

MP-IDSA

Issue Brief

Left-Wing Extremism in Maharashtra: Counterinsurgency Strategies and Current Challenges

Anushka Chavan

October 09, 2025

Summary

There has been a gradual reduction in Naxal-related violence in Maharashtra on account of the implementation of effective counterinsurgency strategies. Challenges include integration of tribal rights and developmental activities, as well as relief and rehabilitation of surrendered Naxals.

Introduction

Maharashtra has been affected by the Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) movement for over four decades, as Maoist activities have prevailed in both rural and tribal areas, as well as some urban areas of the state. Over the last few years, there has been a significant decline in violence perpetrated by Naxals, with only the Gadchiroli district remaining a hotbed. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis—who became the first-ever CM to assume responsibility as Guardian Minister of the district—pledged to eradicate Naxalism during his three visits to Gadchiroli within the first seven months of 2025. Moreover, the State legislature's passing of the Maharashtra Special Public Security (MSPS) Bill 2024 has brought back debates on the challenges of 'Urban Naxalism'. This brief seeks to analyse the evolution of LWE in Maharashtra, the state's response and the current challenges the state government faces.

Background

In Maharashtra, the LWE movement spread from undivided Andhra Pradesh (AP) in the 1980s, after the People's War Group (PWG) was formed. One of the PWG's divisions was sent to Gadchiroli to expand operations,¹ and the district eventually became a 'liberated zone' ruled by a *Janata Sarkar*, i.e., a parallel government. The Dandakaranya jungles in Gadchiroli provided a suitable base for the Maoists to mobilise and undertake armed activities. Additionally, there was a spillover of the movement from AP due to police action in that state, pushing the armed cadres into neighbouring regions, including Maharashtra's eastern districts.

The movement's enabling factors were the vast forest cover and rough terrain, also home to a large tribal population. Furthermore, the jungles form part of the geographical tri-junction of Maharashtra and other affected states, such as AP and Chhattisgarh. Given that police jurisdiction is limited to state boundaries, cadres can cross porous interstate borders and flee to neighbouring regions to take shelter.

Secondly, the affected districts of Maharashtra are a part of the 'Vidarbha Region', which is well known for its recurring droughts and climate vulnerabilities. These factors and the rough terrain limited the government's ability to undertake welfare activities to provide basic facilities, leading to severe underdevelopment, unemployment, and a lack of socio-economic integration. Moreover, restricted access to forest produce, displacement due to mining activities and tribal alienation added to the grievances faced by the tribal residents of the region.

The exploitation of these grievances by Maoist leaders brought the tribals within the folds of the Communists, ultimately pushing many to take up arms and engage in

¹ Pushpita Das, [*India's Internal Security: Role of State Governments*](#), Pentagon Press, 2024, p. 21.

violent conflict to address their long-standing socio-economic grievances. With the movement initially being restricted to the eastern-most districts only, the state government's approach was limited to local police action to counter the threat perceived to be a small-scale law and order issue.

Efforts to expand the movement into urban areas were seen particularly after 2010, when Maoists started targeting the youth for ideological and financial support, and succeeded in indoctrinating university students and activists, who were inspired by the utopian idea of establishing an equitable, classless society, as part of the 'New Democratic Revolution'. Maoists also penetrated the working classes in the industrialised areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat's 'Golden Corridor'² for shelter. This was done as it was easy to discreetly mingle amongst labourers and exploit their grievances to expand recruitment and armed activities. By the late 2000s, the movement had spread across eight districts of Maharashtra, forcing the state government to adopt a large-scale, multi-pronged security policy.

Trend in Naxal Attacks

By the early 2000s, various Naxal groups had merged and expanded their operations. This, coupled with the adequate capitalisation of tribal grievances by the Communists, resulted in a sharp rise in violence across India. Incidents of open firing from jungles, torching of security vehicles and detonating of IEDs by the Maoists kept surging. There were increasing cases of kidnappings and killings of landlords, contractors, factory workers, Security Forces (SF) personnel and political leaders.

