

Conflict, State Capacity and Human Security: Insurgency, Civil-Liberty Constraints and the Drug–Violence Nexus in Manipur, India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1308000338>

Received: 12 September 2026; Accepted: 17 September 2026; Published: 24 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Manipur, located along India's international border with Myanmar, presents a complex security environment in which protracted insurgency, ethnic conflict, contested state authority, restrictions on civil liberties, transnational narcotics trafficking, and institutional weaknesses intersect. This article examines the relationship between conflict, state capacity, and human security in Manipur, with particular attention to the interaction among insurgency, extraordinary security legislation, civil-liberty constraints, and the drug–violence nexus. Drawing upon the human security framework, state-capacity and legitimacy perspectives, conflict literature, judicial decisions, government documents, scholarly studies, and reports of international and human-rights organisations, the article argues that security in Manipur cannot be adequately understood through a conventional state-centric lens. The persistence of armed groups and transnational criminal networks represents a challenge to the state's monopoly over legitimate coercion; however, prolonged reliance on militarised responses can simultaneously undermine public trust, political legitimacy, and civil liberties. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), while providing an extraordinary legal framework for counterinsurgency, has generated longstanding debates concerning accountability and proportionality. At the same time, Manipur's geographical proximity to Myanmar and the wider Golden Triangle has exposed the state to narcotics trafficking, illicit economies, and possible intersections between criminal and insurgent networks. The article cautions against reducing the drug problem to an ethnic or purely security narrative and instead conceptualises narcotics trafficking as a political-economy and human-security problem. It argues that sustainable peace requires a transition from predominantly coercive security management towards accountable state capacity, inclusive governance, rule of law, cross-border cooperation, livelihood opportunities, public-health interventions, and community-based peacebuilding. The article concludes that strengthening state capacity must mean not merely increasing coercive capacity but enhancing the state's capacity to provide security, justice, rights, welfare, and legitimate governance.

Keywords: Manipur, human security, state capacity, insurgency, AFSPA, civil liberties, narcotics trafficking, drug–violence nexus, ethnic conflict, Northeast India

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between conflict and state capacity has become an important theme in contemporary political science and security studies. Conventional approaches to security have generally emphasised the protection of territorial sovereignty, state institutions, and national interests from external and internal threats. The human security approach, however, shifts the analytical focus from the security of the state to the security of individuals and communities. The *Human Development Report 1994* reconceptualised security in terms of people rather than territories and development rather than arms (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994).

This conceptual shift is particularly relevant to Manipur, a border state in India's Northeast where political violence has historically intersected with ethnic mobilisation, insurgency, militarisation, socioeconomic vulnerability, and transnational criminal networks. The contemporary crisis cannot be explained by a single

factor. Historical territorial arrangements, competing political aspirations, ethnic insecurities, armed organisations, contested land and resource regimes, migration concerns, institutional weaknesses, and the state's security response have interacted over time.

The large-scale ethnic violence that began in May 2023 demonstrated the fragility of Manipur's political and institutional order. Recent scholarship has interpreted the crisis not simply as an ethnic clash but also as a crisis of state authority, fragmented sovereignty, and institutional legitimacy (Khashimwo, 2026; Kipgen & Ganie, 2026). The violence resulted in extensive displacement, destruction of homes and property, disruption of livelihoods, and deterioration of inter-community relations.

At the same time, Manipur's long history of insurgency has produced a security environment in which extraordinary legal and military measures have become institutionalised. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), has been one of the principal instruments of India's counterinsurgency architecture in the Northeast. The continuing use of extraordinary security legislation raises an important theoretical question: **Can a state increase its coercive capacity while simultaneously weakening the legitimacy upon which effective state authority ultimately depends?**

The question is central to understanding Manipur. State capacity is not synonymous with coercive power. A capable state must also provide justice, public services, rights protection, and legitimate institutions. The World Bank (2011) emphasised that institutional legitimacy, citizen security, justice, and employment are central to breaking cycles of violence and fragility.

