# Does Identity Assertion Lead to Insurgency?  A Case Study of Bodoland Movement in Assam

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## Abstract

The presumption that ethnicity is one of the drivers of insurgency has not been adequately validated empirically. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to empirically estimate the relationship between ethnic identity and insurgency in the context of Bodoland Movement of Assam in India. To do so, we determined a sample size of 408 using Taro Yamane's formula. A total of four ethnic group's viz., Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Santhal were considered for the sample survey. Then using stratified sampling method, primary data was collected from the households of the from the four districts (Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri) of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in Assam, India. The BTR is an autonomously administered region under the provision of the sixth schedule of the constitution of India. Then to find the relationship between the identity and insurgency, Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) is used for estimation. The main finding of our study is: ethnicity acts as a major driver behind insurgency. This finding has a significant policy implication in polity management and governance particularly in a polyethnic social setting. Our finding calls for federalist accommodation of the ethnic groups as a way forward towards conflict resolution and peace building in a polyethnic social setting *a la* Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in BTR.

**Keywords:** Assam, Bodo, Ethnic Identity, Insurgency.

## Introduction

In poly-ethnic social settings, especially in developing countries which lack institutional capacity to control and manage inherent conflicting elements, competition for (or control of) resources including state privileges among the different ethnic groups often lead to inter-ethnic conflicts (1, 2). For example, the conflicts between the Gurji versus Burji in Southern Ethiopia; the Hausa and Fulani of the north versus the Yoruba and Ibo of the south in Nigeria; the Tigania and Tharaka communities of the Meru region in Kenya; Kuki vs Naga, Bodo vs Adivasi, Bodo vs Bangladeshi Muslim in Northeastern part of India, to name a few, are the manifestations of inter-ethnic competition for resources (3–6). The principles of integration or assimilation were broadly used for managing the ethnic diversity. The principle of integration, which is based on the decentralisation of power and accommodative of the claims and aspirations of the groups–be it economic, political, territorial or status symbol– that benefits all the ethnic groups ultimately resulting in the peaceful co-existence. The case of

French speakers and English speakers in Canada; the Malays, Chinese and Tamils in Malaysia; the Catalans and Spanish in Spain are few examples that uphold this phenomenon (7, 8).The second approach of assimilation is based on the notion of cultural homogenisation in favour of the majority group to make political and cultural boundaries coterminous. But when the modern state run by the dominant group uses this assimilation as a tool of social engineering particularly to establish majority cultural hegemony over the minorities, it becomes problematic and gives rise to inter-ethnic conflicts. This type of forced assimilation engineered by the majoritarian ruling elites is often faced with stiff resistance from the minorities leading to ethnic assertion, demands for separatism and sometimes calls for secession. In fact, the nation building process in post-colonial societies, particularly driven by the orthodox ideological forces, is woven around the majoritarian praxis which adopts an assimilationist approach unfavourable for the minority groups as it poses an existential threat to

them. Hence it is challenged and opposed by the minority groups. The causal mechanism is that the elites of the minority groups mobilise their people along ethnic lines that ultimately lead to the formation of sub-national movements that challenge the very idea of majoritarian nationalism (9). The case of Baloch community vs majority Punjabis in Pakistan; majority Burmans vs smaller ethnic groups like the Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Shan, Mon, Rakhine in Myanmar exemplify the unfolding of this assimilation process (10–12). An assimilationist approach followed in post-colonial Assam to forge a common Assamese identity out of disparate ethnic groups has not only failed but also led to the dismemberment of undivided Assam in 1972. The process had triggered a series of identity movements particularly among the ethnic minorities and tribal groups having different senses of identities like the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Dimasas, Karbis, and Bodos. They asserted their own identities, reconstructed and reinvented themselves, and demanded secession but ultimately settled with either separation or local level devolution of power under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. For example, Nagas and Mizos demanded secession and conducted armed rebellions which turned into ethnic insurgencies under the leadership of Naga National Council (NNC) and Mizo National Front (MNF) respectively. While the Naga insurgency continued for more than five decades till the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) (Issak-Muivah) entered into peace talks in 1997, Mizo insurgency lasted for 26 years (1960-86). However, Khasis and Garos got their own state without resorting to insurgency in 1972 On a closer look it is evident that ethnic groups especially the hill tribes not assimilated to Assamese were the ones to gain more from these identity-based movements achieving statehood through separation in comparison to the plain tribes who had historically assimilated themselves. Sharper identity differentiation between the Nagas vs Assamese, Mizos vs Assamese, Khasi and Garo vs Assamese—made it possible for the Naga, Mizo, Khasi-Garo political elites to quickly and easily mobilise their respective masses and rally them for demanding political autonomy. However, the Bodos, who got assimilated, to a large extent, in the course of history, in spite of having a dormant sense of identity difference vis-a-vis the Assamese,

