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Anomalies in Manipur's Census, 1991–2011

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Anomalies in Manipur's Census, 1991–2011

Ankush Agrawal and Vikas Kumar

Abstract: This paper examines Manipur's census statistics for the period between 1991 and 2011. It argues that conventional demographic factors cannot explain the abnormal population growth rates reported in parts of Manipur and that the abnormalities in the headcount might instead be explained by the manipulation of census data driven by political and economic considerations. Manipur's experience is used to draw attention to systemic problems related to the inadequacy of metadata supplied by the Census of India, the lack of guidelines for the correction of census data, the impact of political interference on data quality and the cascading effect of errors in fundamental statistics such as headcount on other government statistics.

Keywords: Census, Coverage error, Data quality, Delimitation, Ethnic conflict, Manipur, Nagaland, Over-enumeration, Senapati.

Anomalies in Manipur's Census, 1991–2011[1]

Ankush Agrawal and Vikas Kumar

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the Office of the Registrar General of India (ORGI) has released multiple sets of estimates of headcounts of Manipur and three sub-divisions of Senapati district—Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul (henceforth, *the three sub-divisions*). In 2001, it first published enumerated figures and then replaced them with estimated figures for the three sub-divisions. This reduced the decadal population growth rates of these sub-divisions from between 123 to 169 per cent to just 39.16 per cent. A decade later, the 2011 Census straightaway published estimated figures for these sub-divisions before eventually accepting enumerated figures in later publications, which increased their growth rates from 23.80 per cent to between 99 and 137 per cent. The diversity of unannotated figures released by the ORGI for Manipur confuses even government statisticians, including those with the Directorate of Census Operations in Manipur. The *District Census Handbook* for Senapati for 2011 reported that the district's population grew by 206.1 per cent during 2001–11 (DCO 2014: 34). The Handbook compared the 2001 population of the district excluding the three sub-divisions with the 2011 population including the three sub-divisions.[2]

This paper clarifies the context of the diversity of estimates and draws attention to some of the deeper problems affecting the collection, compilation, and analysis of government statistics in India. It contributes to the literature on the interface between census and politics, and on the related errors in data on tribes (Kulkarni 1991; Verma 2013; Agrawal and Kumar 2020), castes (Maheshwari 1996; Verma 2013), religions (Gill 2007) and languages (Brass 1974; Gill 2007; Agrawal and Kumar 2020). More specifically, it contributes to the small but growing literature on the production and use of flawed statistics in India's troubled ethno-geographic periphery, which includes Jammu

and Kashmir and the states in the North-East. This literature has examined fertility estimates for Manipur (Singh 2006),[3] Jammu and Kashmir's child sex ratio and population (Guilmoto and Rajan 2013), Nagaland's population (Agrawal and Kumar 2013, 2018, 2020), sample surveys in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland (Agrawal and Kumar 2014, 2017b, 2020) and Nagaland's area (Agrawal and Kumar 2017a, 2017c, 2020). It suggests that the data deficit in some of the smaller states in India's periphery, which are heavily dependent upon federal funding, is inextricably intertwined with political and economic competition over legislative power and scarce public resources.

In this paper we will first introduce census statistics for Manipur covering the period between 1991 and 2011. We will then argue that conventional demographic factors cannot explain the abnormal population growth rates reported in certain sub-divisions of the state and that the abnormalities might instead be associated with the manipulation of the census data driven by political and economic considerations. In the concluding section, we will use Manipur's experience to draw attention to systemic problems related to the inadequacy of metadata supplied by the census, the lack of guidelines for the correction of census data, the impact of political interference on data quality and the cascading effect of errors in fundamental statistics such as headcount on other government statistics.

Flawed statistics

Manipur comprises a small valley that accounts for 10 per cent of the state's area (GoI nd4) and for 60 per cent of the state's reported population (Table 1, Map 1). At the time of the 2001 and 2011 censuses, there were nine districts in the state. Five of these—Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur, Chandel, and Ukhrul—were located in the hills and the rest—Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, and Thoubal—were located in the Imphal Valley.[4] The Meiteis inhabit the Valley and constitute the largest community in the state. The hills are populated by 34 recognised Scheduled Tribes (GoI nd7). Naga tribes dominate the hills to the north (Senapati, Tamenglong, and Ukhrul districts, which account for 54.67 per cent of Manipur's area), while Kuki tribes are dominant in the south (Churachandpur district, which accounts for 20.47 per cent of the state's area). Chandel district,

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3 Doubts have also been raised about the quality of civil registration data, which showed Manipur ranked "lower than even states like Haryana" in terms of child sex ratio (Bhuyan 2015) despite the fact that its women enjoy a better social status and have more freedoms. The reliability of the estimates of infant mortality rate in Manipur is questionable as well (Agrawal and Kumar 2020).

4 In December 2016, the state government announced the creation of seven new districts amidst allegations that "Naga villages have been "appropriated" and merged with non-Naga areas to form the new districts in an attempt to divide the Naga people" (Roy 2016). Each of the five hill districts and two districts from the Imphal Valley (Imphal East and Thoubal) ceded territory to a new district (GoM 2016). However, the borders of the newly carved out districts have not yet been officially demarcated (Thokchom 2018). In fact, it seems the government has not updated the maps of even the older districts "after land records, maps and other documents were reduced to ashes in a major fire that engulfed the then deputy commissioner's office at Laphel in Imphal West in 1990" (ibid.). Moreover, details of the distribution of area between rural and urban areas are not available. As a result, the ORGI treated the entire area of districts as rural in four of the five hill districts of the state while calculating their population density (GoI nd4). This matter has not been clarified in census reports and has led to the underestimation of the rural population density. The borders of electoral constituencies are contested as well. On the one hand, the tribes complain that they are underrepresented in the legislature (Piang 2019). On the other, Meiteis complain that along the foothills they have been unfairly included in the Outer Manipur parliamentary constituency that is reserved for tribes (Laithangbam 2020).

Table 1: Population Change and Assembly Seats in Manipur, 1991–2011

Territory	Population					Decadal growth (in %)				Population share (in %)			Assembly Seats (Existing)			Gain		
	1991	2001 (En)	2001 (Es)*	2011 (En)*	2011 (Es)	1991–2001 (En)	1991–2001 (Es)*	1991–2011 (En)†	2001–2011 (Es)–(En)	1991	2001 Es[En]	2011 Es[En]	1991	2001 Es[En]	2011 Es[En]	1991	2001 Es[En]	2011 Es[En]
Manipur	1,837,149	2,389,489	2,293,896	2,855,794	2,727,749	30.07	24.86	24.50	18.91									
Chandel	71,014	118,327	144,182			66.62		21.85		3.87	5.16 [4.95]	5.29 [5.05]	2			0.32	1.10 [0.97]	1.17 [1.03]
Ukhrul	109,275	140,778	183,998			28.83		30.70		5.95	6.14 [5.89]	6.75 [6.44]	3			0.57	0.68 [0.53]	1.05 [0.87]
Tamen-glong	86,278	111,499	140,651			29.23		26.15		4.70	4.86 [4.67]	5.16 [4.93]	3			-0.18	-0.08 [-0.20]	0.09 [-0.04]
Chura-chand-pur	176,184	227,905	274,143			29.36		20.29		9.59	9.94 [9.54]	10.05 [9.60]	6			-0.25	-0.04 [-0.28]	0.03 [-0.24]
Senapati	208,406	379,214	283,621	479,148	351,103	81.96	36.09	68.94	23.79	11.34	12.36 [15.87]	12.87 [16.78]	6			0.81	1.42 [3.52]	1.72 [4.07]
Mao-Maram	49,676	120,774	69,131	163,380	85,584	143.12	39.16	136.33	23.80	2.70	3.01 [5.05]	3.14 [5.72]						
Paomata	19,448	43,299	27,065	53,901	33,506	122.64	39.17	99.15	23.80	1.06	1.18 [1.81]	1.23 [1.89]						
Purul	22,213	59,705	30,912	68,123	38,269	168.78	39.16	120.38	23.80	1.21	1.35 [2.50]	1.40 [2.39]						
Rest	117,069	156,513	156,513	193,744	193,744	33.69	33.69	23.79	23.79	6.37	6.82 [6.55]	7.10 [6.78]						
Valley	1,185,992	1,411,766	1,411,766	1,633,672	1,633,672	19.04	19.04	15.72	15.72	64.56	61.54 [59.08]	59.89 [57.21]	40			-1.27	-3.07 [-4.55]	-4.07 [-5.68]
Hills	651,157	977,723	882,130	1,222,122	1,094,077	50.15	35.47	38.54	24.03	35.44	38.46 [40.92]	40.11 [42.79]	20			1.27	3.07 [4.55]	4.07 [5.68]