A further dimension is the drug–violence nexus. Manipur shares a long international boundary with Myanmar and is geographically close to areas associated with the production and trafficking of opium and methamphetamine. The wider Golden Triangle has historically been a major centre of illicit drug production and trafficking. Recent UNODC evidence indicates that Myanmar's illicit opium economy remains significant, while political instability has complicated efforts to control drug production and trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2025).

The drug issue in Manipur has increasingly been framed as a security problem. Yet a purely securitised interpretation risks overlooking the complex political economy of narcotics, including poverty, alternative livelihoods, cross-border networks, corruption, demand, public health, and conflict financing. Some analyses have argued that insurgent organisations and criminal networks may intersect through taxation, protection, trafficking, or financing arrangements. However, claims of systematic ethnic or organisational responsibility require careful evidentiary scrutiny and should not be generalised from allegations or isolated cases.

This article therefore examines Manipur through a multidimensional framework connecting **conflict, state capacity, human security, civil liberties, and illicit political economy**.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has five principal objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between prolonged conflict and state capacity in Manipur.
2. To analyse insurgency and militarisation through the framework of human security.
3. To examine the tension between national-security imperatives and civil liberties under extraordinary security legislation.
4. To analyse the drug–violence nexus as a transnational political-economy and human-security problem.
5. To propose a governance-oriented framework for strengthening peace, legitimacy, and human security in Manipur.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How has prolonged conflict affected state capacity and institutional legitimacy in Manipur?
2. To what extent has the counterinsurgency framework contributed to both security provision and civil-liberty concerns?
3. How does insurgency interact with transnational narcotics trafficking and other illicit economies?
4. What are the consequences of conflict and securitisation for human security?
5. What institutional reforms could strengthen legitimate state capacity and sustainable peace?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature relevant to conflict, state capacity, and human security in Manipur can broadly be organised into five interconnected strands: insurgency and armed conflict; militarisation and exceptional security legislation; ethnic conflict and state legitimacy; narcotics, illicit economies, and border security; and human security, displacement, and civil liberties.

Although these bodies of literature have developed substantially, they have generally been examined separately. This study attempts to bring them together within an integrated framework.

4.1 Insurgency and Armed Conflict in Manipur

The insurgency literature on Manipur has generally examined the emergence and persistence of armed movements in relation to historical grievances, political autonomy, identity, territoriality, and the relationship between Manipur and the Indian Union.

Pukhrambam and Hanjabam (2011) argue that armed conflict in Manipur has been associated with political and socioeconomic conditions that cannot be adequately addressed through militarised containment alone. Earlier scholarship on Northeast India similarly demonstrates the importance of historical state formation, nationalism, territoriality, and the distinctive political economy of the region (Baruah, 2005, 2020).

This literature establishes that insurgency represents more than the presence of armed organisations. It also reflects unresolved political claims and institutional relationships between the state and communities. However, much of the earlier literature predates the 2023 ethnic conflict and therefore does not fully capture the subsequent transformation of Manipur's security environment.

4.2 Militarisation, AFSPA, and the State of Exception

A second body of scholarship examines the militarisation of Manipur and AFSPA. Mathur (2012) situates AFSPA within the broader framework of Indian sovereignty and counterinsurgency in border regions. She demonstrates the tension between national-security imperatives and civilian rights.

Ngaihte (2015) similarly examines AFSPA through concepts of emergency government, state exception, necessity, and rule of law. The institutionalisation of exceptional powers creates questions about the relationship between military authority and civilian governance.

Sitlhou (2022) takes the discussion further by examining how state violence under militarisation can generate collective victimhood. Her analysis demonstrates how experiences of insecurity can become politically organised and contribute to collective identities.

This literature is particularly relevant because it challenges the assumption that coercive state capacity necessarily produces human security. A state may increase its capacity to use force while simultaneously

experiencing declining legitimacy among sections of its population.