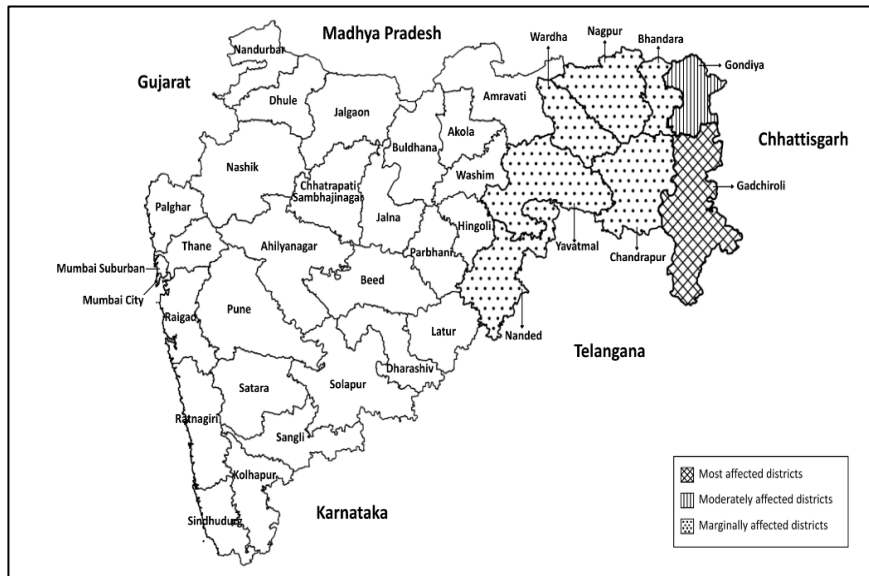
In Maharashtra, its impact could be seen in the districts of Gadchiroli, Gondia, Chandrapur, Bhandara, Yavatmal, Nanded, Nagpur and Wardha (Figure 1). The evolving nature of the insurgency had spread across 40 per cent of the country by the late 2000s. Correspondingly, the state also witnessed approximately 1,478 Naxal-related incidents leading to 536 deaths (Security Forces + civilians) between 2004 and 2019.³ In 2009, particularly, the violence peaked across the country, and Maharashtra state witnessed 154 Naxal-related incidents, leading to 93 deaths in one year alone. Former state Home Ministers Jayant Patil and R.R. Patil termed

² The Golden Corridor refers to the industrial belt from Maharashtra's Pune to Gujarat's Ahmedabad which houses numerous industries and factories. It is a strategic corridor providing jobs to a large migrant population from other Indian states.

³ Compiled from multiple MHA reports. Data from 2004 has been taken as it marked the sharp rise in violence post the merger of PWG and the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI). Data till 2019 has been taken as it was the first time in 15 years that MHA reported Naxalism was limited to two districts only, unlike the earlier eight.

Naxalism as “a war-like situation against the state”.⁴ Proactive measures to counter LWE were subsequently taken.

Figure 1. Naxal-affected districts in Maharashtra



Source: Illustration made by the author using Geographical Information System (GIS), with data sourced from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.

Counterinsurgency Strategies

As a result of the growing violence across the country, the union government launched a multi-pronged strategy for coordinated action by LWE-affected states, focusing on political security, development, perception management and tribal rights. These guidelines were implemented in Maharashtra’s affected districts, and the following countermeasures were undertaken:

Security-related Initiatives

In the initial stages, the Gadchiroli Police formed the Crack-60 (C-60) task force in 1990, consisting of young commandos from Naxal-affected areas,⁵ skilled in guerrilla warfare, to counter the incoming threat. Deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in Naxal-affected regions was undertaken, Security-related Expenditure (SRE) was provided by the Union government and police reforms were initiated under the Modernisation of Police Forces (MPF) scheme.

⁴ “[War like Situation Prevails in Naxal-infested Districts: Patil](#)”, *India Today*, 2 June 2009.

⁵ The C-60 had advantages in terms of terrain familiarity, on-ground insight and linguistic competence, which helped them gain public confidence and establish strong informer networks. Although not very active and successful in the initial stages of its formation, the C-60 turned out to be a formidable force in countering Naxalism in the later stages.

In 2011, multiple revisions were made in staffing patterns to enhance Anti-Naxal Operations, including the upgradation of the rank of Anti-Naxal Operations Chief from DIGP to ADGP and the revival of the post of ADGP (Special Operations) for state-level coordination of different security groups. Patil also requested greater police powers and urged the Union government to lead coordinated operations.