Notes: (i) Both Enumerated (En) and Estimated (Es) figures are available for the population of the three sub-divisions in 2001 and 2011. (ii) * The ORGI accepted 'Es' and 'En' figures as final figures in 2001 and 2011, respectively. (iii) † indicates the growth rate corresponding to the final figures. (iv) †† indicates that 2001 (Es) figures have been used for Senapati and its three sub-divisions and 2001 (En) for the rest in growth rate calculations. (v) 'Gain' is the difference between the projected assembly seats as per the relevant census and the existing seats. (vi) In case of 2001 (En), the population of the sub-divisions of Senapati does not add up to the district total as the Final Population Totals do not include the population of the three sub-divisions.

Sources: GoI (nd2, nd3, nd5). For the three sub-divisions of Senapati and Senapati district—GoI (2001a, 2001b), Telegraph (2003), and Pou (2007) for 2001 (En); GoI (2004a, nd1) for 2001 (Es); GoI (2013: Annexure IV) for 2011 (Es); GoI (2014) for 2011 (En).
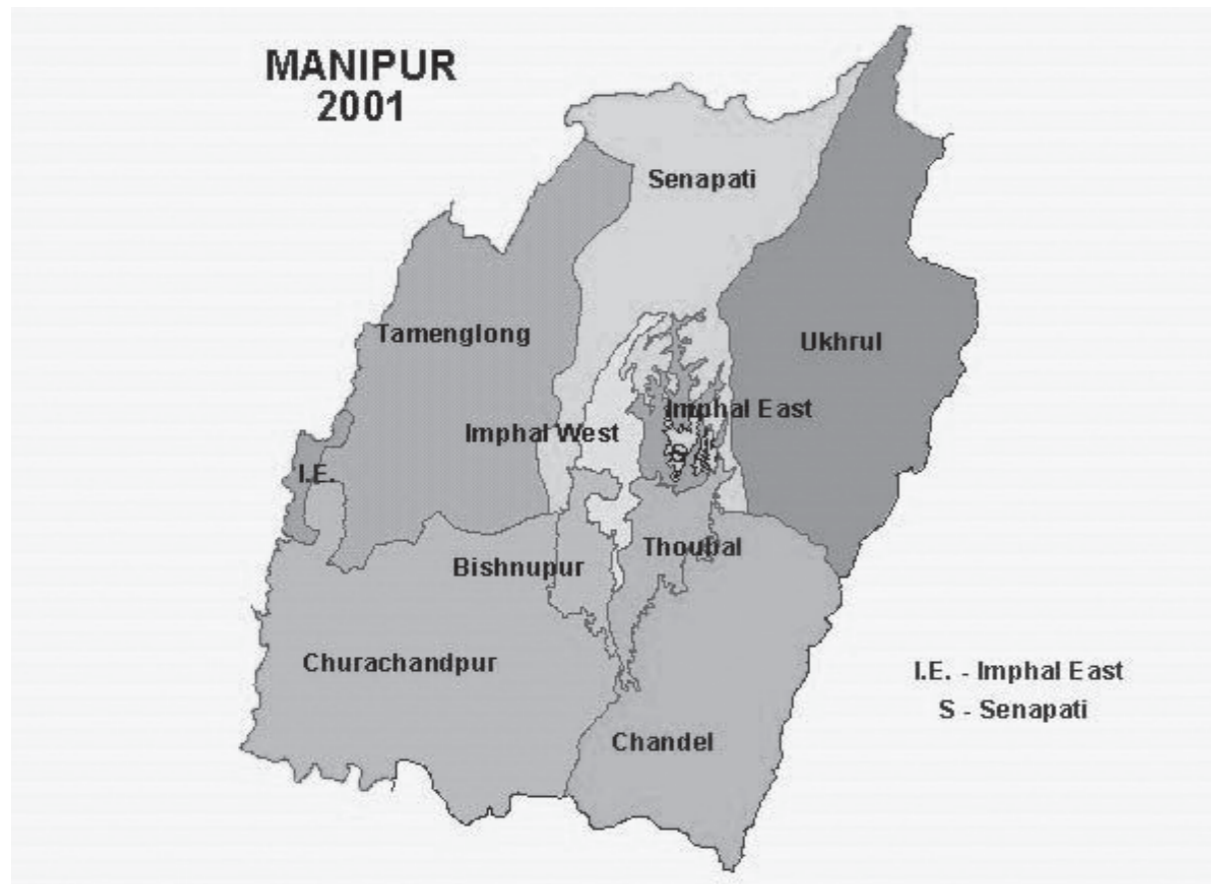
Map 1: Districts of Manipur (2001)

Source: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/maps/State_Maps/StateMaps_links/manipur01.html

which accounts for 14.84 per cent of the state's area, has a mixed population, with Kukis probably enjoying an edge. The three sub-divisions of Senapati district—Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul (Map 2)—that reported decadal population growth rates exceeding 100 per cent during 1991-2001 are inhabited by the Mao, Poumai and other Naga tribes. The other sub-divisions of Senapati have a mixed population, including the Kukis. Chakpikarong, the sub-division of Chandel that reported a similarly high population growth rate, has a mixed population of Naga and Kuki tribes.

The population growth rate of Manipur (Singh 2006: 1473) and errors in its population projections (GoI 2011: 168–172) grew unexpectedly after 1991. Three hill districts—Senapati, Ukhrul, and Chandel—reported very high population growth rates in 2001. Two of these, Senapati and Chandel, ranked among the ten fastest growing districts of the country in 2001 (GoI 2001b: Statement 8) and also among the ten districts with highest increase in the percentage of illiterates (GoI 2001b: Table 14). The Manipur government did not accept the population estimates for some of the sub-divisions of these districts where the population growth was exceptionally high.[5] Eventually, the

