An Analysis of the Role of National Identity upon Democratic Development in Pakistan

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Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote: ‘It would be better before examining the act by which a people give itself to a king, to examine that by which it has become a people; for this act, being necessarily prior to the other, is the true foundation of society’ (9). Using Pakistan as a case study, this essay will follow Rousseau’s advice and explore how a collective identity affects the nation’s ability to function as a democracy.

The nature of the identity that provides unity for a nation is a fundamental issue for democracy. As the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville once noted: ‘In order that society should exist and, a fortiori, that a society should prosper, it is necessary that the mind of all the citizens should be rallied and held together by certain predominant ideas’ (qtd in Miller 1). This essay argues that a cohesive national identity is necessary to create the consensus needed to legitimize democratic governance. The Pakistani establishment has awakened to the importance of identity issues rather belatedly, and this will be shown to be a major factor to their inability to sustain a democratic system of government.

Pakistan, as we know, is a case apart. Emerson noted the peculiarities behind the formation of the state when he said:

‘of the more recently created nations the most striking and extraordinary case is that of Pakistan where a nation which almost no one had foreseen and few could credit in advance as even a possibility came into being virtually overnight through its own assertion that a nation existed which had not been there yesterday morning.’ (92).

Pakistan was initially separated into two territories separated by thousands of kilometers and with practically no history of shared national unity. Citizens did not speak the same language, have a homogenous culture, or even share a common geographical space. Pakistan was not a nation in the traditional Western sense and thus, like many others
emerging from colonial rule, failed to create a cohesive national identity.

Since 1947, Pakistan has struggled to establish a democracy. The creation of Pakistan was based on the idea that Muslims in India needed a separate state where the Hindu majority in British India would not dominate them. The new state lacked an institutional base, was financially crippled by efforts to deal with one of the largest waves of refugees in history, and embroiled in a military conflict with its neighbor. It never fully recovered. The explanations to why the state has been unable to institute some form of democratic governance can be reduced, without much controversy, to three dominant factors. These are the role of the nation’s military and bureaucratic elite, its feeble institutions, and inter-ethnic strife. It shall be argued that the form national identity has taken plays a pivotal role in the causation of all these explanations of Pakistan’s political history. This does not refute these claims; it rather identifies an underlying factor that must be considered as a substantial hurdle to democratic consolidation in the state. To create ‘unshakable roots’ for democracy in Pakistan the social dynamics can no longer be ignored (Kukreja 84). Thus, this essay hopes to put forward a relatively novel thesis by filling the need for a comprehensive account of the arguments dealing with the failure of democracy in Pakistan.

Pakistan has been struggling to develop an all-encompassing identity since it’s founding. Western-educated professionals created the nation as a homeland for Muslims in the hope that Pakistanis would freely and earnestly engage in political and civil society under the umbrella of an Islamic identity. This vision of unity soon encountered the realities of state building. Today, the disillusionment among Pakistanis with the state is a serious concern for it ability to ever create a lasting democratic regime. As will be shown,
the failure to institutionalize a nationwide concept of identity is reflected in the state’s inability to assert control over powerful interest groups, to empower its institutions, and to reduce tension among ethnic groups. Pakistanis need to find consensus on what it means to be a citizen of the state if it is to be able to make sustainable progress towards forming a democratic society.

This is a case study that sets out to investigate the relationship between a national identity and the failure of democracy to take root in Pakistan. Since inception, Pakistan has been unable to consolidate an identity making the establishment of democracy untenable. A theoretical segment will firstly establish the correlation between the form a national identity takes and democracy. This will be followed by a case study of Pakistan, which will historically trace the Pakistani identity and how it has curtailed the nation’s quest for democratic governance. The conclusion will recap the argument and briefly detail its implications for democratization in post-colonial states.
Locating the Discussion

People create whole states just to make the point about who they are and how they are different from others. While this idea has in some way been evident since antiquity, it was only after end of the Cold War that contemporary political science began to emphasize the role identity plays upon the ability of the state to govern. Today, a national identity is acknowledged as the predominant form of collective identity (Smith). Most people are socialized in such a manner that their association with a distinct nationality is taken as a given. All forms of government, from monarchies to democracies, accommodate the need to establish a common identity. The reassertion of identity has forced a reevaluation of the foundation needed to institute a democratic order. To be presented in the following pages are the theoretical grounds for the following case study on Pakistan that supposes a cohesive national identity is necessary for a democratic community to take shape.

This essay will thoroughly evaluate the literature on national identity and nationalism to establish that the form such an identity takes can either undermine or sustain a nation’s ability to establish a democratic form of government. To start, an overview of the discourse on democracy and national identity should make evident the fact that the notion of social unity has been seen as necessary for a free society since the nation-state emerged as the dominant form of political organization. The following concise section will clarify what nations are, to better understand the political consequences having a national identity. This will lead into a discussion of the formation of nation-states and how contemporary issues shape the debate between contesting theories. Here it will be established that post-colonial states, like Pakistan, had particular difficulty in establishing
a liberal form of national identity thus identifying an underlying factor to their uncertain record of democratic consolidation. An overview of the literature on identity politics, as it pertains to sub-national groups, argues that such tensions only pose a danger to democracy if an overarching national identity is lacking. Finally, what national identity implies for the internal policy of a state will be explored and how the choices states make are critical to the form national identity takes. This theoretical overview is not meant to be exhaustive, but to locate the discussion such that the following case study on Pakistan can establish the argument developed here in practice.

**Democracy and Unity**

A sense of common political purpose is commonly thought of as necessary if citizens are to be compelled to make their government work. Such ideas have been prevalent in political and social theory for years, from Rousseau’s general will to Durkheim’s concept of the conscience collective. In this vein, a cohesive national identity answers one of the most pressing needs of the modern democratic state, a means to maintain unity among the population. After defining terms, this segment will establish that the social solidarity that ensures the support for a democratic political order requires such an identity to take root in the national consciousness. Confirmed here is how a national identity compatible with democratic values is necessary if a society hopes to be based upon such principles, especially in a multicultural context.

Before delving deeper into the subject, one must firstly clarify the terminology this segment will use. It will explore the deliberative model of democracy, which places an onus on the processes by which individual preferences are managed in the state decision-
making apparatus. Josh Cohen, who drew heavily from John Rawls, envisions the ideal of a deliberative democracy as ‘an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members’ (2001: 87). It requires a high level of trust and a mutual understanding among citizens, which is difficult to generate without a sense of social unity (Lummis 37).

Democracy is not just about the ballot box, but about public debate and reasoning in an attempt to reach agreement, what Sen describes as ‘government by discussion’ (53). Reaching this ideal is not an end goal but a process that can be furthered or hindered at any time. As a system of government, democracy is compelling because it operates upon the consent of the people as the basis for political order. This model does indicate the need for collective organization because it institutionalizes citizen control over the state. Beetham exemplifies this onus on civic culture when he described democracy as ‘a mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control’ (5). It is a system of governance that ensures the people hold in their hands the power to determine the destiny of the nation, thus making the nature of the polity exceptionally important. The question that begs answering is how a national identity affects a nation’s path to realizing such an ideal.

Identity politics are about differentiating between what one is and what one is not. In contemporary social science, identity is determined by caste, class, religion, tribe, language, gender, or race. This essay will focus on the concept of a national identity or what is commonly referred to as a nationality. The concepts of national identity and nationalism are interrelated, though the terms are not interchangeable. Similar to Smith, this essay understands national identity as a derivative of the nationalism of the said state.
Arguing that there is a necessary and positive link between national identity and
democracy opposes many theorists who maintain that nationalism is illiberal, thus
national identity is a similarly illiberal conception. This stems from a stigma that took
hold in the aftermath of the Second World War and the carnage that had taken place in
the name of nationalism. The entire ideology was branded as irrational, violent, and
fundamentally undemocratic. American historian, Robert Wiebe, defines nationalism
simply as ‘the desire among people who believe they share a common ancestry and a
common destiny to live under their own government on land sacred to their history’ (5).
Thus it is an ideological movement that can be a liberating and unifying force, breaking
down barriers to unite peoples into free and functional states. It is a crude
oversimplification to associate nationalism solely with the fanaticism, xenophobia, and
bloodshed that states have unleashed in its name, as conservatives like Lord Acton once
did or contemporary theorists like Kedourie still do.

Nationalism and national identities are primarily a means to attain unity. Given this,
however, there are many conceptions of national identity that are indeed illiberal. A
liberal national identity is defined as one that is inclusive and accommodates differences
between members of the nation. A cohesive identity is inherently liberal because it
accommodates the entire body politic in this manner. Thus while illiberal identities exist,
it must be recognized that they do not represent all who wish to cultivate a strong sense
of nationalism (Miller 26). As all nations can be presumed to promulgate a nationality, it
is the form this collective identity takes upon which this study focuses. It is the purpose
of this paper to establish that a liberal formulation such an identity is, indeed, necessary
for the institution of a government based on democratic values.
National identities fulfill social, political, economic, and individual functions. For our purposes, we will focus on the social and political role that a national identity plays. Socially, the role of a collective identity in establishing social solidarity has been noted by social scientists like Durkheim, Tocqueville, and Webber to name a few. This argument was also put forward by one of the great scholars of the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill. He perceived in the concept of nationality a source of social unity that could stabilize the foundations of liberal democratic society. In the chapter entitled ‘Of Nationality’ in Representative Government, Mill asserts his argument that a liberal national identity is necessary for democracy. He said, ‘Among a people without fellow-feeling… the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist’ (428). His argument supposes that unless the many groups that compose society have the ‘mutual sympathy and trust’ that stems from a cohesive identity, it is impossible to have the free institutions needed for democratic governance. Mill also saw in a national identity a means to protect liberal freedoms from the ‘tyranny of the majority’ that procedurally democratic states could create (Varouxakis 29). This Hobbesian interpretation of majority rule, synonymous with draconian social conformity, can only become plausible when social unity has been undermined. By this logic, the concentration of power in the hands of elites or dominant groups is more likely to occur when a collective sense of destiny does not envelop the people. Mill’s understanding of nationality, which clearly correlated a national identity and democratic governance, is the classical argument that underlies the theory behind this case study.