4.3 Ethnic Conflict and Crisis of State Authority

The 2023 conflict has generated a new body of literature that shifts attention from insurgency towards ethnic territoriality, state authority, and competing security systems.

Baruah (2024) characterises the post-May 2023 situation as an unprecedented form of armed ethnic warfare and emphasises the ethnicisation of law enforcement, the looting of weapons from state institutions, and the emergence of conditions resembling civil war.

More recent research by Khashimwo (2026) conceptualises the crisis as a structural crisis of state authority rather than simply an episodic law-and-order breakdown. The study argues that competing ethnic territorial projects and differentiated institutional arrangements have contributed to fragmented sovereignty and parallel governance structures.

Kipgen and Ganie (2026) similarly identify the proliferation of arms, youth radicalisation, involvement of armed groups, and emergence of parallel security arrangements as major features of the post-2023 conflict.

The recent literature therefore suggests that the analytical problem has shifted. The question is no longer simply why insurgency persists, but how the authority of the state is affected when communities develop their own security institutions.

4.4 Drugs, Borderlands, and Illicit Political Economy

The drug–violence nexus represents another important dimension of Manipur's security environment. Manipur's geographical location along the India–Myanmar border exposes the state to transnational trafficking networks associated with the wider Golden Triangle.

The broader literature on conflict economies suggests that illicit markets can provide financial resources to armed groups and criminal networks. However, the relationship between narcotics and insurgency should not be assumed to be automatic. Different armed groups may have different financing structures, while drug trafficking can also involve independent criminal networks.

The literature therefore supports an approach that distinguishes between:

1. drug production;
2. transportation and trafficking;
3. organised criminal networks;
4. insurgent financing;
5. corruption and protection networks;
6. vulnerable cultivators; and
7. drug consumption and public health.

This distinction is particularly important in Manipur because the political discourse surrounding poppy cultivation and narcotics has sometimes acquired an ethnic dimension. A scholarly analysis must therefore distinguish documented criminal activity from collective attribution to an ethnic community.

4.5 Human Security, Displacement, and Civil Liberties

The human-security literature provides an alternative to state-centric approaches to conflict. The UNDP (1994) conceptualised human security as encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, political,

and community security.

Applied to Manipur, the framework makes it possible to examine the effects of conflict beyond deaths and armed attacks. Displacement, livelihood loss, disruption of education, healthcare insecurity, restrictions on movement, psychological trauma, and deterioration of inter-community relations all constitute human-security consequences.

The scale of displacement following the outbreak of violence in May 2023 illustrates this point. Amnesty International (2023) documented large-scale displacement and destruction of homes and property, together with communication restrictions during the crisis.

4.6 Research Gap

Despite substantial literature on Manipur, four important gaps remain.

First, **insurgency, ethnic conflict, narcotics, and human security are frequently examined as separate problems** rather than interconnected processes.

Second, much earlier insurgency literature focuses on the state-versus-insurgent relationship and gives comparatively less attention to the transformation of state authority following the 2023 ethnic conflict.

Third, the drug debate is frequently framed through national-security and law-enforcement perspectives, while insufficient attention is given to its political-economic, livelihood, and public-health dimensions.

Fourth, relatively little work systematically connects **coercive state capacity, civil liberties, legitimacy, and human security** within a single analytical framework.

The present study addresses these gaps by developing an integrated model in which insurgency, state capacity, civil-liberty constraints, illicit economies, and human security are treated as mutually interacting variables.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Human Security

Human security provides the principal analytical framework for this study. Unlike traditional national-security approaches, human security places individuals and communities at the centre of security analysis. The UNDP (1994) identified seven major dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, political, and community security.

This framework is particularly appropriate for Manipur because conflict affects several dimensions simultaneously. Armed violence threatens personal security; displacement threatens economic and food security; destruction of health and educational infrastructure affects human development; ethnic polarisation threatens community security; restrictions on movement and communication affect political security; and prolonged insecurity undermines livelihoods.