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5   In neighbouring Nagaland, the state government rejected the 2001 Census figures for the entire state (Agrawal and Kumar 2020). However, unlike in Manipur, the ORGI did not endorse the rejection of the headcount in Nagaland, possibly because the state government wanted a fresh census in the entire state. For analyses of the abnormal increase in Nagaland's population, see Agrawal and Kumar (2013, 2018, 2020).
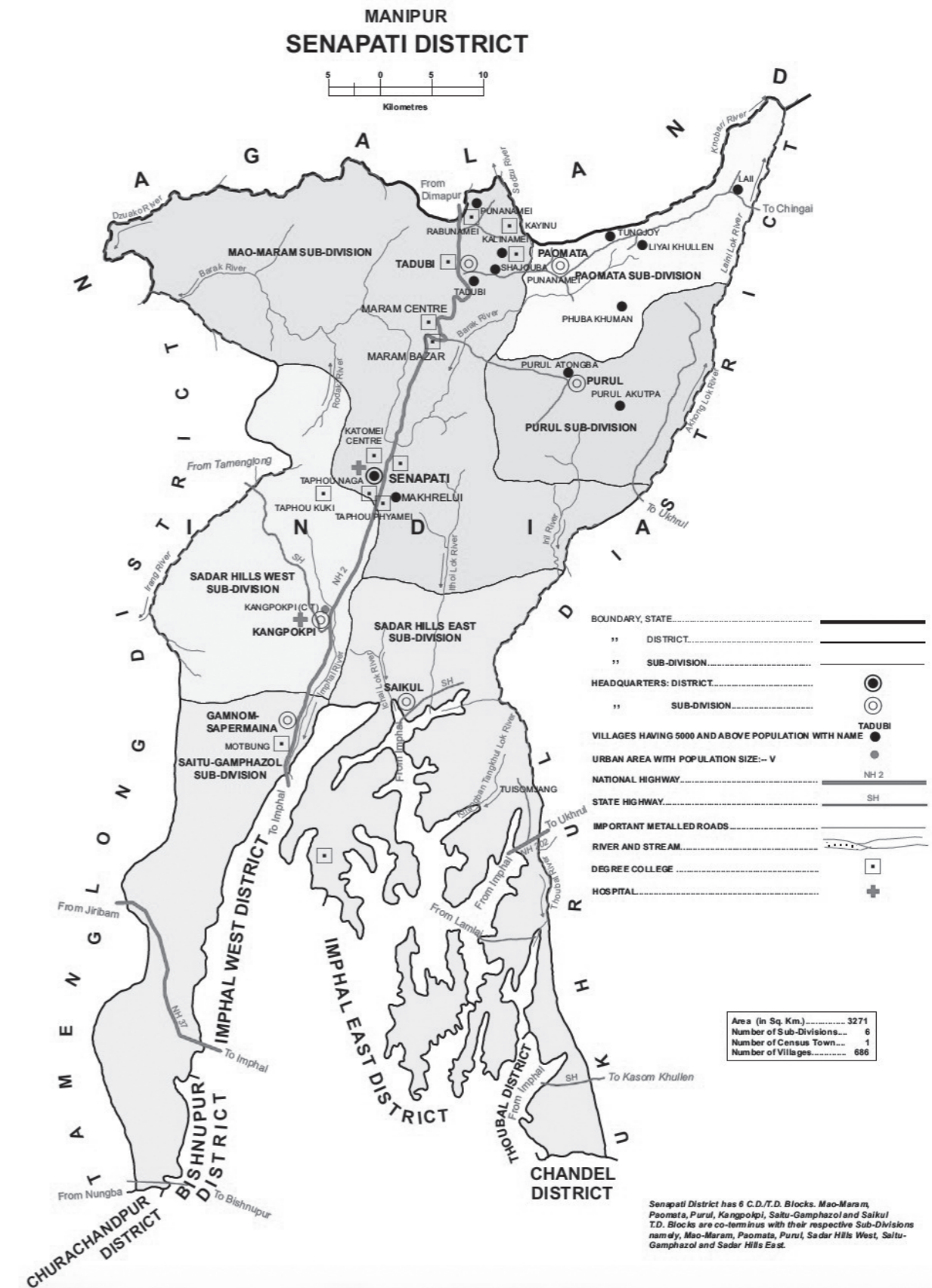
Map 2: Sub-divisions of Senapati district (2011)

Source: *District Census Handbook*, Senapati, 2011.

ORGI rejected the headcounts of the Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district "due to administrative and technical reasons although the [2001] population census was carried out in the sub-divisions as per schedule" (GoI nd1; also E-pao 2003). Attempts to verify the headcount met with resistance:

> To examine the possibility of reviewing the census report, a central team including . . . the registrar general of India visited Manipur on September 15, 2003 and discussed the matter in the state capital . . . Accordingly, the government of Manipur started a reenumeration/resurvey from October 7 to October 12, 2003 in the villages which were considered to show abnormal growth. But the people of the concerned districts did not cooperate with the resurvey. (Singh 2006: 1473; see also Telegraph 2003)[6]

Similarly, people resisted the state government's attempt to verify electoral rolls:

> Election officials had gone to these Naga villages after a proper notification for a physical verification of the people said to be residing there. However, in all instances the villages were deserted. (Laithangbam 2004)[7]

In 2001, the ORGI released two sets of data—enumerated and estimated—for the three sub-divisions (Table 1). The enumerated population data, as reported in the *Provisional Population Totals* (GoI 2001a; GoI 2001b; GoI 2001c; GoI 2001d; GoI 2002; see also Telegraph 2003; Pou 2007), suggest that the three sub-divisions of Senapati (Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul) grew at the rate of more than 120 per cent between 1991 and 2001. Later the ORGI excluded the three sub-divisions from subsequent publications (DCO 2006: xiv; GoI 2003; GoI 2004b) before releasing *estimated* figures for these sub-divisions (GoI 2004a; GoI nd1). As per the estimated figures, the population of these sub-divisions grew at the rate of 39 per cent during 1991–2001.

The procedure through which 39 per cent population growth rate was estimated is not mentioned in any census publication.[8] Two points are noteworthy in this regard. Firstly, Senapati's growth rate was 36.13 per cent during 1981–91 (GoI nd6). By assuming that the population in these three sub-divisions grew by 39 per cent during 1991–2001, the ORGI ensured that between 1991 and 2001, the growth rate of the district as a whole remained at the 1981–91 level. Under the assumption of 39 per cent growth rate of the three sub-divisions, the growth rate of the district was 36.09 per cent during

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6   A referee suggested the following on the lack of cooperation: "Regarding . . . villagers not cooperating with officials for [the] resurvey and difficulty of carrying out [the] headcount [,] we can draw some insights from a village like . . . (next to Mao Gate) [in Mao-Maram sub-division] which has over 300 persons residing in Delhi alone. To bring each and every individual residing outside of the village [for the recount] is not pragmatic." This supports our claim that non-resident natives were added to the headcount, i.e., people staying elsewhere were included in the population of hill villages. The Census of India follows the *de facto* extended synchronous method of census taking and not the *de jure* method. People "residing in Delhi" and elsewhere at the time of the census should have been counted in Delhi and not in their native villages.
7   The number of electors per seat for the 2017 Assembly elections were 28,890, 37,947, and 43,541 for the constituencies in the Valley, the hills, and Senapati, respectively. The average size of the electorate of the constituencies of the hill districts and of Senapati drops to 35,660 and 36,177, respectively, if we exclude the assembly constituencies of Karong, Mao, and Tadubi (Map 3) that include the three sub-divisions for which a reliable population headcount is not available.
8   Discussions with ORGI officials failed to clarify the procedure followed to adjust the growth rate of the three sub-divisions (interview, 21 February 2019, New Delhi).

1991–2001 (ibid.; Table 1). Secondly, the Manipur government seems to have considered the growth rate of a sub-division in 2001 to be abnormally high if it exceeded 40 per cent (Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005). The ORGI arguably avoided the aforesaid threshold by choosing 39 per cent as the estimated growth rate.