Even among modern theorists a strong sense of national unity is accepted as a foundation for democratic transition and consolidation. The eminent German social
theorist, Jurgen Habermas, speaks of the need for a ‘supportive spirit to uphold a liberal political culture’ (212). O’Flynn similarly claims that as long as citizens don’t see themselves as bound by a common identity they will not be motivated to do their civic duty to maintain a democratic order. Schmitter explicitly describes a cohesive nationality as the ‘overriding political requisite for democracy’ because of the social cohesion it could ensure (84). Seyla Benhabib reiterates this line of thinking by identifying a collective identity as one of the public goods that modern democratic societies must secure to be sustainable (6). The relationship between nationalism and democracy in contemporary politics may be troubled, but the basis a national identity provides for a democratic community is difficult to deny. Yack goes one step further and traces the historical relationship of the democracy and nationalism and comes to a significant conclusion about why identity politics has reemerged into mainstream political debate. He says:

‘The age of liberal democracy is also the age of nationalism. Every great landmark in the rise and spread of the liberal democratic state – the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the North and South American Wars of Independence, the great French Revolution of 1789, the springtime of peoples in 1848, the collapse of European and colonial empires in the twentieth century – looms large in the history of nationalism as well. It should not be surprising, then, that the collapse of Soviet communism has led to a resurgence of nationalist politics as well as the extension of liberal democratic ideals and institutions. The pattern in familiar.’ (Yack 29)
Thus, history and theory shows that a viable sense of unity, embodied in a cohesive national identity, is necessary for the establishment and maintenance of a democratic society.

Questions about the accommodation of difference in democratic communities and the subsequent implications for social unity are some of the most troubling issues in democratic politics today. Diversity, if not properly regulated, can inhibit the construction of a democratic system (Benhabib). The capacity of a national identity to ‘bond citizens together in a single community’ is a means to overcome the challenges posed for social solidarity by diversity (Miller 63). An inclusive national identity can serve as the groundwork for democratic institutions that manage the expression of difference without fracturing the collective identity of the state. The formulation of a unifying identity was all the more pressing for many of the multinational states that emerged from colonialism. Without the institutional capacity to ‘dissolve’ sub-identities as established states had, pluralism risked being undermined (Hoover 5). As an example, India’s diversity overwhelmed democratic theorists and many questioned the likelihood of it sustaining a democratic political system (Harrison 338). Remarkably, a liberal national identity wedded to the constitutional principles of secularism and democracy overcame the ethnic and linguistic divides within the state. India’s accomplishment was not mirrored elsewhere, most evidently in the contrasting success of its neighbor. Only a cohesive identity can ensure the social consensus to undertake what Robert Dahl notes as ‘the great transformation of modernity’ (qtd. in Miller 23). This was the establishment of democratic rule within multinational states. Thus the contradiction between the
homogeny of a nation and the diversity of the nation-state that has perplexed scholars since the Enlightenment can be placated by a cohesive national identity.

The extension of feelings of reciprocity and trust from the private to the public sphere can underpin the solidarity needed to reinforce a democratic society. J.S. Mill thought that this sense of common identity was best illustrated by a national identity. He saw such a concept as not only compatible with fundamental liberal arguments for freedom and democracy, but necessary for the institutionalization of a society based on such values. A cohesive national identity subsumes the entirety of the polity, and thus ensures the social unity needed for a democratic society to take root.

**The Nation and Legitimacy**

The triumph of the doctrine of nationalism in the West has shaped, and continues to shape, the international state system. Almost all peoples, even the displaced and the migratory, live under the political authority of the nation-state. In Joseph Stalin’s well-known work, *Marxism and the National Question*, four essential features of a nation are identified. These are: a common territory, shared language, economic life, and a ‘psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture’ (15). The last of these is vague, but it will be taken here to denote a common identity to which all citizens can associate and is necessary to the formation and function of a nation. Another manner of conceptualizing a nation is one that focuses solely on the psychological dimension that Stalin mentioned. Harvard’s Rupert Emerson is one of the most distinguished scholars in this category. He defines a nation simply as ‘a community of people who feel that they belong together’ (95). These theorists are referring to the political justification needed by
modern nations to legitimize the rationale for having a state and why state structures should be endowed with authority to govern. This is a study of one of the sources of legitimacy; national identity.

Nationalism scholar, Anthony D. Smith, provides us with another view of the nation-state. It started as community that was bound primarily by a common heritage. Modernity transformed these old ethnic communities into modern nations, in a process of state formation that will be touched on later. National identities have preserved some elements of the old group identities, but evolved with the addition of the principle of citizenship. Thus national identities are based on two elements: ‘an ethnic element, which stems from cultural-historical legacies and a civic element, which stems from modernity’ (Smith 1984: 8). Smith acknowledges that a national identity is the most potent form of collective identification because of its ability to ‘link past and present in a communally meaningful way’ (qtd in Malesevic 123). The importance of the past to the formation of a common identity cannot be underestimated. A nation’s political legitimacy is dependent on regular reaffirmation of its values and collective past. As Ernest Renan eloquently noted: ‘The existence of a nation is an everyday plebiscite’ (18).

Identity, while relying heavily on the past, is never fixed or static. It must adapt to the changing needs of society, as to ensure legitimacy for state authority. One can easily criticize such a view as idealistic in the increasingly globalized modern world. In this way, national identity, like democracy itself is an aspiration. In its liberal form, it cultivates the shared belief among citizens of the state that they belong together, and a shared wish to continue doing so.
Post-colonialism and State Formation

Nationalism is an ideology about the ‘social basis of political authority’ that raises interesting problems because it is practically impossible to clearly define the unit that has the right to self-governance (Wiebe). The great difficulty about the concept of nationhood is that it seems impossible to define along one singular concept. The difficulty of national integration that befell many post-colonial governments is indicative of this ambiguity. The assertion in this section is that the state-formation model of Anthony D. Smith is best suited to providing an adequate analysis of numerous identity issues that pertain to democratic development in the context of states like Pakistan. This section will trace the origins of postcolonial nations and subsequently establish why they have had difficulty in forming the liberal national identity needed for democratic governance. This point is most clearly epitomized by the following case study, which demonstrates how this handicap adversely affected democratic development.

The concept of nationalism was spread to the non-European world through imperialism. There it was adopted by liberation movements as a means to oppose the legitimacy of colonial administrations. Many of these nationalist movements were modeled on the West, as in their ambitions entailed the creation of autonomous states similar to those that emerged in Europe centuries earlier. Their task, however, was severely complicated by the legacies of colonialism. The colonial boundaries that these successor-states inherited were created on the basis of military and economic strategy that ignored the historical and cultural allegiances of the people inhabiting them. Thus the states that emerged from these demarcations struggled to overcome contradictions in the relationship between communal and political loyalties (Hobsbawm 365). In the Western
world, the nation and the state emerged together. The Westphalian order was a legitimate means to divide lands and peoples into homogenous entities. The experiences of Africa, Asia, and Latin America were very different. A European ideology from the 18th century in a 20th century context resulted in the formation of nation-states that encompassed groups that were supposed ‘to dissolve into enlarged and internally undifferentiated political communities’ (Maiz 38). These complications severely hindered these states’ ability to foster a cohesive national identity, and thus placed them at a severe disadvantage to creating an effective democratic system.

The origins of nations can be explained by four different paradigms: the primordialist, the perennialist, the modernist, and the ethno-symbolic. As the latter two schools dominate academic discourse, it is upon these that this paper will clarify the context within which post-colonial states formed their national identity. Modernism, the dominant scholarly paradigm used today, sees the nation as a contemporary conception that has emerged from the fervor of the French Revolution. The modernist view of nations and nationalism as represented by Hobsbawm, Gellner, and Anderson was strongly criticized by Anthony Smith in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Ethno-symbolists, like Smith, critique this model because it does not give due importance to long-standing ties that are needed between members of a polity if it is to be cohesive (9).

Classical modernists see nations as the buildings blocks of the modern world order. The nation-state was a conception that could be applied to bring people together, in Anderson’s words, into an imagined political community (38). Importantly, modernist approaches show that the nation was a political community before a cultural community, meaning nationalism preceded the nation. As Hobsbawm declares, ‘Nations do not make
nationalisms, but the other way round’ (10). Gellner agrees, ‘Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist’ (168). Such logic, prevalent among the leaders of many of the new states that emerged following decolonization, underestimated the emotional appeal of nationalism and thus misunderstood the importance of a national identity to social solidarity and political legitimization. Modernists believed nationalism could be manipulated for the sake of national unity without constructing a national identity based on historical or civic ties to ground it.

The dramatic social and political changes that states have experienced since the 1970s have overturned the traditional understanding of nation-states. Smith used Durkheim’s evolutionary approach to society to form his interpretation of the formation of nations, known as the historical ethno-symbolic approach. He cited the resurgence of ethnic conflict and the crisis of identity that many nations face as signifiers that the literature on nationalism is outdated. For ethno-symbolists, a shared history is vital to the formation of a cohesive national identity. As Smith explains:

‘Ethno-symbolism claims that most nations, including the earliest, were based on ethnic ties and sentiments and on popular ethnic traditions, which have provided the cultural resources for the latter nation-formation; and that even those new state-nations in Africa and Asia that sough to turn ex-colonies into territorial nations must forge a cultural unity and identity of myth, symbol, values, and memory that can match that of nations built on pre-existing ethnic ties, if they are to survive and flourish as nations’ (Smith 1991: 13).
It is important to note that the Smith’s model is not antithetical to a cosmopolitan culture; it simply means to point out the difficulty that clearly exists in achieving this. He does not rule out the use of invented traditions in establishing a common identity (1984: 100). Artificial constructions become especially important to the creation of a national identity in post-colonial states whose borders reflect imperialism rather than natural human demarcations, but they must be grounded in some sense of history.