Human security therefore allows the consequences of conflict to be examined beyond casualty figures and counterinsurgency operations.

5.2 State Capacity and Legitimacy

State capacity refers broadly to the ability of public institutions to formulate and implement policies, provide public goods, maintain public order, enforce law, and protect citizens.

However, capacity without legitimacy may generate coercion rather than effective governance.

The OECD (2010) argues that legitimacy transforms power into authority and establishes the basis for rule through consent rather than coercion. The World Bank (2011) similarly argues that institutional legitimacy and

the provision of security, justice, and employment are essential for breaking cycles of violence.

This article distinguishes between:

- **coercive capacity** – the ability to deploy police, military, and other security institutions;
- **administrative capacity** – the ability to deliver public services;
- **legal capacity** – the ability to enforce law impartially;
- **responsive capacity** – the ability to respond to citizens' needs; and
- **legitimate capacity** – the ability to exercise authority that citizens perceive as lawful and justified.

The central proposition is that sustainable security requires all five.

5.3 Conflict and the Political Economy of Violence

Conflict creates economic incentives for actors capable of controlling territory, extracting resources, taxing populations, and exploiting illicit markets.

Narcotics trafficking can therefore become connected to conflict without necessarily being the original cause of conflict. Drug markets may finance armed groups, corrupt officials, criminal intermediaries, or other networks. Conversely, conflict can create conditions favourable to drug trafficking by weakening law enforcement, disrupting legitimate markets, and increasing the value of territorial control.

The relationship is therefore potentially circular:

Conflict → institutional weakness → illicit economy → financial resources → armed/criminal capacity → further violence → deeper institutional weakness.

This feedback mechanism is central to understanding the drug–violence nexus in Manipur.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The study adopts a **qualitative case-study design** with an integrated documentary and empirical approach. Manipur is selected as the case because it represents a particularly complex interaction between prolonged insurgency, ethnic conflict, exceptional security legislation, international-border dynamics, narcotics trafficking, and human-security challenges.

The study covers the period from approximately **2000 to 2026**, while giving particular analytical attention to the transformation of the conflict following the outbreak of large-scale ethnic violence in May 2023.

The research uses three complementary approaches:

1. documentary analysis;
2. qualitative thematic analysis; and
3. descriptive empirical analysis of conflict and human-security indicators.

The approach is designed to identify relationships and patterns rather than to establish statistical causality.

6.2 Sources of Data

The study relies primarily on secondary data obtained from five categories of sources:

Government and legal sources: Government notifications, legislative documents, Supreme Court judgments, Ministry of Home Affairs materials, and other official documents.

Academic sources: Peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, research reports, and academic studies relating to insurgency, ethnic conflict, state capacity, human security, and narcotics.

International organisations: Reports and datasets produced by organisations such as UNDP and UNODC.

Human-rights organisations: Reports by organisations such as Amnesty International and other credible rights-monitoring institutions.

Media and open-source material: Reputable national and international news organisations are used primarily for event chronology and triangulation rather than as sole evidence for contested claims.

6.3 Unit of Analysis

The principal unit of analysis is the **conflict-affected political and institutional environment of Manipur**.

Five analytical dimensions are examined:

Dimension	Indicators
Conflict intensity	Armed violence, ethnic clashes, fatalities, displacement
State capacity	Policing, security deployment, administrative reach, institutional response
Civil liberties	Internet restrictions, allegations of excessive force, restrictions on movement and assembly
Illicit economy	Poppy cultivation, narcotics trafficking, border networks, alleged conflict financing
Human security	Displacement, livelihoods, education, health, community security, political participation

6.4 Analytical Framework

The study employs thematic coding around six major categories:

1. security and violence;
2. state authority and legitimacy;
3. militarisation and exceptional law;
4. illicit economies and narcotics;
5. civil liberties and accountability; and
6. human-security outcomes.