The ORGI's adjustment satisfied neither the hills nor the Valley. Naga organisations approached the courts for the restoration of the provisional results of the 2001 Census (Naga Peoples' Organisation, Senapati & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (C) No. 3226 of 2006) and threatened the Valley with
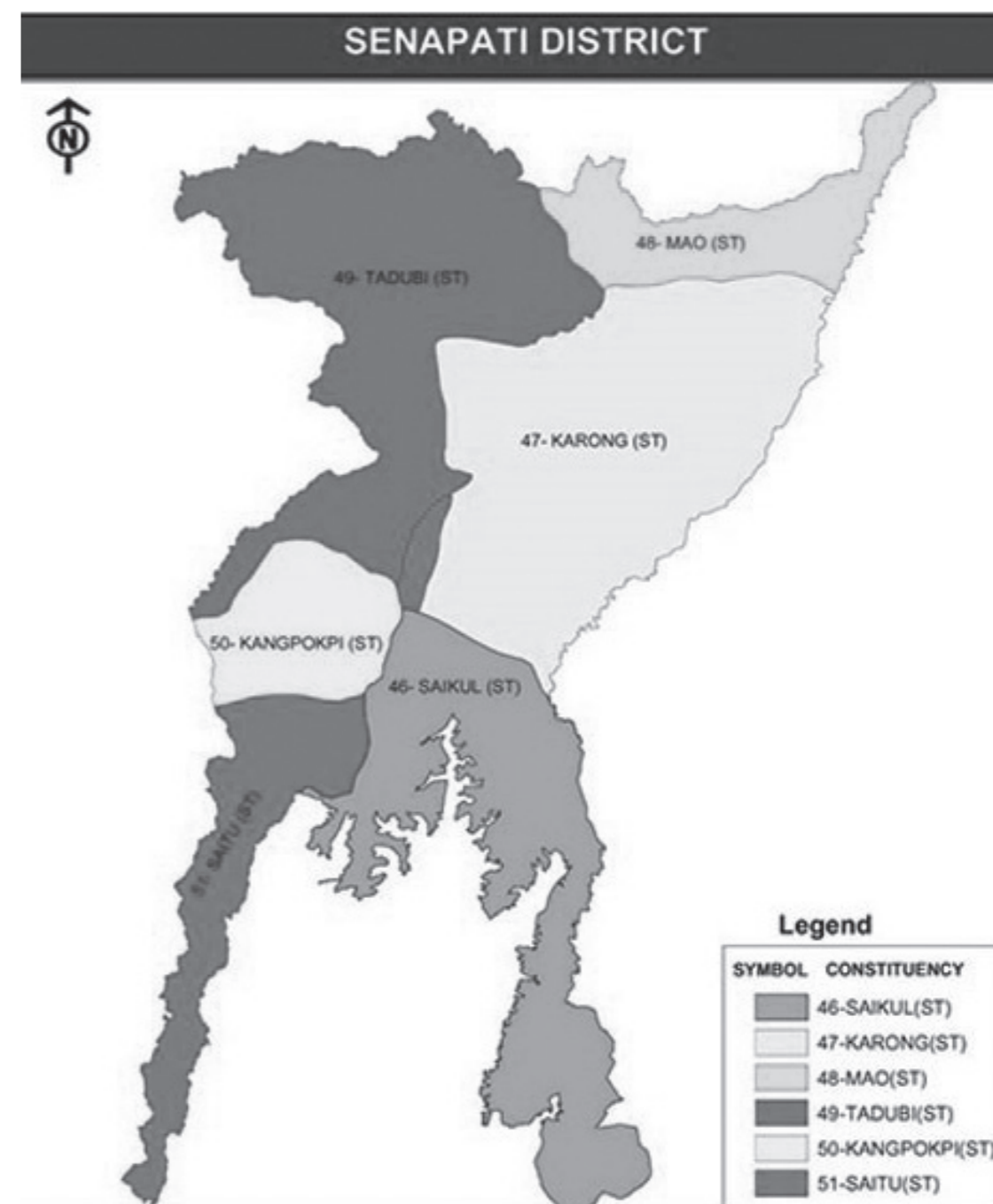
Map 3: Constituencies of Senapati district (2017)
Source: https://ceomanipur.nic.in/ACMap.html#

road blockades (Laithangbam 2004), as they control all the highways that connect the state to the rest of the country. The Nagas of Senapati continue to complain about the non-implementation of delimitation as per the 2001 Census (E-pao 2013), which would have raised the number of seats allotted to the hills from 20 to 25 in the 60-member legislative assembly of which they would have been the primary beneficiary. On the other hand, the Valley points out that while the Gauhati High Court ordered a recount of the population in nine hill sub-divisions of the state that reported "unnatural, abnormal, impossible and miraculous growth of population", only three sub-divisions were "selectively chosen" (Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005) and that the ORGI "imposed 39 per cent as [the] decadal growth rate . . . without any field verification" (North East News Agency 2007). As a result, even the corrected population growth was seen to be "ridiculous[ly] . . . high" (Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005).

In 2011, the ORGI initially reported estimated figures in the *Provisional Population Totals* (GoI 2011) and the Primary Census Abstracts (GoI 2013: Annexure IV). The *Provisional Population Totals* carries the following note:

> The figures for India and Manipur, include by sex, the *estimated* population, 0–6 [year] population and literates of Paomata, Mao-Maram and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur for Census 2001 and 2011. (GoI 2011: x, emphasis added)

The estimated figures for 2011 cap the decadal growth rate in the three sub-divisions at 23.8 per cent, which equals the growth rate of the rest of Senapati district during 2001–11 (Table 1). However, after initially withholding the enumerated population data for the three sub-divisions due to "administrative reasons", the ORGI belatedly released the "finalized" figures in 2014 without any explanation (GoI 2014).[9] The enumerated figures for 2011 suggest that the population of the three sub-divisions grew at abnormally high rates between 100 and 136 per cent during 2001–11.

A comparison of the 2001 and 2011 census publications shows that the ORGI did not follow a common reporting practice for these three sub-divisions. Two observations are in order in this regard. Firstly, in 2001, enumerated figures released initially were superseded by estimated figures released as final figures. In contrast, in 2011, the ORGI discarded estimated figures that were released first and released enumerated figures as final figures.

Secondly, the 2001 census publications do not follow a uniform format for reporting the population of Manipur. The *Provisional Population Totals* for India and its Supplement (GoI 2001a, 2001b) released in 2001 provide enumerated figures for both Manipur and Senapati. Later publications of the 2001 Census such as the *Final Population Totals* for India (GoI 2004a) report estimated figures with the following note:

> It is important to note that the census results for Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur were cancelled due to administrative and technical reasons although a population census was carried out in these sub-divisions also as per schedule. However, the population by sex and residence only for these three sub-divisions has been *estimated*. The *estimated* figures are . . . (GoI 2004a: xv, emphasis added)

Other census publications such as the *District Census Handbook* for Senapati and the *Primary Census Abstract* reported district averages excluding the three sub-divisions.

> As the 2001 Census population of the 3 sub-divisions of Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul were not accepted on account of administrative and technical reasons[,] the following tables and the related Primary Census Abstracts showing the villages wise figures could not be generated for these sub-divisions and the analysis was limited to the [remaining] three sub-divisions of Sadar Hills west, Sadar Hills East and Saitu Gamphazol only. (DCO 2006: xiv)

Still other publications such as the *General Population Tables* for India (GoI 2005a), Manipur's *Administrative Atlas* (GoI 2005b), Manipur's *Census Atlas* (2008c) and *Statistical Handbook of Manipur 2017* (GoM 2017: 22, 40, 42) reported the headcount of Manipur both including the estimated figures for the three sub-divisions as well as completely excluding these sub-divisions. The following excerpt from *General Population Tables* notes that the estimated figures were included.

> The 2001 Census population of India and Manipur State includes the estimated population of Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul Subdivision of Senapati district. (GoI 2005a: 30–31, also 36–37, 41–72, Table A-1, Table A-2, emphasis added)

Another part of the aforesaid report, however, refers to figures that exclude the three sub-divisions altogether.

> The 2001 Census population of India and Manipur State excludes Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions, as the Census results for [the] 2001 Census for these sub-divisions were cancelled due to administrative and technical reasons. (ibid.: 173)

Census publications, including those on Senapati district, cryptically refer to administrative and technical difficulties, but do not explain the actual problems faced during enumeration, how these problems affected the quality of census data, and the procedure followed to arrive at the estimated figures. It bears mentioning that interpolated figures have been used in the past to complete the time series for states such as Assam (1981) and Jammu and Kashmir (1991) where census could not be conducted due to political unrest (GoI 2005a: 30–31, 36–37). Unlike in Manipur, in both these cases, the method of interpolation is self-evident and only one set of figures was released.

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9   We believe that the "finalized" figures for 2011 are based on the enumerated (and not estimated) headcounts. The Census adds an explanatory note if figures have been arrived at through estimation, adjustment or correction. In 2011, the "finalized" census figures for Manipur do not carry any explanatory note.