The logic of modernization as expressed by Western intellectuals pressed the first generation of postcolonial leaders to adopt conceptions of nationalism that emphasized political unity without any ‘social or cultural reasoning’ (Wiebe 9). This underestimation has become apparent in the last two decades as the legitimacy of weak states crumbled and democratic gains were reversed in what Larry Diamond called ‘the global democratic divergence’ (356). As Wyatt notes, this broad trend is evidently present among the nation-states of South Asia. The most prominent example being Pakistan’s reversion to military rule in 1999 after 11 years of elected civilian governments. This trend that reversed the optimism of many democratic theorists was in not entirely due to identity issues, but they did play an important part in undermining the sustainability of democratic consolidation made in years prior. This claim is further substantiated by Haynes, who believes that following the independence of many Third World states in the mid-20th century ‘social schisms led to cultural mistrust between people, often feeling little or no affinity with each other yet forced to coexist in countries with inflexible state boundaries, led to a failure to build a strong, durable, [and] legitimate political systems’ (8). Thus the underestimations of the predominant modernist paradigm contributed to the inability of
states in the post-colonial world to create the necessary social unity needed for legitimate
government and thus any semblance of democratic rule.

In response to the crisis of legitimacy that many faced, states reformed national
identity policy to better reflect their societies and to gain authority for their own waning
institutions. This is easier said than done, as according to Smith, any ‘attempt to create
new identities is likely to prove painfully slow and arduous, especially where the new
identities lack clear boundaries and must compete with well established and deep rooted
identities and communities’ (1991: 19). This leads us into the research of sociologist
Mark Juergensmeyer. His investigation into the regressive trend of Third World nations
adopting religious or ethnic bases to their national identity allows us to come to an
interesting correlation between state formation, national identity, and democracy in the
postcolonial world.

Birch has identified four different bases of national identity; ‘ethnicity, religion,
shared historical experiences, or shared commitment to a set of political ideals’ (17). In
the developed world, national identities have evolved such that the political ideals that
they are based upon reflect a position of pluralism and secularism that encompass all
ethnicities and religions. Additionally, a shared historical experience, while still vitally
importantly, is no longer restrictive due to a civic conception of citizenship that has open
membership. Thus a modern liberal national identity has come to be based upon
democratic ideals (Birch). Juergensmeyer claims that such conceptions of national
identity have failed in the in many developing states (194). Thus states in need of
legitimacy to assert authority imposed an illiberal conception of national identity. Such a
national ideology is usually based upon the religion or ethnicity of the dominant group.
The adoption of an exclusive nationality was a consequence of the failed policies of modernization that promulgated one-dimensional national identities in states with diverse populations.

This is relevant because such ideological national identities placed an emphasis on the collective rather than the individual. The notion of individualism is arguably the common denominator to all democratic theory from the social contractarians through the classical liberal individualist model and to the deliberative model this paper has adopted (Cohen 2001). Thus religious or ethnic nationalism promulgates a national identity that, while providing some semblance of unity, does not espouse a democratic ethos. Despite being critical to sustaining state-structures in fledgling nations, such nationalisms could further unravel democratic progress because of its tendency toward ‘demagouery and dictatorship’ (Juergensmeyer 195). These forms of national identity are illiberal and oppressive in that they discount all previous identities and force the adoption and prominence of the state-sanctioned identity. A defining characteristic of non-democratic societies and situations is a limitation on access to power to certain categories of people, and this is more likely to occur in the when national identity is based by ethnicity or religion. As discussed earlier, only an inclusive national identity can be considered as complementary with and necessary for a democratic society.

The sociologists and political scientists who have studied nationalism are divided on the question of what unifies a national polity. The dominant model underestimates national identity as a political expedient means for governments to assert themselves. Others, who argue for the primacy of affinity based on a common history, place an onus on the consent of the populous in forming a national identity (Smith, Miller). Established
here is that the modernist paradigm firstly did not promote the importance of a cohesive national identity thus undermining the democratic gains of states that emerged from colonialism in the latter half of the 20th century. These same states then adopted an illiberal form of national identity to reassert authority. These nationalisms emphasize difference rather than commonality, and undermine individuality in the name of national interest. These identity formations are exclusive and deeply undemocratic, and are a key factor in the difficulty of sustaining democratic consolidation in the developing world today.

Many of the new states of Asia and Africa, as Rupert Emerson has pointed out, ‘are not yet nations in being but only in hope’ (67). Unlike the European countries where common language and culture were key elements in the growth of nation-states, the members of Huntington’s ‘third wave’ were faced with the task of establishing a national identity in a diverse social setting. The difficulties experienced by postcolonial states in the formation of a liberal national identity and their subsequent record of democratic consolidation further establish the correlation between national identity and democracy.

**Sub-national Identities**

Identity politics can be used in multiple circumstances aside from its nationalist conception. Identity-based social movements can coalesce under any natural or socially constructed grouping. An example of the former could be an ethnic group, and an example of the latter could be a class. Criticism for the overemphasis such sub-national identities place on difference at the expense of unity is rife among scholars (Schlesinger, Hobsbawm). This segment will not reiterate the argument that identity politics at the
domestic level breed conflict and division that threatens democratic governance within the state. Rather, it will argue that identity politics only pose a threat to democracy if an overarching national identity is not present. This should further harden the relationship between a cohesive national identity and democracy, and will be clearly exemplified later when Pakistan’s different identity groups are examined.

Amy Gutmann, a leading political scientist, explores in her book *Identity in Democracy* the role that identity groups play in democratic consolidation. Her argument resists categorically labeling any identity group as ‘bad’ to democracy because of their capacity to galvanize their constituents’ interest and participation in civil and political society (14). Identity groups are understood as a consequence of the world we live in, where nations are almost never totally homogenous. As James Madison said in the *Federalist Paper 10*, ‘It would be as much folly to try to abolish what causes identity groups to form as it would be to wish the annihilation of air’ (qtd in Gutmann 22).

Permitting and accommodating expressions of different identities become especially important for the deliberative democratic model as it fosters the debate and discussion necessary to ensure the engagement of the people.

Gutman does, however, highlight the circumstances in which groups need to be labeled as ‘bad’ for democracy (16). She describes this as disregard for the institutions of state, especially law and order. This can be interpreted as undermining the sovereignty of the state in question, which causes the instability and division that stalls democratic growth. Guibernau believes similarly that only groups that attempt to assert their own distinctive identity ahead of their national identity are threats to pluralist order (26). In this scenario, the form of national identity adopted is not sufficiently cohesive for the
state, thus sub-national identities become antithetical to a unified functional state. Such consequences for governance only arise from ‘bad’ identity groups in the case where a national identity fails to provide the unity necessary to keep the all members of the state committed to the democratic process.

Much has been said recently about the dual processes of globalism and localism, or as Benjamin Barber’s famous title described it, *McWorld vs. Jihad*. Such literature has articulated the need for states to more aggressively address the demands of different groups. The dangers presented by sub-state identity politics are more prevalent in states that do not have a cohesive national identity to speak of. In similar vein, Hoover discusses how without a nationality with which to identify, sub-national group identities tend towards extremes (40). An overarching national identity institutes a certain tolerance between individuals of separate ethnic, regional, or linguistic groups because they perceive each other as equal citizens. Only this mutuality, or ‘common-sympathies’ as J.S. Mill said, can allow for the development of a pluralist democracy.

Even mature democracies struggle to balance particularistic appeals of groups and citizens, thus institutionally-incapable states find it extremely difficult to establish democratic regimes while balancing groups without a collective interest. Thus the dangers of identity politics are more acute in post-colonial states. As Jalal says; ‘the assertion of distinctive identities by variously defined social groupings has come to pose the biggest challenge to the dominant idioms deployed to sustain and legitimize post-colonial state structures’ (2). A cohesive national identity is a means to placate minority interests, and commit them to the existing structure of the state.
Gutmann argues that identity groups are ‘neither friends nor enemies of democracy,’ it is the agendas which they pursue that determine their role (37). Established here is that these agendas if drawn without a cohesive national identity in place tend to undermine democracy by veering toward extremes of radicalization, militarization, or secessionism. Such deadlocks are very difficult to resolve because the group identity becomes defined by difference from the collective, fracturing bonds (Brown). In contrast, agendas drawn in the presence of a strong national identity propel groups to utilize the existing framework to have their interests meet. In this way, the deliberative systems of governance need an overarching collective identity to function freely and openly, especially in diverse multinational states.

**Implications for Policy**

The study of the amalgamation of society was a subject in the social sciences traditionally taken up by sociologists. In modeling the integration of members into a society, Migdal presents two visions of society: ‘society as a mélange of competing forces and actors, and society that stresses commonality among members’ (93). This corresponds to the Durkhemian concept of social solidarity. The distinguished French sociologist believed that if social regulation was insufficient it could result in fragmentation of its members. However, if properly conducted, it could manage competing forces and facilitate social integration and a sense of collective identity (Durkheim 18). This section will provide an overview of how states conduct policy in regards to creating and fostering a national identity.
Different governments have to contend with different kinds of identity problems, each having a number of policy instruments at their disposal to form, manipulate, and strengthen national identity. Policies are based either on coercion or inducement. Brown lays out four basic policy options: forced assimilation, induced assimilation, benign accommodation, and toleration (513). Government policies to mediate identity issues are critically important. Other government policies- demographic, political, or economic- also have significant effects on the course of relations between groups in the country in question. These decisions can aggravate or placate issues that make the difference between unity and stability, on the one hand, or inequality and conflict, on the other. This section will explore Brown’s writings about the political dilemmas that multiethnic states must face in the implementation of policy, and then connect citizenship policies to clarify the tools state’s can use in addressing their identity issues.

