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Status of Militarisation: Examining the Impact of Army Deployment, Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 and Insurgency in the Longding District of Arunachal Pradesh

Chakwang Wangsaham

Guest Assistant Professor,

Dept. of Political Science

Govt. Model Degree College, Daporijo

Upper Subansiri, Arunachal Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

This study examines the status of militarisation in Longding District, Arunachal Pradesh, focusing on the impact of army deployment, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), and insurgency. The research centers on Longding town and Tissa town to analyse the everyday lives of residents amid AFSPA enforcement and ongoing insurgent activities. Longding, the 17th district of Arunachal Pradesh, is declared a "disturbed area" under AFSPA, due to issues primarily stemming from unrest in neighbouring states. Findings from 141 respondents indicate a majority agree AFSPA has led to human rights concerns and creates fear, though many note that issues have lessened over time. Most respondents also view insurgency as the primary cause of lagging infrastructure and economic growth.

KEYWORDS

Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958, Insurgency, Arunachal Pradesh (Reorganisation of Districts) (Amendment) Bill, 2011, punitive containment, Disturbed Areas, Security Forces

INTRODUCTION

'Status of Militarisation in Longding District' This study examines the status of militarisation in Longding District, Arunachal Pradesh, focusing on the impact of army deployment, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), and insurgency. It centres on Longding town and Tissa towns to analyse the everyday lives of residents amid AFSPA enforcement and ongoing insurgent activities.

Longding, Arunachal Pradesh's 17th district, was bifurcated from Tirap in 2012. Situated in the state's easternmost region, it shares borders with Myanmar (international), Assam, and Nagaland. The Government of India has declared Longding, Tirap, Changlang, and parts of Namsai District as "disturbed areas" under Section 3 of AFSPA; Tirap and Changlang were notified specifically on September 17, 1991 (Ministry of Home Affairs Notification No. S.O. 603(E)).

The Wanchos, a Naga tribe inhabiting the Patkai highlands of Longding District, share ethnic and cultural ties with the Nocte of Arunachal Pradesh and the Konyak of Nagaland. Their language, Wancho, belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family (Parag News, October 31, 2022).

AFSPA's History and Controversy Enacted in 1958 amid the 1954 Naga rebellion in Assam and Manipur (where Naga Hills were then part of Assam), AFSPA grants armed forces extensive powers, fueling debate among academics, civil society, and veterans over its impact on citizens' rights. A 1972 Rajya Sabha amendment extended it to the Seven Sister states (including Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland) and Union

Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, which had split from Assam. Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram gained statehood from Union Territory status in 1987 (Armed Forces Special Powers Amendment Act, Gazette of India).

The Reason for Insurgency in the State

The troubles in Arunachal Pradesh stem from unrest in neighboring states like Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. These issues disproportionately affect the state's TCL Districts—all located along the Indo-Myanmar border. Arunachal Pradesh serves as a transit route for various militant groups, whose camps are situated in Myanmar's Sagaing Region. TCL remains the 'axis' of conflict in the state.

These Indo-Myanmar border districts serve as transit routes for groups like NSCN-K-YA, NSCN-IM, and ULFA-I, with camps in Myanmar's Sagaing Region. Lacking major indigenous insurgents, the area sees extortion and violence, positioning TCL as the state's "axis of conflict" (South Asia Terrorism Portal, Volume 22, No. 35). Therefore, residents remain "trapped between insurgents and security forces."

Longding and the Northeastern region as a whole have struggled with internal security challenges for several decades. There has been sustained and dramatic improvement over the years. The region has suffered from a range of afflictions, including insurgency and economic marginalisation. The region has long been known for the wrong reasons, and it still has a long way to go.

Rationale and Gaps While AFSPA addresses national security, its militarized approach often fails to uphold human rights, proving inefficient and counterproductive. This study addresses these tensions in Longding, highlighting the need for stronger accountability and balanced measures.

Security Operations Spark Local Outrage / Contested Army-Villager Clashes in Longding:

1. First case, On November 18, 2018, security forces conducted a search operation in Longkhjon village, Longding District, Arunachal Pradesh. This followed inputs from an apprehended insurgent about "war-like stores" in three houses.

Soon after, allegations surfaced that army personnel had treated villagers violently. Several news portals reported these claims, stating that villagers complained to the Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC), who wrote to the Longding District Commissioner.

Reports cited the EAC, claiming the nighttime operation injured several people. Media also reported that 23 persons were detained overnight on a general ground without food, water, or warm clothes.