Additionally, Maharashtra became one of the first states to implement the Surrender and Rehabilitation (S&R) Policy⁶ in 2005, leading to the surrender of over 500 Naxals between 2005 and 2015.⁷ Although violence gradually declined, there existed inadequacies in policing structures,⁸ including ill-equipped and insufficiently-trained commandos,⁹ improper implementation of MPF¹⁰ and lack of timely intel-sharing between centre–state forces.¹¹

With the change in government at both the central and state levels in 2014, a renewed thrust was given to pre-existing anti-Naxal strategies, and a zero-tolerance policy was adopted towards LWE. Under this, advance disbursement of SRE was increased for Maharashtra by 138 per cent in 2014–15,¹² and significant funds were disbursed under MPF in 2017. CAPF were deployed for longer durations and undertook frequent coordinated operations with other state forces.

Between 2014 and 2016, the government made better use of Central government funds. C-60 commandos were highly trained in guerrilla warfare, UAVs were utilised for better operational efficiency, the fortification of police stations was sped up, the Army imparted skill training, the police’s arsenal was significantly upgraded, and all police posts were connected via video conferencing for real-time intel-sharing. Informers and their children were rewarded,¹³ and financial incentives for SF were enhanced.¹⁴

⁶ [**“Proposed Policy for Surrendering Naxals in Maharashtra”**](#), Unstarred Question, Rajya Sabha Debates, 10 December 2014.

⁷ [**“502 Naxals Have Surrendered in 10 Years; Rehabilitated: Maharashtra Government”**](#), NDTV, 6 October 2015.

⁸ Yatish Yadav, [**“Police vs Maoists: Are Indian Security Forces Strong Against Naxals?”**](#), *The New Indian Express*, 27 April 2015.

⁹ U.S. Rathore, “Central Police Organisations Training for anti-Maoist Operations”, *Indian Defence Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January–March 2011, pp. 122–129.

¹⁰ Om Shankar Jha, [**“Impact of Modernisation of Police Forces Scheme on Combat Capability of the Police Forces in Naxal-Affected States: A Critical Evaluation”**](#), IDSA Occasional Paper No. 7, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, December 2009.

¹¹ [**“Centre Not Sharing Inputs on Naxal Threat: Maharashtra Minister”**](#), *India Today*, 30 March 2012; [**“PM’S Opening Remarks at the Meeting of Chief Ministers of Naxal Affected States”**](#), SATP.

¹² [**“Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 144”**](#), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 24 February 2015.

¹³ The maximum monetary reward for informers was increased from INR 60,000 to 1 crore (depending on rank of cadres) and around 40 children of informers killed were given third/fourth category state government jobs. [**“Kids of Naxal Informers to Get Jobs?”**](#), *The Asian Age*, 11 February 2018.

¹⁴ As per the 7th Central Pay Commission, Monthly Risk and Hardship Allowance for counterinsurgency operations was increased from Rs 3,000–11,700 to Rs 6,000–16,900. For CoBRA forces it was increased

A central-level multi-disciplinary group was constituted to choke terror funding, and coordinated action with State Intelligence Departments was increased. C-60 commandos are also being deployed at crossing points and camping sites during *tendu* collection seasons to bust extortion activities by Maoists, undertaken on the pretext of fighting against tribal exploitation. Commandos also increased border patrolling and encounter operations, which led to the dismantling of primary drug and extortion syndicates run by Maoists.

Socio-Economic Development

Major central government-led initiatives were implemented under the Backwards Regions Grant Fund, 2006, for the socio-economic development of affected areas. Skill Development Centres for vocational training were set up, and road connectivity projects were launched under the Road Requirement Plan, 2009. Although centrally funded public infrastructure and skill development plans were envisioned, their implementation on the ground was slower than anticipated. This was due to difficulties in land acquisition and environmental clearances, poor contractor performance, and a lack of contractor response to tenders due to workers' security concerns.

As security improved, old development projects were continued and completed, including seven Eklavya Model Residential Schools in Gadchiroli and a 'Navjeevan Colony' for rehabilitated Naxals. Private companies were invited to undertake fast-paced infrastructure and development activities. These included projects providing basic facilities, improving inter and intra-state connectivity and enhancing human development through skill-building and employment generation. The State government has mandated mining companies operating in LWE-affected areas to recruit local youths to create employment opportunities.¹⁵ Moreover, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), several companies have undertaken developmental projects such as constructing schools and hospitals, employing local youths in manufacturing units and other welfare projects in LWE-affected areas.