Governments generally have one of two basic visions of their nation: ‘a unicultural vision, where the policy goal is assimilation; or a multicultural vision, where the policy goal is maintenance of political unity while preserving cultural diversity’ (Brown 534). The balance of power between state and society is critical to what direction policy will take. A strong state would be inclined towards envisioning a unicultural identity because of the benefits to centralized governance and national security. A multicultural vision, quite conversely, is more likely to allow interest groups to assert themselves upon the political structure. Identity issues are complex issues that governments address with caution and deliberate intent. The modernization policies of post-colonial states like Pakistan, for instance, promoted a unicultural vision of society through policies of forced assimilation (Brown). This allowed the dominant ethnic, religious, or socio-economic
group, hesitant to relinquish authority or recognition to minorities, to consolidate power in their own hands. Such a policy was pursued by several newly-formed states after the Second World War to ensure stability by strengthening the state and weakening society. It, however, runs counter the concept of a liberal national identity that this essay has thus developed.

This relates to Maiz’s discussion about a possible contradiction that has arisen between identity policies and democracy. He questions the ‘traditional centralism of the nation-state’ in multinational states and what that entails for minority groups (36). Creating a society capable of ‘harmonious and democratic coexistence of several identities within one state’ requires a balance of group rights against individual rights’ (Maiz 36). The recognition and accommodation of the plurality is the most effective means to governing a multicultural state. The arrangement of the state must prioritize the accommodation of cultural pluralism with political unity. The collective political identity, thus, must be formulated as inclusive if it is to be considered compatible with democratic values. This approach to identity reveals the limits to policies of assimilation. Homogenization of a diverse population by a strong state cannot be justified in the name of stability; it is autocratic and creates an illiberal form of national identity. Accommodation or toleration of varied identities is the only means through which a political system defined by equal rights, a respect for diversity, and the rule of law can be realized.

Citizenship policies are also profoundly important because they help to define the legal and political demarcations of a national identity. The critical policy issue is whether a nation should adopt a narrow sectarian definition or a broader civic definition of
citizenship. Derived from the Locke’s natural law tradition and Aristotle’s republican tradition, a civic conception of citizenship is a form of identity that relies upon an allegiance to the institutions of the state (Habermas). By depoliticizing identity, the state makes it accessible to all. A citizen is thus one who identifies with the shared values and practices of the community, and is a stakeholder in the state. The other is a cultural identity that ‘stresses the importance of ethnicity and culture’ (O’Flynn 54). The ethnic form is competitive and exclusive. The democratic notion of treating all citizens equally regardless of their differences leads to the inevitable conclusion that an overarching civic nationality is preferable for the maintenance of democracy. As Habermas states, ‘the nation of citizens finds its identity not in ethnic and cultural commonalities but in the practice of citizens who actively exercise their right to participation and communication’ (209). Only when citizenship is defined broadly and available to all can the polity be galvanized to participate and coordinate the functioning of their state in a democratic manner. Miler similarly says, that a civic conception of citizenship ‘is better able to respond to cultural diversity than other versions by virtue of its ability to draw groups who initially have very different priorities into public debate, and to find compromise solution to political issues that members of each group can accept’ (3). The modern nation-state must link citizenship with nationality if it is to develop a national identity that will shape the polity in a manner that accommodates democratic pluralism.

Modernist logic advocated state policy that created a national identity that was forced upon the population from above and thus perpetuated the disequilibrium in state-society relations. The rejection of assimilationist models and the consensus that multicultural democracies need to address minority representation in their conceptualization of a
national identity are evidence that ‘ideas of equality have become more pervasive and compelling than ever’ in the discourse on identity (Phillips 47). Simply put, the form that national identity takes is vitally important to democratic development. Too weak and an identity could fail in its task of creating a cohesive polity. Too strong and an identity may not adequately accommodate for differences within the polity. These scenarios are simple yet demonstrative of how national identity policy has direct effects on the democratic consolidation.

**Conclusion: Identity and Democracy**

Smith epitomizes the sentiments of the argument developed here in saying:

‘Of all the collective identities which human beings share today, national identity is perhaps the most fundamental and inclusive. Not only has nationalism, the ideological movement, penetrated every corner of the globe; the world is divided, first and foremost, into nation-states and national identity everywhere underpins the recurrent drive for popular sovereignty and democracy’ (1984: 143).

Smith is a modern theorist who is repeating an argument that has been made for years correlating the social and political need for a collective identity to democratic governance. Each and every nation must develop such a concept in a national identity that combines traditional historic roots and modern citizenship rights. In the post-colonial world this was especially difficult considering the heterogeneous nations that emerged, but further complicated by modernization programs that did not stress the need for liberal conceptions of national identity. Furthermore, in instances where the national identity fails to create adequate unity, sub-national identities can undermine the state’s ability to
maintain a democratic order. Policy decisions also affect how the national identity will form and how minority rights will be addressed. Laid out in the above pages is the theoretical framework to ground the core argument to follow, which states that Pakistan’s path towards democracy has been directly curtailed by its inability to form a cohesive national identity.
On March 3 of this year gunmen opened fire on a bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team in the Pakistani city of Lahore. Regardless of which jihadi group was behind the attack, their ultimate goal was clear: to destroy democracy in Pakistan. Their choice of target was especially pertinent. In Pakistan, the love for cricket cuts across all social divides. To destroy democracy, the militants choose to attack one of the few remaining vestiges of national unity in Pakistan.

This essay will explore unity in Pakistan through the concept of a national identity, and establish that the conception of a national identity in Pakistan has undermined the ability of the state to establish a lasting form of democratic governance. As a nation that sits at the intersection of Islamist terrorism and nuclear weapons, Pakistan requires the sustained attention of the world. Ever since gaining independence in 1947, its political development has been turbulent and chaotic. The country has been under military rule for nearly half its existence. No elected government has ever completed its term in office. It has had three wars with India and lost half its territory in the process. Its economy has never flourished. Over half of its population of a 165 million is illiterate and a third live below the poverty line (UNDP Pakistan). It is a country founded with a democratic mandate, which has made woeful progress toward the ideal of democratic civilian rule. It is a country where the consolidation not just of democracy, but also of a national identity is a serious concern.

Considerable literature has been produced that deals with Pakistan’s continuous inability to institute a form of democracy. Most of these studies, while discussing the
problems of democratic consolidation in depth, tend to deal exclusively with just one theme or one aspect of history. Typical topics that have been explored include the role of colonialism, religion, ethnicity, the armed forces, and foreign actors. After a thorough review of the literature pertaining to this subject, there emerges three groups of issues that are acknowledged among scholars and policy-makers as the country’s foremost handicaps. These are a legacy of praetorianism, institutional incapacity, and divisive sub-national identities. The role of religious fanaticism is also discussed, but in connection to elite dominance; the reasons for which will be made apparent. The point this segment hopes to make is that these different perspectives to viewing democracy’s inability to grow have a common denominator; the role of a national identity.

In order to establish this hypothesis, an outline of Pakistan’s turbulent political history from pre-partition to today will be presented to highlight the nation’s experience with democracy. Following this, the formation of the identity crisis will be explored to understand why the concept of a Pakistani nationality has failed to create a cohesive polity. Then the various arguments presented for the lack of democracy will be examined, and their rationale connected with the role national identity has played, or failed to play, in Pakistan. This section will conclude by establishing that democracy in Pakistan did not take shape early in its history and cannot hope take root today without the development of a cohesive national identity. This essay fills a gap in our knowledge of a historical understanding of a national identity in the state by exploring the foundations, evolution, dynamics, and implications of being Pakistani.
In his presidential address to the annual meeting of the Muslim League in 1930, the leading Muslim philosopher in British India, Sir Muhammad Iqbal presented the idea of joining the Punjab, the NWFP, Sind, and Balochistan into a single state. This was the germination of the Pakistan Movement. Events early in the 20th century led Muslims to begin to think that their destiny might be separate from the Hindus they had lived among for millennia. Born through discussion on how to solve the Hindu-Muslim equation in the subcontinent after the British left India to self-rule, the discourse slowly shifted from how to balance power to ideas of a separate Muslim homeland. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a British-educated lawyer who emerged as the principal leader of India’s Muslims, was convinced that the formation of two separate states was the only just means to divide India. This two-nation theory was presented at the Muslim League’s annual session in Lahore in 1940. The representatives of India’s disparate Muslim community resolved that the areas of Muslim majority in northwestern and eastern India should be grouped together to constitute independent states. The Lahore Resolution, as this declaration has come to be called, has often been referred to as the Pakistan Resolution, but the word Pakistan was still to be created.

The history of the partition of India has been extensively covered and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that in 1947 it created two states, both with a majority of one religious group, but with multiple linguistic cleavages as well as other divisions including ethnicity, region, and sect. Jinnah became, in Jalal’s terminology, ‘the sole spokesman,’ of the Pakistan Movement, contrasting sharply with the Congress’s many prominent leaders. When Pakistan finally came into existence, it came into existence with
two wings. East Pakistan, modern-day Bangladesh, was comprised of a homogenous Bengali-speaking population. West Pakistan, quite conversely, was composed of four provinces, each with a distinct cultural and linguistic heritage.

