

# Explaining Political Violence In South Asia: Theories And Concepts

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## **Abstract:**

*Political violence in South Asia has escalated significantly since the region's independence, primarily driven by the erosion of social cohesion. This paper investigates the socio-political and economic foundations that underlie violent political actions. By examining key movements across South Asia, including the Bengali liberation struggle, Kashmir and tribal conflicts in Northeast India, the MQM problem in Pakistan, the JVP and Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka, the study identifies internal colonisation, state repression, and resource mobilisation as central catalysts of violence. The analysis highlights the role of relative deprivation, land disputes, and marginalisation as pivotal motivators for insurgencies. Additionally, state incapacity and external support further exacerbate and sustain violent movements. The paper concludes that the exclusion of marginalised groups from political power and economic opportunities, compounded by uneven development, continues to fuel cycles of violence in the region.*

**Keywords:** South Asia, Political violence, Internal colonisation, Resource mobilisation, Relative deprivation, Ethnic conflicts, Secessionist movements, Insurgencies

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## **I. Introduction**

Political violence has historically been endemic to South Asian politics. Over the decades since the independence of the states in the region, there has been a notable escalation in political violence. Social and political cohesion gradually eroded over the past seven decades, resulting in a violent socio-political order. The interaction between states and civil society was often characterised by violence, revealing a profound lack of trust in normative political processes. Various ethnic groups and social classes turned to violence as a means of negotiating with the state. This phenomenon was shaped by the prevailing socio-political and economic conditions of the time.

Colonial rule in the subcontinent did not face as much violence as the post-colonial states did. Soon after independence, many South Asian countries were embroiled in domestic conflicts. While some conflicts were resolved or lost momentum, others evolved into insurgent movements, primarily relying on violence to assert demands. The communist-led peasant insurgencies in North Bengal, such as the Tebhaga uprising and in Telangana, in the former princely state of Hyderabad, marked the early use of localised violence. As the post-colonial era progressed, violence fuelled by ethnicity and sub-nationalism became the primary challenge to national identity in these states. The demands for secession from groups such as the Bengalis, Baloch, Nagas, Mizos, Assamese, Sikhs, Kashmiris, and Tamils illustrate the persistence of violent political movements across the region.

Violence as a subject of political inquiry has been a complex issue. The treatment has been mainly normative. Even within the realm of politics, analysts invariably take recourse to socio-psychological, cultural and anthropological explanations to understand the phenomena. This problem is much more pertinent in the case of South Asia. Despite the increasing use of violence, whether in the assertion of identity or for structural change, as a dominant mode of political action in the subcontinent, enough attention does not seem to have been given to this problem.

The focus of this paper is to give salience to political and socio-economic explanations in understanding the causes and nature of violent political action. While it cannot be denied that psycho-cultural explanations only add to our understanding of violence, such explanations cannot delve into the roots of political violence as they exonerate the material bases that nurture such action. This study attempts to analyse whether the roots of such actions can be located in state structures and political economies.

## **II. Underlying Causes And Conditions**

By the 1970s, South Asia had already seen numerous conflicts manifest into violence. The conflicts of the 1980s were even bloodier. While the underlying causes of these conflicts were an intermingling of political, economic, social, and cultural factors, not all of them resulted in violence. For instance, the Dravidian movement in India, which initially sought a sovereign state, did not transform into a violent movement, fading by the 1960s. Similarly, the Sindhi nationalist movement in Pakistan, despite separatist aspirations, never escalated into widespread organised violence.

This discrepancy raises the fundamental question: Why did some movements resort to violence while others did not? The explanation lies in the underlying causes and the subjective and objective conditions of the actors involved in these movements. This section examines the causes of violence in South Asia through concepts such as internal colonisation, relative deprivation, and resource mobilisation. It also introduces additional conditions that enhance the propensity for violence.

