

Pakistan clarified



Once a failed state, forever a failed state. That, in a rough synopsis would apply to Pakistan over the last three quarters of a century, after its independence from British India. It actually was more a secession from British India than independence from England. The separation, on the eve of independence from India, was exerted under the slogan of Muslim autonomy and safety. Behind that movement with a religious call for action, to an extent in conjunction with the colonial administration, were the big feudal lords and the high brass in the military.

Kristoffel Lieten

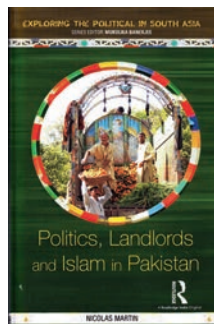
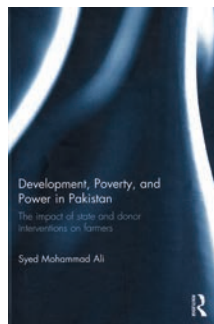


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Reviewed titles:

Nicolas Martin. 2016.
Politics, Landlords and Islam in Pakistan
London and New York: Routledge
ISBN 9781138821880

Syed Mohammad Ali. 2015.
Development, Poverty, and Power in Pakistan: The Impact of State and Donor Interventions on Farmers
London and New York: Routledge
ISBN 9781138804531

THE STATE THAT EMERGED in 1947 was deficient and remained deficient in many respects. It continued to have all the ingredients of backwardness, such as low levels of industrialisation, stark poverty, mass illiteracy, a chaotic and deficient infrastructure, etc. In addition to the various

interconnecting features of underdevelopment, it had two additional circumstances which would put a spanner on development and justice: the economic and political power of the landlord-military combine and the strategic role of Pakistan in the Cold War (against the Soviet Union and Afghanistan), and nowadays in the Coalition of the Willing. This Coalition induced the United States and an international consort to financially bail out and sustain the regime, however badly it managed its own affairs and its democracy. Such financial, political and military support have failed to provide the panacea to either development or a victory over 'Muslim terrorism'.

Both features of landlord power and international connivance have been addressed in two recent books, which go a big way in accomplishing the analysis of Pakistan. Scholarly studies have been few, and quite a number of them have focussed on politicking and terrorism. Nicolas Martin has

Electoral dynamics in Indonesia

This volume contains an incredibly valuable treasure trove of insights that delve beneath the legality of Indonesia's electoral system. In doing so it shines a light on the good, the bad and the ugly ways people win elections in this country. As for the good, many of the tactics and strategies deployed would be quite familiar to candidates elsewhere in the world in both new and established democracies. Building campaign teams, information networks, contact points and understanding community needs are the nuts of bolts of functioning democracies anywhere.

Kevin Evans



Reviewed title:

Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati (eds). 2016.
Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots
Singapore: NUS Press
ISBN 9789814722049

ANOTHER FEATURE of contemporary Indonesian electoral politics, noted in this volume, is that the political 'bad' of electoral violence is largely absent. Even in Aceh, a region whose people have long suffered from civil strife, levels of violence and intimidation are now declining towards the national norm. This also reminds

that efforts at future electoral and wider political reform need to take account to preserve those positive factors that represent the strengths of the existing system all the while redressing those areas that are poor and in need of redress.

The volume also reveals other unusual dynamics. Most notable is mutual candidate support at different levels (from national, provincial to local) and quite intriguingly among candidates across parties but based upon other primordial affiliations that transcend partisan loyalties. This finding should beg for further research and understanding certainly by party leaders.

Indeed this issue also offers an insight into another element of the political system in Indonesia that calls for more detailed exploration, namely the very weak and frail structure and place of the political parties. Frequent references by party activists interviewed to the old Soeharto era concept of the 'floating masses' in terms of politically disconnected voters reminds us that it is actually the political parties that are floating. They are clearly unanchored from community and ultimately very vulnerable. The impact of the open list PR system on the further enfeeblement of the party system needs to be seen in the context of the wider problem of the incapacity of parties to regularise internal political competition without degenerating into monarchies or splintering into several parties. The impact of the latter has been to thwart the emergence of genuinely large parties despite all the regulatory efforts to restrict the entrance of new parties into the system.

produced an anthropological study on how control over resources, particularly land, allows the landed elites to keep the impoverished rural population under their thumb and the country poor. The result, he writes, after a careful study stretching over 25 months of field work, starting in 2001, is everyday violence and disempowerment which in turn creates a state of vulnerability and fear among the poor.

New forms in an old straightjacket

In the introduction, Martin writes: "It is a world inhabited by absentee landlords with vast estates, large retinues of servants, peasants, cattle rustlers, criminals, peasant girl mistresses and unscrupulous farm managers, bureaucrats and politicians... Their mansions in Lahore are staffed with valets, butlers, drivers, cooks, and maids, all brought from the villages on their estates. Here parties are hosted where high-ranking military officers, politicians, businessmen and civil servant gather and drink smuggled Black Label Scotch whisky. Their children study in prestigious universities in the United Kingdom and, increasingly, the United States." After such an introduction, as the entire book written in a fluid style, one could be tempted to put the book aside, for is this not the old-fashioned stuff which characterised academic research in the 1970s? One would be advised to read on, for the various chapters offer such a detailed report of what rural life really looks like, that in the end, the bottom line of the introductory statement is validated.

