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# **State Building and Good Governance as an Antidote to Violent Extremism**

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## Abstract

Pakistan has been in the grip of violent extremism since 1979 in general and 9/11 in particular. Not only is the nature of violence in Pakistan multifaceted, but it is multi-causal as well. This study aims to explore the links between state building, good governance, and violent extremism in Pakistan. It also discusses how factors such as the continuation of colonial political order, exclusionary state building, the lack of good governance, the utilisation of religion as a tool of legitimacy, and the effort to homogenise ethnically and sectionally diverse Pakistan through religion, have paved the way for violent extremism. The study argues that building the capacity of the state (so as to make it capable of providing public good and services to the common people), recognising and cherishing diversity, and building a consensus on the role of religion in politics can help Pakistan get rid of the scourge of violent extremism. Moreover, the provision of public services along with public accountability provides a more robust mechanism for legitimacy. Stressing the need for inclusive state building, the study calls for considering everyone as equal citizen of the state.

**Keywords:** Governance, ethnicity, state-building, nation-building, state failure, violent extremism

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## Introduction

The links between the state, governance, legitimacy and terrorism and violent extremism became a focus of scholarly discussions after 9/11. The state is a “power container,” but the capacity of each container is not the same, as there are weak and strong states in the world. Strong states are those where legitimacy is not contested, and where political and economic systems function freely and effectively (Jackson & Sorensen, 1999). On the contrary, weak states are those states which fail to provide public goods and services to their citizens and are beset by internal violence (Rothberg 2004). They also lack legitimacy that makes them prone to terrorism and violent extremism (Masters & Hoen 2012). This shows that there is a link between state weakness, contested legitimacy, and violent extremism.

The 9/11 attacks, which were reportedly planned in the war-torn Afghanistan, made the international community realise that state weakness was no more the states’ internal issue, as such states become havens for terrorists. Building the capacity of weak states, so that they can deliver public goods and services, was proposed as a remedy for violent extremism.

As terrorism and violent extremism affected the whole world shaking the global security setup after 9/11, so Pakistan was no exception. It suffered both in terms of human lives and properties. Unfortunately, terrorism has yet to subside and as late as March this year, there were almost 200 terror-related incidents causing at least 340 fatalities (Gul 2023). All this is happening even after over a dozen military operations were carried out against militants in Pakistan (Ahmad 2023). Violent extremism and terrorism, therefore, pose a serious threat to Pakistan. The issue, therefore, warrants a theoretically sound and methodological rigorous academic scrutiny.

This study aims to discuss why Pakistan is so vulnerable to violent extremism and what steps are needed to counter it. This study also explores the links between state weakness and violent extremism. In addition, it examines the discrepancy between “official nationalism” (an identity imposed from above) and the ethnically diverse population, and how this leads to relative deprivation, which in turn leads to violence against the state. It demystifies the role of religion in statecraft and its utilisation as a tool of legitimacy instead of public accountability through elections and the provision of public goods and services. Finally, it evaluates how recognising diversity and building the capacity of the state at all levels will ensure a society free of violent extremism in Pakistan.

## Methodology

The study based on both primary and secondary data sources is mainly qualitative. For primary sources, interviews were conducted in Peshawar and Islamabad (Appendix-1). Prior to interviews, a questionnaire was shared with the interviewees and notes were taken with their consent during the interviews. Furthermore, secondary literature (books, journal, newspapers) was also consulted.

This policy brief addresses the following questions:

1. What are the links between state weakness and violent extremism, and how will augmenting the state capacity provide the pathway to containing and ultimately defeating violent extremism?
2. How did the top-down nation-building efforts lead to the militarisation of the state and society in Pakistan?
3. How does the use of religion as a tool of legitimacy and a homogenising force affect the state and the society?

## Literature Review

Pakistan's birth was attended by a displacement of 13 million people (Talbot 2007) and the death of over a million people (Brocklehurst 2017). This death and misery had left an indelible mark on the psyche of the state managers. Furthermore, Pakistan was economically and militarily weaker than India and this power asymmetry played a key role in determining the nature and direction of the state from 1947 onwards (Talbot 2004). The sense of weakness and insecurity provided a chance to the military-establishment to rise to the top of the pecking order in the state (Waseem 2004). However, it was not only the massacre around partition that affected the nature of the state, but it was the colonial political order that impinged upon the state of Pakistan as well.

During colonial period, Pakistani areas — especially the Punjab and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) — were part of the non-regulation provinces, where Deputy Commissioners had enormous discretionary powers, the subjects had a little sense of rights and duties, and the development of representative institutions was sacrificed on the altar of security (Sayeed 1968). In other words, the areas inherited by Pakistan were “part of the British security state [...] [where] the requirements of maintaining political order were privileged over those of encouraging representative institutions to flourish” (Talbot 2012). So, the massacre during partition and the colonial political order had set the scene for Pakistan to become a security state.

