

Political Organisation and State-Building in Pakistan

The history of political activity and state-building in Pakistan is marked by periods of instability and conflict over who will control formal structures of governance. This paper attempts to explain the paradox of Pakistan – i.e. the coexistence of state fragility with apparently favourable institutional conditions for state-building – using an organisational framework. It distinguishes between two types of political organisation: representative political parties on the one hand, and an unelected state apparatus consisting of the military, civil, and judicial organisations, on the other. Subsequent sections of the paper examine the elites and support bases that characterise the Pakistani state apparatus and political parties respectively, and how it is not just ideology but also processes of rent disbursement, patrimonial politics, and factional rivalries that play an important role. The kinship group-based social organisation that prevails across the country helps sustain the unresolved conflict between these competing institutional arrangements. The concluding section offers insights about the prospects for state-building in Pakistan in light of these key organisational features.