

## **Policy Choices and the Politics of State-Building – Insights from Two Cities in Pakistan**

Haris Gazdar and Sobia Ahmad Kaker

Karachi and Quetta provide a range of insights into the politics of state-building in Pakistan. Karachi is the country's largest metropolis, its commercial and financial hub, and one of the most populous cities in the world. It has also been the site of challenges to the state, in the shape of ethnic strife, political conflict and criminal violence which have often been inter-related. Quetta, at the other end of the urban spectrum is a provincial city in the midst of two wars – the struggle between US-led forces and their Taliban and Al Qaeda foes in Afghanistan, and a nationalist insurgency in Balochistan. Despite their obvious differences, these two cities offer lessons about the politics of state-building not only in Pakistan and its environ, but in other developing countries where modern state-building might be interpreted as the attempt to achieve the hegemony of formal over informal institutions of governance.

This paper argues that the balance between formal and informal institutions at any given moment in time is an outcome of past and current political settlements. Such outcomes are dependent, among other things, on the strategic priorities and normative agendas of the state-building elites. It is problematic to expect development interventions to push state-building as though the process were somehow autonomous of the composition and normative goals of the state-building elite itself. The regional, ethnic and class composition of the state-building elites do matter, as do their ideological orientations. It is important to enquire about the political and ideological motivations behind a project of state-building, and not only about the capacity of elites to effect state-building as such.

We believe that in the case of Pakistan a secularist, ethnically inclusive and social democratic platform for state-building should be supported, but openly acknowledge our own partisan position in this regard. We accept that other state-building projects are possible in our country, but happen not to support them, and might even lobby against them. Development policy debate having come as far as acknowledging the endogeneity of state-building, may also need to face the fact that international state-building interventions will be shaped by political and normative goals and possibilities in any particularly country.