### ***Internal Colonisation and State Suppression***

The violence in East Pakistan during the liberation war stands out as a particularly illustrative case. The conditions that motivated Bengali Muslims to engage in armed struggle were not merely perceived deprivation but actual exploitation and marginalisation. Two key contradictions existed in the relationship between East and West Pakistan. First, it was essentially a colonial relationship, with the West exploiting the East for economic gain. Economic disparities grew over time despite East Pakistan generating substantial wealth. For instance, during Ayub Khan's regime, per capita income in East Pakistan was only 30 per cent lower than in West Pakistan; by the time he stepped down in 1969, the gap had widened to 61 per cent (Noman, 1988).

Moreover, political power remained concentrated in West Pakistan. Though the East accounted for 55 per cent of the population, it had negligible representation in national elites. For example, in 1955, Bengalis comprised less than 5 per cent of the military elite and about 30 per cent of the civil bureaucracy (Jahan, 1994). This colonial dynamic drove the perception of the West as a coloniser, with the Bengalis eventually asserting their separate identity through violence. The crackdown by the West Pakistani military only fuelled the conflict.

While similar cases of internal colonisation have been cited in other regions, such as India's Northeast or Balochistan in Pakistan, the dynamics are different. These regions have faced economic neglect and have been economically exploited by outsiders, but the processes of colonisation vary from those in East Pakistan.

### ***Land Colonisation and State Support***

In some cases, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh, land colonisation was state-sponsored. Land-hungry Bengali settlers were encouraged to colonise tribal areas, altering the demographic balance. In the CHT, over four decades, the tribal population declined from 91 per cent to 51 per cent, primarily due to state-supported settlement schemes (Ahmad, 1996). Development projects, such as the Kaptai hydroelectric dam, exacerbated the situation by submerging tribal lands and further alienating the indigenous population. In some ways, the construction of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam helped in the 'resource appropriation' from the CHT for the larger benefits of the country's growing industrial economy (Zaman, 1982).

Similar patterns were observed in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil-majority areas were subject to Sinhalese settlement schemes. A large number of Sinhalese peasants were resettled in the Tamil areas through state-sponsored colonisation schemes. The Tamils believe this was a deliberate policy to undermine the contiguity of the Tamil majority districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar, Vavuniya, Batticalao, and Trincomalee where they form the largest ethnic group. These measures were instrumental in altering the demographic composition of the districts of Amparai, Batticalao, Mannar, Trincomalee and Vavuniya. Though the Sinhalese constituted only 20.6 per cent of the population of Trincomalee in 1946. Over the years, it has gradually increased; by 1971, it was 28.8 per cent, and in 1981, it was 33 per cent. In the Amparai district, in only a decade, from 1971 to 1981, the increase in the Sinhalese population was as high as 78 per cent (Suryanarayan, 1986). These policies, the Tamils believe and fear, have been progressively making them minorities in the land to which they make claims as their homeland.

### ***Settler Colonisation and State Incapacity***

The complexities in the North-eastern region of India arose due to the colonial pattern of economic development introduced by the British after it annexed Assam in 1826, leading to an influx of immigrant labour and significant demographic changes. The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 resulted in migrations due to the restructuring of state boundaries. This process continued with a massive influx during the Liberation War in East Pakistan. Subsequently, a large number of Bengali Muslims infiltrated Assam to escape economic hardships in Bangladesh. This uncontrolled migration, particularly into Assam and Tripura, marginalised the indigenous people.

The migrants who settled in Assam monopolised or dominated virtually all new opportunities for resource exploitation or jobs in the economy's modern sectors and government service. Land alienation among the poor tribal peasantry and demographic changes have engendered a feeling among the indigenous people that the 'outsiders' have robbed them of their economic opportunities. The creation of the Assamese as a minority in their state and their uneven share in the process of uneven national economic development and its consequently persisting underdevelopment led to a perception that it was due to the intrusion of outsiders and the unresponsiveness of the central authority.

Therefore, initially, the movement that emerged due to these grievances sought to control Assam's resources and ensure that the management of those resources remained with Assamese themselves. The demands also included sharing political and administrative control, revenues generated in the state, employment and other opportunities. The state's inability to effectively address these grievances led to the rise of insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which ultimately resorted to violence.

