between 2010 and 2025, deaths of civilians and security forces by about 90%, and the number of districts officially classified as LWE-affected from 126, the earliest figure in the MHA's series, to zero by March-April 2026. The contraction of violence, geographical reach and organisational leadership has reduced the scale of the active counter-insurgency challenge. In its place is a different and in some respects more demanding task, maintaining security gains while consolidating durable civilian institutions in areas where insurgent influence has contracted. The state has substantially expanded its security reach and infrastructure, especially in Bastar, but civilian institutional consolidation is less clearly demonstrated: the evidence does not yet show that schools, health services, local administration, justice and welfare delivery now function regularly and independently in the former core areas. In parts of south Bastar, some basic services are delivered through or beside security camps. It would therefore be premature to conclude that India has completed the transition from counter-insurgency to ordinary civilian governance in these areas, and the government's continued support for 38 districts reflects this. Resurgence is not predicted here, and the evidence reviewed does not show that it is under way, it remains a conditional analytical risk whose likelihood depends partly on how the post-LWE phase is managed. What the coming years require is a combination of continued security vigilance, deliberate institutional consolidation and attention to the conditions that could allow renewed insurgent mobilisation. One analytical implication follows, although this study does not establish it as an empirical criterion, progress in this phase may be better judged by whether civilian institutions function without extraordinary security support than by the absence of violence alone. Because the study relies on documents, field-based research is needed to assess this on the ground.

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