Understanding the anomalies

Both in 2001 and 2011, over-reporting was mostly reported from the Naga-dominated hill districts, namely Senapati (Mao, Poumai, and other Naga tribes and Kuki tribes in sub-divisions closer to the Valley) and to a lesser extent Chandel (mixed population of Naga and Kuki tribes) and Ukhrul (Tangkhul Naga tribe) (Table 1). Within Senapati, the three sub-divisions along or closer to the border with Nagaland reported abnormally high growth rates. The growth rates of these three sub-divisions far exceeded those of the rest of Senapati, the whole of Manipur and the neighbouring districts in Nagaland (Figure 1). As a result, the share of these sub-divisions in Manipur's census population increased sharply from 4.97 to 9.99 per cent between 1991 and 2011 (Figure 2). During this period, the population share of Senapati increased from 11.34 to 16.78 per cent. The increase in Senapati's share was driven by the three sub-divisions, which, in turn, drove the sharp increase in the population share of the hill districts as a whole from 35.44 to 42.79 per cent (Table 1, also Figure 2). Tamenglong, which shares a border with Assam and is inhabited mostly by the Zeliangrong Nagas, and Churachandpur, which shares a border with Mizoram and Myanmar and is inhabited by Kuki and other related tribes, did not report high growth rates.

Similarly, the gender composition and the share of the child population (0-6 year) of the three sub-divisions as well as Senapati behaved anomalously. Between 1991 and 2001, the child sex ratio of the three sub-divisions increased by 27, in contrast to the declining trend observed in the district and the state (Figure 3). In the subsequent decade, however, the child sex ratio of the three
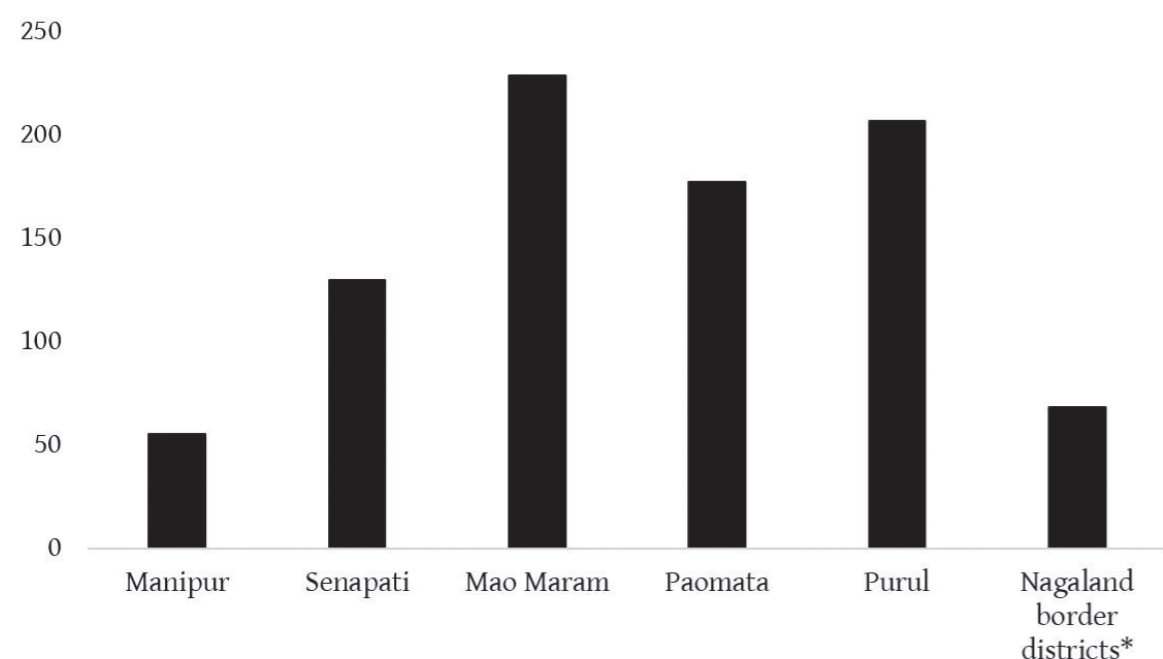

Figure 1: Population Growth Rates (in per cent), 1991–2011

Notes: (i) The growth rate is the percentage change in population between 1991 and 2011. (ii) * Corresponds to the three districts of Nagaland—Kohima, Phek, and Peren—which share a border with Senapati district. (iii) Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul are sub-divisions of Senapati district of Manipur.
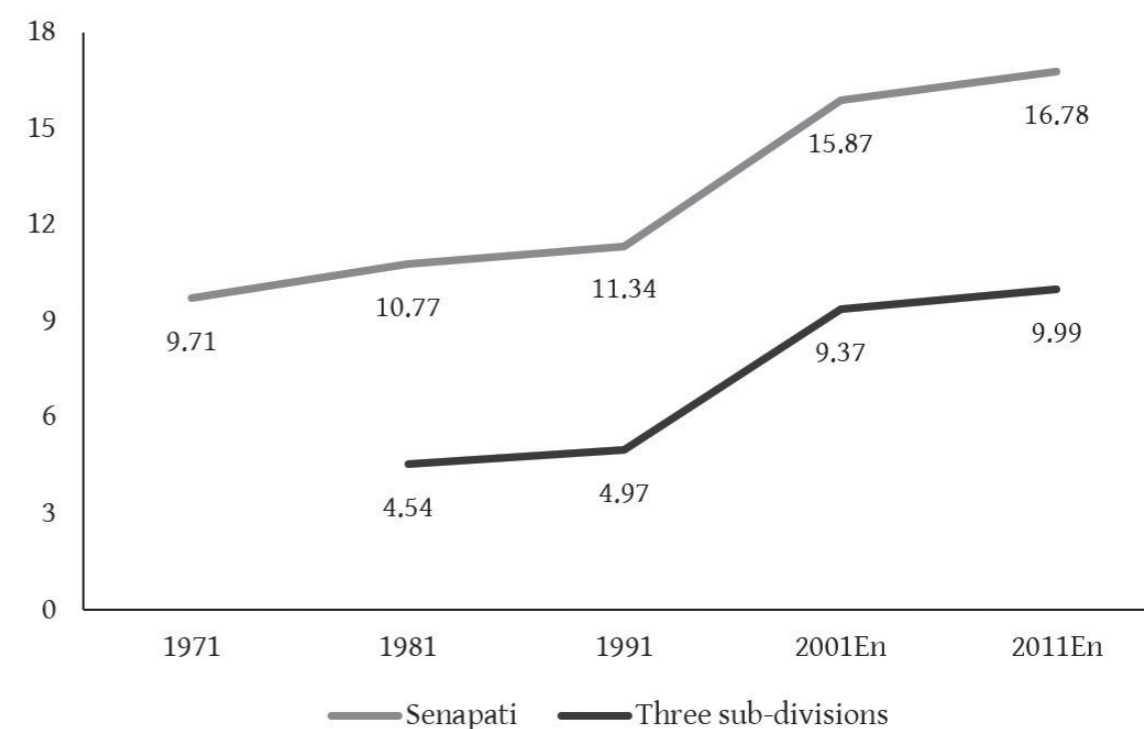
Sources: See Table 1.

Figure 2: Population Share (in per cent)

Notes: (i) The figure shows the share of Senapati and the three sub-divisions (Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul) in the state's population. (ii) 'En' indicates enumerated figures (see Notes to Table 1).

Sources: DCO (nd); GoI (1976); Table 1.

sub-divisions fell by 125, which swung the district's child sex ratio downwards by more than 100. While the child population grew in absolute terms in the three sub-divisions and Senapati between 1991 and 2001, its share in the overall population fell sharply (Figure 4). This suggests relatively higher over-enumeration of those aged 6 years and above. While these anomalous changes in the 0-6 year population and its sex ratio require further investigation, they add to concerns about the quality of census data on Manipur.