The above instances show a pattern in which the question of right over land has generated considerable violence. Whether in the case of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Chakmas in Bangladesh, the Assamese Hindus in Assam, or the tribal in North-east India, the primary grievances revolve around land dispossession. While the conflict is against the state, settlers have also become targets of violence. When the state is perceived as incapable or unwilling to protect indigenous rights, violence becomes a means of reclaiming territory and resources.

The LTTE in Sri Lanka adopted the tactics of attacking peasants in colonised lands. The Chakmas have also attacked the state-sponsored settlement schemes in the CHT. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) have occasionally used violent tactics to expel foreigners. The pattern of extensive mass violence witnessed in 1983 during the movement to detect and deport Bengali Muslim nationals of Bangladesh origin was due to attempts to foil the February 1983 election, which was being conducted without revising the rolls. This resulted in an unprecedented wave of violence and destruction.

### **III. Peripheral Societies And Lack Of State Penetration**

Peripheral societies are those in which state influence is physically and institutionally weak. Physically, these societies may be located in remote or outlying regions that have yet to be fully integrated into the state structure. Institutionally, the state may not have secured the allegiance of the local population. These people often maintain a degree of independence and tactical mobility in their relationship with the modern state.

In South Asia, this phenomenon is a colonial legacy, with institutional structures failing to penetrate the tribal-dominated north-eastern regions of India and the north-western regions and Baluchistan in Pakistan. These regions share a high potential for violence. State penetration is weak in these areas on both physical and institutional fronts. Institutionally, the inhabitants of these regions have a weak identification with the idea of the state, leading to resistance to incorporation into postcolonial state structures. Physically, their peripheral location creates a gap between the centre and the outlying regions. This weak state penetration contributes to underdevelopment in peripheral societies, leaving them behind compared to core regions. This development gap further discourages allegiance to the central state from resistant groups.

The perception of being beyond the effective reach of the state's coercive power emboldens some groups to resort to violence. The Baloch guerrillas, for instance, have confronted the Pakistani army due to these factors. A similar dynamic exists with the insurgencies led by tribal people in north-eastern India and by the Chakmas in Bangladesh.

While the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Kashmiris, and the Sikhs cannot strictly be classified as peripheral societies, their location in border regions enhances their capacity for violence. These regions are peripheral to the extent that state policing functions are weak, and the state lacks control over borders through which insurgents can move people and material to strengthen their resistance. Thus, insurgent movements in these areas retain tactical mobility when confronting the state.

#### ***Class, Caste, and Agrarian Violence***

Peripheral societies are often associated with outlying tribal regions, but the concept can also apply to societies physically located at the heart of a state. Central India, where the borders of Chattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh meet, presents a prime example. Here, the state's authority is weak, and the rural oligarchy perpetuates an exploitative agrarian system (Prasad, 1989, 75).

The state's incapacity or unwillingness to intervene in these areas has allowed landlords to establish private armies, such as those in Bihar (PUDR). These armies have engaged in violent repression to maintain existing agrarian relations. Resentment or rebellion from the lower classes often leads to brutal retaliation, not only against individuals but against entire castes or villages. This environment enabled the Maoist movement, which emerged from the parent Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in 1969, to mobilise peasants and low-caste groups through armed struggle (Nathan 1975, 75).

The Maoist movement highlights how class-based violence can emerge in regions where the state's presence is minimal and feudal production relations dominate. The struggle for land and autonomy continues to be a driving force behind agrarian violence in these areas. The Maoists, who advocate for tribal autonomy and land reform, focus on redistributing land and resources. They have taken over the land and distributed it to landless labourers, sometimes through their own "people's courts," as seen with the People's War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh (Menon, 1991). This redistribution threatened rural power structures, prompting landlords to become even more repressive, perpetuating cycles of violence (Nathan 1975, 75; Prasad 1989, 165).