Pakistan was cast as the seceding state and India as the inheritor-state of the recourses and institutions of the British colonial administration. Pakistan literally had to build the institutions of state from scratch. The constitution envisioned a parliamentary system based on the Westminster model, with directly elected legislatures at the federal and provincial levels. The President was head of state and the symbol of unity for the federation. Jinnah wanted Pakistan to be a secular democracy inspired by, but not restricted to, Muslim values. Yet, for all his ideals, he never behaved very democratically (Cohen 2004). As the founder of the nation, Jinnah had such massive personal authority that when he died, just thirteen months after Pakistan was born, a crisis of leadership materialized. Compounded by the assassination of his chosen successor, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, in 1951 and the fractionalization of the Muslim League soon after, a power vacuum formed that the powerful military-bureaucratic elite filled (Ziring 64).

In 1958, to avoid a spiraling political crisis, Pakistan was placed under martial law. It was a joint decision of President Mirza and the Commander in Chief of the Army, General Ayub Khan, ‘taken by the former at the insistence of the latter’ (Ziring 81). Ayub would be the first in a long history of military rulers to command the country. He oversaw the first war with India in 1965 and pushed forward aggressive policies of modernization. His disdain for the effectiveness of civilian politicians, and belief that Pakistan was unprepared for the democratic values espoused by the West set the precedent for future military leaders to follow. But his failure to ensure the security and
stability that was needed forced his resignation. Martial law was imposed to ensure a smooth transfer of power to Ayub’s handpicked successor, General Yahya Khan.

Yahya’s regime was viewed as a transitional arrangement that would lead to the establishment of a participatory political process (Kux). Pakistan’s first free democratic elections took place in 1970. The victorious party, the Awami League, was representative of East Pakistan’s Bengali majority. At the risk of being subordinated by a Bengali-dominated civilian government, Yahya invalidated the elections and began a vicious crackdown on political opponents, described by the US consulate in Dhaka as a ‘reign of terror’ (Haqqani 81). The ensuing conflict resulted in the further partition of Pakistan. Nationalists supported by the Indian military seceded from Pakistan and formed Bangladesh. The army’s inability to ward off the Indian military offensive forced Yahya to resign in shame; finally returning, what remained of Pakistan, to rule by a civilian-lead government.

The Pakistan People’s Party emerged as the country’s most prominent political party following the elections of 1971. Its leader, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, overcame strong pressure from opponents in the military to become the first civilian ruler with real power in Pakistan for almost two decades. Bhutto’s opposition to the civil-military complex that had played a critical role in the functioning of the state thus far and his socialist agenda angered the nation’s elites (Haqqani 95). His idealism was short-lived and an attempt to rig elections in 1977 resulted in the Army Chief General Zia-ul-Haq imposing martial law for the third time in the country’s short history.

As his predecessors had, Zia appeased the international community and domestic opposition with the promise of future elections. As the promise of quick elections faded,
Zia tightened his grip on the nation’s political, economic, and social institutions. His controversial Islamization policies and authoritarian decrees, epitomized by the trial and subsequent execution of Bhutto, lead to the deterioration of civil and political society in Pakistan (Ziring 136). The Islamization of the polity was the central concern of the third martial law regime. Zia considered the introduction of Islamic system ‘as an essential prerequisite’ for the military-theocracy he envisioned for Pakistan (Rizvi 160). Zia’s policies found a willing partner in the United States after the USSR invaded Afghanistan. Foreign aid poured into national coffers, and was dolled out to Islamist groups willing to oppose the Soviet forces by waging a violent jihad. The effects of Zia’s campaign are still being felt today, as the militant groups he founded remain well-organized, well-armed and well-financed (Haqqani).

A mysterious plane crash in 1988 killed Zia and several of his close associates, forcing the military to once again abdicate power to the civilian government. Benazir Bhutto, daughter of the former PM and new leader of the PPP, and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz emerged as the main democratic contenders. Their two personality-dominated political parties held sway over the political arena in Pakistan during the subsequent decade. Bhutto and Sharif each served two non-consecutive terms in the years between 1988 and 1999 that were ended prematurely. The squabbling and corruption that characterized the administrations of the secular PPP and the conservative PML-N perpetuated the weakness of the Pakistan’s civilian institutions. The military furthered its influence within the state through these years of political turmoil under civilian misrule, coming to the forefront again in October 1999, when General Pervez
Musharraf ended Pakistan’s democratic experiment by dismissing the civilian government and assuming power (Cohen).

Musharraf moved quickly to shape himself as a modern leader with democratic ambitions. He garnered international support by allying himself with the United States after the events of 9/11. The unelected military dictatorship of Musharraf and the Bush administration’s War on Terror allowed Pakistan and the US to once again realize common interests. The unexpected consequence of this action, however, was that when the United States successfully drove the Taliban out of much of Afghanistan in 2001-2002, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda moved across the border into areas of Pakistan that are only loosely controlled by the federal government where they succeeded in establishing a strategic foothold (Ali). From there, they have launched the aggressive guerrilla struggle that the Pakistan Army is struggling to contain today.

The past few years have been characterized by increasing violence and political instability in Pakistan. In March 2007, despite the legal community’s reservations, President Musharraf insisted on pursuing his re-election as President even though he was still Chief of Army Staff. To avoid a decision by the Supreme Court to nullify his candidacy, Musharraf assumed emergency powers under a State of Emergency. Citing the deteriorating security situation, he fired senior judges, arrested democracy and civil society activists, restricted the media and amended the constitution. The deposed Chief Justice sparked an unprecedented social movement in Pakistan for the restoration of the rule of law. Domestic and international pressure for the restoration of democracy forced Musharraf to schedule elections and allow former-PM Benazir Bhutto to return from exile and contest. Her assassination at the hands of Al-Qaeda sympathizers in December
2007 came at a particularly critical time in the election process, forcing the government to reschedule. Tariq Ali, the Pakistani historian, phrased it fittingly as ‘a death foretold’. The notion that her death was inevitable given the nature of Pakistan’s political system was the true national tragedy.

In historic elections in mid-February 2008, democracy returned to Pakistan. The election helped end a year of political instability since Musharraf’s sacking of the Chief Justice and restored Pakistan on a path toward civilian-led rule. The PPP emerged victorious after running on a platform of countering extremism and bringing modernity to the country. Sharif’s PML and the remnants of Bhutto’s party, led by her controversial husband Asif Zardari, put aside their differences and agreed to form a coalition government. An important thing to note is that the Islamic parties garnered only 2.2% of the popular vote, a clear repudiation of the notion that democracy would empower Islamists in Pakistan (Curtis). After weathering serious blows to the political process, the election was widely viewed with great optimism.

Today, only a year later, the picture is unquestionably bleak and precarious. Unclear and limited success against the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist elements are compounding the sense that the country is in danger of imploding. Pakistan cannot provide security, justice, or basic welfare for most of its citizens. Its elected politicians have validated fears that they spend their time in office conspiring against each other for power rather than pushing for real change. As a result, President Asif Ali Zardari's approval ratings are even lower than those of Musharraf when he resigned due to public pressure shortly after the elections (Traub). The state is losing legitimacy as well as the capacity to actually govern. The Pakistan Army’s new head, General Kiani, has made
clear that he wants to keep the military out of politics. It is indispensable that that take
place. Nonetheless, there are many people in Pakistan and the outside world who are
nostalgic for an autocrat. Pakistan’s fragile civilian government is facing several daunting
challenges that threaten its continued existence. Understanding why democracy in
Pakistan has struggled to find a footing is the purpose of this essay, and is critical to
devising a strategy to address these problems.

National Identity Formation in Pakistan

Pakistan, like most de-colonized countries, had to face the difficult problem of nation
building, particularly intricate in a multiethnic context. Its inability to create the sufficient
consensus necessary for democracy has made the state continuously politically unstable
and unable to establish a viable system of governance. Kukreja introduces this point in
saying: ‘The reason for the failure of democracy to take root in Pakistan lies in the entire
political process on which the state and successive governments have based themselves.’
(58). Kukreja is referring to the crisis of legitimacy the state has faced since its inception,
and correlating it to the state’s neglected social dynamics. This segment will look at how
the Pakistani identity was formed and why it has failed to create the kind of social unity
that was needed in the new state.

The problem with a study of Pakistani identity like this is that it has benefited too
much from hindsight and fails to appreciate quite how daunting and difficult of a task it
was to unite a country the size of Pakistan into one nation and one nationalist movement.
In light of the preconditions at the time of its birth, the task of nation-building in Pakistan
was ominous. One question had to be settled at the very beginning: On what grounds was
a distinct Pakistani identity to be founded? In Cohen’s study of the internal dynamics of Pakistan, he draws out a number of potential identities that the new state of Pakistan could have based itself upon given the complex roots of Indian Muslims (2004: 37-38). The first is the Indian dimension of Pakistan’s identity. This identity would have derived from the shared history of all South Asians. As LaPorte points out, the modern Pakistani is ‘a product of his own Islamic culture as well as Hindu influence and British colonial rule’ (29). In order to achieve a sense of urgency and loyalty to the new state, this lineage was ‘systematically overlooked’ by Pakistani authorities (Cohen 2004: 37). The second identity was the ‘modern extension of the Islamic empires of South Asia,’ predominantly drawn from the history of the Mughal Empire (Cohen 2004: 37). The locations of most of the physical landmarks of this period were, however, located in India. The third identity is a response to British colonialism. But the Pakistan Movement’s main obstacles were Congress Party members who opposed partition and not the British. The fourth was to draw on strategic importance of its geographical location. This failed to be significant until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1981. The fifth potential identity was purely ideological. It was the promulgation of a religious basis of nationhood. It was exclusionary and untested. It was the model Pakistan’s leaders adopted.