failed to sail the wind in favour of gaining autonomy during the heydays of ethnic upsurge during the 1960s and 1970s. This dormant identity consciousness among the Bodos first manifested in the form of memorandum submitted by Kalicharan Brahma, an enlightened Bodo social reformer, to the Simon Commission in 1929 pleading to reserve seats in the State Legislative Assembly metamorphosed in the formation of Tribal League in 1933, Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952, then Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967, and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in 1967–the first exclusive platform of the Bodos (13, 14). Although ABSU functioned as an apolitical body for about 2 decades, it morally supported the political aspirations of the Bodos and passively supported PTCA's demand for the creation of a separate state for the Bodos by the name of Udayachal. It also lent its shoulders to support BSS' demand for the implementation of Roman script for writing the Bodo language. However, with the launching of assertive ethnic movements by the trinity of All Assam Students' Union (AASU), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS) against the foreigners coming from Bangladesh particularly the Muslim Bengalis and holding them as a security threat to the existence of the Assamese people at large during 1979-85 had been an eye opener to the Bodo political elites who could read the catch line "Assam for Assamese" and instantly up in the arms demanding " Divide Assam Fifty/Fifty" by way of intensifying their struggle for identity and autonomy during 1986-2020. Following the path of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) (1979), Bodo youths, also influenced by the ripple effect of ethnic militancy across the region, formed Bodo Security Force (BdSF) in 1986 to fight for the cause of the Bodo community by way of establishing a separate state–the Bodoland, the homeland of the Bodos. Following the state suppression and use of excessive force to curb the Bodo militancy further fuelled it. In fact, this heavy-handed approach, arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings caused widespread resentment among the Bodos further fuelling their sense of injustice and alienation (15). This Bodo militancy took shelter in the hills of Bhutan across the border, got assistance from outside power as well as other regional entities and metamorphosed into Bodo insurgency (16–18). The trajectory of this movement that spread

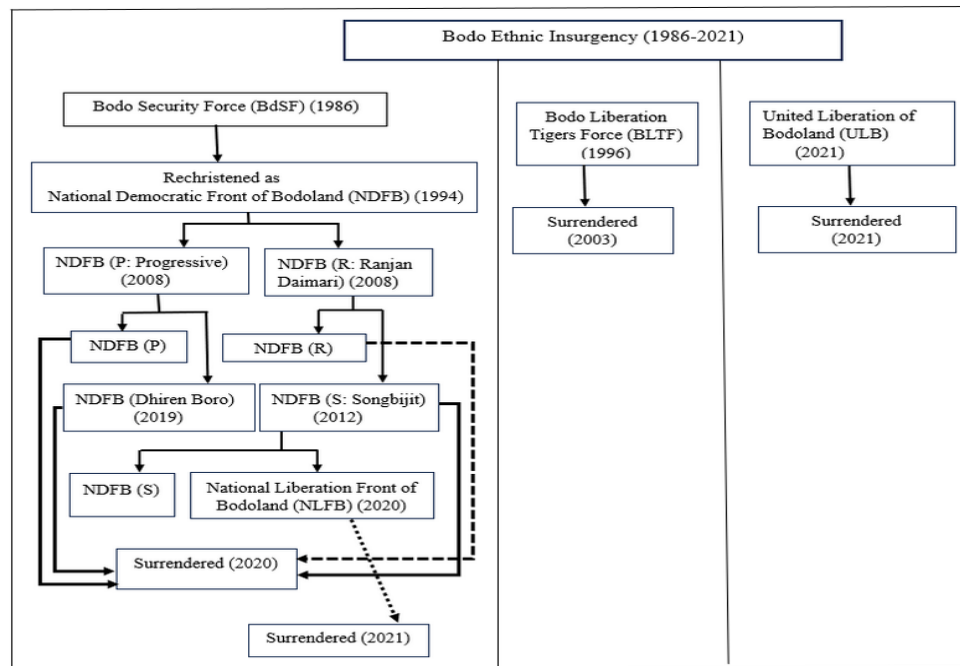through a process of fission is outlined in the Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Flow Diagram 1 Bodo Ethnic Insurgency (1986-2021)

The Bodo insurgency was active for 35 years (1986-2021). There were many drivers that had led to its emergence. Identity is believed to be the prime driver. The present study seeks to investigate whether identity caused insurgency among the Bodos or not. On three counts lies the novelty of the present study.

First: we attempted to establish causality between identity and insurgency unlike the narrative centric studies (3, 6, 19–21). Second, we have employed partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) as we have used a cross-section data set and latent variables in capturing the cause-and-effect relationship between the identity and insurgency. Whereas other researchers have made use of logit regression (22, 23). Or autoregressive distributed lag (ARDL) model (24). Or Granger causality test (25–28). Third, instead of secondary data, as has been used by most of the quantitative studies (22, 24–28). This study has made use of primary data based on people's perception of the Bodo insurgency, collected from the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam; India. As the government generated data often suffer from underreporting or overreporting of insurgency related incidents for political motives, primary data collected from the study area will be largely free from such biases. The rest of the paper is organised sequentially as

study area, methodology, results and discussion, and concludes with an outline of policy implications.

## The study area

This study is concerned with the issues pertaining to the Bodos, residing in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. BTR is composed of five districts: Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Tamulpur and Udalguri. The BTR is an Autonomously Administered District, under the provision of the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. It came into existence with the signing of the third Bodo Accord on 27th January 2020 between the Government of India and the Government of Assam and the representative of the Bodos; for the political, economic, social, cultural and identity–related aspirations of the Bodos following a long struggle (1966-2020), better known as Bodoland Movement.