#### **IV. Relative Deprivation**

One of the primary motivators for violent movements in South Asia has been a sense of relative deprivation. This occurs when groups feel disconnected from their potential and opportunities, often blaming the political system for this imbalance. These frustrations have frequently manifested in violence against the state. The feeling that the system is responsible for this disparity drives movements to turn violent in their quest to correct perceived imbalances.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka is a prime example of a movement driven by relative deprivation. The movement capitalised on disillusionment among unemployed youth, as well as the inability of the agricultural sector to provide livelihoods. This sense of alienation and deprivation reached a tipping point when the rural youth, who had completed their education but returned to agricultural work, saw no avenues for advancement. Educational opportunities and aspirations had increased, but frustration grew when the job market failed to provide matching employment opportunities, setting the stage for the 1971 JVP insurrection. (Wriggins and Jayewardene 1973, 331; Lakshman 1992, 93).

Many violent movements in South Asia have been motivated by a feeling of relative deprivation. These groups perceive a mismatch between what they are capable of and what they get. The transformation of movements from demands of autonomy to secession and the capacity and willingness of some of these movements to use violence is a simultaneous development with the rise of a petty-bourgeois class, which, due to the development policies of the state, has also suffered from a feeling of relative deprivation. Such a class is identifiable in the case of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, amongst the Assamese, Sikhs and Kashmiris in India, amongst the Muhajirs and to a certain extent among the Baluchis in Pakistan.

Relative deprivation is often tied to the state's educational policies. In traditional societies like South Asia, education is a key channel for social mobility. However, the failure of the state to align educational opportunities with employment prospects results in frustration, alienation, and, ultimately, violence. This was the case in Sri Lanka, where the JVP capitalised on the discontent of unemployed youth, particularly those from rural areas who had been promised upward mobility through education but found all avenues closed.

This trend continued in the late 1980s, following Sri Lanka's post-1977 economic reforms, which led to greater inequality and reduced state support for education and employment. These market-oriented policies worsened conditions for vulnerable sections of society, including the rural youth. The contraction of the state sector and the rise of private sector jobs, which demanded skills not available to rural youth, deepened the sense of relative deprivation. For example, while urban elites benefitted from economic liberalisation, rural youth faced increasingly limited opportunities for upward mobility, exacerbating social unrest (Lakshman 1992, 94-96).

Similarly, among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the state's discriminatory policies, particularly in education, fuelled feelings of relative deprivation. The 1956 "Sinhala Only" law, which required knowledge of Sinhala for government employment, disproportionately affected the Tamils, reducing their representation in public sector jobs (Bastian 1984, 166). The introduction of a standardisation system for university admissions in 1970 further alienated the Tamil community, as they had to secure higher marks than Sinhalese students for the same opportunities (de Silva 1982, 165). This discrimination led to a drastic reduction in Tamil enrolment in higher education between 1970 and 1975, contributing to their sense of marginalisation.

There was also a rise in unemployment and a lack of commensurate employment among Tamils. The major part of this unemployed group was the offspring of the Tamil lower-middle class, who did not have alternative means of securing suitable employment, unlike the higher strata of Tamilian society. Most of these unemployed and underemployed were channelled into the militant movement, which had started emerging by the early seventies. Many young Tamils, particularly from lower-middle-class backgrounds, were drawn into militant movements as a result of these policies.

In India, the Sikh demand for greater autonomy in Punjab was also driven by relative deprivation. The Akali Dal, representing Sikh farmers, argued that more autonomy would allow them to correct economic imbalances. Punjab's Green Revolution generated wealth among the rural Sikh farmers, but when they sought to reinvest their surplus in industry or services, they found these sectors dominated by urban Hindus (Puri, 1983, 116-17). The peculiar social division of capital in Punjab was instrumental in the feeling of insecurity amongst the Sikhs.

In Punjab, Sikhs are concentrated more in the villages and rural settlements, while Hindus predominate in the towns and cities. Punjab was never considered good for setting up heavy industry. However, it had a sampling of agro-industry, but most of these and the service sectors were owned and controlled by the Hindus. The Green Revolution was to result in the rise of a rich class of prosperous modern farmers. By 1978, the so-called Green Revolution had reached a plateau. However, when the Sikh farmers wanted to invest their surplus capital in the other sectors of the economy, they found avenues for reinvestment blocked, as the Hindus controlled industry and the service sector. The Sikhs also realised that they had no control over agricultural pricing and industrialisation policies, as these were determined by the central government in New Delhi. This economic frustration led to the rich farming class demanding more political power.