In-migration cannot explain the reported population growth rates of the three sub-divisions. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, land-scarce Meiteis, who constitute the majority in Manipur, are not permitted to buy land in the hills and they have no other incentive to migrate to the hills. On the other hand, the hill people can freely settle in the Meitei-dominated valley, the educational and economic hub of the state, and they can also migrate to other states, including to Kohima and Dimapur in neighbouring Nagaland. In their submission to the High Court, groups opposed to the use of the 2001 Census data for delimitation pointed out that:

> [M]igration of many tribals from the hill Districts to the valley Districts had been taken [has been taking] place for the last many years… For example, Tangkhul tribe from Ukhrul District settled at Dewlaland and Nigaram in Imphal District. Similarly [,] many people of Senapati District had been settling at Sangakpham village in the Imphal District, many tribal people from Churachandpur District has been settling

at Imphal Airport area, in Imphal West District. The tribal people of Chandel District has been settling at Haokip Veng, Zomi Villa, Chassad Road (New Checkon), Old and New Lambulane etc. in Imphal East District. As a result thereof, the growth rate of population should be more in valley Districts rather than the hill Districts. (Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005)

Secondly, after violent ethnic conflicts between Kuki and Naga tribes in the mid-1990s, Kukis migrated out of the Naga-dominated hill districts. Writing soon after the 2001 Census, Oinam (2003: 2035) pointed out that:

> At present, barring some areas at Chandel [district] and Kangpokpi [in Senapati district] [,] there are no Kukis in the Naga inhabited areas. The claim can be ascertained after a decade long Naga–Kuki conflict where Kukis have been driven out of the districts of Tamenglong and Ukhrul, and partly from Chandel and Senapati. Starting from [the] early 1990s till the end [of] the decade [,] as many as 750 Kukis were massacred in the state, excluding those in Nagaland and Assam. Casualty, of course, had been in both ends. In total, nearly 1,14,300 Kukis and Nagas were displaced. (see also Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005)

Furthermore, an increase in fertility cannot explain the abnormal population growth, as most surveys suggest a drop in fertility rates associated with the general improvement of literacy rates and the provision of healthcare.[10] Commenting on the 2001 Census, Singh (2006: 1473) points out that:
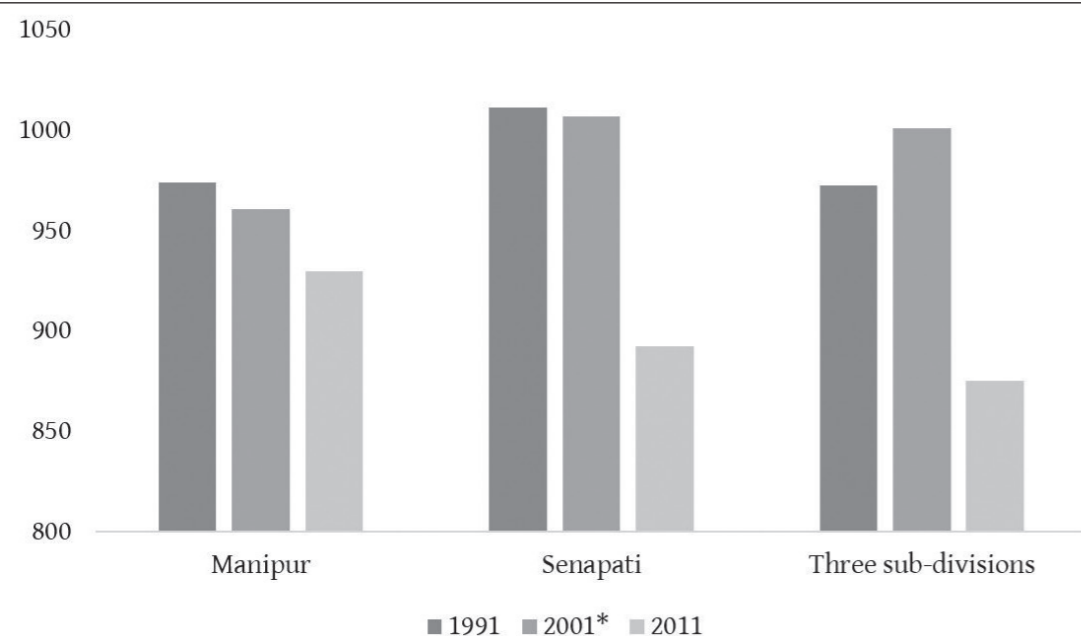

Figure 3: Child (0-6 years) sex ratio

Notes: * Indicates that the figures for 2001 are based on *Provisional Population Totals* because the final figures were not released.
Sources: GoI (nd5); GoI (1994); GoI (2001d)

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10 Manipur reported one of the lowest infant mortality rates (IMR) in the country during 2011–2015 (relevant SRS Bulletins). However, the reliability of the Sample Registration System in some of the smaller states of the North-East including Manipur is doubtful (Agrawal and Kumar 2020).
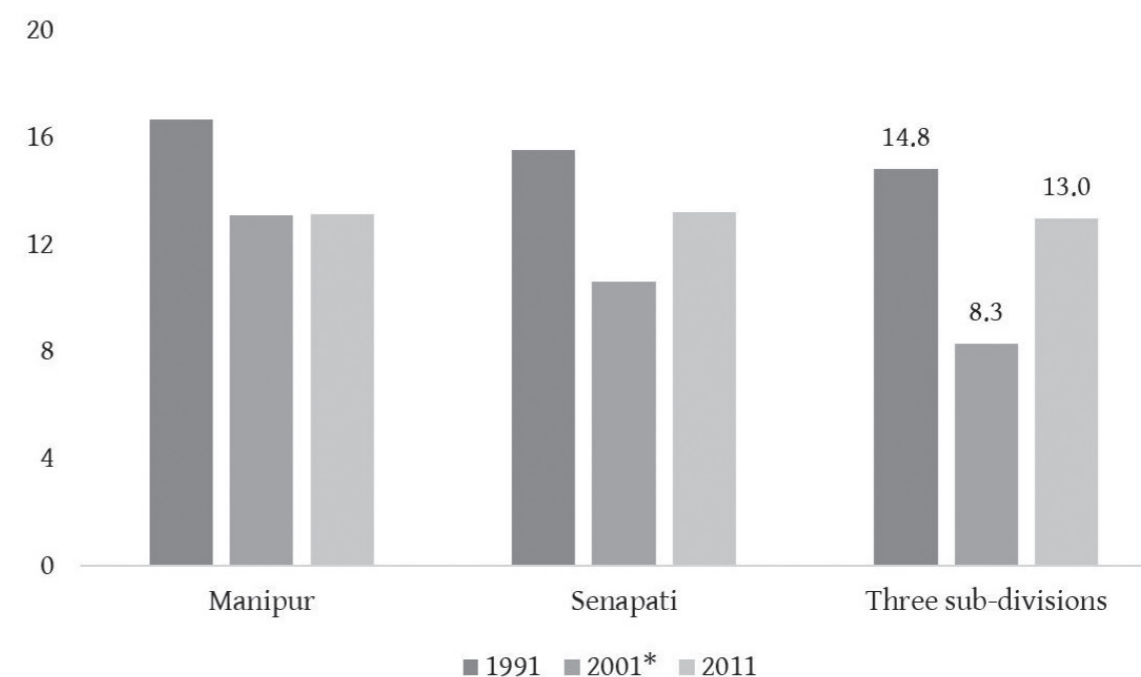
Figure 4: Population share (in per cent) of the child (0-6 year) population

Notes and Sources: See Figure 3.

The growth rate of [Manipur's] population increased from 29.29 per cent in 1981–91 to 30.02 [this should be 30.07][11] per cent in 1991–2001 which is the third highest in the country . . . The increase in [the] growth rate in the state is also quite contradictory to the trends of the birth rate. The birth rate per 1,000 population given by the Registrar General of India has declined continuously from 29.1 (1984) to 19.4 (1990) and further to 18.6 (1999).