It is a book on the world behind the utter luxury.

It questions theories such as by Anatol Lieven (*Pakistan: A Hard Country*, London: Allen Lane, 2001) that patronage mitigates poverty and exploitation and provides the impoverished population with the minimum basic needs of subsistence. It questions the benign broker status of the new rural lords whose position, rather than helping the poor getting access to the state institutions and thus contributing to democracy, impoverishes, disempowers and entangles.

The ethnography presented in the book looks at the functioning of various mechanisms, such as monopoly of resources, debt bondage, electoral politics, decentralisation of state institutions and the recourse to Islam, in the emergence of a new class of political and economic entrepreneurs from within the middle – and upper sections of the old landed class.

Doing research in such difficult, sensitive and inhospitable circumstances (in the green revolution Sargodha district, the grain 'California of Pakistan') requires the co-operation of the rich and powerful. Martin was in the lucky position that these gatekeepers provided him with all necessary support during two weekends in a month that they come down from their palaces in Lahore. The rest of the week, he could mingle with the various layers in the villages and learn the details of the local drug trading, bootlegging, buffalo theft, electricity theft, and the various forms of embezzlement of government funds. To obtain power and wealth, "people stole, killed, kidnapped, bribed, and sold adulterated goods, trafficked heroin, and engaged in bootlegging". Interestingly, the moral disorder, perceived as degradation in comparison with the earlier days, was ascribed to the entry of western social values

(which to an extent goes to explain the attraction of the jihadi movements). Another explanation for the resurgence of religious adherence is being provided in the last chapter: the political recourse to Islam by the regime (and its international backers) helped to deflect the attention of people away from issues of social justice. Islamisation brought issues of moral righteousness, rather than social justice and economic development, central on the agenda. It ultimately backfired by giving birth to radical movements. It once served as a shortcut for the regime, bent on stifling economic reforms which would affect the rich.

Landlord power

Martin's book deals with some of the very essentials of village life. It explains how, despite the rapid transition to capitalist farm management, debt bondage continued to play a pivotal role in keeping labour unfree. The debt relationship binds the nominally independent workforce. Martin argues that the use of kinship ties in the servicing of debts displaces the potential class conflict onto the kinship groups and keeps the labourers divided. A minority of the poor has benefitted from post-feudalism, but the controlled access by the wealthy to public services, such as health care, housing and education, keeps the common family disempowered. The forms of patronage, it could be added, have helped the selected retinue of poor but disenfranchise the majority of poor. Landlord power is bent on blocking the emergence of impersonal governance, the rule by the canon of modern state management. This, as Max Weber had argued in the 19th century, is the prerequisite for development.

The last chapter in Martin's book brings us close to the subject matter of the other book under review – the study of *Development, Poverty and Power in Pakistan* by Syed Mohammad Ali. It deals with market development and with devolution, designed in consultation with a variety of international aid agencies. It is considered to be the answer to the authoritarian (and failed) state from above: democratize the institutions of state by bringing them closer to the people in the localities and increase transparency, participation and accountability.

Ali also is an anthropologist but his book has many cross-linkages with political science and political economy. Chapter Three actually is political economy. It provides a short but solid brief on the changing ownership relations and the abysmally stark inequality, especially in the lower Sindh province. On the basis of macro-data, it argues along the same lines as Martin has done with his quantitative data: a nexus of dependency characterised by debt bondage and insecurity which keeps poor peasants and agricultural labourers in poverty and the country in underdevelopment.

A powerful nexus, including NGOs

Although capitalism has pervaded Pakistan, it operates through pre-capitalist forms of social organisation and state functioning. The problems which face Pakistan, Ali argues, emanate from the uneven landholding patterns which also allows a disproportionate control over state resources:

A number of case studies presented information indicating that even where money was deployed, it was not always a guarantee of electoral success. Equally the special public funds incumbents could deploy as pork barrelling were also shown to be less than a guarantee of re-election. Many case studies suggested that this may be because the candidates concerned were simply not 'professional enough' to make optimal use of these financial resources and manage networks of clientelism rather than suggesting that money as such was not enough. The wider impact of the increased resort to money to secure election victory begs the very question of who actually pays?

Since the 2014 election ever more MPs have been arrested for corruption, not from the election process as such, but rather since they have taken their seats in Parliament. The almost complete removal of public funding since 1999 has left the parties almost totally dependent for serious contributions upon the wealthiest of citizens to be viable. The 'privatisation' of electoral funding is reflected very sadly by the concept that campaign funds are not seen as contributions but rather as investments. The predominance of the logic of the market is sorely in need of redress from the nation's elite to its grass roots. Pushing back against these political investors will surely not be easy especially when a popular view from civil society in Indonesia is that public funding is a form of 'legalised corruption'.