The Bodos, are the original settlers in the Brahmaputra Valley (29, 30). They have a history of ruling the land long before the arrival of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century (31). However, they were conquered and subjugated by the latter Ahom, and with the passage of time got assimilated with the Assamese society (31, 32). In fact, the Bodo Movement sought to reverse the destiny of the Bodos by way of removing the long social and

cultural subjugation by way of establishing an autonomous Bodoland (18, 33, 34). Out of 14.54 lakhs of Bodos in Assam, 9.60 lakhs, i.e., 66 percent live in BTR (35). In fact, BTR is one of the least developed areas in Assam. For instance, while the average GDDP (Gross District Domestic Product) at current prices at the state level accounts at Rs 8580.75 crores, the same for BTR is calculated to be Rs 5257.46 crores (36). Similarly, while the average district level bank deposit in case of the state of Assam is Rs 6099.12 crore, the same for the BTR district stands at Rs 2167.75 crore (37). In fact, a comparison between the district averages in the state vis-a-vis BTR glaringly reveals the economic, educational, and infrastructural backwardness of the latter region (38). The relative backwardness of the Bodos, coupled with their political, economic, and cultural marginalization, fostered a deep sense of relative deprivation (39, 40). This discontentment was further amplified by the Assam Movement that called for "Assam for Assamese." In response to this, Bodo political elites sought to address their plight by advocating for greater autonomy and demanding a separate state for the Bodos (41). This Bodo identity movement branched out to give birth to Bodo militancy led by the youths and entangled with the cross-border forces to metamorphose into Bodo insurgency. In fact, Bodo insurgent groups acted as the vanguard of the Bodo causes till the signing of the Bodo accord in 2020.

## Methodology
### Sample and Data
The procedure employed for collecting the data is displayed in Table 1. Three stage stratified sampling is employed to reach out the targeted sample population groups and random sampling is used to collect the sample data.

Firstly, the sample size is determined by using the formula equation –[1] given by Taro Yamane.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2} - - - - - - - [1]$$

Where $n$ denotes the sample size to be obtained. 'N' is the population size which in our case is 3155359 that is the population of BTR (35). And 'e' is the margin of error (moe). The 'moe' is a statistic expressing the amount of random sampling error

in the results of a survey, and the acceptable 'moe' falls between 4% to 8% at 95 percent confidence interval level.

$$n = \frac{3155359}{1+3155359\,(0.05)^2}$$

=> $n$ = 399.949 (= 400).

Thus, our required sample size is 400.

In the first stage, the electoral rolls were used to identify the sample electoral constituencies across the four (during the time of data collection BTR consisted of four districts. On 11 August 2023, a new district named Tamulpur was carved out of Baksa district, making the total number of districts into five) districts of BTR. And from each district one-third of the constituencies were selected based on the higher levels of ethnic diversity measured in terms of the number of ethnic groups living in them. In the second stage, two polling stations were selected from each of the sample constituencies based on the similar criterion in identifying the sample constituency, i.e., highest level of ethnic diversity. However, in certain cases all the ethnic groups were not found in one polling station, in such cases along with that polling station the nearest polling station was also considered thereby making a stratum for data collection. In the third stage, though the initial plan was to choose 50 respondents from each of the polling stations based on the principle of equal weight, we selected 51 respondents that were equally distributed across the ethnic identities based on their percentage share to the total population in BTR. The decision to choose 51 respondents instead of 50 was to round off the decimals digits that arose while calculating the percentage share of each of the ethnic groups. As 8 polling stations (or strata), are considered, the total sample size amounted to 408 (i.e. 8 multiplied by 51). As per the Census of 2011 (since no Census Report is available after 2011), four major ethnic groups–Assamese, Bengalis, Bodos and Santhals live in the BTR and their percentage share in the total population in BTR are 25.56, 20.43, 30.44 and 5.35 percent respectively; together they formed 81.78 per cent. So, from each polling station, respondents were drawn based on these percentages which work out to be 16 Assamese, 12 Bengalis, 19 Bodos and 4 Santhals from each of the polling stations.

**Table 1:** Details of Sample Drawing Procedure

| Districts | Total Number of Assembly Constituencies | Name of the Sample Constituencies | Number of Polling Stations | Name Of the Sample Polling Stations | Sample Households of Ethnic Groups at Polling Station Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baksa | 3 | Barama | 207 | Nikasi L.P. School | |
| | | | | Maithabari L.P. School | Assamese = 16 |
| | | | | Saulkara LP School | |
| | | | | Dakhinkuchi L.P. School | Bengali = 12 |
| | | | | Nayabasti MV School | |
| Chirang | 2 | Bijni | 202 | 880 No. Oxiguri L.P. School | Bodo = 19 |
| | | | | Bhumkipara L.P. School. | |
| | | | | 283 No. Silikhaguri L.P. School | Santhal = 4 |
| | | | | Ulubari High School | |
| Kokrajhar | 3 | Kokrajhar East | 247 | 97-Monchergaon L.P. School | Total = 51 |
| | | | | Gaurang High School | |
| Udalguri | 3 | Udalguri | 194 | Niz Udalguri L.P. School | |
| | | | | Purani Thana L.P. School | |
| | | | | Bengbari L.P. School | |
| | | | | Ghagrapara L.P. School | |
| Total | 11 | 4 | 850 | 15 | |

