

Geopolitical Borders and Socio-Economic Realities: A Comparative Assessment of the Mara (MADC), Lai (LADC), and Chakma (CADC) Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram

F. Lalfakawmi¹, A. Muthulakshmi², Lalrintluanga³

¹Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Aizawl.

²Professor, Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Aizawl.

³Retired Professor, Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Aizawl.

Abstract:

The southern frontier of Mizoram houses a unique constitutional triad under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, comprising the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC), the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC). Formed through the 1972 trifurcation of the erstwhile Pawi-Lakher Regional Council, these three administrative entities manage localized tribal affairs. This study presents a comparative empirical evaluation of MADC, LADC, and CADC across multiple perspectives: geographic layout and international border configurations, demographic profiles, socio-economic index achievements, and fiscal performance capacities. The analysis highlights how variations in spatial topology, ethnic compositions, and historical trajectories influence governance outcomes and regional development across southern Mizoram.

Keywords: *Sixth Schedule, Autonomous District Councils, MADC, LADC, CADC, Comparative Regional Analysis.*

1. Introduction

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in Northeast India serve as critical laboratories for sub-national devolution, seeking to protect ethnic identities while driving localized development. In the southern expanse of Mizoram, three distinct administrative bodies—the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC), the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)—share contiguous spaces yet experience diverging socio-economic and geographical realities.

Originally functioning as a unified administrative block under the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council, the region was divided in 1972 to accommodate the distinct linguistic and cultural identities of the Mara, Lai, and Chakma communities. Evaluating MADC in direct comparison with LADC and CADC offers critical insight into how geographic isolation, demographic scale, and borderland positioning shape local governance, infrastructure distribution, and human development indicators.

Published: 30 September 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i5.301278>

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

2. Literature Review

Scholarship on autonomous governance under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution highlights a persistent tension between normative decentralization and operational constraints. Early historical analyses, such as those by Chaube (1999, pp. 112–145) in *Hill Politics in Northeast India* and Prasad (1996, pp. 78–94) in *Autonomy Movements in Mizoram*, mapped the evolution of regional administrative bodies in the Lushai Hills, emphasizing how colonial segregation policies gave way to post-independence democratic integration.

More recent evaluations by Dounghel (2010, pp. 45–68) in *Evolution of District Council Autonomy in Mizoram: A Case Study of the Lai Autonomous District Council* and Goswami (2014, pp. 531–549) in *Autonomous District Councils in Northeast India: Political Dynamics and Governance Challenges* (published in the *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 60, Issue 3) focus specifically on the institutional mechanics of Mizoram's district councils. They note that while bodies like MADC, LADC, and CADC successfully preserve customary laws and traditional dispute resolution frameworks, they remain hamstrung by structural fiscal dependency.

Furthermore, contemporary administrative studies, notably the work by Lalnundika Hnamte (2023, pp. 45–62) in *Parallel Administration of Autonomous Government and State Government: The Case of Mizoram* (Aizawl Academic Research Publications), introduce the critical concept of dual institutional friction. Hnamte empirically demonstrates that the co-existence of autonomous council departments alongside state government directorates frequently triggers administrative duplication, jurisdictional overlaps in forest and land management, and inflated overhead costs. Building upon this academic foundation, this paper expands the discourse by offering a direct comparative empirical assessment of how these structural variables manifest uniquely across the three southern autonomous councils of Mizoram.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical and comparative empirical framework, combining secondary quantitative data with qualitative institutional analysis. To ensure absolute methodological transparency, the study parameters are defined as follows:

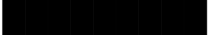
- **Study Period and Scope:** The temporal analytical window covers official financial, demographic, and administrative reports spanning from the 2011 Census benchmarks through the 2024–2026 budget and administrative cycles.
- **Selection Criteria:** Inclusion criteria required each entity to be a Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Council functioning within the southern districts (Siaha and Lawngtlai) of Mizoram, possessing independent budgetary allocations and devolved departmental structures.
- **Analytical Procedure:** The methodological design is structured around four core analytical phases: Archival data sourcing, comparative parameter matrix construction, qualitative policy triangulation, and descriptive statistical evaluation.