The two-nation theory supported by Jinnah and his cohorts argued that they were two nations in India: a nation of Hindus and a nation of Muslims. Religion defined nation. Thus Pakistan was created on the basis that the Muslims of India had a different identity, yet the question of what this identity entailed went unresolved. Leaders hastily espoused an Islamic identity to unify Pakistan’s heterogeneous population. Islam was viewed as the most expedient means of establishing some kind of social cohesion. In Qadeer’s words:
‘It [Islam] unites spiritually and emotionally all Muslims despite sectarian divides and
differences of beliefs and practices (276). Hostility to the neighboring Hindu-majority
state of India, and the Urdu language were also identified as the cornerstones of this new
national ideology (Haqqani 15). Jinnah and his cohorts expected such an identity,
predominantly defined by religion, to unite the nation and guide it towards its democratic
destiny. The abject failure of this identity to be cohesive resulted in the identity crisis that
handicaps Pakistan’s development to this day.

One explanation for the failure of the Pakistani identity is that competing claims of
individuals and groups shortly after independence undermined the cohesion that had
characterized the Pakistan Movement under Jinnah. Bashir claims the unity of Pakistan
was based on the fear of marginalization in a Hindu majority nation (3). As independence
delivered freedom from the fear of exploitation, it also delivered a fatal blow to the unity
of the new state. Speaking from the context of a recently divided Pakistan, Bashir notes
with remorse the cause of the nation’s failings: ‘The most important explanation is the
absence of unity; for a house divided cannot stand; and when the Quaid [Jinnah] died
Pakistani society became a house divided’ (3). Such a view attributes significant
importance to the role of leadership plays in promoting an identity that can forge some
semblance of unity in society. The armed forces repeatedly usurped this role in the face
of incapable democratic politicians, but were often as ineffective as their civilian
counterparts. Bashir points out two characteristics that every Pakistani leader since
Partition has failed to have. The first is an ability to ‘project an image around which the
collective can identify,’ and secondly, to represent the general interest of the people
rather than that of a particular group (5). Such a leader cannot democratically emerge
from the ranks of the armed forces, and has yet to emerge from the nation’s convoluted civic structure. A continuous ‘search for Saladin,’ as Akbar Ahmed puts it, has contributed to the crisis of confidence people had with their new national consciousness, forcing many to revert to traditional identities.

The integrationist approach maintained by the political leadership towards sub-national ethnic and linguistic identities has also been criticized. By relying almost exclusively on policies of forced assimilation to create the unicultural vision of an Islamic polity, the new state ended up being suppressive of sub-national identities. Thus the state-endorsed Islamic identity invoked a backlash by which minority groups prioritized their ethno-linguistic identities ahead of an overarching one. Pakistan was also born with a significant percentage of religious minorities, symbolized by the white stripe on its flag. Their status was not defined equally, as a Muslim identity was institutionalized as dominant. For instance, the 1956 Constitution stated that the President of Pakistan had to be Muslim. The language issue typifies the homogenizing practices that Pakistani leaders undertook. Tariq Rahman believes the state’s attempt to unify through the assertion of a national language, Urdu, can be deemed a failure because of the manner the policy was carried out. Urdu was not a regional language and was widely understood only among the elites of West Pakistan. Ethnic groups across the state countered such ‘internal colonialism’ by reasserting their own languages (117). This resistance was especially strong among the people of East Pakistan, who raised the demand of making Bengali as a national language as this was the language of a majority of the population. But this demand could not be acceptable to the people of West Pakistan because Bengali had no roots in any of their provinces. The early leaders of the Muslim
League were unwilling to compromise with any linguistic identities other than the official language of Urdu, as heterogeneity was viewed as dangerous to social cohesion from a unicultural point of view. Such heavy-handed policies, argues Rahman, were ignorant of history and the culture of the ethnic groups within Pakistan and were an instigating cause ethno-nationalism in 1971 and beyond. Policies of forced assimilation by a weak state were overambitious, and thus resulted in the hardening of sub-national identities that increasingly undermined the government’s legitimacy (Burki).

Yet others have argued that the Islamic identity failed not because of resistance to policies of forced assimilation, but because it in itself was open to debate and interpretation. The most visible example of this is the sectarian violence that has pitted the majority Sunni sect against the Shi’as, Ismailis, and Ahmadis since Zia’s Islamization policies in the 1980’s (Kukreja 28). Zia and the Islamist groups he helped bring into the mainstream painted Sunni Islam as the one true sect, and thus legitimized the discrimination against all others. As an Islamic state, it was Sunni values and norms, strongly influenced by Wahhabism, which would serve as the foundation of national identity. This policy can be thought of as a direct result of the failure of the initial Islamic identity to take root. Thus the government attempted to make the national identity further exclusive and thus increase solidarity among the majority which it addressed. It is notable that such a policy shift coincides with the timeframe Juergensmeyer gives to the slide towards illiberal forms of nationalism in the Third World.

Except for the State of Israel, no other modern nation-state has appealed to a religious faith as its raison d’être. Though Pakistan was created as a homeland for Muslims, those who demanded the state were secular minded. The early death of Pakistan’s founder left
the question of Islam’s role in society unresolved. Pakistan’s rulers and military have frequently used religion to define state ideology and, as Jalal says, this has led to Islam actually becoming a ‘divisive force in so far as it is being utilized by the state to deny people’s rights or even to deny diversity’. Using modernist logic, the two-nation theory disregarded ethnic and linguistic differences and considered a religious identity sufficient to create a nation. The state, Bashir argues, could have maintained unity had it insured ‘equal participation in power to the exclusion of none’, but as previously established such dogmatic forms of nationalism are fundamentally exclusionary (4). The illiberal nature of Pakistani nationalism not only limited its capacity to unify society, as will be discussed later, it also spawned the dangerous extremist groups now threatening the state.

These explanations, while all valid, fail to emphasize the historical context within which these failed identity policies were formed. Talbot’s rereading of the foundation of the Pakistani state clearly illustrates this point:

‘The reality of the Pakistan movement was that it was not monolithic. Indian Muslims adopted an identifiable Muslim political platform because of the encouragement they received from the colonial state. Jinnah’s genius was to recognize the realities of the divisions in Muslim society and forge what in fact approximated to a marriage of convenience between the Muslim professional classes of the Hindu dominated areas and the landlords of the future Pakistan regions. Local allegiances were what counted in political mobilization rather than an understanding of Muslim/Pakistani nationalism.’ (5).

In essence, the nation’s leaders did not consider the consequences of their plans because they underestimated the importance of national identity to nation building. The
government and the public was so overwhelmed with the task of creating a new state as a Muslim homeland, that they did not settle on what this polity would look like once manifested. Haqqani epitomizes this in saying; ‘India’s Muslims demanded Pakistan without really knowing the results of that demand’ (18).

Colonial legacies constitute another influential set of factors that helped to set the stage for the adoption of a religious conception of nationalism. Long-time Pakistan observer, Ziring, describes Pakistan as a ‘product of the age of European imperialism’ (1). Most importantly, colonialism introduced western political concepts to the subcontinent. The attempt ‘to create a contrived national identity was, to some extent, a colonial heritage, reflecting the predisposition of Pakistan’s leaders to the European concept of the nation-state’ (Ahmed 1997: 90). This concept of the nation-state equates to the modernist approach critiqued in the previous segment of this paper. Pakistan’s leaders did not appreciate the role a national identity plays in maintaining social cohesion and an effective base for democratic governance. The state did not attempt to reform its national character even after the succession of Bangladesh in 1971. A national identity continued to be viewed as a means to force conformity, rather than to realize unity collectively.

In his description of a vibrant and modernizing Pakistan, Qadeer has some sober thoughts on how modernist thinking has fractured the nation’s current social system. His contemporary social history characterizes the state as a work in progress because the state ‘has not been able to reconcile divergent interests and values’ (57). Thus the state is still composed of a multiplicity of interpretations to what it means to be Pakistani. He says; ‘It is the misguided attempt to silence divergent voices with state authority and political intimidation that has not allowed the ideological contradictions to be resolved and
dynamic consensus to be found’ (62). To solve the persistent identity crisis one needs to restore faith in diversity, put aside the ideals of assimilation, and underpin the national identity with a figure or institution that represents such ideals.

Chadda puts forward the argument that the process of democratization should be viewed in the context of nation-state consolidation. Pakistan had to pursue the objectives of creating a secular-democratic government and coalescing disparate people into a new national framework (25). In its first sixty years, Pakistan failed to manage either task. Decades of failed identity policy in Pakistan has led to secession in the east and continued turmoil in the west. In 1986, Shahid Burki titled his study of Pakistan *A Nation in the Making*. Twenty-three years later, it remains a nation in making.

**Explaining the Failure of Democratic Consolidation**

There have been four periods of democratic rule in Pakistan. The first, between 1947 and 1958, began with independence and ended when the chief of army staff, General Ayub Khan, mounted the country’s first military coup. The second, between 1971 and 1977, belonged to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The third, dominated by Bhutto’s daughter, Benazir, and her rival, Nawaz Sharif, started after General Zia’s death in a plane crash and came to an end when General Musharraf took over. The fourth is ongoing, and is facing what many see as an inevitable slide toward another collapse (Traub).