The three sub-divisions together reported a population growth of 41.55 per cent during 1981–91. The growth rates should have dropped with growing outmigration for educational and economic reasons and also because of a decline in fertility levels inter alia due to improvements in health care facilities and female literacy.[12] However, contrary to expectations, the reported growth rates spiked during 1991–2001. Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul reported growth rates of 143, 123 and 169 per cent, respectively (Table 1). Manipur's growth rate drops substantially from 30.07 to 24.05 (24.86) if we exclude (use the estimated figures for) the three sub-divisions.

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11 As per the enumerated data for the three sub-divisions, the population growth rate of Manipur was 30.07 per cent during 1991–2001. It drops to 24.86 per cent if the estimated figures are used (Table 1).

12 Using the 1991 Census data, Mari Bhat (1994: 3278) observed that "Manipur clearly has low levels of fertility and had experienced [a] significant fall during the 1980s" compared to the other north-eastern states. According to Guilmoto and Rajan (2002, 2013), who provide district-level fertility estimates based on the 2001 and 2011 Census data, Senapati (along with Imphal West) had the lowest total fertility rate (TFR), i.e., 2.2, in the state in 2001. However, their analysis shows that in 2011, Senapati's TFR (2.6) not only increased compared to 2001, but was also higher than the state's average. The treatment of the three sub-divisions in their analysis is not clear. It is possible that the steep increase in Senapati's TFR is an artefact of distortions in the underlying census data.

Since conventional demographic explanations based on fertility and migration cannot account for the unusual population dynamics of these sub-divisions, we have to explore other factors. The change in the intensity of conflict after the government signed a ceasefire agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) in 1997 might have affected the headcount in Nagaland and northern Manipur in the 2001 Census. Agrawal and Kumar (2020) rule out the possibility that the (a) return of insurgents to their villages who may not have been counted during earlier censuses carried out amidst active conflict; (b) decrease in the death rate due to the drop in casualties related to armed conflict; and (c) changes in the pattern of deployment of the armed forces after the signing of the ceasefires between the government and the Naga insurgent groups can explain the high population growth rates reported in Naga-dominated districts in and around Nagaland. Their discussion holds good for northern Manipur as well. Briefly, the potential number of Manipuri Naga insurgents in Nagaland who could have returned to their villages was far lower than 10,000; the decrease in the death rate due to the cessation of hostilities was much less than 0.5 per 1,000; and the deployment of the armed forces was reduced due to the Kargil War. It could also be argued that the ceasefire(s) would have allowed better coverage of remote areas in Senapati, which might explain the spike in the population growth rate. The census is, however, completely silent on the change, if any, in coverage in Senapati.

In the case of Nagaland, Agrawal and Kumar (2020) show that double counting, i.e., counting of tribal migrants both in their native villages and in their place of current residence in urban areas, which inflates the headcount in tribal villages, played a major role in inflating the overall population. They further show that political and economic factors, including competition for a greater share of seats in the state legislative assembly in the run-up to the 2002 delimitation, too contributed to the unusually high growth rates reported in the 2001 Census. As discussed below, similar factors seem to have influenced the headcount in the hills of Manipur.

The manipulation of population figures in Manipur has to be understood in the context of (a) zero-sum ethno-territorial conflicts between the hills and the Imphal Valley as well as between the Naga and Kuki tribes in the hills (Oinam 2003); (b) the political economy of the proposed "Greater Nagaland" that will have a substantial overlap with Manipur as well as the proposed "Kukiland" (Agrawal and Kumar 2017a, 2020); and (c) the dysfunctional Hills Area Committee and Autonomous District Councils that have failed to meet the aspirations of the tribes (Shimray 2001; Piang 2019). In a state that is dependent on federal transfers[13] and where public sector spending[14] and employment[15] overshadow the formal private sector of the economy, communities try to enhance their share in power and, by implication, public resources at the expense of other communities by manipulating government statistics that govern power sharing and resource distribution (as happened in

Senapati and in other Naga-dominated districts) and, in the worst case, expelling others physically (as happened to Kukis in Naga-dominated districts). Discussions with government officials suggest that the manipulation of statistics involved reporting ghost entries, double counting out-migrants and double counting the population of new villages, and that the manipulation was particularly pronounced in the ethnically diverse hill districts of Senapati and Chandel (interviews, 7–8 October 2019, Senapati and Chandel; also interview, 11 December 2018, Kohima; Footnote 6, *supra*).

Delimitation on the basis of the disputed 2001 population figures would have transferred five assembly seats to the hill districts of Manipur at the expense of the Imphal Valley (Table 1; see also Sangai Express 2007). Groups opposed to delimitation, based in the Valley, where population grew at a much lower rate, approached the union government (North East News Agency 2007) and the Gauhati High Court. They drew attention to the high growth rates reported in the hills—Mao-Maram, Paomata, Purul and Saitu Gamphazol sub-divisions of Senapati; Chakpikarong, Moreh, Machi and Chandel sub-divisions of Chandel; and Kasom Khullen sub-division of Ukhrul (Table 2).

A 2008 Presidential Order indefinitely deferred delimitation based on the census because it was "likely to arouse the sentiments of the different groups of people living in the State of Manipur due to their apprehension that new delimitation in many electoral constituencies may result in [the] break-up of the delicate social equilibrium which may cause alienation among different ethnic

Table 2: Population Change in Select Sub-divisions of Manipur, 1991–2011

Sub-division	Population			Decadal growth	
	1991	2001	2011	1991–2001	2001–11
Senapati district					
Mao-Maram	49,676	1,20,774	1,63,380	143.12	35.28
Paomata	19,448	43,299	53,901	122.64	24.49
Purul	22,213	59,705	68,123	168.78	14.10
Saitu Gamphzol	28,633	44,130	58,536	54.12	32.64
Chandel district					
Chakpikarong	21,582	43,202	52,939	100.18	22.54
Tengnoupal	20,755	31,762	39,245	53.03	23.56
Machi	10,133	17,087	19,865	68.63	16.26
Chandel HQ	18,544	26,276	32,133	41.70	22.29
Ukhrul district					
Ukhrul South	6,341	10,206	12,360	60.95	21.11
All districts					
Manipur	18,37,149	23,89,489	28,55,794	30.07	19.51

Notes: Our population figures differ slightly from those quoted in Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee & Ors. vs Union of India & Ors. WP (PIL) No. 16 of 2005. In the case of the three sub-divisions of Senapati, for which two sets of figures are available in 2001 and 2011 (Table 1), we have used the enumerated figures for both these years.

Sources: Same as Table 1 for the three sub-divisions of Senapati and the corresponding *District Census Handbooks* for 2001 and 2011 for the rest.

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13 States such as Manipur "were dependent upon central transfers alone (share of divisible pool plus grants) for meeting more than 60% of their expenditure in 2013–14" (Bhattacharjee 2018: 26).

14 Bhattacharjee (2018: 26) pointed out that in 2013–14 government expenditure constituted "more than 50%" of the gross state domestic product (GSDP) in Manipur and added that its economy "will collapse without the central transfers".

15 In 2011, the ratio of state and central government employees to Manipur's population was about 2.53 per cent compared to the national average of 0.80 per cent (GoI 2016).

groups." The order further noted that delimitation could trigger "ethnic clashes, leading to law and order problems throughout the State" and threaten "the peaceful coexistence among the communities" apart from offering "an opportunity" to various insurgent groups "to exploit the sentiments of the local people to indulge in large scale violence, in furtherance of their agenda" of disrupting "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India" (GoI 2008b: 2–3).

According to the 2011 Census, the population of the three sub-divisions has more than doubled within a decade and now Senapati alone accounts for about one-sixth of the entire population of Manipur (Table 1). If delimitation were to be carried out using the 2011 population estimates, the Valley would lose six assembly seats to the hills (Table 1). Senapati district would have gained 3.52 (rounded off to four) seats as per the enumerated figures from the 2001 Census. The gain would increase to 4.07 (rounded off to four) seats if the enumerated figures for 2011 were used.