- **Study Limitations:** The research is constrained by reliance on secondary official administrative records, periodic lags in decentralized rural data reporting, and the exclusion of primary household survey metrics due to logistical challenges in remote border tracts.

4. Geographical Topography and Border Dynamics

The physical layout of the three southern ADCs is defined by rugged terrain, steep ridges, and vital river basins that dictate internal connectivity and cross-border interactions.

Figure 1.1: Comparative Territorial Span (Geographical Area in Sq. Km)

- **Lai ADC (LADC):**  1,870.75 Sq. Km
- **Mara ADC (MADC):**  1,445.00 Sq. Km
- **Chakma ADC (CADC):**  686.25 Sq. Km

Geographical Parameter	Mara ADC (MADC)	Lai ADC (LADC)	Chakma ADC (CADC)
Administrative Headquarters	Siaha Town	Lawngtlai Town	Kamalanagar (Chawngte)
International Frontiers	Myanmar (Eastern & Southern)	Myanmar (Southern border)	Bangladesh (West) & Myanmar (South)
Primary River Basins	Chhimptuipui (Kolodyne) system	Chhimptuipui & Mat river networks	Toijong (Tuichawng) and Thega rivers
Topographical Profile	High mountain ranges, deep gorges	Mountainous, featuring Phawngpui	Gentle river valleys, lower hill foothills

A granular examination of physical topography reveals distinct spatial configurations that directly influence regional administration across southern Mizoram. The Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) encompasses the largest territorial span at over 1,870.75 square kilometers, followed closely by the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) at 1,445.00 square kilometers. In stark contrast, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) is geographically compressed into a much smaller area of approximately 686.25 square kilometers, squeezed tightly along vulnerable river valleys.

Both MADC and LADC are defined by high-altitude, rugged mountain ranges and deep gorges that severely fragment internal connectivity, isolating remote rural habitations and driving up the cost of public service delivery. Conversely, CADC features a lower-elevation, riverine layout anchored by the Toijong and Thega river basins. While this avoids extreme vertical

climbing, it exposes local settlements to recurring monsoon flooding and riverbank erosion, creating unique environmental hurdles for rural infrastructure development.

5. Demographic Composition and Settlement Patterns

The assessment of demographic variables across the three southern autonomous councils reveals sharp divergences in ethnic composition, population concentration, linguistic affiliation, and religious adherence.

Figure 2.1: Comparative Recorded Population Scale (Inhabitants)

- **Lai ADC (LADC):**  111,277 inhabitants
- **Chakma ADC (CADC):**  62,094 inhabitants
- **Mara ADC (MADC):**  56,505 inhabitants

Demographic Indicator	Mara ADC (MADC)	Lai ADC (LADC)	Chakma ADC (CADC)
Primary Ethnic Group	Mara (Scheduled Tribe)	Lai / Pawi (Scheduled Tribe)	Chakma (Scheduled Tribe)
Recognized Village Units	105 rural habitations	74 main villages / 7 sub-villages	52 localized habitations
Dominant Religion	Protestant Christian	Christian Majority	Theravada Buddhist
Linguistic Profile	Mara (Tibeto-Burman)	Lai (Tibeto-Burman)	Chakma (Indo-Aryan branch)

A comprehensive assessment of demographic variables across the three southern autonomous councils reveals sharp divergences in ethnic composition, population concentration, linguistic affiliation, and religious adherence. The Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) sustains the largest demographic footprint with a recorded population of 111,277 inhabitants distributed across 74 main villages and 7 sub-villages, backed by its expansive territorial jurisdiction. In comparison, the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) houses an estimated 56,505 inhabitants dispersed across 105 recognized rural habitations, maintaining a culturally and linguistically cohesive demographic fabric uniformly anchored by the Mara Scheduled Tribe, who predominantly adhere to Protestant Christianity and communicate via the Tibeto-Burman Mara language. Conversely, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), with a recorded population of 62,094 residents spread across 52 localized habitations, presents a fundamentally distinct socio-cultural identity.

LADC maintains the highest population concentration among the three councils, supported by a broader territorial base. MADC presents a cohesive linguistic and cultural demographic

dominated uniformly by the Mara community. CADC stands apart culturally and linguistically: unlike the Tibeto-Burman, Christian-majority populations of MADC and LADC, CADC is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Chakmas who speak an Indo-Aryan language and practice Theravada Buddhism, creating a distinct socio-cultural dynamic within Christian-majority Mizoram.