On November 21, 2018, Ninong Ering, former Congress MP from Arunachal Pradesh, tweeted about the alleged incident and expressed his concerns.

However, on December 12, 2018, Minister of State for Home Affairs Dr. Subhash Bhamre rejected these allegations in a written Lok Sabha reply to Ninong Ering's question. He stated: "Based on certain allegations regarding misbehaviour and harassment, the incident was inquired into, and the villagers confirmed there were no complaints against the Army." Village elders dismissed the media's false claims of violence complaints.

2. Second case, On May 16, 2020, in Longding, a civilian from pumao village under longding district, was shot dead and several others injured during firing by the 19th Sikh Regiment of the Indian Army at Pumao village, Longding District.

The deceased was identified as Lamdaan Lukham (60). According to reports, the incident occurred during a peaceful meeting between villagers and the army. This followed an earlier event where army personnel had beaten Jimphu Wangnow without reason on Friday night.

A commotion broke out when the army personnel—unable to sufficiently explain their actions—tried to leave midway, angering the villagers. The crowd pelted stones at the army, which retaliated by firing into the crowd, killing one civilian and injuring several others.

RESEARCH GAPS

There is limited empirical research available specifically determined to focus on the Longding District, and subtle analysis on the impacts of insurgency activities at the local level. There is also a lack of current, systematic, and empirical data on the perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes of the local population in the Longding District regarding the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958 and its relationship with the insurgency in the region.

There is a noticeable lack of studies based on first-hand accounts of local residents in insurgency-affected areas, partly because researchers are apprehensive about post-traumatic consequences and reprisals from non-state actors (insurgency)

Existing literature rarely incorporates openly disclosed testimonies from denizens in insurgency-hit regions, as both researchers and participants are often unwilling to put sensitive facts into the public domain due to the perceived risk of retaliation. therefore researchers conducted a study on the current issue ongoing in Longding district.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To know the status of militarisation in Longding district.
2. To examine the impact of the Army Deployment, Armed Forces (Special Power) Act and Insurgency in the Longding District.

AREA OF STUDY

The area of study focuses on Longding District in Arunachal Pradesh. Within this district, I have randomly selected two locations for the study: Longding town and Tissa town. Longding district is Located at eastern most part of Arunachal Pradesh. this district share international boundary as well as state boundary. Longding district with as of Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, record has population 56963 people, with stretch of area of 1192 sq km. longding was part of Tirap district until it was bifurcated in 2012, it become the 17th district of the state with passing by the state legislature "Arunachal Pradesh (Reorganisation of Districts) (Amendment) Bill, 2011 the creation of the new district was approved by the state cabinet on August 7, 2009, as of now there are 77 village (census 2011). Religion in Longding District (2011 census) majority of follows Christianity 91.97 %, followed by Hinduism 5.73 % and others 2.3 %. The Govt of India has declared three districts, namely Tirap, Changlang and Longding and some areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur, and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh declared as 'disturbed area' under section 3 of AFSPA, 1958. This district has long been infested with insurgency, infamous for AFSPA, and known as an insurgency-affected area for all the wrong reasons.



Fig: Longding map of Arunachal Pradesh

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF AFSPA, 1958 AND INSURGENCY

The origins of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, can be traced to the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1948. The latter in turn was enacted to replace four ordinances—the Bengal Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; the Assam Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; the East Bengal Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance; the United provinces Disturbed Areas (Special Powers of Armed Forces) Ordinance—invoked by the central government to deal with the internal security situation in the country in 1947. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1948, as a matter of fact, was modelled on the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance of 1942, promulgated by the British on August 15, 1942 to suppress the 'Quit India' movement. As the title itself indicates, 'special powers' were bestowed on 'certain officers' of the armed forces to deal with an 'emergency'. These 'special powers' included the use of force (even to cause death) on any person who does not stop when challenged by a sentry or causes damage to property or resists arrest. Most importantly, the Ordinance provided complete immunity to the officers; their acts could not be challenged by anyone in court except with the prior approval of the central government. Incidentally, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1948 was repealed in 1957, only to be resurrected a year later in 1958. The context was the fast deteriorating internal security situation in the 'unified Assam'. The Nagas, who inhabited the Naga Hills of Assam and Manipur, had opposed the merger

of their area with that of India on the grounds that they were racially and socio-politically different from the Indians. They had even voted in favour of a referendum declaring independence in 1951 and raised the banner of revolt. They boycotted the first general election of 1952, thereby demonstrating their non-acceptance of the Indian Constitution and started committing violent acts against the Indian state. In order to deal with this rebellion, the Assam government imposed the Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous District) Act in the Naga Hills in 1953 and intensified police action against the rebels. When the situation worsened, Assam deployed the Assam Rifles in the Naga Hills and enacted the Assam Disturbed Areas Act of 1955, in order to provide a legal framework for the paramilitary forces as well as the armed state police to combat insurgency in the region". (Chaddha, 2013)

