

PART I

FRAMEWORK

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Excerpt
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I

Introduction

I.1 SNAPSHOTS FROM A HARD WINTER

On December 11, 2019, the Modi government in India promulgated the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which allowed non-Muslims from surrounding countries to become Indian citizens. Many saw this legislation as a fundamental challenge to principles of secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. As a result, citizens staged mass protests throughout India throughout the winter. A group of Muslim women established an activist encampment in Shaheen Bagh, gathering together thousands in the cold, smoggy Delhi winter for four months between mid-December and mid-March. Many similar protests took place throughout the country, from Assam to Punjab and from Kerala to Bihar.¹ Student protests against the actions of the government met with violence from right-wing activists and from the police, including at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Milla Islamia in New Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh. Violent altercations between protestors and the police on December 20 led to several deaths in the northern cities of Meerut and Kanpur.

In the context of both these protests and then-President Donald Trump's visit to India in February, Hindu nationalist activists conducted a pogrom among lower middle-class neighborhoods in northeastern Delhi, in which fifty-three people were killed over the course of four days. Most of the fatalities were Muslim, and the police kept hundreds of the wounded from receiving medical attention while subjecting them to physical abuse. The riots began when a local leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) called for the removal of a sit-in against the CAA. But the ensuing social violence fanned out through neighborhoods and targeted Muslim communities and businesses, following well-established patterns of Hindu-Muslim riots implicated in organized crime,

¹ Ahuja and Singh 2020.

police complicity, electoral politics, and the absence of social integration across religious communities.

Yet other forms of political violence continued at far remove from the CAA agitations and the Delhi pogrom. In the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, whose constitutional provisions for autonomy were abrogated by the central government in November, incidents of insurgent violence continued despite the presence of a million Army and paramilitary personnel; security forces and militants engaged in armed clashes in the districts of Rajouri, Poonch, Pulwama, Jammu, Srinagar, and Shopian. And elsewhere, Maoist cadres engaged in battles with government forces and violence against civilians in Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and even eastern Maharashtra.

More widespread, though less noticed, lethal political violence also occurred, taking the form of riot-based conflict between activists of political parties, such as in Telangana and West Bengal, and clashes among caste and communal militias and vigilante groups, such as in Punjab and Gujarat. One of the deadliest attacks on civilians occurred in a village in West Singhbhum district in the Maoist-impacted state of Jharkhand, where members of the Pathalgarhi movement for tribal autonomy kidnapped and killed seven villagers opposed to the movement. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) reported 857 violent incidents, including 516 riots, during December 2019, and January and February 2020 – an average of just under ten incidents of political violence a day.

Insurgent violence is more salient in Pakistan, India's neighbor to the west, particularly since Pakistan's ambiguous involvement in the civil war in Afghanistan and the ensuing terrorism and territorial insurgency. During the winter of 2019–2020, several battles between government forces and militants represented the continuing fallout from the decade-long Taliban insurgency in the northwest of the country. However, separatists in the western province of Balochistan perpetrated even more significant and deadly attacks, including a Baloch Liberation Tigers assault on army personnel in Dera Bugti that left sixteen fatalities. Terrorist attacks associated with both conflicts have continued to occur in Pakistani cities.

For all this emphasis on insurgency, social conflict was also prevalent; riots accounted for more than a quarter of violent incidents between December 2019 and February 2020. These included clashes among rival factions in a tribal jirga in Balochistan, rival party workers in Peshawar, rival student groups in Sindh, and groups representing different Muslim sects in southern Punjab. All told, ACLED reported 121 incidents of conflict in Pakistan over that winter. It also recorded 1,314 mass-organized protests in Pakistan, with civil society organizations, business groups, and unions speaking out against price hikes, the unavailability of electricity and gas, and the murder of journalists, parties staging rallies to protest government policies, and ethnic and religious groups demanding greater recognition.

In Bangladesh, multiple forms of political violence during the winter included acts of terrorism, with unidentified assailants planting improvised explosive devices at police stations in Khulna and Chittagong. But by far the most prevalent among the 171 violent incidents recorded by ACLED during this period was a wide array of riots and armed clashes within Bangladeshi society: among sectarian factions, rival parties, factions within one party, between the police and student groups, party workers or civil society activists. Property and political control, as well as social grievances, were often at the heart of political violence, with many protests turning into riots and armed clashes.