The impact of non-transactional and microlocal factors including personal and familial connections on the potential for victory, while generally sidelined as determinants of potential success or failure, nonetheless did break through. Several writers noted that despite all the gamesmanship around the campaign period party leaders did also concede glumly a mood shift by voters. A better understanding of what leads to this shift in voter mood would be a very valuable future form of research. Comments like 'the party had long been the

"The Pakistani's state patronage of the landed rural elite not only helps them capture state resources, but to also avert reforming major causes of prevailing rural inequalities... Since donor agencies have not directly contended with altering power relations associated with landownership in rural areas, they have further enabled the capture of state-led and donor supported agricultural schemes by large landowners" (p. 22).

The book indeed addresses the question as to why – despite all the fantastic programmes that have been developed, the financial resources that went with it and the good intentions which probably many of the (international) bureaucrats in the official NGOs must have had – the results in the field have been close to null and void. The many golden bullets of the recent past, the much trumpeted Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers of the World Bank being one of them, seemingly have underwritten the golden luxury of the wealthy.

It is a grim picture of the nexus of international agencies, state institutions and NGOs. Some would argue that it is too grim a picture. It possibly is, but in that case, which other explanatory model do we have to explain for the failure as a developmental state with some measure of justice for around 200 million people?

Ali has done well in looking for some hope in the instances of resistance by Pakistan farmers. He devotes an entire chapter to it. Movements have been a frequent occurrence, but also this chapter ends in a grim mood. The only successful movements, one may add, have been the extremist Islamic organisations, but it is not quite improbable that they have some kind of commonality of interests with the elite. The Taliban anyway had been created by the United States and the then military rulers of Pakistan as the battle troops in the battle with the communist regime in Afghanistan.

Gatekeepers

Both anthropological studies are robust specimens done by scholars with their feet on the ground. Whereas Ali has interviewed a few hundred men and women over large tracts in Pakistan, Martin has been hovering around in a small area, collecting bits and pieces. Unfortunately Martin has not talked to women. He had been told that approaching them would have been "a threat to the modesty". That is very unfortunate, because Punjabi women are very outspoken and knowledgeable about gender-specific aspects. My own experience, doing field work in the area, has been that these women are very much accessible. Martin was inhibited by the fear that it would lead to gossiping, but the main reason for not talking to women independently may have been the gatekeepers, the gatekeepers who, as stated earlier, had provided him magnificent channels into rural society, but who, on the other hand, obliged him not to approach the women folk.

Nevertheless, Martin's book remains a great study on the ground of a failed state. Ali's study, on the other hand, clarifies why large international aid programmes do not work.

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Public and media attention with the great and powerful individuals who dominate their respective parties have led many to presume that parties are powerful. This volume strips such perceptions naked. The ease with which party structures are breached through cross-party alliances of candidates, the fact that candidates effectively rely on their own resources, efforts and networks, rather than party networks and resources, in addition to the electorally self-destructive conflicts among candidates, suggest the party structures are anaemic and impotent.

The key ugly issue revealed in virtually every case study was the dangerous penetration of money into electoral processes. The incentive to compete publicly with members of one's own party for votes, a practice both reflecting and causing the lack of internal party cohesion, coupled with the almost universal reference to the intensified deployment of money directly to voters in 2014, constitute challenges to the healthy consolidation of Indonesia's democratic systems.

The frequent observations that distributing money and other semi-valuable goods to voters using euphemisms and hiding behind the social legitimacy of religion and culture when doing so reflects a wider 'fog' of obscurity in Indonesia that seeks to cover the stench of corruption with the fragrance of cultural and religious legitimacy. As such it links electoral corruption with wider forms of corruption found elsewhere in Indonesia. It suggests that practitioners recognise that what they are doing is wrong, even sinful, but that they believe they can make it palatable through deploying (abusing) the legitimacy of cultural and religious symbolism. Other common refrains to emerge included the impact of incumbent candidates' access to legislated slush funds to support initiatives in their electorates. This implies a distinctly unlevel playing field among candidates.

dominant force in local politics, and many former supporters were becoming disappointed with its performance' suggest a clear need to explore what moves voters beyond the tactics of campaign time. Could it be that voters also take account of the performance of their elected leaders and their governments in deciding how they will vote regardless of who pays them or how much? Do these members of the voting public represent a significant enough number that party leaders and incumbent MPs should actually consider their actual performance for the almost five years leading up to the campaign period?

While the studies provided sobering insights into the dynamics of the open list PR system for electing party based MPs, including women, in the House of Representatives from national to local levels, they provided essentially no information on election to the second chamber of the national Parliament, namely the House of Regional Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah). Given the exclusion of parties from that House plus the much higher levels of victory by women in the House of Regional Representatives and the operation of four-past-the-post, not PR, for election to the House of Regional Representatives, the potential for comparison and the learning of lessons that might better inform the dynamics of election to the House of Regional Representatives suggest a major opportunity was forgone.

The timing of the release of this volume could hardly be better. The country will soon begin to focus on further improving its electoral systems and procedures. The detailed information provided at quite granular levels offers excellent evidence of the impact of the electoral system and of wider issues of electoral management.

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