## Model Specification

To examine the relationship between identity and insurgency, we have used two proxies: ethnocentrism (Et) and perceived insurgency (PI). While ethnocentrism (Et) is a notion of perceived feeling of deprivation in one ethnic group (Bodos) by another (Assamese) arising out of superimposition of the latter's cultural markers on the former, perceived insurgency (PI) is captured in terms of a vector of 7 indicators consisting of probable causes of Bodo insurgency as listed in Table 2. The effect of ethnocentrism on perceived insurgency was estimated using 'partial least squares structural equation modelling' (PLS-SEM) technique. In PLS-SEM, two parts are assessed: measurement model and structural model. Generally, in the measurement model confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is performed to validate (assess the reliability and validity of) the constructs (latent variables) of a given set of indicators. However, in our case ethnocentrism is a construct with a single indicator (represented in the second row of Table 2 and left-hand side of figure 2) so the construct is the same as the indicator, hence the usual CFA assessments will be inappropriate (42). Hence, we report only the estimated relationships between construct and its indicator i.e., the indicator loading which is equal to 1. Whereas, the construct 'perceived insurgency' is a second order construct of the reflective-reflective type (43). It is conceived of indicators grouped under three domains which are also known as the first order constructs. They are: political-economic factors (Z1-3), cultural insecurity factors (Z4-6) and land alienation factors (Z7) as cited in Table 2. In the first stage CFA is performed in the reflective mode to assess the reliability and validity of the first order constructs, then in the second stage the first order construct scores are used to conduct CFA in a reflective mode. Finally, in the structural model the effect of the independent variable ethnocentrism on the dependent variable perceived insurgency has been estimated.

## Measurement Model

In equation [2] ethnocentrism (denoted by $Et$) is a single item construct measured by its indicator $'X'$ while $'\theta'$ represents the loading of $X$ on $Et$ (Table 2, Figure 2). Equation 3 represents the first order constructs ($\lambda_k$) of perceived insurgency (denoted by $PI$) measured reflectively, through its indicators ($Z_i$) (Table 2, Figure 2). Equation (4) represents the second-order construct measured reflectively, where the first order constructs ($\lambda_k$) scores have been used to assess $PI$. And $\xi_i$ is the vector showing the outer loadings of the variable $\lambda_k$; while $\zeta_l$ is the error term.

$X = \theta\, Et\; ------------[2]$

$Z_i = \gamma_j \lambda_k + \upsilon_i$ (Where i= 1,2 …7; j=1,2…7 and k = 1,2,3) $---------[3]$

Where, $\lambda_1$ = political-economic factors, $\lambda_2$ = cultural insecurity factors, and $\lambda_3$= land alienation factors and $\gamma_j's$ are outer loadings of the first order constructs $\lambda_k$ and $\upsilon_i$ are the error terms.

$\lambda_k = \xi_i PI + \zeta_l$   (k, i = 1,2,3) $--------------[4]$

**Table 2:** Constructs and Indicators

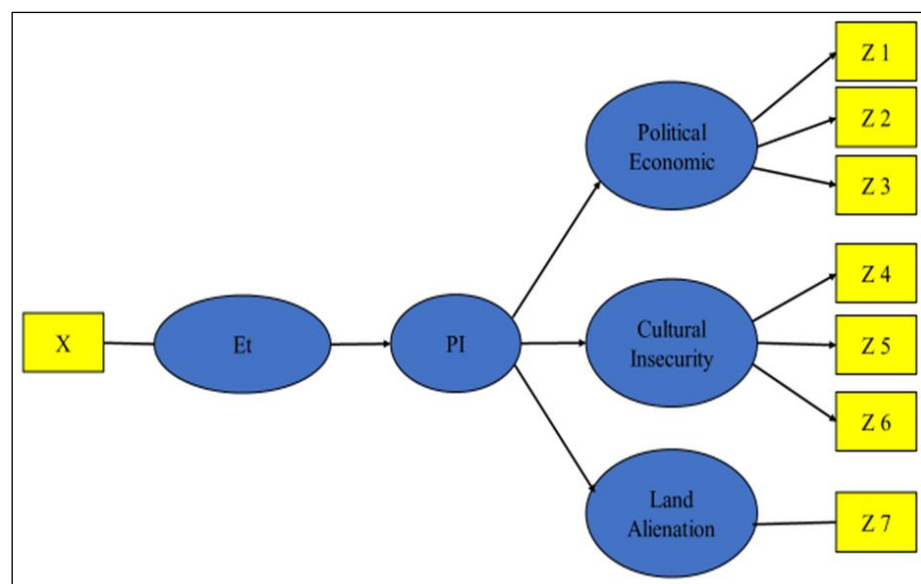| Constructs | | Indicators | | Measurement scale |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ethnocentrism Et | | X | The Bodos in Assam were a victim of Assamese ethnocentrism. | 1= Strongly Disagree |
| | Political-Economic $\lambda_1$ | Z 1 | Economic deprivation of the Bodos led them to launch a militant autonomy movement. | 2=Disagree |
| | | Z 2 | Large scale unemployment among the Bodo youths led them to join militancy. | 3=Neutral |
| | | Z 3 | Economic insecurity has pushed a section of the Bodos towards militancy. | 4=Agree |
| Perceived Insurgency | Cultural Insecurity $\lambda_2$ | Z 4 | Cultural crisis has led the Bodos to assert their identity using a violent mode of protest. | 5=Strongly Agree |
| | | Z 5 | Being a minority in polyethnic Assam, a section of the Bodos adopted violence as a strategy to gain autonomy. | |
| | | Z 6 | Assimilationist policy of the Assam Government led the Bodos to militancy. | |
| | Land Alienation $\lambda_3$ | Z 7 | Land alienation has led to rising frustration among the Bodos. | |