This brief survey of just three months in the political life of three countries in the Indian subcontinent suggests that Naipaul's characterization of the Indian polity in 1990 – as consisting of “a million mutinies” – is just as relevant today and applies equally to India's neighbors as to India itself.² In other words, countries in South Asia face multidimensional challenges to civic peace and stability from politically motivated actors. The sheer diversity of different forms of conflict and competition across these South Asian countries suggests that an enduring question of the politics of developing countries – what explains organized political violence? – is very much alive in the Indian subcontinent and important for understanding the politics of countries in the region.

Characterizing the array of South Asia's multiple, complex instances of political violence, in order to uncover their causes, is a difficult task, however. Like many countries in the developing world, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh lie in the middle of a spectrum between the stable political order enjoyed by prosperous and peaceful countries like Canada and Denmark and the systemic civil conflict associated with the collapse of the state in war-torn countries like South Sudan and Syria. Much of the scholarship on civil conflict has sought systemic explanations for the incidence, duration and intensity of civil wars at the cross-national level, but have little to say about serious, multidimensional – but not regime-threatening – violent conflict within countries. On the other end of the scale, sophisticated studies of the micro-dynamics of violence are conducted within sites of systemic conflict, contexts which are usually seen as exceptional and thus beyond the remit of quotidian politics. Scholars of the contentious and violent politics of South Asia, meanwhile, have investigated the causes of specific conflicts, such as the Taliban insurgency or terrorist violence in Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim riots, the insurgency in Kashmir, or Maoist rebellion in India, but rarely from a systematic comparative perspective either across or within national boundaries.³

The variegated nature of political violence in South Asian countries has two specific features that defy extant approaches. First, different species of political violence are present in different areas of the same country. For instance, some

² Naipaul 1990.

³ For notable exceptions, see Staniland 2012, 2014, 2021. In other national contexts, see Varshney 2008.

parts of India experience insurgencies, others ethnic riots, even though they are ruled under the same government and policed by the same official organizations tasked with upholding the coercive monopoly of the state. This varying national geography of violence has not been well-accounted for in the literature on political conflict. Second, there are common geographical patterns of violence in South Asian countries – especially India and Pakistan, but even in Bangladesh – despite significant differences in social structure and regime type. These parallels stand awkwardly in relation to scholarship in South Asian politics, which emphasizes national differences rather than similarities.

These geographically diverse threats to political order invite us to investigate their causes within and across India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, an investigation which can integrate forms of violence like riots, terrorist attacks, and rebellions into a single explanatory framework. Why do different forms of violence occur, in different places, within the same national boundaries? What characteristics of politics and relationships between state and society at the local level might lead to these different patterns of conflict? How might we characterize the linkages among the state's political authority, citizens' engagement with that authority, and different species of conflict? How might these interact with less violent forms of political competition, and over what? To begin such an investigation, I suggest that patterns of political violence in South Asia might be usefully characterized as the concrete consequences of a longstanding geographic unevenness in the authority of the state within and across national territories.

1.2 THE PATCHWORK STATE

This book argues that these varieties of violence are embedded within a more expansive spatial politics of conflict and competition within and across South Asian countries. This spatial politics is the concrete consequence of how the state was built, which was without national coherence at all in mind. The fragmented and diverse character of public institutions at the local level – what I call the patchwork state – shapes the deep and long-lasting character of state capacity and relationships between state and society, prefiguring how citizens and social groups, including violent actors, engage the state's authority and resources. Patchwork governance institutions can thus configure the relative incidence and patterns of political violence in different places within India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.⁴ They can also inform other expressions of conflict and competition, such as local electoral contests and trajectories of

⁴ This notion of patchwork governance has some family resemblances to the variations in bureaucratic concentration and effectiveness in African countries reflected in McDonnell's (2020) *Patchwork Leviathans*. This book adds to the ongoing conversation on the uneven nature of the state in developing countries by focusing on *spatial* variation and seeking to explain other outcomes, like patterns of political violence.

development, which are similarly embedded in the same variations in state capacity and state–society relations.