6. Institutional Capacity and Representative Governance

Each council operates as a micro-legislature under the Sixth Schedule, but structural seat distribution and administrative departments vary according to population size and statutory evolution.

Governance Metric	Mara ADC (MADC)	Lai ADC (LADC)	Chakma ADC (CADC)
Total Council Seats	28 Seats (25 Elect + 3 Nom)	29 Seats (25 Elect + 4 Nom)	24 Seats (20 Elect + 4 Nom)
Executive Leadership	CEM & Executive Committee	CEM & Executive Committee	CEM & Executive Committee
Managed Departments	24 Devolved Departments	32 Devolved Departments	20 Devolved Departments
Customary Court Efficacy	High disposal rates in civil/domestic	Active tribal customary law benches	Traditional headman/village courts

LADC manages the largest departmental apparatus (32 departments), reflecting a broader devolution of administrative responsibilities. MADC and CADC operate on slightly smaller legislative scales (28 and 24 seats respectively). All three councils face similar institutional challenges, including heavy reliance on state-level bureaucratic clearances, limited technical manpower, and frequent political realignments that affect executive stability.

7. Fiscal Independence and Resource Allocation

Financial sustainability remains a severe structural bottleneck for all sub-national autonomous councils in southern Mizoram, as internal revenue generation is overwhelmingly overshadowed by external central grants and state fiscal transfers.

Figure 3.1: Approved Annual Budget Scale (INR Crores)

- **Lai ADC (LADC):** INR 84.20 Crores
- **Mara ADC (MADC):** INR 71.40 Crores
- **Chakma ADC (CADC):** INR 49.50 Crores

Figure 3.2: Fiscal Autonomy Index (Internal Revenue Contribution %)

- **Lai ADC (LADC):**  3.1% Internal Contribution
- **Mara ADC (MADC):**  2.8% Internal Contribution
- **Chakma ADC (CADC):**  1.9% Internal Contribution

Fiscal Parameter	Mara ADC (MADC)	Lai ADC (LADC)	Chakma ADC (CADC)
Primary Revenue Source	Central Grants (Art. 275(1)) & State	Central Assistance & State Plans	Central Special Allocations & Aid
Internal Tax Base	Forest royalties, property fees, tolls	Land revenue, professional taxes	Minor forest produce, local tolls
Approved Budget Scale	INR 71.40 Crores	INR 84.20 Crores	INR 49.50 Crores
Fiscal Autonomy Index	2.8% Internal Contribution	3.1% Internal Contribution	1.9% Internal Contribution

A comparative evaluation of fiscal parameters reveals that the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) commands the largest approved annual budget envelope at INR 84.20 Crores, driven by its expansive territorial span and higher population footprint. Meanwhile, the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) occupies an intermediate tier with an approved annual budget of INR 71.40 Crores, relying on forest royalties, property fees, and market tolls. In sharp contrast, the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) faces acute fiscal starvation, operating on a constrained budget scale of just INR 49.50 Crores due to its restricted geographical tax base. Across all three entities, the Fiscal Autonomy Index remains critically low—ranging from a meager 1.9% internal contribution in CADC and 2.8% in MADC to 3.1% in LADC. This extreme reliance on higher-tier government disbursements renders their administrative functions and developmental projects acutely vulnerable to bureaucratic delays.

8. Socio-Economic Development and Infrastructure Indices

Access to basic amenities, educational facilities, and healthcare networks varies considerably across the three southern autonomous councils.

Development Indicator	Mara ADC (MADC)	Lai ADC (LADC)	Chakma ADC (CADC)
-----------------------	-----------------	----------------	-------------------

Primary Educational Reach	137 council-managed schools	174 primary / 106 middle schools	94 localized primary institutions
Road Connectivity Status	312 km rural link roads maintained	420 km district road network	210 km rural connectivity tracks
Healthcare Infrastructure	14 primary health outposts	22 community health centers	9 primary medical outposts
Key Human Development Hurdle	High transport costs, Jhum dependency	Distance from capital, high poverty	Border isolation, educational lag

While LADC has achieved a broader spread of primary and middle educational institutions, mountainous isolation impacts all three councils equally. MADC and LADC struggle with rugged, landslide-prone mountain roads that drive up transport and logistics costs. CADC faces a distinct isolation challenge stemming from its international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar, compounded by difficult river crossings and historical socio-economic marginalization.

