



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Strategic choices and negotiations in insurgencies: National Democratic Front of Boroland in Assam

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Insurgencies have been prevalent in many parts of South Asia including India at different points in time with demands ranging from sovereignty, autonomy arrangements to other socio-economic and political inducements. Northeast India also witnessed the onset of several insurgencies with various demands ranging from secessionism to autonomy arrangements and other socio-economic and political incentives for their respective communities. However, a deeper analysis reveals that some non-state armed groups (NSAGs)/insurgent groups decide to renounce the violence after a certain points in time and engage in the negotiation process with the state actors while others chose to remain in conflict. The thesis focuses on the former set of insurgent groups. The conditions or the factors that motivate the insurgent groups to engage in the political process vary from case to case.

Thus the present study attempts to examine why and under what conditions do Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs)/insurgent groups decide to negotiate with the state actors? The thesis examines this question with a specific focus on the insurgency led by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in Assam in India's northeast. The study analyses the probable factors that motivated the NDFB to accept the offer of negotiations after almost two decades of violence. The thesis argues that the incentive structure and relative capabilities may motivate the Non-State Armed Groups to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. The thesis also

examined the negotiation process which involves discussions and various stages of bargaining process between the states and the insurgent groups, which is very critical for successful negotiation and bring an end to such armed rebellion. The study also examines how engaging insurgents in the negotiation process may contribute to peace-building especially in countries like India.

The sample selected for the study included former NDFB rebels as well as senior ABSU activists, BSS, ABWWF, former BLT rebels and members of a political party called United People's Party Liberal which comprised mostly former NDFB members and ABSU. These interviews, which included both formal as well as informal, were conducted in BTR as well as in Bongaigaon and Kamrup (M) districts of Assam. Forty four interviews were conducted during the course of the study. The interviews mainly focused on the conditions that led to the onset of the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India in 2005. At the same time, the field study also focused on several critical socio-economic and political developments that led to the onset of the insurgency and various ethnic mobilizations among the Bodos especially after the independence of the country in 1947. .

Negotiations between NDFB and the Government of India started in 2005. The NDFB leadership were motivated by several factors to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process. We find evidence that destruction of safe havens/bases in Bhutan, arrests, deaths and surrender of rebels as well scarcity of finance motivated the NDFB to participate in the negotiation process. These setbacks further increased the cost of continuing the insurgency for the NDFB. The Bodo intellectuals as well as Bodo non-combatants repeatedly appealed to the NDFB leadership to renounce the violence and engage in peaceful discussions with the Government of India and resolve the core issues of the insurgency. The other significant factor which motivated the NDFB to participate in the democratic process was the continuous appeals from the government especially the Assam Government led by Tarun Gogoi in the early 2000s. The attitude of the Government had changed towards the insurgents by early 2000s. At the same time, NDFB had also showed its willingness to do away with violence and participate in the political process by early 2000s. Thus, the study finds relative capabilities and incentive structure as critical indicators that motivated the NDFB to engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India in 2005.