

The Purpose of Government, Manufacture of Legitimacy, and Violence of the State:
Reflections on Conflict Transformation in Pakistan

Workshop Paper for the University of Peshawar Summer School
and the Fourth International Conference on
“Dynamics of Change in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderland”

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Abstract

The paper is written to stimulate a two-hour guided discussion on the central concepts of political science. Participants must read the paper in advance of the workshop and provide me with written answers to questions related to the paper. I would like participants – M.Phil. and Ph.D. students mainly from Pakistan but also from neighboring Central Asian countries – to be precise in their use of political terms and to be cautious with the confused language of much international relations scholarship. I would like participants to distinguish between actors, affects, institutions, and places, and thereby between governments, legitimacy, states, and countries.

With this conceptual clarity as a foundation, I would like to focus on a central conceptualization of political science, provided by Max Weber, that a state is “a community, which over a given territory, has the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force.”¹ My intention is to expose this conception of the state, which dominates thinking about the state and legitimacy, as both nonsensical and immoral, as it anthropomorphizes the state and then condones violence by government officials whenever they can claim that ‘the community’ is under threat. The paper presents specific instances of violence by the government officials in Pakistan. During the workshop, participants will be asked to reflect and comment on the core purpose of government, government justifications for violence, the distinction between legality and legitimacy, and the phenomenon of coerced legitimacy.

¹Weber defines the state “*als eine Gemeinschaft, welche innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebietes das Monopol legitimer physischer Gewaltbarkeit.*” Max Weber, *The Profession of Politics*, Washington, DC: Plutarch Press, (1920) 1989, 2.

Host and Venue

My host is the University of Peshawar's Department of Political Science. The workshop is scheduled for the overlapping last day of the University of Peshawar Summer School and first day of the Fourth International Conference on "Dynamics of Change in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderland." The Summer School and Conference are being held at Bara Gali on the Murree Road, 55 miles from Islamabad.

Contribution to the Field of Pakistan Studies

As indicated in the abstract, there is unnecessary and harmful confusion in the standard language of political science, where we still make such claims as "Pakistan went to war," as if a country (a territory) or a state (a collection of institutions) could initiate a war. I would like to equip participants – M.Phil. and Ph.D. students who are working in the field of Pakistan Studies – with vocabulary that is capable of distinguishing between actors who can be held accountable for their actions and vague concepts that conflate actors and the tools at their disposal, including subordinates, a distinction that is fundamental to international law.

Additionally, I have found that interaction with early-career scholars in Pakistan often leads to productive professional relationships. I have served as the external evaluator of five dissertations in the field of Pakistan Studies written by participants in workshop that I have conducted in Pakistan, co-authored a book chapter related to Pakistan with another participant of a workshop in Pakistan, and am planning a bi-campus, bi-national videoconference course on Pakistan with another. I expect that this workshop will also lead to lasting professional relationships with Pakistani scholars. Indeed, I have been asked to chair a session of the international conference, on gender silencing, also on August 31, and to advise M.Phil. students who are developing their Ph.D. research questions, at the conclusion of the Summer School.

Contribution to my Academic and Professional Development

The ideas that I advance in the paper and that we will discuss in the workshop are ideas that I have been discussing for some years with my Comparative Politics students at Wellesley College. These discussions have helped me to sharpen these ideas. For example, students have asked whether police officers, who have independent authority to use violence, are government officials or instruments of the state. I expect that the response of the Pakistani (and Central Asian) scholars will enable me to sharpen these ideas further. Ultimately, I would like to submit the paper as an article for a peer-reviewed academic journal. The ideas also serve as foundational material in my manuscript on the Politics of Muslim Charity in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.