Evidence was compared across sources to reduce dependence on a single institutional or political narrative.

Particular care was taken in analysing contested allegations. Claims concerning insurgent involvement in narcotics trafficking, ethnic responsibility, human-rights violations, or state complicity are not treated as established facts unless independently corroborated.

6.5 Empirical Strategy

The empirical component uses a **process-tracing approach** to examine how changes in the conflict environment affected state capacity and human security.

The principal sequence examined is:

Historical insurgency → militarisation → institutionalisation of exceptional security → ethnic polarisation → 2023 conflict → displacement and parallel security structures → narcotics and border-security concerns → challenges to state legitimacy.

The study does not claim that every stage mechanically causes the next. Instead, it identifies reinforcing

relationships and institutional feedback mechanisms.

6.6 Reliability and Triangulation

Triangulation is achieved by comparing government sources with judicial decisions, academic research with institutional reports, human-rights documentation with official statements, and event-level reporting with broader scholarly analysis.

This is particularly important because Manipur is a highly contested information environment in which competing political and ethnic actors frequently present conflicting narratives.

6.7 Ethical Considerations

Because the subject involves ongoing ethnic conflict and allegations of human-rights violations, the study avoids identifying private individuals or presenting unverified allegations as fact.

The article also avoids collective attribution of criminal behaviour to ethnic communities. The appropriate analytical focus is on **specific actors, networks, institutions, and documented activities**.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, access to conflict-affected areas is uneven and therefore the available evidence may disproportionately reflect areas accessible to researchers and journalists.

Second, reliable longitudinal data on insurgency, narcotics trafficking, and conflict financing are limited.

Third, official statistics and independent estimates sometimes differ.

Fourth, the continuing nature of the conflict means that empirical findings remain provisional.

Finally, the study is primarily qualitative and therefore does not attempt to estimate causal effects statistically.

These limitations are addressed through triangulation and cautious interpretation.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

7.1 Evolution of Conflict and State Response

Manipur's security environment has evolved from a predominantly insurgency-centred conflict into a more complex system involving insurgent organisations, ethnic militias, community-based security structures, criminal networks, and state security forces.

Earlier studies described the principal conflict as one involving armed movements and the state. The post-2023 environment differs significantly.

The 2023 violence generated large-scale mobilisation of communities, widespread displacement, proliferation of weapons, and development of territorially concentrated security arrangements.

This transformation represents a significant challenge to state capacity.

The conventional state-security model assumes:

State → monopoly of legitimate coercion → public security.

The Manipur experience increasingly resembles:

State + community security structures + armed groups + criminal networks → fragmented security environment.

This does not mean that the state has completely lost its authority. Rather, it indicates that state authority has

become contested and unevenly experienced across territories and communities.

7.2 The 2023 Conflict as an Empirical Test of State Capacity

The events beginning in May 2023 provide an important empirical case for evaluating state capacity.

The initial violence followed a period of intense political and ethnic mobilisation. The conflict rapidly expanded geographically, resulting in deaths, destruction, displacement, and establishment of segregated territorial spaces.

Amnesty International documented more than 50,000 displaced persons during the early period of the crisis, alongside widespread destruction and looting.

Later academic research placed the total displaced population at more than 60,000 and identified the development of parallel security arrangements among the principal conflict communities.

From a state-capacity perspective, this evidence suggests weaknesses in at least three areas:

Preventive capacity

The state was unable to prevent political mobilisation from escalating into large-scale violence.

Protective capacity

State institutions struggled to provide equal and timely protection to populations in vulnerable areas.

Legitimacy capacity

The perception that the state response was uneven contributed to mistrust and encouraged community-based security responses.

The empirical implication is important: **state capacity should be measured by outcomes and public confidence, not simply by the quantity of security forces deployed.**

7.3 Proliferation of Arms and Parallel Security Structures

The proliferation of weapons represents one of the most serious consequences of the 2023 conflict.

The emergence of armed community formations created a classic **security dilemma**.