Armed Forces (Special Power) Act, 1958, was passed in 1958 under the context of the 1954 Naga rebellion against India in Assam and Manipur as the Naga Hills were then, a part of Assam. In an amendment introduced by the upper house of the Indian Parliament, Rajya Sabha in 1972, the AFSPA was extended to the remaining seven sister states like Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland and the Union territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram – all of which had split from Assam and were granted statehood in the same year of the amendment. Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram lapsed from a union territory and gained statehood in 1987 (Armed Forces Special Powers Amendment Act, Gazette of India).

The Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act, 1958

"The Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act of 1958 was so called because it was enforced in the Naga-inhabited areas of the state of Assam and the Union Territory of Manipur. This Act is now popularly referred to as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act. The preamble of the Act states that certain special powers are conferred upon the members of the armed forces in the disturbed areas of the state of Assam and the union territory of Manipur. Section 3 of the Act empowered the governor/administrator of the state/union territory to use the armed forces to aid the civilian power if he was of the opinion that the situation was disturbed enough to demand such an action. He could do so by declaring the entire state/ union territory, or a part of it, as a disturbed area through a notification in the official gazette. However, it is unclear whether the governor, of a disturbed area has to ask the central government to send in the armed forces or whether the central government on its own can send the army to aid the civil administration once an area has been declared 'disturbed'.

As regards 'special powers', Section 4 of the Act confers upon any commissioned officer, warrant officer, non-commissioned officer or any other person of equivalent rank in the armed forces, the power to shoot, kill and arrest without warrant, any person he suspects; as well as enter and search without warrant or destroy any premises he believes are sheltering the rebels. The 'special powers' to open fire, even causing death, however, is not unfettered. It is qualified by two clauses. First, the power to open fire is given in a disturbed area where the assembly of five or more persons or the carrying of weapons is forbidden. Second, if a person is seen as violating such a law.¹⁵ Section 5 of the Act stipulates that any person who is arrested should be handed over to the nearest police station with least possible delay along with the report of his arrest. The 'least possible delay' being, within 24 hours of the person's arrest. Finally, Section 6 provides immunity to the armed forces personnel against arrest or prosecution for anything done or alleged to have been done in the discharge of official duties except after obtaining the consent of the central government". (Chaddha, 2013)

Armed Forces (Special Power) ACT, 1958 is an Act enable certain special powers to be conferred upon members of the armed forces in disturbed areas in north East states. It was enacted by parliament, originally It began as the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Ordinance, promulgated by President Dr. Rajendra Prasad on May 22, 1958, to address Naga insurgency threats. Parliament passed the Act on September 11, 1958, empowering governors of Assam and the Chief Commissioner of Manipur (then a Union Territory) to declare "disturbed areas". It allows armed forces to use lethal force lethal force when needed for public order, conduct searches and arrest without warrants, and provides legal protection from prosecution. critics call it draconian, arguing it breeds fear, human rights violations, and deeper conflict in regions like Northeast India and Jammu & Kashmir rather than fostering peace.

In Nagaland AFSPA, 1958 has been extended as of 26th September, 2025 the ministry of Home affairs union of india notification Dimapur, Niuland, Chumoukedima, Mon, Kiphire, Noklak, Phek, Peren and Meluri districts in Nagaland and the areas in Nagaland falling within the jurisdiction of i) Khuzama, Kohima North, Kohima South, Zubza and Kezocha police stations in Kohima District; ii) Mangkolemba, Mokokchung-I, Longtho, Tuli, Longchem and Anaki 'C' police stations in Mokokchung District; iii) Yanglok police station in Longleng District; iv) Bhandari, Champang and Ralan police stations in Wokha District; and v) Ghatashi, Pughoboto, Satakha, Suruhuto, Zunheboto and Aghunato police stations in Zunheboto District, are declared as 'disturbed area' under Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a period of six months with effect from 01.10.2025, unless withdrawn earlier.