Figure 2: Path Diagram of Constructs and Indicators

**The Structural Model**

In the structural model, we estimated the effect of ethnocentrism ($Et$) on the dependent variable $PI$. Age, land, education, monthly income, gender and mother tongue (a proxy for ethnicity) have been used as control variables. These explanatory variables were considered in our model as they are

also known to influence insurgency (6, 16, 23, 44–46).

The regression equation is written as:

$PI = \beta_1 Et + \beta_2 Age + \beta_3 Land + \beta_4 Education + \beta_5 Monthly\ Income + \beta_6 Dum_{Gender} + \beta_7 Dum_{Assamese} + \beta_8 Dum_{Bengali} + \beta_9 Dum_{Santhal} + \delta$ -------- [5]

where $\beta's$ are the parameters to be estimated, and δ is the error term. Age is measured in years, land holding in acres, education in years of schooling and monthly income in rupees. Gender is a dummy variable, and females serve as the reference category. The four mother tongues–Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Santhal–have been coded as a dummy variable where the Bodos are considered as the reference variable.

## Results and Discussion

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of our sample respondents is shown in Table 3. As evident from t mean age of the sample respondents is about 44 years. As the field survey was done from February to April 2023, hence a comparison between the mean age and the duration of Bodo insurgency period (1986-2021) that lasted for 35 years confirms to the fact that majority of the respondents have lived during this period and

hence they are well aware of issues relating to insurgency in Bodoland area. About 97 percent of the respondents are male which indicates the centrality of man in the patriarchal social system across the different identity groups in BTR. As the male members played the lead role in identity movements and countermovement, they are in a better position to perceive various nuances of the trinity of identity, development and insurgency. The mean years of schooling of the sample respondents stands at 8.50 years.  It has been pointed out that the irregular functioning of the academic institutions during the Bodo Movement (1986-2020) had been a major cause of low level of schooling. It may be pertinent to mention that the average enrolment at the lower primary schools in BTR districts (47818.80) is far below than the state average (77464.94) for the year 2021-22. The same for the upper primary for BTR stands at 30795.80 compared to the state average of 43124.14 (2021-22) (38).

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics

| Demographic Attributes | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age in years | —---- | —---- | 44.02 | 8.978 |
| Monthly Income(in Rupees) | —---- | —---- | 15522.01 | 14406.68 |
| Land size (in Acre) | —---- | —---- | 1.41 | 1.53 |
| Gender | Male | 394 | 96.60 (%) | —---- |
|  | Female | 14 | 3.40 (%) | —---- |
| Education (Years of schooling) | —---- | —---- | 8.50 | 3.389 |
| Mother Tongue | Assamese | 128 | 31.40 (%) | —---- |
|  | Bengali | 96 | 23.50 (%) | —---- |
|  | Bodo | 152 | 37.30 (%) | —---- |
|  | Santhal | 32 | 7.80 (%) | —---- |

The mean monthly income of the respondents is calculated at Rupees 15522.01. Majority of the respondent i.e. 39.7 percent are engaged in agriculture with a low mean land holding size of 1.41 acre, especially growing paddy and areca nuts, along with it many are engaged in rearing of livestock like pig(s), chickens, ducks, cows, goats etc. Income from agriculture and allied activities

accrues annually to the households which are then averaged out for monthly estimates. For wage earners and businessmen constituting 27.7 and 21.8 percent respectively, their daily income has been worked out on a monthly basis. Only 10.8 percent of the respondents are salaried persons. Four major ethnic groups reside in BTR.  While the Bodos with 37.3 percent constitute the majority in

our sample; Assamese, Bengalis and Santhals constitute 31.4, 23.5 and 7.8 percent respectively. In fact, the population size wise order of ranking of these four ethnic groups has remained the same as has been recorded in the 2011 Census, the last published population register as the report of 2021 Census has not yet been published.

## Results and Discussion on PLS-SEM

### Results of the Measurement Model for First Order Constructs

The results of the measurement model for first order constructs of perceived insurgency, conducted in a reflective mode are shown in Table 4. Firstly, indicator reliability is checked with the help of outer loading. It may be observed that for the construct political-economic the outer loadings of its indicators are greater than 0.708, the benchmark value (43). Hence all the indicators Z1-Z3 are retained (Table 4). For the indicators of the construct of cultural insecurity, except Z5, the values of outer loadings are greater than 0.708. However, even though Z5 has a loading less than 0.708, we have retained it as it is greater than 0.40, and its retention does not affect the construct's composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (42, 47). In case of the constructs, land alienation and ethnocentrism, they have only one indicator each therefore usual CFA assessments are inappropriate hence we report only their outer loading which is equal to 1(42). Thus, all the indicators of our model are reliable.