The excessive prosperity of the big landowners and capitalist landlords not only encouraged but necessitated greater political power so that Sikh farmers could decide and direct economic policies and free the industrial sector from the Hindus (Hasan, 1989, 22-23). One of the peculiar economic demands in the Anandpur Sahib resolution was that all key industries should be brought under the public sector. This contradicted the principles of state autonomy, but ostensibly, these demands reflected the interest of the landowning upper crust of Sikh society. Among the rich farmers, this feeling of not being able to generate more wealth from surplus capital resulted in their feeling of relative deprivation; however, their moderate movement for more autonomy was hijacked by the rise of a petty bourgeoisie.

The Kashmiri conflict, while often framed in terms of political grievances and Islamic revivalism, economic factors have also been an important dimension of the problem. There has been a dramatic improvement in the standard of living in Jammu and Kashmir between 1977 and 1984. During 1977-78, 33.4 per cent of the population lived under the poverty line. By 1983-84, it had declined to a mere 16.3 per cent (Statistical Outline of India, 1989, 27). Only four states – Manipur, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana – had better poverty figures for the same period. The per capita income in the state in 1971-72 was Rs. 588, and by 1986-87, it had gone up to Rs. 3344, which was overall sixth highest in the country after Delhi, Goa, Punjab, Haryana, and Maharashtra during the same period (Statistical Outline of India, 1989, 16).

While average standards of living have gone up in Jammu and Kashmir, it has not benefitted the Muslims in real terms. Free education up to the level of the Universities introduced by Sheikh Abdullah resulted in a large number of poor students who could aspire for social mobility to get educated. The pressures of educated unemployed youth were to strain the system soon. The number of unemployed matriculates rose from 6,875 in 1971 to 14,374 by 1981 and 26,559 by 1986. The number of unemployed graduates rose from 1,228 in 1971 to 6,368 in 1981, while that of postgraduates increased from 409 in 1971 to 1,177 in 1981 to 2,866 in 1985. The number of unemployed engineering graduates increased from 166 in 1961 to 443 in 1988. It was also observed that the higher the educational qualification, the higher the growth and incidence of unemployment in that category (Mishri & Bhat, 1994, 39).

The main sources of employment for educated Kashmiri Muslims were government services and public corporations. In the state government, their representation in the non-gazetted and clerical services was fairly high. Still, when it came to the gazetted posts, the representation of Hindus was far ahead of Muslims. In 1987, Hindus held 51 per cent of gazetted posts compared to only 42 per cent among Muslims. However, in the central government jobs, Hindus monopolised almost 83 per cent of the gazetted posts while Muslims held only 7 per cent. In the clerical non-gazetted central government jobs, Hindus held as high as 79 per cent in comparison to only 13 per cent among Muslims. From 1986-87 to 1989, there was an increase of 200 per cent in unemployed educated youth from 100,000 to 300,000. Under these circumstances, mobilising the educated and underemployed youth was easy. The processes of modernisation also produced a sizeable intelligentsia that could mobilise them. The state government's failure to address these employment issues, along with the dominance of Hindus in higher-level jobs, further fuelled resentment among Kashmiri Muslims, who increasingly turned to violence to express their frustration.

The Muhajirs in Pakistan offer another illustration of relative deprivation. Once dominant in Pakistan's civil bureaucracy and military elite, they saw their influence decline in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly with the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In 1972, Sindhi language was restored as the official language of the Sindh province. Muhajirs protested as they felt their interests in the provincial government were threatened. Bhutto also introduced in 1971 a regional quota system for recruitment to the federal bureaucracy. The quota allocated 50 per cent to Punjabis, 11.5 per cent to the NWFP, 11.4 per cent to rural Sindh, 7.6 per cent to urban Sindh, 3.5 per cent to Baluchistan and 10 per cent to be filled based on merit at the national level (Kennedy, 1987, 181-208). This quota system was designed to increase the representation of the Sindhis in the federal bureaucracy as the higher percentage intake from rural Sindh envisaged an increase in Sindhi recruitment.