It further argues that territorially distinct governance institutions that constitute the modern South Asian state have concrete roots in the process of state-building under colonial rule. In contrast to much of the research on political order in South Asia, which focused on political institutions after independence, and analyses of colonial legacies that identify the long-run effects of specific institutions, I examine the construction and persistence of a *diverse set* of governance arrangements before independence. Over most of the subcontinent for nearly two centuries, British colonial authorities quite deliberately formulated and maintained differentiated forms of rule over subject peoples and suzerain polities. They did so to pursue specific objectives associated with imperial conquest and domination. This had the effect of prefiguring differences in the local capacities of the state and the relationship between state and society in different places, which have had long-lasting influences.

Postcolonial governments certainly attempted to revise and homogenize this diversity of governance through projects of state-building after independence. These efforts were only partially successful, however, due to the constrained capacities of the state for conducting administrative reform and the political divisions that foreclosed the wholesale transformation of the state. The patchwork nature of the postcolonial state and its consequences for geographical patterns of political violence thus have concrete, complex – but explicable – historical roots.

As a result, the state in contemporary India and Pakistan encompasses significant differences in its capacity, authority and relationships with social actors across its territories. The state is powerful and autonomous in some places, weak and captured in others. In some places, state and society penetrate one another, but in others, society and the state are distant from one another, and at the extreme, the latter violently occupies the former.⁵ In what follows, I will introduce the ways in which British colonizers shaped variations in governance for their own purposes, and how postcolonial state-builders sought to revise these arrangements. I will then explore how patchwork governance shapes contemporary outcomes in patterns of political violence, as well as electoral competition and development trajectories, through mechanisms of state capacity and state–society relations.

1.3 GREED, FEAR, AND FRUGALITY IN COLONIAL STATE-BUILDING

An investigation into the provenance and explanatory power of the patchwork state concept in South Asia must begin with the motivations and impulses behind state-building efforts during the colonial period, which ultimately led

⁵ Bangladesh is a more territorially homogenous state that represents an exception to this characterization, but one that is explicable through the same historically informed analytic framework.

to deliberate differentiation in colonial governance. This exercise involves examining the concrete ends and the means of British rule in India. I argue that organizational motivations of *greed*, *fear*, and *frugality* drove the politics of colonial conquest and consolidation.⁶

Scholars and commentators have contended that British rule in India, and colonialism more generally, had a singular purpose, in the extraction of valuable resources, and that the institutions of colonial rule existed to solely enable this purpose.⁷ This assumption is not without solid foundations. Yet a framing of colonialism as a straightforwardly extractive enterprise elides some of the complexities of exactly how it extracted, and with what consequences, in different locations.

Colonizers' extractive impulses generally stand in for a broader notion of naked material greed at the very core of the colonial project, but this was expressed in two very different ways: taxation and trade. These accord to extraction and protection, two forms of resource mobilization in Charles Tilly's famous comparison between European state formation and organized crime.⁸ Extraction represents the straightforward expropriation of resources by authorities who wield coercive monopolies, just as (nominally less legitimate) gangsters might rob banks. State-building projects, in order to accomplish such extraction, require the building up of significant bureaucratic capacity to calculate and administer taxation, with record-keepers, tax-collectors, and bailiffs. Tilly referred to "protection," by contrast, as the efforts by state-builders to simultaneously encourage and support commercial activity and to threaten its operation unless protection rents are paid, following the logic of racketeers rather than larcenists. Olson located the logic of protection in the successes of capitalist development; "stationary bandits" have incentives to invest in production in the areas of their jurisdiction, and the certainties required for private investment then necessitated investment in state institutions.⁹

British colonial rule in India enabled raw acquisitiveness both through protection and extraction because its activities in the subcontinent constituted at once a mercantile empire and a territorial one. Yet unlike Tilly's framework, either set of activities yielded a strong, coherent state. This was primarily because colonizers also intended their proceeds to flow back to the metropole, while maintaining a weak polity under colonial subjugation; as I will argue later in the text, colonial state-building was governed by objectives of frugality rather than effectiveness. Nevertheless, these two forms of acquisitiveness had quite

⁶ Here and throughout this book, I use greed, fear, and frugality as shorthand idioms for the organizational goals of and risks to the imperial project writ large, manifested in different places and different times, rather than the emotive responses of individuals. I thank Taylor Sherman for pushing me to clarify this point.

⁷ See Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson 2001 for an influential theoretical treatment. See Tharoor 2018; Dalrymple 2019 for recent popular applications to India.