The problems facing Pakistan at present are not the same as those facing other developing countries where there is broad agreement as to what the real issues and problems are. To explain the failure of democracy to take root academics have posited a number of reasons that can be categorized according to Svante Ersson’s four-fold
division of potential challenges to the institution of a democratic order (10). The first is the socio-economic condition of praetorianism, in which elitism becomes institutionalized in the structure of the state. Husain Haqqani and Ayesha Sidiqqa are the most notable among a large swath of scholars who similarly blame the military-bureaucratic elite for Pakistan’s paucity of democratic rule. The second obstacle is the incidence of an ideology that overrules or ignores the will of the people as in theocracies and political ideologies like fascism. This kind of culturalist critique has become a cliché among journalists reporting on Pakistan, who see the disturbing rise of Islamic fundamentalism as the main obstacle to democracy in the state (Bhutto 157). This essay, however, will correct misconceptions by showing that the role of radical Islam is a direct consequence of elite dominance and not due to the natural evolution of the polity. The third hurdle is the country’s institutional capacity. Western academics like Diamond and Candland are inclined to cite the breakdown of Pakistan institutions as the main cause of democratic failure. The final challenge is the lack of a cohesive polity and the resulting identity issues. Samina Ahmed and others have pointed to the ethnic strife that has so often undermined the ability of the state to function. In the following pages, it will be established that the dominant understandings of the failure of democracy actually have their roots in the identity crisis described in the previous segment. Thus the failure of the state to institute a cohesive national identity will be shown to be directly causal of all four hurdles Ersson believes inhibit the establishment of a democratic system of government.

Recognizing that national identity formation is a major factor in Pakistan’s turbulent relationship with democracy is vital to the future consolidation of such a system. To be evaluated are the predominant explanations for Pakistan’s political turbulence:
praetorianism, institutional incapacity, and polarization along ethnic lines. These factors feed on one another, undermining the confidence and stability needed for democratic governance, and are strongly correlated to the nation’s inability to institutionalize a cohesive national identity.

Role of Elites

No discussion of the problems of democracy in Pakistan can avoid the structural role of elites. They are the ‘top-level military and civilian bureaucrats whose social base is traditional wealth and power’ (LaPorte 4). Pakistan’s current power distribution and its history fit the description of the elitist model, ‘where both economic and political power is held by a small coterie of elites’ (Husain 12). State affairs are conducted in a manner that delivers most of the benefits of economic growth, political power, and social status to this small group. The country’s inability to find a workable framework for governance is often argued as a consequence of their stranglehold, particularly the upper echelons of Pakistan’s military establishment. The Pakistan Army is without question the most dominant actor in this group. Its capacity to influence the direction the state takes in foreign and domestic affairs outweighs those of civil institutions (Rizvi, Haqqani). Its powers stretch beyond the public sphere as well. Ayesha Saddiq’a’s stinging critique of the military’s private sector holdings brought to light the true extent of their penetration into the national economy. Many insist that since the designs of this small group direct the affairs of state, they are accountable for the nation’s failure to institute a lasting democratic form of government. There is little debating the fact that the pervasive involvement in state affairs of the praetorian elite has stifled the establishment of
democratic institutions. Academics, however, have relied too heavily on criticizing the elites for undermining the democratic process without fully understanding how they emerged into and maintained this powerful position. To be proven here is that the power vested in elite interests is a direct result of the failure of Pakistan’s national identity to create the kind of social solidarity that was hoped for by its leaders.

Having gained their desired homeland for India’s Muslims, the military-bureaucratic elite, remnants from the colonial administration, took an early importance in a state born with serious institutional challenges. With the leadership crisis that followed Jinnah’s death, the military convinced the domestic and international arena that it needed to play a decisive role to protect the nation’s ideological underpinnings (Rizvi 3). The military was able to portray external and domestic challenges as imminent threats, thus only by empowering the army could Pakistani nationalism sustain. The military, quite simply, usurped the notion of a national identity by portraying themselves as the only stalwart between the Pakistani people and disintegration (Rizvi 22-23). They convinced the people of the need for Pakistan ‘first to be made strong and only thereafter was it permissible to talk of distributive equity’ (Ali 32). Thus their ability to influence and shape what the nation represented was unrestricted. They ‘regarded intrusion into Pakistani politics as a right; more than that: as an obligation that safeguards the territorial integrity of the country in the face of lingering ethnic, linguistic, and religious fissures’ (Monshipouri 91). The praetorianism, believed to undermine Pakistan’s democracy, emerged from the failure of a cohesive national identity to take root.

While Pakistan was founded on democratic principles, its key decision-makers quickly showed disinterest in instituting such a system. Democracy was never introduced
in the country. The people never developed a sense of participation in the government. The nation’s elites rationalized this usurpation of power in order to ‘foster stability and trust in social and cultural relationships between various segments of the population’ (Husain 398). As the self-styled guardians of state ideology, the civil-military bureaucratic elite decided to uphold the Islamic identity promoted by Pakistan’s founders. To supposedly protect the Islamic identity of the state, the elite ‘dictated their interpretation of Pakistan’s identity and ideology from the top down, without the bother of elections’ (Traub). This power equation was and continues to be justified because no consensus has emerged on what the idea of Pakistan truly means (Cohen 2004: 54). Without the social unity that a cohesive national identity would have provided, the elites cannot be dislodged from their dominant structural position in the state hierarchy.

In Haqqani’s book, *Between Mosque and Military*, he reveals grave consequences of this agenda by exploring the links between the army and Islamic radicals. He characterizes the troubling relationship between the armed forces and the nation’s Islamist groups as a structural problem because it is rooted in the nation’s quest for a national identity (2). The military, he argues, took upon itself the role of maintaining the Islamic identity because it believed without their intervention the ideology that united the state could fall to pieces. In doing so they reached out to the nation’s Islamist groups for legitimacy in exchange for their support. The relationship, which many argue now puts at risk Pakistan’s integrity as a state, was born out of a desire to reinforce the nation’s identity (Haqqani 311).

The role of regional and international influences played in perpetuating this relationship is also pertinent. The India-Pak rivalry, which began within months of
independence, has imbedded a sense of vulnerability among Pakistanis that has provided the elites with a pretext for assuming the powerful position they hold in the state apparatus. Significantly, the identity crisis coupled with its obsession of maintaining parity with India pushed the military into the center of the political arena. Of course, the Pakistan Army’s role in triggering regional tensions cannot be overlooked. Starting with Ayub Khan, the government used Islam to reinforce Pakistani identity in opposition to that of Hindu-dominated India. The dispute also encouraged public support for the growth of militant Islamists. These elements were radicalized beyond control of the state when it was infused with the hard-line ideology of the Taliban brought by refugees from Afghanistan (Haqqani). Elites, thus, supported the growth of the radical Islamist ideology in Pakistan because it served their vision of the state.

The manner in which public opinion is continuously ignored in Pakistan is evidence of the concentration of power among a few key leaders. But the choice that Pakistanis face is not between the military-bureaucratic elite and the mullahs, as is generally perceived in the international community. The dynamics of the problem are much more complex. Having taken control of the nation at its inception, the nation’s elites only grew more powerful as security and identity issues remained unresolved. In an effort to embody the Islamic identity of the state, they created a generation of Islamists that were considered as strategic assets to their military and social agenda. These actors, however, have found themselves bereft of state-support after 9/11 forced a policy change by the Pakistani establishment. Today, the nation’s elites are fighting a battle against the very forces they unleashed to define Pakistan from actually doing so.
The civil war underway in the tribal areas and a large part of the Frontier province, including Swat, presents the biggest challenge the state has ever faced. At stake is not only its integrity, but also the nature of its polity. Any hope for a state victory against this despotic ideology will take a significant change in Pakistan’s domestic political landscape. This would entail a redefinition of the national identity in opposition to what these groups represent. The praetorian elite’s control over the shape and form of the Pakistani identity resulted in creating the most dangerous crisis the state has yet faced. The Pakistani people must take collective action and redefine themselves, before reactionary forces do it for them.

After decades of praetorian rule, the political system in Pakistan has been distorted to the point where it is simply not evident what the authentic preferences of the nation actually are. Moshipouri argues that democracy can only emerge in Pakistan when the military elites withdraw themselves from the political process. This is exemplified in 1971 after the debacle in East Pakistan, in 1988 after Zia’s sudden death, and in 2008 after Musharraf’s political gambit backfired (94). Such a distorted balance in civil-military relations inevitably limits democratic consolidation, but as this section has argued, the role of the nation’s identity crisis in providing the elites a rationale to usurp and hold power is patent. Also recognized here, is that the ideology of fundamentalist Islam that many see as the most pressing concern to the future of democratic values in the state is a repercussion of policies designed to address these very identity issues by the nation’s ruling elite.
Institutional Incapacity

Pakistan is a nation facing enormous challenges to realizing the democratic ideal, particularly in the process of building independent and accountable institutions. There has been a widespread breakdown of trust and confidence in the major institutions governing the country. The incapacity of Pakistan’s institutions will be evaluated through an examination of the federal rubric under which they operate. Federalism, it will be argued, has been undermined by the weakness of national identity, thus contributing to the inability of the nation’s institutions to operate effectively. Without a collective identification with the federal government, the institutions of the state lack legitimacy. This section establishes an implicit relationship between national identity and the institutional incapacity of Pakistan, thus further correlating the variables of the core argument.

There are many institutions in Pakistan that are dreadfully weak. The justice system has consistently failed in its responsibility to uphold the constitution since the beginning of the state. Today, for the first time in about 60 years, Pakistan has a Supreme Court justice who reaffirms the importance of the rule of law. Institutions like the Parliament in Pakistan function like a ‘gigantic patronage machine’ (Ziring). It is a deliberative body that has a remarkably poor record of actually implementing policy. Political parties are similar. They are held together simply by the charisma of individual personalities and institute no kind of inner-party democracy (Curtis 2). Take away the leader and the party essentially folds, a pattern that began with Jinnah and the Muslim League. Civil society, an ideal site for the creation of identities that facilitate democracy, has been weakened by continuous state interference and inter-group competition (Weiss). The fear of
marginalization limits the development of societal trust and cooperation, in the sense that Putnam and Lummis speak of. National identity can be related to these institutions through the constitutional framework of federalism within which they function.