Furthermore, the focus on nation-building (imposing national identity from above) instead of state-building, exacerbated the situation. The imposition of national identity from above rather than an identity that organically develops from below is referred to as “official nationalism” (Anderson 1983). More importantly, the Pakistani nationalism is perceived to be appropriated by one dominant ethnic group that is overwhelmingly present in the power structure of Pakistan (Alavi 1989). The perception that Pakistan and Punjab are one has led to alienation among other ethnic groups.

Pakistan is a multilingual, and multicultural state where ethnic groups have unique characteristics and want to preserve their separate identity within the overarching identity of the state. This diversity, Pakistan's biggest strength, was converted into its weakness by the architects of nation-building. In short, homogenising Pakistan in the name of nation-building has failed to foster the

sense of state nationalism. It is now time to focus on state building instead of nation-building.

The capacity of the state institutions needs to be enhanced so that they might deliver. Pakistan's juridical statehood — an internationally recognised juridico-political order — is not contested. Nevertheless, it lacks empirical statehood. Jackson and Sorensen (1999) argue that there is an empirical statehood when a state is effectively politically administered, where there is a strong economic base, and there exists a sense of unity among its citizens. So, there is a governance problem in Pakistan, as it lacks empirical statehood.

Before discussing governance issues in Pakistan, it would be good to have a theoretical understanding of it. Every state sets some goals, and these goals are achieved through governance—that is “a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services” (Fukuyama 2013). The ultimate concern of governance, therefore, is to create “the conditions for ordered rule and collective action” (Stoker 1998). Governance is thus about the state's ability to formulate and enforce rule, deliver services, and ensure ordered rule for an ordered national life.

Those states, which are incapable of providing services ultimately lose legitimacy as well as monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, are then challenged by non-state actors (Bates 2006). Pakistan has been characterised as a weak state since 2005, as extremist forces have been trying to dislodge the state and deprive it of its monopoly over legitimate use of violence (Fragile State Index 2023). There are numerous reasons for violent extremism in Pakistan. This study focuses on the following reasons: Exclusionary state building, state weakness, and governance issues, the imposition of “official nationalism,” and the instrumentalisation of religion for political ends (legitimacy).

## Discussion and Analysis

Weak state, terrorism and violent extremism drew an international attention in the 1990s in general and post-9/11 in particular. In the 1990s, Tony Blair stated: “If you allow a series of failed states to rise, then sooner or later you end up having to deal with them” (qtd in Holm, 2002). Failed or weak state exhibit weak law enforcement and are incapable of maintaining law and order especially in peripheral areas, which then become a haven for violent extremists, said Muhammad Fahim Jan (personal communication, 20 June 2023). The solution to the problem was, therefore, inclusive, not exclusionary, state building.

Evidence suggests that exclusionary state building resulted in radicalisation in Turkey, Spain, and China. In this kind of state building projects, some areas get developed while some lag behind, which ultimately leads to an us-versus-them situation that results in violent extremism (Knoope & Knoope 2017). The case of violent extremism in ex-FATA and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa can be explained through this framework.

The Frontier Crimes Regulation was a “black law” (Shah 2014), which remained enforced until



2018. It is also a fact that ex-FATA lagged behind the rest of the country on almost all accounts from poverty and per capita income to development (Shinwari 2012). There is a link between poverty and terrorism (Khwaja 2016). This shows that exclusionary state building leads to uneven development paving the way for violent extremism.

Furthermore, the role of “official nationalism”— an imposition of national identity from above — in violent extremism cannot be discounted. As noted above, Pakistani nationalism is equated with a dominant group, and the Punjab is commonly known as “the power base of Pakistan” (Waseem 2021). The concentration of power in one ethnicity has alienated the rest of the ethnic groups (Alavi 1989). The examples of East Pakistan and Balochistan are cases in point.

Ethno-nationalism is a perennial problem in Pakistan. Afrasiab Khattak (Personal communication, 11 July 2023) was of the view that the state managers needed to recognise the fact that Pakistan was a state, not a nation. This recognition, he added, coupled with increased horizontal connectivity, could lead to less friction between ethnic groups. Roshaan Mahsud (Personal communication 21 June 2023) highlighted that Pakistan needed to start social and political reconciliation, as it could ill-afford further polarisation and radicalisation. Despite the analytically distinct character of ethnic and religious conflicts, a more serious question arises here: Can faith and ethnicity join hands?

The case of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) joining hands with Pashtun nationalists is too far-fetched an idea, and any evidence that tries to establish a link between the two distinct variables needs to be taken with a large shaker of salt. For some analysts, however, the two cannot be de-linked, as the TTP “portrays itself as an outfit working for the liberation of Pashtuns in Pakistan” (Khan 2023). The TTP demands do include keeping the Pashtun belt away from Islamabad’s influence (Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2023), which is evidenced by their anti-merger stance (Gul 2022). The TTP is “ideologically fuelled by both Pashtun nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism,” (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada 2023). This is not satisfactory evidence to conclude that TTP is driven by fundamentalism and Pashtun nationalism, yet people joining hands with the TTP for achieving that goals might not be an untenable position. Religion and politics have had a complex interface in Pakistan since 1947.