If Community A believes that Community B is becoming militarised, Community A has an incentive to acquire weapons for defensive purposes. Community B then interprets the same action as a threat and increases its own armament.

Thus:

Perceived threat → defensive armament → opposing perception of threat → counter-armament → increased insecurity.

The state consequently faces a difficult problem. Re-establishing its monopoly over legitimate coercion requires weapons recovery and disarmament, but coercive disarmament in a deeply polarised environment may itself generate resistance.

Therefore, arms recovery must be linked to credible security guarantees, political dialogue, community confidence-building, impartial policing, and reintegration programmes.

7.4 Militarisation and Civil-Liberty Constraints

The empirical evidence demonstrates a continuing tension between security measures and civil liberties.

Manipur has experienced prolonged reliance on exceptional security legislation. Academic research has linked AFSPA to militarisation of everyday life and concerns about accountability and civilian oversight.

During the 2023 conflict, the government also imposed internet restrictions. Such restrictions may be justified by governments as necessary to prevent misinformation, rumours, or incitement. However, prolonged restrictions can interfere with emergency communication, family contact, medical assistance, economic activity, documentation of abuses, and access to information.

The empirical conclusion is therefore not that all restrictions are illegitimate. Rather, restrictions should satisfy **necessity, proportionality, legality, and temporal limitation**.

7.5 State Violence, Accountability, and Legitimacy

The literature on Manipur provides evidence that allegations of excessive state violence have consequences extending beyond individual victims.

Sitlhou (2022) demonstrates how experiences of state violence have contributed to collective victimhood and the emergence of organisations representing victims and survivors.

This has implications for counterinsurgency.

A conventional model assumes:

More force → weaker insurgency → greater security.

A human-security perspective introduces an additional variable:

More force → possible short-term suppression → possible grievances → reduced trust → weaker cooperation → longer-term insecurity.

Consequently, accountability is not simply a human-rights issue. It is also a **state-capacity issue**.

7.6 Narcotics and the Border-Security Environment

Manipur's location along the India–Myanmar border constitutes an important structural factor in the state's drug-security environment.

The wider region is connected to the Golden Triangle, while political instability and armed conflict in Myanmar complicate border management and trafficking control.

However, the empirical analysis must distinguish between **geographical vulnerability and demonstrated criminal networks**.

The existence of a porous border does not establish that a particular community, village, or insurgent organisation is responsible for narcotics trafficking.

The appropriate empirical question is:

Which networks control production, transportation, financing, protection, distribution, and profits?

This network-based approach is preferable to ethnic attribution.

7.7 Poppy Cultivation and the Livelihood–Security Nexus

Poppy cultivation presents an especially difficult policy problem because it lies at the intersection of criminality, livelihood, and state authority.

Where cultivation occurs in economically marginal areas, eradication may remove an income source without immediately providing a viable alternative.

This creates a potential cycle:

Poverty → illicit cultivation → state eradication → livelihood loss → resentment → further insecurity.

An alternative model would combine eradication with agricultural diversification, market access, rural infrastructure, credit facilities, horticulture, value-chain development, vocational training, and appropriate market support.

The objective should be to make legal livelihoods economically more attractive than illicit cultivation.

7.8 The Drug–Violence Nexus

The drug–violence nexus can be conceptualised through four possible relationships:

Model 1: Drugs finance violence

Profits from trafficking may provide resources for armed organisations or criminal groups.

Model 2: Violence facilitates drugs

Conflict and weak governance create opportunities for trafficking networks.

Model 3: Drugs and violence share institutional causes

Weak governance, poverty, corruption, border vulnerabilities, and unemployment may independently contribute to both problems.

Model 4: Drugs become securitised

The state interprets narcotics primarily as a national-security threat, resulting in intensified policing and militarisation.

The fourth model is particularly important for human-security analysis because an exclusively security-centred response can overlook public-health and livelihood dimensions.

