

Book Review

Naseemullah, Adnan. *Patchwork States: The Historical Roots of Subnational Conflict and Competition in South Asia*. 309pp. Oxford University Press 2022.

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Adnan Naseemullah makes an original and innovative contribution to the understanding of the spatiality of political conflict and competition in South Asia at the district level. He argues that the colonial legacy of fragmented governance and how post-colonial governments modified but did not eliminate them is the institutional context within which to understand variations in political violence. Numerous writers have asserted the importance of the colonial legacy on governance, but the question of the causal mechanisms of the colonial legacy has been more difficult to identify. The conventional approach is through natural experiment to identify causal inferences and focus on the specific context. However, causality is then restricted to context and difficult to generalise—it all becomes about context. Furthermore, the logic of path dependency and punctuated equilibrium underestimates the role of agency, in particular anti-colonialism which becomes absent from critical junctures. There are two core questions that Naseemullah addresses. How did differentiated forms of governance emerge in South Asia and how do resulting differences in state capacity shape contemporary relationships on the subnational level? Institutional framework embedded within endogenous conflict processes of state formation provides a more robust approach to understanding the causal influence of the colonial legacy in South Asia and how agency modified it. By analysing internally complex colonial regimes and institutions as a whole and how this explains the local capacity of the state and its relationship to social actors, such an approach is better at explaining patterns of violence, political competition and development at the subnational level.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first part the author briefly establishes the framework where greed, fear and frugality were exigent factors that motivated particular forms of state-building in the colonial era. These three motivations for colonial expansion establish the foundations of the different forms of governance that emerged. So rather than arguing that British colonialism was a singular unitary

autocratic regime he suggests instead that it was an arena for different forms of authoritarianism and that these different forms of authoritarianism resulted in multiple kinds of colonial legacies. Arguing that the pragmatic nature of colonial rule in South Asia resulted in varying forms of governance ranging from high degrees of state penetration in metropolitan areas motivated by commerce to exceptional arrangements in frontier regions motivated by security.

In the second part of the book, Naseemullah identifies six colonial governance categories: metropolitan, modernising, intermediate, conservative, chieftaincy and exceptional. He reflects on the differences in the way that districts and states were governed, taxed and policed, and that the army was recruited or stationed. Taxation is an important indicator of the power of the state, the degree of its penetration and the nature of state-society relations at the local level. In terms of total revenue extraction, it's not surprising that metropolitan districts raised twice as much revenue as the next category, modernising districts, despite negligible land revenue. Law and the judiciary were critical in the enabling of the colonial economy, yet the presence and strength of these institutions were geographically uneven, concentrated in metropolitan areas and dissipating in the periphery. Internal security was managed in different ways through different forms of governance; coercive capacity can be measured through police deployment. The variations reflect the different ways internal security was maintained, with higher policing capacity in metropolitan districts and significant differences between modernising, intermediate and conservative districts. Coercive capacity in conservative districts was managed by intermediaries, while higher police numbers per capita in chieftaincy and exceptional cases included paramilitary forces. Military force was a key instrument in Imperial power projection, but recruitment was concentrated in intermediate districts concentrated in the northwest: Punjab, NWFP, western UP, and Rajputana. Military deployment was also concentrated in the northwest in intermediate districts while

there was a low presence in exceptional districts such as the north-western tribal areas, where it was seen as a mechanism of last resort. The governance structure variation thus established in the Victorian period was modified in the inter-war period and continued to mediate, amplify or suppress economic and political change.

Naseemullah then revises his districtwise categories as they are changed by the post-colonial nation building project. Four categories of metropolitan, modernising, conservative and exceptional remain but two colonial categories—chieftaincy and intermediate arrangements—disappear. Princely states and chieftaincy arrangements are absorbed into India and Pakistan. Most of the intermediate category districts converged into the modernising category, enabling public investment, commercialisation and political competition. Here he revises the categories of governance that constitute the patchwork of the post-colonial state. He shows that a combination of internal contention and constrained capacity refined but did not eliminate variations in governance capacity at the district level, thus helping to understand the spatiality of political conflict and competition in South Asia.

The third part of the book applies these categories to the investigation of three interrelated themes that reflect the type of governance at the sub-national level: political violence, political competition and development in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Political violence is divided into Sovereignty Challenging Violence (SCV) and Sovereignty Neutral Violence (SNV) and incidents are tabulated across districts. Both India and Pakistan show that SCV is high in districts where exceptional forms of governance arrangements are in place and low in metropolitan districts where governance capacity is most effective. The main difference between India and Pakistan is that in the latter case SCV has entered the urban areas. As for SNV both incidents and fatalities are higher in metropolitan districts and lower in the other districts for both India and Pakistan. In the case of Bangladesh, the governance landscape is more homogeneous and both kinds of violence have lower incidents but higher fatalities in Metropolitan districts than exceptional districts. This suggests that the author's typology may not be so useful in the case of Bangladesh.

Naseemullah's second theme investigates social violence as an aspect of electoral competition, which varies across electoral geography. However, the structure of patronage, the leitmotif of South Asian politics, represents a way of understanding electoral politics. Structures of patronage vary, with state capacity and state-society relations providing an explanatory framework for why and how voting takes place across South Asia. The patchwork nature of the colonial legacy explains these variations. Effective number of Parties (ENP) is a key measure of electoral competition at the constituency level. The evidence shows that both in India and Pakistan metropolitan districts show lower ENPs. In the case of India, conservative districts had high levels of dispersion. In the case of Pakistan all the other categories were reversed, with modernising and exceptional districts having higher than average and conservative districts lower ENPs. Bangladesh however has a much lower median score, reflecting the consolidated party structure there. Consolidated electoral

competition at the district level is indicative of the politician's ability to deliver state largesse. If rent and state patronage is not under public control the incentive for political consolidation decreases.

The third interrelated theme that Naseemullah addresses is the spatial dimension of development, a key component of electoral violence and competition especially in India. Markets and commodification are more pronounced in modernising districts, reflected by higher ratios of cultivators to landless laborers. Modernising districts successfully dismantled traditional structures while in conservative districts they remain intact and there are significant numbers of landless laborers. When distribution of rents and investments are considered, modernising districts with penetrative governance have patterns of lucrative rents and patronage which set up elite competition, adjudicated by elections, among the various groups. However, where governance is subcontracted, rents are only distributed among a small elite. When percentage of rents by districts are considered, he shows that only exceptional districts have higher levels of rent-implicated activity associated with SCV violence. Corporate sector private investment is concentrated in modernising districts, as are sites of governance associated with SNV violence such as Hindu-Muslim violence or electoral violence in Kerala. Overall growth is highest in metropolitan districts except in exceptional districts where it's driven by government activity; private investment is highest in metropolitan districts. What Naseemullah shows is that the politics of development is inextricably connected to political competition and conflict.

Naseemullah's remarkable book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the colonial legacy. He focuses on more than simply the dead hand of history and brings new insights to the understanding of political competition and conflict through an institutional approach to governance. Variations in governance explain spatiality and distribution of political conflict and violence at the district level and explain political consolidation and development. His pioneering approach allows for comparative analysis and potential to expand beyond South Asia.