**Table 4:** Results of the Measurement Model; Outer Loadings, Composite Reliability and Convergent Reliability (First Stage)

| Constructs | Indicators | Outer Loadings ≥ 0.708 | Internal Consistency Reliability | Convergent validity |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Composite Reliability 0.60 – 0.90 | AVE ≥ 0.500 |
| Political- | Z 1 | 0.713 | 0.771 | 0.528 |
| Economic | Z 2 | 0.758 | | |
| $\lambda_1$ | Z 3 | 0.709 | | |
| Cultural | Z 4 | 0.589 | 0.775 | 0.539 |
| Insecurity | Z 5 | 0.767 | | |
| $\lambda_2$ | Z 6 | 0.825 | | |
| Land Alienation $\lambda_3$ | Z 7 | 1 | ----- | ----- |
| Ethnocentrism Et | X | 1 | ----- | ----- |

Secondly, the internal consistency reliability of the constructs is assessed with the help of composite reliability (CR) that should range between 0.60 – 0.90, with higher values indicating higher levels of reliability (42, 47). The CR for the constructs of political-economic and cultural insecurity are 0.771 and 0.755 respectively (Table 4) indicating that both are reliable.

Thirdly, average variance extracted (AVE) is used to establish convergent validity–the extent to which the construct converges to explain the variance of its indicators. The acceptable AVE value is 0.50 or higher (42, 47). For both the constructs– political-economic and cultural insecurity, the AVE is 0.528 and 0.539 respectively (Table 4) which confirm their convergent validity.

Fourthly, cross loading and heterotrait-monotrait ratios (HTMT) are used to establish discriminant validity i.e., the extent to which a construct is empirically different from other constructs in the structural model. In Table 5 figures in bold represent cross loading that shows that the indicators are highly correlated with their respective constructs and low with other constructs, thereby establishing discriminant validity at the indicator level. Establishment of the discriminant validity of the constructs requires the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) value to be 0.85 or lower (48). As all the HTMT ratios in our model lie below 0.85, discriminant validity of constructs is affirmed.

**Table 5:** Results of the Measurement Model; Discriminant Validity (First Stage)

| | | Discriminant validity | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cross Loading** | | | | | **Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio< 0.85** | | | | |
| | $\lambda_1$ | $\lambda_2$ | $\lambda_3$ | Et | | $\lambda_1$ | $\lambda_2$ | $\lambda_3$ | Et |
| Z 1 | 0.713 | 0.214 | 0.264 | 0.203 | $\lambda_1$ | | | | |
| Z 2 | 0.758 | 0.235 | 0.279 | 0.240 | $\lambda_2$ | 0.732 | | | |
| Z 3 | 0.709 | 0.414 | 0.149 | 0.197 | $\lambda_3$ | 0.425 | 0.399 | | |
| Z 4 | 0.372 | 0.589 | 0.211 | 0.207 | Et | 0.393 | 0.611 | 0.280 | |
| Z 5 | 0.256 | 0.767 | 0.272 | 0.376 | | | | | |
| Z 6 | 0.292 | 0.825 | 0.199 | 0.461 | | | | | |
| Z 7 | 0.321 | 0.301 | 1.00 | 0.280 | | | | | |
| X | 0.295 | 0.502 | 0.280 | 1.00 | | | | | |

## Results of the Measurement Model for Second Order Construct

In the second stage, PI is estimated reflectively using the disjoint two-stage approach (43). Here the first order constructs are treated as indicators of the second order construct (PI). It may be evident from Table 6 that all the requisite diagnostics like the indicator reliability of the first order constructs, and the composite reliability and convergent validity for the second order construct are met. Similarly, the discriminant validity between PI and Et also holds good.

**Table 6:** Results of the Measurement Model (Second Stage)

| Second order constructs | First order constructs | Outer Loadings ≥ 0.708 | Internal Consistency Reliability | Convergent validity | Discriminant validity | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Composite Reliability 0.60 – 0.90 | AVE ≥ 0.50 | Cross loading | | Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio | | |
| | Political-Economic $\lambda_1$ | 0.709 | | | | PI | Et | Et | PI |
| PI | Cultural Insecurity $\lambda_2$ | 0.856 | 0.783 | 0.549 | $\lambda_1$ | **0.709** | 0.295 | | |
| | Land Alienation $\lambda_3$ | 0.642 | | | $\lambda_2$ | **0.856** | 0.502 | Et | |
| | | | | | $\lambda_3$ | **0.642** | 0.280 | | |
| | | | | | X | 0.510 | 1 | PI | 0.619 |