In Arunachal Pradesh AFSPA 1958, has been extended as of 26th September, 2025 notification the ministry of Home Affairs, Union of India, The Govt of India has declared three districts, namely Tirap, Changlang and Longding and some areas falling within the jurisdiction of Namsai, Mahadevpur, and Chowkham police stations in Namsai district of Arunachal Pradesh declared as 'disturbed area' under section 3 of AFSPA, 1958. In Manipur AFSPA 1958, has been extended as of 26th September, 2025 the Ministry of Home Affairs, Union of India notification had declared entire State of Manipur, excluding the areas falling under the jurisdiction of the 13 (thirteen) Police Stations of 5 districts, as 'disturbed area' excluding the areas falling under the jurisdiction of the following 13 (thirteen) Police Stations of 5 districts, under the Imphal West district, the excluded police stations includes:

1. Imphal
2. Lamphel
3. City
4. Singjamei
5. Patsoi
6. Wangoi

Under the Imphal East district, the excluded police station includes:

1. Porompat
2. Heigang
3. Irilbung
4. Thoubal

Under the Thoubal district, the excluded police station include:

1. Thoubal

Under the Bishnupur district, the excluded police stations includes:

1. Bishnupur
2. Nambol

Under the Kakching district, the excluded police station include:

1. Kakching

In Assam also AFSPA, 1958 has been extended as of 27th September, 2025 notification under section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Government of Assam declared the area of three districts- Tinsukia, Charaideo, and Sivasagar- as a disturbed area

In jammu and Kashmir also no exception, in Jammu and Kashmir Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act. 1990 has been extended to whole of the state of Jammu and Kashmir remained in force since 1990.

AFSPA was withdrawn from Meghalaya in 2018, from Tripura in 2015, and from Mizoram in the 1980s. <https://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/india-insurgencynortheast>

Whereas Insurgency refers to an organized, armed rebellion or uprising by non-state actors against an established government or authority, typically using guerrilla tactics and asymmetric warfare to challenge or overthrow the existing political order.

Insurgency is a term historically restricted to rebellious acts that did not reach the proportions of an organised revolution. It has subsequently been applied to any such armed uprising, typically guerrilla in character, against the recognized government of a state or country. Britannica Editors (2025, December 27).

METHODOLOGY

The precise focus of this research is to examine the everyday life of the people living with AFSPA and Insurgency activities in the Longding district of Arunachal Pradesh. The study is quantitative, qualitative, and analytical in nature.

Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected using a structured interview-based questionnaire in Google Docs format from 87 respondents, while data from another 54 respondents—gathered in person via printed hard copies—were converted to Google Docs for convenience; the total sample size was thus 141 respondents selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods from Longding district. Respondents included those who had resided in the district either for a short period or for a long time: 84.3% had lived there for more than 10 years, whereas 15.7% had lived there for less than 10 years. The majority of respondents (72.1%) were aged 26–35 years. On the basis of occupation, respondents included agriculturalists/farmers, students, government employees, businesspeople/traders, politicians, and others not specified here. Additionally, 84.9% of respondents belonged to the Wancho community, while 15.1% belonged to non-Wancho communities.

FINDINGS

The data collected from 141 samples and individual inputs were interpreted by dividing responses from 25 questionnaires into various themes.

Theme, AFSPA and human rights violation

It was found that the majority (70%) agree that AFSPA implementation in the region has led to human rights violations or abuse of power, while 30% say it is not an abuse of power; however, most people noted that such issues have lessened over time.

Theme on psychological impact/effect, firstly, the presence of military deployment under AFSPA and active insurgency outfits led most respondents (48%) to agree that it created fear—such as a sense of fear and social wear—among civilians. Additionally, 65% of respondents reported "mild to moderate fear," 85.9% expressed concern about the psychological impact of militarization in the district, 41.1% agreed that punitive containment measures by security forces (e.g., surveillance, crackdowns, night curfews after 7 PM, checkpoints, and civilian suspicion) caused psychological imprints of fear and trauma, whereas a majority (47%) remained neutral or unsure.

On the theme of gender-based targeting, a majority of respondents (45%) were unsure or had no idea about disproportionate gender-based targeting in the district, while 29% disagreed that there was a disproportionately higher level of harassment or targeted violence.

Respondents' Views on AFSPA:

Regarding the repeal of AFSPA, a majority of respondents (44.8%) were unable or unwilling to give an opinion or explanation at this time. Very few (11.9%) favoured repeal, while 30–35% agreed that AFSPA fosters a climate of fear among civilians. Meanwhile, 41% stated that abuses of power by security forces and insurgent activities (i.e., the militarised environment), along with punitive containment measures, have lessened over time.