9. Implications and Policy Recommendations

The empirical findings of this comparative assessment carry profound administrative and structural implications for sub-national governance across the southern borderlands of Mizoram. The persistent reality of low Fiscal Autonomy Indices—ranging from 1.9% to 3.1%—proves that district councils cannot sustain independent grassroots development without a major overhaul of revenue mechanisms. Furthermore, the administrative friction generated by overlapping jurisdictions between state government departments and council secretariats leads to institutional inefficiencies, delayed project execution, and fragmented public service delivery.

To resolve these structural bottlenecks and optimize grassroots self-governance, the following policy interventions are recommended:

- **Broadening the Internal Revenue Baseline:** Legislative frameworks must be amended to empower MADC, LADC, and CADC to levy modernized taxes on local commercial enterprises, commercial land usage, and mineral extraction. Expanding the internal tax net will reduce absolute dependency on external treasury allocations.
- **Institutionalizing Inter-Governmental Coordination Committees:** A statutory coordination mechanism should be established between the Government of Mizoram and the respective Autonomous District Councils. This platform will eliminate jurisdictional disputes regarding forest management, primary education administration, and rural development fund disbursement.

- **Mitigating Parallel Administration Overhead:** State and council departments must execute functional unbundling to prevent administrative duplication. Clear boundaries should separate state-level macro infrastructure planning from micro-level council execution in health, education, and public works.
- **Targeted Infrastructure Financing for Border and Riverine Pockets:** Special capital outlays should be channeled toward bridging connectivity deficits. For MADC and LADC, this requires all-weather landslide-resistant road engineering, while CADC requires prioritized investment in flood-resilient river crossings and boat-transit infrastructures along the Tuichawng and Thega river channels.
- **Administrative Capacity-Building Programs:** Regular technical and financial management training should be mandated for council bureaucrats and secretariat employees to enhance e-governance adoption, transparent public procurement, and efficient fund utilization tracking.

10. Conclusion

A comparative examination of the Mara, Lai, and Chakma Autonomous District Councils reveals shared structural roots under the Sixth Schedule alongside divergent developmental paths. While LADC benefits from a larger population base and wider departmental devolution, and MADC maintains stable customary administration across the Siaha highlands, CADC navigates unique linguistic, religious, and geographic barriers along its international boundaries. Addressing structural fiscal dependency, improving inter-governmental coordination, and upgrading physical infrastructure remain common imperatives for all three councils to fulfill their constitutional mandate of grassroots empowerment in southern Mizoram.

References

- Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of northeast India*. Oxford University Press.
- Chaube, S. K. (1999). *Hill politics in northeast India* (2nd ed.). Orient Longman.
- Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC). (2026). *About CADC: History, geography, and profile*. Government of Mizoram. <https://www.cadc.gov.in>
- Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG). (2025). *Report on Local Bodies and Autonomous District Councils*. Government of Mizoram.
- Constitution of India. (1950). *The Constitution of India: Sixth Schedule (Articles 244(2) and 275(1))*. Government of India.
- Directorate of Census Operations. (2011–2024). *District Census Handbooks: Siaha, Lawngtlai, and Lunglei Districts*. Government of Mizoram.
- Doungel, J. (2010). *Evolution of district council autonomy in Mizoram: A case study of the Lai Autonomous District Council*. Spectrum Publications.

- Goswami, A. (2014). Autonomous district councils in Northeast India: Political dynamics and governance challenges. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 60(3), 531–549.
- Hnamte, Lalnundika. (2023). *Parallel Administration of Autonomous Government and State Government: The Case of Mizoram*. Aizawl Academic Research Publications.
- Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). (2024). LADC at a glance and historical background. Government of Mizoram. <https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in>
- Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC). (2026). Administrative directory and departmental profiles. Government of Mizoram. <https://madc.mizoram.gov.in>
- Prasad, R. N. (1996). *Autonomy movements in Mizoram*. Vikas Publishing House.