Further, Bhutto's nationalisation policy from 1972-76 still shrunk private sector employment prospects, and the quota system regulated public sector recruitment. General Zia further curtailed prospects for employment in the state sector by introducing in 1982 a quota of 10 per cent in the federal secretariat for retired military

personnel (Kennedy, 1987, 122-25). Bhutto's and Zia's policies eroded the Muhajir domination of Pakistan's civil bureaucracy and public sector business elite while increasing the representation of Punjabis and Sindhis.

Though there has not been an absolute decline in the Muhajir share of jobs and admissions, their share has dropped relative to that of the Punjabis, Pathans and Sindhis. The middle- and lower-middle-class Muhajir youth have felt more of the constraints of the quota system. The Muhajir underclass (mostly Biharis from Bangladesh) was also faced with severe competition for scarce jobs with a large influx of Pathan immigrants to Karachi in the 1980s, further deepening their sense of deprivation. Thus, it was not surprising that the Muhajir Quami Movement's (MQM) leadership and support came largely from the lower middle-class and working-class segments of the Muhajir population. The rise of the MQM largely responded to this marginalisation, as the party successfully mobilised support by addressing these grievances.

## **V. Strategies Of Mobilisation**

The articulation of demands by disenfranchised groups is often framed not in narrow economic terms but through the assertion of broader cultural or ethnic identities. The petty bourgeoisie, a rising class that has often led these movements, typically mobilises support across a wide range of social groups by tapping into identity-based grievances. These movements have often employed cultural symbols as rallying points for mobilisation, demonstrating that ethnic demands are not always rooted in essentialist or inherent identities but in political and economic processes that have shaped these identities (Das 1995, 118-36).

The use of proximate identities as mobilisation tools has been pervasive in South Asia. For example, although ideologically aligned with Marxism and class struggle, the JVP appealed to Sinhala nationalism during its campaigns in the early 1970s. In its fight against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the JVP presented itself as a patriotic organisation defending Sri Lankan sovereignty, thereby gaining popular support across different strata of Sinhala society. By portraying itself as the only group truly opposed to Indian intervention and the collaboration of the ruling United National Party (UNP), the JVP was able to unite diverse segments of the Sinhalese population under a common banner of patriotism (Gunatilleke, Tiruchelvam, and Coomaraswamy 1983, 143).

Similarly, the Sikh militant movement in India used religious revivalism as a key tenet in its mobilisation strategy. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the face of the Khalistan movement, emphasised the idea that the Sikh Panth (community) was under threat, using this religious narrative to rally support for secession from India (Das 1986, 177-95).

In Kashmir, while the conflict is primarily political and economic, many militant groups, particularly those aligned with the Jamaat-e-Islami, have used the rhetoric of jihad to mobilise Kashmiri Muslims and appeal to broader Muslim solidarity across India (Shahin, 1997). However, it is important to note that religion is not the primary motivating factor for most Kashmiri militants. A psychoanalytical study of captured militants revealed that only 10 per cent identified religion as their driving force, whereas 45 per cent cited economic deprivation and alienation as their primary reasons for joining the insurgency (Ray 1987, 12; Shahin 1997).

Ethnic mobilisation has also been a powerful tool in Pakistan. The Muhajirs, who initially rejected a particular ethnic identity in favour of a broader Islamic identity, began asserting their ethnicity in response to their growing marginalisation by the Punjabis and Pathans. The MQM effectively addressed the sense of relative deprivation felt by the Muhajirs, successfully mobilising ethnic loyalties and even demanding the creation of a separate Muhajir province, known as Muhajir Suba, comprising Karachi and Hyderabad (Haq 1995, 990).

### ***Internal Violence and the External Dimension in Mobilisation***

External support has often been a critical factor in the success and sustainability of violent insurgencies in South Asia. Both ideologically and materially, insurgent movements frequently seek assistance from sympathetic foreign powers, using this support to enhance their bargaining power against state forces.