## Structural Model Assessments

The relationship between the constructs—ethnocentrism and perceived insurgency—is estimated in model 1 and 2 as depicted in figures 3 and 4 respectively and also reported in Table 7. In both cases we have used six control variables: gender (female served as reference variable), land holding, monthly income, mother tongue (proxy for ethnic identity), age and education. However, in the first model we have made use of four mother tongues: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo and Santhal where Bodos served as the reference category; whereas in the second model the variable mother tongue is coded as a binary variable Bodos and non-Bodos where the former served as the reference variable. Both the models have been checked for collinearity between the predictor variables using variance inflation factor (VIF) and all the VIF values are found to be less than 3 (47). This implies the absence of any severe collinearity issues (Table 7). In the first model path coefficient between the two constructs is 0.479 which is significant at 1 percent meaning that ethnocentrism positively affected perceived insurgency (Figure 3 and Table 7). This significant positive path coefficient is in alignment with the various narrative studies that have highlighted the case of various ethnic insurgencies caused by ethnic assertions, such as case of Bengalis of erstwhile East Pakistan, The Kashmiris of Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir, Kurds of Turkey (49–51). In all these cases the elites of the dominated ethnic groups have exploited their ethnic boundaries vis-a-vis the dominant group, as a rallying point to demand for autonomy via insurgency movement. Like the Bodos, nearer to

home, the Nagas and Mizos of Nagaland and Mizoram respectively also took up arms demanding separate homelands for themselves (16). Regarding the control variables, except for the mother tongue, Assamese, which showed a significant (at 5 percent) negative relationship with perceived insurgency in comparison to the Bodos, all the others were insignificant? We may, therefore infer that the Bodos have a significant positive influence on perceived insurgency in comparison to the Assamese. In fact it may be mentioned that the Bodos had considered the Assamese as the normative reference group and hence they held different perspectives on insurgency (16). As such this finding aligns with the fact that the Bodo agitation was a reaction to their long standing–social, cultural and economic–marginalisation in the state of Assam ruled by the Assamese (18, 52, 53). Bodo tribal nationalism was revived to redress this perceived marginalisation and the Bodo elites mobilised the Bodo masses against the dominant Assamese rule to create a separate homeland for themselves. The other two variables of mother tongue, Bengali and Santhal, though have negative coefficients are insignificant (Table 7). It could plausibly be due to the fact that, unlike Assamese, the other two communities do not have strong political control over the state of Assam. However, the statistically insignificant results of mother tongue variables other than Assamese go against the ground reality as the Bengalis and Santhals also had to face the wrath of the Bodo militants. Since the territorial claim of homeland necessitated Bodo majority, the presence of the non-Bodo population in the perceived homeland stood against the fructification of this dream. Hence, apart from Assamese, the Bodo movement was also directed against the Bengalis and Santhals as well. Therefore, we re-coded the four mother tongues as Bodos and non-Bodos, where the former served as the reference variable and incorporated them in model 2 (Figure 4 and Table 7) to see their effect on the perceived insurgency. We found non-Bodos to be significant at 10 percent. As the estimated coefficient has a negative sign, we may conversely say that the Bodos (reference group) influenced perceived insurgency positively. The value of $R^2$ for the first model is 0.291. It indicates that our model can explain 29 per cent of the variance in perceived insurgency. It may be mentioned that in case of PLS-SEM, $R^2$ greater than or equal to 0.10 is admissible (54). Given the interdisciplinarity of the phenomenon of insurgency, it is only natural that all the important drivers of insurgency–be it social, linguistics, political, anthropological, economic, historical–could not be captured in a single econometric model. Considering these shortcomings, $R^2$ 0.291 (0.280) for the first (second) model appears to be satisfactory. In both the models, the model fit index was ascertained with the SRMR (standardised root mean squared residual) estimates (55). The SRMR value for the first model is 0.065 and 0.063 for the second, which are both below the upper threshold limit of 0.080, indicating that both the models have good explanatory power.
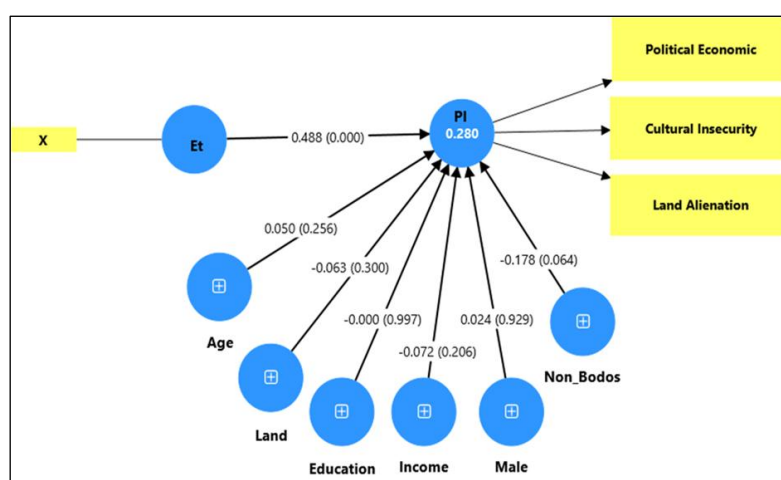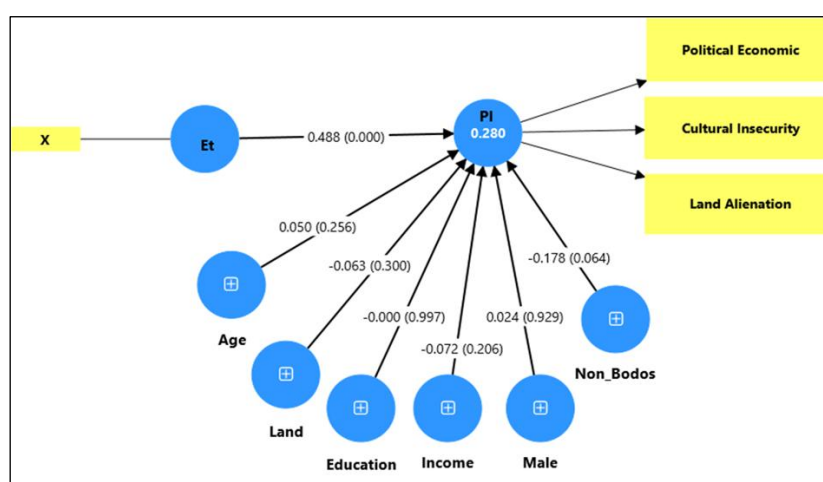