The empirical evidence available for Manipur supports examining all four models rather than assuming that one explains the entire phenomenon.

7.9 Displacement as a Human-Security Indicator

Displacement provides one of the clearest measurable indicators of the human-security consequences of the conflict.

The scale of displacement following the May 2023 violence demonstrated that the consequences extended far beyond direct combatants. Amnesty International documented more than 50,000 displaced persons during the early period of the crisis. Later academic research placed the number above 60,000.

Displacement affects multiple dimensions of human security simultaneously:

Human-security dimension	Conflict consequence
Personal security	Threat of violence
Economic security	Loss of property and employment
Food security	Disruption of agricultural activity
Health security	Limited healthcare access
Educational security	Disrupted schooling
Community security	Ethnic separation
Political security	Reduced participation and representation

This demonstrates why human security provides a broader measure of conflict impact than conventional casualty statistics.

7.10 The 2023 Conflict and the Crisis of State Authority

Recent scholarship increasingly interprets the Manipur conflict as a crisis of state authority.

Khashimwo (2026) argues that competing ethnic territorial projects have contributed to fragmented sovereignty, parallel governance, and erosion of the state's monopoly over violence.

Kipgen and Ganie (2026) similarly identify the development of parallel security arrangements as a major consequence of the state's inadequate response to the initial violence.

These findings are consistent with the central proposition of this study:

Where citizens perceive state protection as unreliable or partial, they are more likely to seek security through community institutions.

The resulting institutional fragmentation makes restoration of state authority more difficult.

INTEGRATED FINDINGS

The empirical evidence supports five major findings.

Finding 1: State capacity is multidimensional

Manipur demonstrates that substantial coercive capacity can coexist with weaknesses in preventive, administrative, judicial, and legitimacy capacities.

Finding 2: Militarisation has ambiguous effects

Security deployment can reduce immediate violence but cannot by itself resolve political grievances or restore institutional legitimacy.

Finding 3: Civil liberties are part of security

Restrictions that are excessive or insufficiently accountable may weaken the legitimacy and cooperation required for effective security governance.

Finding 4: The drug problem is multidimensional

Narcotics trafficking must be understood simultaneously as a criminal, economic, border-security, public-health, and governance problem.

Finding 5: Human security is a useful measure of state effectiveness

Displacement, livelihood loss, education disruption, health insecurity, and community fragmentation demonstrate that conventional security indicators are insufficient.

DISCUSSION

The findings challenge a narrow understanding of state capacity. In conventional security thinking, a state is considered capable when it can deploy sufficient force to suppress armed threats. The Manipur case suggests that this definition is inadequate.

A state may have substantial military deployment, extensive legal powers, intelligence agencies, police forces, and administrative institutions, yet still experience a crisis of authority if communities do not regard these institutions as impartial and trustworthy.

The central distinction is therefore between **coercive capacity** and **legitimate capacity**.

Coercive capacity allows the state to compel behaviour.

Legitimate capacity allows the state to secure compliance through accepted authority.

The second is more sustainable.

The findings also demonstrate that human security and national security should not be treated as competing objectives. Protection of civilians, accountable policing, access to livelihoods, and community reconciliation can strengthen national security by reducing the social conditions that sustain armed mobilisation.

The same logic applies to narcotics policy. Targeting trafficking organisations is compatible with human security; indeed, it can strengthen human security. However, policies that criminalise entire communities or destroy livelihoods without providing alternatives may intensify insecurity.

The article therefore argues for a transition from a **security-first model** towards an **integrated security-and-governance model**.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The findings allow the development of the following conceptual model:



At the same time, a positive feedback mechanism can interrupt this cycle:





Improved human security

This constitutes the principal theoretical contribution of the article.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The study proposes the following policy priorities for Manipur.

11.1 Strengthening Rule of Law

Security operations must be accompanied by transparent investigation mechanisms. Allegations of unlawful killings or excessive force should be investigated independently and promptly.