⁸ Tilly 1985. ⁹ Olson 1993.

concrete but differentiated consequences for the establishment of different governance arrangements across the subcontinent.

1.3.1 Greed through Trade

At the turn of the seventeenth century, the material wealth of Mughal India – from silk and cotton garments to spices, opium, and indigo – drew the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and French into competition over control of overseas markets for these goods. Early empire-building efforts were purely maritime in nature, concerned with the control of seaborne trade and the domination over commercial relationships at entrepôts – treaty ports or “factories” – rather than affairs further inland. Trade was the primary means by which the English (from 1707, British) state could benefit from colonial enterprises, through collecting duties on imported goods. The East India Company (EIC) was singularly focused on securing and maintaining the wealth associated with unfettered access to overseas markets until the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁰

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the ways that Britain benefited from trade inverted. Despite continuing demand for Indian products, the British came to see India primarily as a market that could be kept open for their industrial goods following domestic market saturation, while allowing Britain to run trade surpluses that could finance growing deficits with Germany and the United States. The emphasis of the commercial foundations of colonial rule had thus shifted; structurally uneven terms of trade destroyed indigenous industries, while transferring the incomes of Indians to the imperial metropole.¹¹

For trade and commerce, certain sites – particularly centers of banking and trade that had long been integrated with overseas markets – were more valuable than others. Ports like Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta and wealthy inland cities like Hyderabad and Bangalore represented capitalist loci in which the authority of the state was relatively extensive and there was an active, though racialized, civil society. This greater administrative capacity and intertwining of state and commercial society enabled the enforcement of contracts and the protection of property rights necessary for complex transactions of debt and finance, which in turn integrated India into global and imperial markets.

Beyond these metropolitan nodes, however, colonial institutions devoted to commerce were less interventionist. Colonial authorities used a variety of formal and informal measures – from plantation agriculture to debt bondage – to maintain the production of key tradable commodities.¹² They

¹⁰ For an overview of the activities of the EIC, see Kohli 2020, 21–68.

¹¹ Digby 1901; Naoroji 1901; Dutt 1902. On how the imperial drain thesis informed Indian nationalism, see Goswami 2004.

¹² Richards 1981.

also made geographically specific investments in communications and transportation, creating webs of infrastructure that linked sites of commodity production and markets for manufactured goods to those of overseas commerce. For much of the agrarian hinterland and far peripheries, however, the powerful institutions of the British mercantile imperial project were simply not evident.

1.3.2 Greed through Taxation

The colonial extraction of agricultural surplus was established through a distinctly different set of historical processes. From the 1760s to the 1840s, the EIC consolidated its territorial dominance, through the conquest of Bengal and subsequent annexations, over most of the territory in the Indian subcontinent. They initially did so to protect their commercial monopolies against indigenous threats to commercial privileges. Yet in so doing, the Company became a continental empire as well as a maritime one. Entrepreneurial colonizers like Robert Clive argued to their superiors that sovereign control of territory could yield significant resources in the extraction of land revenue. As a result, colonial officials conducted surveys over conquered territories and levied revenues regardless of local conditions, periodically causing immense hardship for the peasantry, including several deadly famines.

Over time, however, this form of extraction excited feelings of ambivalence among colonial administrators; revenue administration was costly and the revenues collected were both underwhelming and uncertain. Colonial governments used land revenue and other taxes to defray the costs of empire, including its protection by maintaining the army. Yet the salaries of colonial officials, establishments and supplies, and local expenditures regularly exceeded revenue generation throughout the period of colonial rule, leading to significant, if normatively dubious, structural debts of the Indian government to Britain.

Further, colonial authorities never actually intended the *maximization* of extraction. Evidence for this forbearance can be found in the preservation of India's princely states, together covering a third of the Indian subcontinent, including prosperous states such as Hyderabad, Mysore, and Baroda. These were formally beyond the tax base of the colonial government, even though many yielded much more significant revenue to their rulers than many of the areas under direct colonial administration. While some "native" states engaged in conflict or conspiracy against the EIC had much of their territory annexed, this practice had largely ended by the middle of the nineteenth century. After 1858, the government formally protected princely states from accession and they were key allies of the project of colonial governance.

More significantly for understanding governance variation, colonial revenue authorities, as well as those of princely states, extracted revenues in different