**Figure 3:** Path Diagram-1 (Model 1)

**Table 7:** Results of Structural Model Assessments

| Hypotheses | Model 1 | | | | Model 2 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Std. Beta | P Value | Standard Deviation | VIF | Std. Beta | P Value | Standard Deviation | VIF |
| Et -> PI | 0.479 | 0.000 | 0.045 | 1.908 | 0.488 | 0.000 | 0.044 | 1.080 |
| Age -> PI | 0.050 | 0.259 | 0.044 | 1.065 | 0.050 | 0.256 | 0.044 | 1.059 |
| Land -> PI | -0.057 | 0.369 | 0.064 | 1.227 | -0.063 | 0.300 | 0.060 | 1.194 |
| Education -> PI | 0.019 | 0.723 | 0.053 | 1.294 | -0.000 | 0.997 | 0.053 | 1.216 |
| Income -> PI | -0.062 | 0.286 | 0.058 | 1.157 | -0.072 | 0.206 | 0.057 | 1.135 |
| Male -> PI | 0.062 | 0.822 | 0.276 | 1.017 | 0.024 | 0.929 | 0.272 | 1.012 |
| Assamese -> PI | -0.296 | 0.013 | 0.119 | 1.443 | ------ | | ------ | ------ |
| Bengali -> PI | -0.074 | 0.512 | 0.112 | 1.409 | ------ | | ------ | ------ |
| Santhal -> PI | -0.044 | 0.828 | 0.203 | 1.231 | ------ | | ------ | ------ |
| Non Bodos -> PI | ------ | | ------ | ------ | -0.178 | 0.064 | 0.096 | 1.157 |
| R² | 0.291 | | | | 0.280 | | | |



**Figure 4:** Path Diagram-2 (Model 2)

# Conclusion

This paper tried to establish an empirical relationship between ethnicity and insurgency, which has so far largely remained confined to narratives, in the context of Bodo movement for autonomy in Assam. While the main thrust of this movement remained democratic, it also gave birth to the Bodo insurgency which remained active from 1986 to 2021. As the present study is retrospective in nature, the notion of "perceived insurgency" has been employed as a proxy for insurgency. Similarly, "ethnocentrism" --Bodos' perceived feeling of deprivation vis-a-vis the Assamese–is used as a proxy for ethnicity. The impact of ethnicity on insurgency is then estimated using PLS-SEM technique. Our model results in a statistically significant path coefficient to the tune of 0.479. This implies that a rise in ethnocentrism is likely to fuel ethnic insurgency, as has happened in the Bodoland movement. This robust result is corroborated by the descriptive studies (15, 52, 53). In that a modest attempt has been made to quantify the much talked about the relationship between ethnicity and insurgency. So as to provide empirical support to sociological, political, and identity literature dealing with ethnicity and identity.

## Policy Implication

Our study found that ethnicity is a major driver of insurgency. This finding has significant policy implications for polity management and governance, particularly in polyethnic social settings. The policy of deliberate assimilation of the ethnic minorities with the ethnic majority group is often fraught with socio-political catastrophe. In the age of information revolution, adoption of such a policy rather boomerangs and leads to inter-ethnic warfare. Instead, a policy of federalist accommodation appears to be the way forward for the governance of multi-ethnic social bases of a political unit *a la* Assam.

## Abbreviations

ABSU: All Bodo Students' Union, ASS: Assam Sahitya Sabha, BdSF: Bodo Security Force, BLTF: Bodo Liberation Tigers Force, HTMT: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio, NLFB: National Liberation Front of Bodoland, NDFB: National Democratic Front of Bodoland, NNC: Naga National Council, NSCN: National Socialist Council of Nagaland, PTCA: Plains Tribal Council of Assam.

## Acknowledgement

None.

## Author Contributions

The authors have contributed to the literature on conflict studies by making an empirical analysis between identity and insurgency, which has so far remained narrative centric.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare in the context of this article.

## Ethics Approval

No ethical clearance certificate is applicable for the present study. The authors of the present study have not received any support from any organisation.

## Funding

No funding was received.

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