Perception Management and Community Welfare

In Maharashtra, police forces have played a crucial role in public perception management to counter Naxal propaganda. The C-60 commandos have proactively undertaken community outreach and awareness drives to interact with tribals,

from Rs 8,400–16,800 to Rs 17,300–25,000 per month. [“Cabinet Approves Recommendations of the 7th CPC on Allowances”](#), Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), Press Information Bureau, 28 June 2017. Ex-gratia payment was increased from Rs 10–15 lakh to Rs 25–35 lakh. [“lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2298”](#), Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 29 November 2016. Moreover, public felicitation ceremonies were conducted frequently.

¹⁵ Over 14,000 youths are said to have been recruited and two members of each family losing land reimbursed with jobs. See Ankita Deshkar, [“From ‘Punishment Posting’ to Next Steel Powerhouse: CM Devendra Fadnavis Inaugurates Several Projects in Gadchiroli”](#), *Indian Express*, 22 July 2025.

address grievances and encourage the surrender and reintegration of cadres into mainstream society. Since 2018, Gadchiroli, a part of the union government’s Aspirational Districts Programme, has provided basic utilities such as health, education, connectivity and financial inclusion.

With the launch of Maharashtra Police’s Dadalora Khidki initiative in 2021,¹⁶ over 2.7 lakh tribals living in Naxal-affected areas have successfully received financial services and welfare schemes, and employment opportunities through Project Udaan (2023). In 2022, a comic strip series to counter Naxal propaganda—Gadchiroli Files—was launched and is being published fortnightly in Gondi, Marathi and English, both in print and digital formats. Moreover, the government has contributed to perception management by incorporating a positive, inclusive narrative towards affected regions through increased high-level official visits despite security concerns and proactive engagement with locals.

Tribal Rights

The Recognition of Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006,¹⁷ was passed to grant legal rights to forest-dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to use land and forest resources for their livelihood and socio-cultural needs. This law, in turn, strengthened the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996,¹⁸ which empowered Gram Sabhas by supporting self-governance through traditional systems. Moreover, in 2013, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (RFCTLARR), 2013,¹⁹ was passed to regulate land acquisition for public purposes by laying down rules for granting compensation and resettlement to affected families, thus safeguarding locals against unfair land acquisition and subsequent displacement.

In 2015, Maharashtra became the first state to deregulate non-Timber Forest Products rules, thus allowing decentralised negotiations so *tendu* collectors could directly trade with *beedi* companies. Although the implementation of 18 per cent GST on tobacco products in 2017 reduced tribal incomes, the deregulation, to a certain extent, led to the empowerment of Gram Sabhas. As they earned crores in annual revenue through *tendu* product sales, the funds generated could be directly utilised for community development initiatives. Sustainable initiatives such as Jalyukt Shivar Abhiyan for water conservation, regulated tree cutting for

¹⁶ [“Project Report On Community Policing Programme for Naxal Affected Areas – An Update 2023-24”](#), Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

¹⁷ [“Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers \(Recognition of Forest Rights\) Act \(FRA\), 2006”](#).

¹⁸ [“Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas \(PESA\) Act, 1996”](#).

¹⁹ [“Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act \(RFCTLARR\), 2013”](#).

construction, plantation drives and green mining projects are also being undertaken. However, the provision of tribal rights has not been sufficient in addressing the root causes of grievances, raising multiple challenges for the government.

Current Challenges

Integration of Tribal Rights and Developmental Activities

Striking a balance between undertaking developmental projects for public welfare and providing adequate rights and compensation to displaced tribals has been an issue in the recent past. As per PESA and RFCTLARR, Gram Sabhas, which are affected by land acquisition, must be consulted before finalising projects. However, an amendment by the Maharashtra government in 2018 allowed private companies to undertake particular strategic projects by bypassing specific compliance rules. These included attaining tribal consent, undertaking social impact assessments and providing full compensation to displaced locals.

Although this amendment facilitated land acquisition and development, it weakened the laws constituted to strengthen tribal rights. As such, planned mining projects spanning across 5,000 hectares in Gadchiroli have induced fear amongst the tribals over loss of livelihood and triggered protests. Moreover, allegations of slow-paced resettlement of displaced tribals in already acquired land have also been reported.

Compensation is mainly provided through jobs to displaced locals. Although companies operating in the area have been doing so, allegations of only unskilled/security-related jobs being assigned to them²⁰ have surfaced. This is due to a skill gap, leading to increased migration from other states, causing locals to face a perceived threat of loss of opportunities and increased pressure on their already scarce natural resources.