The Supreme Court's Manipur jurisprudence demonstrates that accountability is compatible with national security and necessary for constitutional governance.

11.2 Calibrated Use of Exceptional Powers

Exceptional legislation should remain subject to periodic review, geographical differentiation, judicial oversight, parliamentary accountability, transparent criteria, and appropriate renewal mechanisms.

The objective should be to restore ordinary civilian policing wherever security conditions permit.

11.3 Police and Criminal-Justice Reform

Strengthening local police and investigative agencies can reduce excessive dependence on military institutions.

Priority areas should include forensic capacity, intelligence-led policing, cybercrime investigation, financial investigation, anti-trafficking units, witness protection, and prosecution capacity.

11.4 Integrated Counter-Narcotics Policy

Counter-narcotics policy should combine:

enforcement + alternative livelihoods + treatment + prevention + financial intelligence + border cooperation.

The focus should move from low-level users and vulnerable cultivators towards organised trafficking networks and financial beneficiaries.

11.5 Border Governance

The India–Myanmar border requires a combination of legitimate cross-border trade, improved infrastructure, intelligence cooperation, anti-trafficking coordination, community participation, and protection of legitimate livelihoods.

11.6 Youth Employment

Young people are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed organisations, criminal networks, and political mobilisation when legitimate economic opportunities are limited.

Employment programmes should therefore be treated as part of conflict prevention rather than merely development policy.

11.7 Community-Based Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding must involve traditional institutions, women's organisations, youth organisations, civil society,

religious institutions, academics, professional associations, and representatives of displaced communities.

11.8 Human-Security Monitoring

The government should develop a human-security monitoring mechanism incorporating indicators of displacement, food insecurity, school disruption, healthcare access, drug dependence, unemployment, violence, human-rights complaints, internet restrictions, and public trust.

Such indicators would complement conventional security statistics.

CONCLUSION

Manipur's conflict demonstrates the limitations of understanding security exclusively through the lens of territorial integrity and counterinsurgency. The state faces genuine security challenges arising from armed groups, organised crime, narcotics trafficking, cross-border networks, and communal violence. Nevertheless, these threats cannot be addressed sustainably through coercion alone.

The central finding of this study is that **effective state capacity and human security are complementary rather than competing objectives**. A capable state must possess the authority and institutional resources to protect citizens, but it must also exercise that authority within the framework of constitutionalism, accountability, justice, and democratic legitimacy.

AFSPA and other extraordinary security arrangements emerged from a context of insurgency and serious threats to public order. Yet prolonged reliance upon exceptional measures creates a continuing challenge: how can a democratic state transition from militarised security to legitimate civilian governance without creating security vacuums?

The drug–violence nexus presents a similar challenge. Manipur's proximity to Myanmar exposes it to transnational narcotics networks, but narcotics trafficking should not be reduced to an ethnic problem or explained solely through insurgency. It is simultaneously a criminal-justice, border-governance, livelihood, public-health, and human-security issue.

The appropriate response is consequently multidimensional. Counterinsurgency must be accompanied by institution-building; counter-narcotics enforcement must be accompanied by alternative livelihoods and public-health measures; and security operations must be accompanied by accountability and respect for civil liberties.

Ultimately, **human security provides a more comprehensive measure of peace than the absence of armed confrontation alone**. A genuinely secure Manipur would be one in which citizens can move freely, work safely, access education and healthcare, communicate without unnecessary restrictions, obtain justice through

impartial institutions, and live without fear of violence because of their identity.

The long-term objective should therefore be to transform state capacity from the **capacity to control territory** into the **capacity to secure legitimate, inclusive, rights-based governance**.

Human security offers an appropriate framework for this transformation because it places the individual citizen, rather than merely the territorial state, at the centre of security policy. In a deeply divided society such as Manipur, sustainable peace will depend not simply upon reducing armed violence but upon creating institutions that all communities can regard as legitimate, impartial, and capable of protecting their dignity and future.

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