During its 1971 insurrection, the JVP assured its cadres that foreign powers would intervene militarily in their favour. Although there is no evidence that such external support was ever forthcoming, the promise of assistance was a psychological tool to boost morale and recruitment. This demonstrates how insurgent groups can use the potential for external support, real or imagined, to inspire mobilisation (Wilson 1972, 367; Van der Kroef 1973, 125).

In the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka, the recruitment to various Tamil militant groups surged after the Indian government decided to provide training and material support. Although India's primary objective was to strengthen the Tamil groups' bargaining position in negotiations with the Sri Lankan government, this external support was instrumental in fuelling the militant struggle. The LTTE, which emerged as the dominant Tamil militant group, gained significant momentum due to this backing (Swamy 1994; Muni 1993, 168-69).

Similarly, in Kashmir, the expectation of Pakistani intervention played a significant role in mobilising support for the insurgency. Many young militants were inspired by the belief that Pakistan would militarily support their cause, leading to a large-scale recruitment effort. Fighting alongside the Afghan Mujahideen during

the Soviet-Afghan war also provided valuable combat experience and a militant consciousness among some Kashmiri youth, further fuelling the insurgency against the Indian state (Kashmir: Training the Fighters 1991, 23-24).

External support, whether through material assistance, sanctuary, or moral backing, has therefore been a key factor in the mobilisation strategies of insurgent groups across South Asia. In some cases, this external support is directly responsible for the longevity and intensity of insurgencies, as insurgents feel emboldened by the belief that they have external allies. However, when external support is limited or fails to materialise, insurgent groups often struggle to sustain their campaigns.

## VI. Conclusion

The theories and concepts discussed throughout this article provide a valuable framework for understanding the causes and conditions of political violence in South Asia. However, the region's political violence is driven by a complex mix of factors, and no single theory can fully explain the vast array of conflicts that have emerged over decades, shaped by various socio-economic conditions.

As noted, the primary drivers of violence in South Asia are largely linked to developmental disparities. Key concerns such as land rights, access to education, and employment opportunities highlight the uneven development patterns across the region. Some areas, like East Pakistan, Balochistan, and Assam, experienced extreme underdevelopment, while others, like Punjab, have seen rapid growth. Both underdevelopment and rapid development have created environments ripe for violent movements to take root.

The concept of relative deprivation, where certain groups feel disadvantaged compared to others, has proven particularly powerful in mobilising violence. This has been evident in movements by the JVP and the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Muhajirs in Pakistan, and the Kashmiris and Sikhs in India, where perceived economic or political marginalisation has fuelled intense, sustained violent campaigns.

The success of these movements depends on a combination of factors. Violent mobilisations have thrived when conditions such as relative deprivation, ethnic marginalisation, external support, and strategic geographical advantages align. For example, the Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka was sustained by a mix of land colonisation, ethnic oppression, external support from India, and the Tamil population's peripheral location. By contrast, movements like those of the Chakmas in Bangladesh or the Baloch in Pakistan, though driven by legitimate grievances, have not reached similar levels of violence due to the absence of such aligning conditions.

The role of the state's political economy is also central to these conflicts. In South Asia, states often align with dominant ethnic groups or ruling classes rather than acting as neutral arbiters. This has exacerbated tensions, as marginalised groups are excluded from political power and economic opportunities. In Pakistan, the dominance of the Punjabi and Pashtun military-bureaucratic elite has led to conflicts in Balochistan and among the Muhajirs. Similarly, in Bangladesh, the Bengali Muslim majority alienated groups like the Chakmas, while in Sri Lanka, Sinhala majoritarianism marginalised the Tamil population.

The core issue driving violence is the contradiction inherent in the development process across the region. Post-colonial South Asian states adopted a model of rapid economic growth aimed at emulating Western industrialisation, hoping to diminish ethnic and religious identities. However, instead of weakening these identities, uneven development and the exclusion of marginalised groups have reinforced ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions. As a result, these fractures have deepened, fuelling further violence.

Moving forward, the trajectory of political violence in South Asia will largely depend on how well these states address the grievances of marginalised groups. To break the cycle of violence, governments must integrate these groups into the political and economic mainstream. These conflicts can be resolved only by addressing legitimate grievances while maintaining state authority.

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