

Lalwani_Abstract

Project Title: Selective Leviathans: Explaining South Asian State Strategies of Counterinsurgency and Consolidation

This project examines state strategies to suppress, co-opt, or contain violent ethnic mobilization and rebellion within their borders. Specifically, I ask why the state incumbent chooses different strategies to fend off these threats within its territory. Extant theories rely on structural factors but have trouble explaining sub-national variation. In contrast, I argue that the strategy is shaped by a core-periphery relationship prior to rebellion—that is between the state's geopolitical core and the contested region (geography), as well as the between the core state elites and the group rebelling (identity). These factors of geography and identity serve to incent and constrain the state's strategy in particular ways. I test this theory with a medium-N analysis and structured, focused comparisons from South Asia (India and Pakistan) using empirical evidence collected from extensive field and archival research. I find that rebel identity plays a significant role in restrained strategies despite the threat level, and that even moderately capable states often choose containment strategies, which can deliver some gains but accept chronic, low-level conflict and “ungoverned spaces.”