Respondents' Views on Insurgency in the District

A strong majority (74.3%) of respondents agreed that insurgency is the primary cause of lagging infrastructure and economic growth compared to other districts and regions. Additionally, 46% viewed insurgency as the main source of violence and trauma, while 32% remained neutral or unsure about the major cause. Most respondents (52.9%) reported that neither they nor their family members had experienced extortion, threats, or violence from insurgent outfits in recent or past days; 22.5% indicated that they or family members had faced such incidents; and 18% were reluctant to answer or preferred not to say. Finally, 76.7% expressed fear about openly opposing insurgent groups.

Alternatives to AFSPA: Community Role in Peace and Security

Regarding whether community roles or community policing work better than AFSPA for maintaining peace and security, 50.4% of respondents opted for neutral, while 28.1% preferred community policing as a better option for long-term, sustainable peace and security.

Hope for Future Resolution

A maximum number of respondents (48.1%) expressed hope that ongoing conflicts, AFSPA-related issues, and insurgency problems in the district will be resolved in the future, while 28.8% were not hopeful about such resolutions.

Exposure to Military Aggression/Harassment (Directly or Indirectly)

The maximum number of respondents (37.9%) indicated they do not know anyone outside their family who has experienced harassment by armed forces, followed by "no idea" (23.6%) and "yes" (21.4%).

The maximum number of respondents (69.8%) reported that neither they nor any family member had encountered threats or violence from armed forces, while only a few (9.4%) experienced harassment by the forces.

Exposure to Insurgency Aggression/Harassment (Directly or Indirectly)

The maximum number of respondents (52.9%) said no—they or their family members had not experienced targeting, extortion, threats, or violence from insurgents—while 22.5% reported such experiences, and 18.1% preferred not to say.

AFSPA/Insurgency and Negative Stereotypes Toward Wancho People/District

A majority of respondents (57.5%) agreed that the implementation of AFSPA and the presence of insurgency in the Wancho foothills contribute to fear, negative attitudes, and unfair stereotypes toward the Wancho community.

Insurgency's Negative Impact on Infrastructure and Economy:

A majority of respondents (74.3%) agreed that insurgency is the main cause of negatively impacted infrastructure and economic growth in the district.

Role of NGOs, CBOs, and Student-Based Organisations:

A majority of respondents (58.5%) remained neutral or unsure about the effectiveness of CBOs, NGOs, and student-based organizations in tackling AFSPA and insurgency issues as negotiators for peace, while 28.9% agreed that they effectively address these challenges.

Status of Military Activity and Insurgency:

The maximum number of respondents (40.8%) stated that military activity and insurgency have lessened over time, while 39.2% were unsure or had no idea.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though insurgency and AFSPA abuses have improved over time and the hostile situation has lessened, the researcher offers the following recommendations based on the survey findings.

Security forces should take every precaution to avoid loss of life among innocent civilians or collateral damage to property (Chadda, 2012). Maj Gen Nilendra Kumar highlights the need for humanizing AFSPA, recommending several measures within the constitutional and legal framework to build necessary checks and balances. Many of these stem from his experience handling the AFSPA debate within the army.

AFSPA should not be the rule but rather an exception, complementary to upholding the spirit of democracy. To minimize stereotypical mindsets and prejudice toward the local people:

- a) Promote cross-cultural exchanges to foster understanding.
- b) Launch government initiatives, programs, and awareness campaigns to boost tourism. For instance, Kaimoi recently won the Best Tourism Village and Cleanliness Village awards for 2025 in Arunachal Pradesh.
- c) Empower local communities through events like the recent Bullet Club Rider Meet Underground Vent at Longding, A.P., at the N.E. level (Ride to Underground 8). Such activities reduce stereotypes, enable cultural exchange, improve exposure to the area, and promote peace.

Village and community efforts, such as Kaimoi's achievement of the Best Tourism Village award in Arunachal Pradesh for 2025, demonstrate the potential for grassroots initiatives to drive positive change.

CONCLUSION

The study on the status of militarisation in Longding District reveals a complex environment where residents are "trapped between insurgents and security forces". Data collected from 141 respondents highlights significant concerns: 70% agree that AFSPA implementation leads to human rights violations, and the presence of military and insurgency creates widespread fear. Moreover, 74.3% attribute lagging infrastructure and economic growth to insurgency. A majority (57.5%) linked AFSPA and insurgency to fear and unfair stereotypes against the Wancho community. While many respondents believe the hostile situation and AFSPA abuses have improved over time, a substantial portion remains unsure or unhelpful about future resolutions. Recommendations focus on humanising AFSPA with checks and balances, promoting cross-cultural exchanges, and empowering local communities to address these long-standing issues.

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