As there were disparate ethnic groups in Pakistan, so Islam was turned into an ideology to homogenise Pakistanis. Additionally, “the acute insecurity syndrome”— that there were threats from within — tension between the centre and the provinces — and from without (India), so Islam became “an all-pervasive ideology and as the leitmotif of an otherwise variegated culture” (Jalal 1999). The use of Islam as a homogenising force and a legitimating tool started from the very beginning.

This emphasis on Islam as a homogenising and legitimating factor has some positive results but it has a flipside as well. It emboldened the clergy to be the ultimate arbiter of power, as they had monopoly over religious knowledge (Jalal 1999), and that Shariah, as interpreted by the ulama, was

to be the only basis for the Constitution of Pakistan (Ahmed 1985). There was also a convergence of interests between the ruling oligarchy (civil and military bureaucrats, politicians, feudal lords, industrialists, etc.), and the religious class as both wanted to impose state from above: the attempt to manipulate and project Islam has led to an enduring alliance between the clergy, religiously motivated non-state actors, and the ruling class (Hussain 2007). As a result of all this, “the geo-religious landscape in Pakistan is dominated by two kinds of organisations, i.e. fundamentalist parties and jihadi organisations (Raman 2011) that has, in turn, led to a “jihadist landscape” (Bukhari 2011).

There are two key consequences of this undeclared alliance between the power wielders and the clergy. Firstly, it has led to the religionization of the public sphere and also provided handy recruits to militant organisations. Jihadi organizations such as the TTP claimed that they tried to impose Shariah in Pakistan (Hoodbhoy 2023), which was the *raison d'être* for Pakistan. The state thus became an instrument for the clergy and militant organisations to be used “to transform society along Islamic lines” (Shaikh 2009). Secondly, non-democratic forces became disproportionately stronger than democratic ones because of reliance on religion as a tool of legitimacy. From the very outset, “the mould was set of an authoritarian bureaucratic polity in which nation-building was to be imposed rather than evolved and where Islam would function as a surrogate for legitimacy” (Talbot 2012). In short, both state and society got militarised due to the pursuit of short-sighted goals by the ruling oligarchy in Pakistan. Such an approach to statecraft needs to be changed.

Religion per se is not a problem but its use for narrow political ends is. Rehmat Khan (Personal communication, June 10, 2023) explained that exploiting people’s ignorance of, and emotional attachment with, religion by religious and political leaders is a disservice to both Islam and Pakistan; religion is, thus, used to divide instead of uniting people. Prof. Faizullah Jan (Personal communication, 20 July 2023) argues that Pakistan was a weak state because its strengths (diversity and plurality) were converted into its weaknesses; the state managers used religion as a force to turn a disparate people into a nation by negating their distinct historical identities. Concomitant to this kind of nation-building process was exclusionary state-buildings in which some parts of the state got more attention, hence more developed, while other areas lagged. All the above factors turned Pakistan into a hub of violent extremism.

## Policy Recommendations

### Inclusivity in state building:

There is an urgent need for inclusive state building so that the state might look after its citizens in a fair and just manner. There is a need to remove the deeply entrenched sense of deprivation and alienation from among the people of the smaller provinces. The perception of Pakistani nationalism and the Punjab's hegemony needs to be dispelled by considering everyone as equal citizen of the state.

### Consensus building on religion:

The role of religion is important in Pakistan, but diverse people cannot be held together by invoking common religious teachings. The state needs to build a consensus on the role of religion in public life, as the use of religion as an ideology and homogenising force has created more division in Pakistan. More importantly, too much emphasis on religion has emboldened some individuals as well as groups to impose their version of Islam on their fellow citizens — with a complete disregard for their religious persuasions.

### Legitimacy through public service:

Last but not least, the government needs to get legitimacy through the provision of public goods and services instead of using ideologies as tools of legitimacy. In this way, rulers will be accountable to people and the people will elect those who provide better services for them. The state will be the ultimate beneficiary of this kind of legitimacy.

## Conclusion

In order to thrive as a democratic and forward-looking state, the power-wielders of Pakistan need to carry out a complete overhaul and transformation of the existing power structure. The mission and vision of the country must be citizen-centric and pro-people. The capacity of all state institutions — from top to bottom — needs to be augmented so that people might look towards them when they face any challenges instead of creating a ballyhoo against the state. Furthermore, this will also deprive violent extremist groups from getting handy recruits, as such groups cash in on the frustrations and disappointments of people from state institutions. Finally, no country can live with peace unless and until it is at peace with itself, it is, therefore, high time for Pakistan not only to recognize its diversity but also cherish it, encourage it, and make it a cornerstone of its policies for a better future.

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## Appendix 1

Name	Designation	Organization
Afrasiab Khattak	Former Senator	Leader of National Democratic Movement
Rehmat Khan Mehsud	Former Inspector General	Frontier Constabulary Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa
Roshan Mahsud	Director-General	Housing Department, Peshawar
Dr Faizullah Jan	Head	Department of Journalism, University of Peshawar
Dr Imran Sajid	Faculty Member	Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar
Muhammad Fahim Jadoon	International Development and Conflict Specialist	Freelance
Dr Muhammad Fahim Jan	Expert in (De)radicalization	Freelance