Improper Implementation of S&R Policy and Security of Surrendered Naxals

Problems remain regarding legal and administrative delays in delivering promised incentives to surrendered Naxals,²¹ as mandated under the S&R Policy. Additionally, some surrendered Naxals have faced insecurities, social stigma and

²⁰ Abhishek Choudhari, [“Won’t Back Down to Naxal Threats in Surjagarh: Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde”](#), *The Times of India*, 29 December 2022.

²¹ Nitin Zade, [“Incarcerated for Life: Understanding the Surrendered Maoist in Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra, India”](#), *International Journal of Information Movement*, Vol. I, Issue III, July 2016, pp. 41–51.

bias when reintegrated into civilian life. It has been noted that surrendered cadres often face harassment from Naxals and security authorities over suspicions of aiding the opposing side.²² Thus, while the S&R Policy can encourage disengagement, its improper implementation and unaddressed insecurities can cause dissatisfaction, and Maoists may potentially exploit this.

Urban Naxalism

According to authorities, educated ‘Urban Naxals’ have been indirectly involved in advocating LWE, by providing clandestine financial, legal and ideological support, without being directly involved in violence. This issue came to prominence particularly after the Elgar Parishad case in 2017 and the Bhima Koregaon violence in 2018, which led to the arrest of 16 individuals from across the country, allegedly sharing links with Maoists. State authorities, on multiple occasions, have accused Urban Naxals of spreading propaganda and brainwashing youth. In 2025, Fadnavis stated they were operating outside the state and using foreign funds to disrupt development in Gadchiroli by spreading misinformation.²³

In response to this growing threat, the Maharashtra government tabled the MSPS Bill, 2024,²⁴ under which any organisation disrupting public order or inciting violence can be declared unlawful by the advisory board. Its activities will be classified as cognisable, non-bailable offences resulting in imprisonment for up to seven years and a fine of up to INR five lakh. This bill received backlash from opposition and civil society groups due to concerns over its vague language, potential misuse and human rights violations.

The bill was revised and reintroduced after receiving over 12,000 suggestions (9,000 demanding complete removal). It was passed in both houses of the state legislature in July 2025 and sent to the Governor, who has reserved it for the President’s consideration.²⁵ Despite being passed, the opposition’s walkout in the Legislative Council, open letters to the Governor to withhold assent, and state-wide agitations against the bill, have now become impending challenges for the government.

²² Ibid.

²³ Mrityunjay Bose, “[Urban Naxals Using Foreign Funds to Derail Development in Gadchiroli: CM Fadnavis](#)”, *Deccan Herald*, 22 July 2025.

²⁴ “[LA BILL No. XXXIII OF 2024](#)”, Maharashtra Legislature, 2024.

²⁵ This is usually done when a state bill affects existing central laws, or endangers national interest or jeopardizes the High Court’s constitutional position (i.e., undermines its jurisdiction or authority), or includes matters enumerated in the Concurrent List. It goes to the union government for scrutiny and the President then acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers. The bill will no longer require the assent of the Governor as it is the President’s decision that matters now.

Conclusion

Maharashtra has witnessed a significant decline in Naxal violence, as the number of armed cadres has gone down from 550 in 2014 to 56 in 2024,²⁶ while 24 currently remain active in Gadchiroli and parts of Gondia. The former government’s policies, along with the current government’s own strategies, primarily those of offensive operations and development, have been successful, bringing down the number of annual deaths from 93 and incidents from 154 in 2009 to only 3 and 5, respectively, until August 2025. However, while countering Urban Naxalism remains a predominance of the current state government, the possibility of the resurgence of rural Naxalism stemming from unaddressed tribal grievances must not be ignored. With the government aiming to make Gadchiroli the ‘steel hub’ of the country by 2030, which would require cooperation and support of the locals, inclusive policymaking with community leaders for addressing deep-rooted concerns is imperative.

²⁶ [“Maoist Movement in Maharashtra Has Weakened Over Past Decade: Shinde”](#), *Hindustan Times*, 8 October 2024.

About the Author

Ms. Anushka Chavan is Research Intern at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses is a non-partisan, autonomous body dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on all aspects of defence and security. Its mission is to promote national and international security through the generation and dissemination of knowledge on defence and security-related issues.

Disclaimer: Views expressed in Manohar Parrikar IDSA's publications and on its website are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or the Government of India.

© Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) 2025