While our discussion has focused on the three sub-divisions of Senapati district that have been at the centre of the controversy, headcounts of the hill districts of Chandel and Ukhrul were also affected by over-reporting. For instance, Chakpikarong sub-division of Chandel district reported a decadal growth of more than 100 per cent during 1991–2001 (Table 2; see also DCO 2006: 23). The abnormalities explain both the increasing share of these districts in the state's population as well as the fact that their reported population growth rates increased in one of the censuses after 1991 despite growing outmigration and improvements in female literacy and other correlates of fertility. As a result, Ukhrul and Chandel stood to gain a seat each if delimitation was conducted using the 2011 Census.

Concluding remarks

Parts of the hill districts of Manipur, especially the three sub-divisions of Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul of Senapati district, reported abnormal population growth in the 2001 and 2011 censuses. Anomalies were also observed in the composition and growth of the child (0-6 years) population of these sub-divisions. Conventional demographic explanations, viz., in-migration and higher fertility rates, cannot explain the abnormal increase. We suggested that the Census estimates of the population are unreliable due to manipulation driven by economic and political considerations, as was the case in the neighbouring state of Nagaland. Further investigation is needed to establish in some detail the mechanisms of manipulation in Manipur.

Our discussion of Manipur's census woes highlights a few systemic problems. Firstly, there is a growing tendency to treat data as self-contained, requiring minimal, if any, explanation. Increasingly, both the suppliers and the users of government data seem to be content with Microsoft Excel tables. The 2011 Census is a case in point, with most data being released in the form of unannotated tables. The unavailability of adequate metadata[16] affects both inter-temporal as well as cross-sectional

comparisons, as the ORGI published a series of estimates in the case of Manipur without explaining the relationship between them, which confused government statisticians (DCO 2014: 34) and academics (Piang 2019) alike. This paper has, among other things, tried to clear this confusion.

Secondly, the ORGI has not followed a consistent methodology for reporting headcounts. In 2001, the ORGI initially released enumerated figures and then released estimated figures for the three sub-divisions as final figures. On the other hand, in 2011, the ORGI initially released estimated figures and then released the enumerated figures as final figures. In both cases, the ORGI explained neither the procedure followed to arrive at the estimated figures, nor how it chose between enumerated and estimated figures. This can be partly explained by the absence of any provision for the retrospective correction of census data in the Census Act, 1948 (amended in 1994) and the Census Rules, 1990 (amended in 1994) (Kumar 2019), because of which the ORGI adopts ad hoc solutions when faced with manipulation of data. Ad hoc solutions merely shift the problem to a later date or to some other place. After the 2001 Census, the ORGI released ad hoc estimates to ensure that the growth rates of the three sub-divisions for the period 1991–2001 were not abnormal. This merely shifted the problem to the next census and, as noted above, the population growth rate of these sub-divisions was found to be extremely high in 2011.

Thirdly, errors in fundamental statistics such as the population headcount have a cascading effect on a whole range of statistics. Per capita figures were underestimated, and the population densities were overestimated in Manipur because of the abnormal increase in population. The three sub-divisions of Senapati reported the highest population densities among the rural sub-divisions of the hill districts, except for Churachandpur sub-division that adjoins the Imphal Valley. In 2001, the densities of these sub-divisions were at least four times those of the adjoining sub-divisions of Ukhrul and Tamenglong (Table 3).

The errors in headcount also affected the sample surveys conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). Since the publication of the results of the 2001 Census, the NSSO sampling frame for Manipur has excluded the three sub-divisions of Senapati district, but this was not mentioned in the relevant NSSO reports (Agrawal and Kumar 2017b). The three sub-divisions accounted for about 44.82/59.54 per cent (5.54/9.99 per cent) of the reported population of the district (state) in 2001/2011. They also accounted for 17.15 and 24.45 per cent of Manipur's *reported* tribal population in 2001 and 2011, respectively. In other words, there was a systematic difference between the areas included in the NSSO surveys and those left out, which would have affected the findings of the surveys.

Last but not the least, Manipur was not the only state where the delimitation was deferred after the 2001 Census. The union government had to defer delimitation in four other states, that is, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, and Nagaland (and also in Jammu and Kashmir where a state law governs delimitation). Not coincidentally, all these states satisfy one or more of the following conditions: (a) sizable tribal and/or religious minority populations; (b) location along the international border; and (c) dependence on the centre for financial support qua special category states (Agrawal and Kumar 2020). Also, just as in Manipur, in Assam (GoI 2008a), Jammu and Kashmir (Guilmoto and Rajan 2013), Jharkhand (Business Standard 2016; Venkatesan 2001) and

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16 *National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy* defines metadata as the "information that describes the data source and the time, place, and *conditions* under which the data were created. Metadata informs the user of who, when, what, where, why, and how data were generated. Metadata allows the data to be traced to a known origin and [a] know[n] quality" (GoI 2012: 11, emphasis added).

Table 3: Population Density of Select Districts and Sub-divisions of Manipur, 2001

State/district/sub-division	Population Density (in persons per sq. km)	
	Enumerated figures	**Estimated figures**
Manipur Rural	82	78
Senapati Rural	116	39
Mao-Maram	116	67
Paomata	187	117
Purul	131	68
Tamenglong Rural	25	§
Tamenglong North[†]	18	§
Ukhrul Rural	31	§
Ukhrul North[‡]	25	§
Chandel Rural	31	§
Churachandpur Rural	50	§

Notes: (i) † Sub-divisions adjoining Mao-Maram. (ii) ‡ Sub-divisions adjoining Mao-Maram, Paomata and Purul. (iii) § Only one set of figures is available for these administrative units.

Sources: GoI (2005, nd4), corresponding District Census Handbooks for 2001.

Nagaland (Agrawal and Kumar 2013, 2020), manipulation of census statistics motivated by political considerations fuelled controversies in the run-up to delimitation. In all these states, protests and counter-protests and courts cases forced the indefinite deferment of delimitation to until after the first census taken after 2026.[17] The ex post deferment of census-based delimitation does not address the underlying political and economic conflicts. Rather, it postpones or deflects these conflicts to other sites. The ad hoc approach of the ORGI is perhaps explained by the absence of any provision in the Census Act, 1948 for correcting erroneous statistics. Kumar (2019) examines the Census Act, 1948 and the Census Rules, 1990 and argues that the census is structurally incapable of addressing politically motivated manipulation of data during enumeration and shows that punitive legislation cannot check politically motivated manipulation. Indeed, the neighbouring state of Nagaland too reported abnormal changes in population during 1991–2011 and witnessed litigation over the delimitation using the 2001 Census, but the state government resolved the problem through dialogue and awareness campaigns. The Nagaland government made a concerted effort to conduct a better census in 2011 by involving tribal groups, civil society organisations and the Church (GoN 2009), which resulted in a partial correction in the headcount in 2011. Unlike Nagaland, there was no public debate on the issue in Manipur, resulting in a lack of consensus over the correction of the anomalies in the headcount. As a result, the problem persisted in 2011, with the three sub-divisions of Senapati once again reporting inflated headcounts.

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17   The government has recently lifted the restriction on delimitation in Manipur (GoI 2020a: 5) and has constituted a delimitation commission (GoI 2020b).

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Azim Premji University was established in Karnataka by the Azim Premji University Act 2010 as a not-for-profit University and is recognized by The University Grants Commission (UGC) under Section 22F. The University has a clearly stated social purpose. As an institution, it exists to make significant contributions through education towards the building of a just, equitable, humane and sustainable society. This is an explicit commitment to the idea that education contributes to social change. The beginnings of the University are in the learning and experience of a decade of work in school education by the Azim Premji Foundation. The University is a part of the Foundation and integral to its vision. The University currently offers Postgraduate Programmes in Education, Development and Public Policy and Governance, Undergraduate Programmes in Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities, and a range of Continuing Education Programmes.