During deliberations about how the Pakistan state would look pre-1947, a federalist institutional arrangement offered the greatest potential to bring autonomous regions together under a central government. The history of federalism dates back to the Mughal Empire, when the difficulty of ruling a diverse territory forced the adoption of such a framework. The Lahore Resolution also called for the adoption of a federal form in the new state by recognizing the merits of the ‘decentralization of power to the federating units of a Muslim state’ (qtd. in Talbot 5). This follows the pattern adopted by many post-colonial states, who chose to create a federation to accommodate the diversity within their territory, and give autonomy to units within the newly independent state that were unfamiliar if not hesitant to seed power to the center. Federalism as a system is difficult to define because of the sheer variety it takes across the planet, but its most notable characteristic is the division of power between the center and the provinces of the state.

The relationship between democracy and federal forms is never definitive. Pakistan, however, is a federation that has consistently lacked democratic credentials. Nordlinger identifies a federation as a system of governance that is particularly ineffective at managing contesting groups (2). Federal structures do not clearly establish a locus of power, thus a linguistically or ethnically diverse populous will be inclined to compete for dominance rather than compromise for the sake of unity. But how can a model that has succeeded in maintaining democracy and stability in multiethnic federations as diverse as India, Canada, and many more be categorically deemed a failure? Adeney analyses the
effectiveness of federalism as a form of governance by using India and Pakistan as case study subjects. Each are cited as examples of how multietnic federations can be successful, like India, or disintegrate as Pakistan did in 1971. The author believes the reasons why Pakistan’s federal system failed were correlated to the vision of the new nation and not an inevitable result of its institutional framework (Adeney 3-7).

In Adeney’s investigation into the state structure of Pakistan, he notes the importance of a state-sponsored national identity upon federal design. Jinnah’s presumption that an Islamic identity would act as a catalyst to the integration of diverse regional groups was misguided. Jinnah clearly understood the consequences of a failure of such an identity to take hold when he said, ‘If we begin to think of ourselves as Bengalis, Punjabis, and Sindhis first and Muslims and Pakistanis only incidentally, then Pakistan is bound to disintegrate’ (qtd. in Adeney 99). The limited accommodation for linguistic and ethnic diversity required the state to pursue a policy of forced assimilation that further dwindled the unity of the federation, eventually resulting in secession of East Pakistan (Adeney 105). Conversely, India succeeded in creating a cohesive national identity that brought units toward the center rather than pushing them away with assimilationist policies. Simply stated, constitutional structures adopted by Pakistan after partition were undermined by the failure to shape an adequately unifying national identity that could make federalism effective. Federalism did not fail, Pakistan’s early leaders failed to foster a cohesive national identity thus leading to ‘federal destabilization’ (Adeney 138). Jalal comes to a very similar conclusion, saying that the volatility isn’t dependant on the form of the state, but rather upon the ‘complex and shifting ways in which social identities are forged and refashioned’ (183). The model for constituting Pakistan’s federation was a
means to promote identification with the central government. This failed and the resulting system was merely the ‘sum of consenting units with distinct identities’ (Rajagopalan 209).

Thus the argument that the institutions now in place in Pakistan are the cause of the inability to build a democracy, while being quite evident in itself, does not properly value the role national identity has played in undermining the federal structure of the state. Pakistan’s problems are not the incapacity of institutions but the trivialization of these institutions. If institutions like the police, judiciary, and administrative services are not working it is partly because they have been undermined by the lack of authority wielded by the central government. They can only be reformed if social and political ethos that underlies these structures is first reformed. A cohesive national identity could legitimize state institutions by strengthening the central government and the federal system.

Sub-national Identity Politics

‘I have been a Muslim for 1,400 years. I have been a Baloch for several centuries. I have been a Pakistani for just over fifty.’ These famous words were said by the late Baloch separatist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti Khan. Other tribal chiefs, feudal leaders and politicians in Balochistan, rural Sindh, and the NWFP share his ethno-nationalist discontent towards the Pakistani state. Islam was meant to be the binding force, but ethnic ties have repeatedly proven to be stronger. The resulting identity issues have repeatedly destabilized the state with ethnic strife and separatist movements. As previously established identity politics of this kind only become detrimental to democratic governance in the absence of a cohesive national identity. This segment will evaluate the
history of ethnic conflict in the nation and thus establish yet another link between the form national identity takes and democracy.

Ethnic strife has splintered and fragmented Pakistan for decades. While four insurgencies by Baloch nationalists have been violently suppressed, it is often not emphasized that a fifth insurgency has been underway in Balochistan since 2002. It truly says something about the scale of Pakistan’s ailments when a full-fledged separatist movement goes underreported (Grare). In the NWFP, a Pashtun nationalist movement was suppressed in the 1970s. And finally in Sindh, tensions have continued between local Sindhis and the Urdu-speaking migrants from India, the Muhajirs. One might think that the loss of East Pakistan in 1971 would have alerted Pakistani leaders to the dangers of ignoring sub-national identity formations. It did not.

The new Pakistani state had to integrate the Sindhis, the Baloch, the Pashtuns, the Punjabis, the incoming Muhajirs, and, before 1971, the Bengalis in East Pakistan. The population was predominantly Muslim, but ethnically heterogeneous. Of Pakistan’s five main ethnic groups, the Balochis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns make up only 30% of the population, but their territory compromises 72% of the national territory (Harrison 294). As Samina Ahmed points out, a single ethnic community, the Punjabis, came to dominate state institutions (1997: 87). Punjab, the largest and most populous province of Pakistan, draws its power from the Pakistan army. The Army, drawing on colonial patterns of recruitment, is mostly made up of Punjabis. Since 1971, Punjabis have made up a majority of the population, and thus emerged as the dominant group in the state bureaucracy as well. Talbot examines this trend, and cautions that Punjabification of the state hinders integration and contributes towards further reinforcing sub-national regional
identities (51). Ethno-nationalist leaders have tended to associate centralist attitudes with
the Punjabi elite. In reality, it has never been as simple as that. After all, Jinnah was born
in Karachi, Ayub Khan was a Pashtun, and the Bhutto dynasty hails from Sindh (Ziring
139).

Compounding these problems, the country’s leaders neglected identity issues and
adopted assimilationist policies that transformed ethnic problems into violent conflict.
The hope that Islam could unify Pakistanis, allowed the government to ignore differences
among the polity on the basis of tribal affiliations, linguistic heritage, or ethnicity. As a
result, the ruling elite in Islamabad have continuously ignored and mismanaged the
country’s many ethnic groups (Ahmed 1997). The army, for instance, has never
recognized ethnic identities. From Ayub Khan to Pervez Musharraf, the army has always
tried to promote a unicultural Pakistan. Former dictator Zia ul-Haq was once quoted as
saying that he would ‘ideally like to break up the existing provinces and replace them
with fifty-three small provinces, erasing ethnic identities from the map of Pakistan
altogether’ (qtd in Grare 3). The disintegration of Pakistan in 1971 is the most evident
consequence of this failed unicultural vision.

Islam formed the basis of the Pakistan ideology that the ruling elites perceived as the
cementing force that could solve the nation-building dilemma. Shah and others have
written in depth of ‘the contradiction that exists between the country’s official status as
an Islamic nation state, on the one hand, and the reality of its existence as a multi-ethnic
society composed of a variety of diverse groups, on the other’ (3). The ideological
religious nationalism, used by the Muslim League to justify the creation of Pakistan,
continues to justify the government’s attempts to erase distinct ethno-linguistic
communities by labeling them as anti-state elements. But these identities stretch back hundreds of years and reinforce themselves through language and culture. Forced assimilation carried out in the name of unity has evidently failed and its continued application contributes towards further alienating minority groups. Similarly, Grare believes attempts to ‘Islamize’ culture act against Pakistan’s diversity and breed discrimination against minorities (11). The elites that dominated government advocated modernization programs to reduce ethnocentrism, but many believe their agenda was intended to consolidate power rather than national unity (Harrison 294). Simply put, the sectarian conflict that threatens Pakistan’s ability to govern itself is a consequence of the marginalization caused by the adoption of an exclusive form of national identity.

It is concerning that Pakistanis show little unease at the threat posed to national cohesion by identity politics because these ethnic divisions threaten the ability of the state to institute any kind of stable governing structure (USIP 37, Ahmed 1997: 123). The imbalance between Punjab and the other provinces has been a major source of this political instability. State structures perpetuate a view among minorities that a national identity is being imposed on them from above, thus evoking their refusal to allow such an identity to take precedence. Talbot also believes a state-centric approach has failed in accommodating cultural diversity, and people have thus reverted to previously held identities. The failure of a national identity to be cohesive or overarching in this sense has contributed to the instability that directly hinders Pakistan’s democratic development.
Looking Ahead: Identity and Democracy in Pakistan

Pakistan's constitutional history has been checkered. The first constitution of Pakistan was not adopted until 1956. Within three years, it was abrogated, and the first martial law regime was instituted. The second constitution of Pakistan adopted in 1962. After the separation of East Pakistan, this was replaced by the constitution that is currently in use. It was suspended for a few years under General Musharraf, and restored after he had made unilateral amendments. In all three constitutions, the preamble reminds us of the most consistent principle of state policy (Haqqani). It seems that through all the dramatic political turns that the history of Pakistan has taken, its self-image has remained surprisingly constant. Pakistan is an Islamic Republic, and its citizens easily identifiable by their Muslim identity.

Such consistency would bring into question why there has been so much discussion surrounding Pakistan’s identity crisis. For instance, the first line of Talbot’s oft-cited study of the formation and history of Pakistan reads: ‘Pakistan for much of its history has been a state searching for a national identity’ (1). Perhaps it is because, today, by some strange irony, Pakistan is the home to only one-third of the Muslims that it was created as a homeland for. As a political innovation, Pakistan’s religious basis for nationalism has failed (Burki 1). Pakistanis, while still predominantly Muslim, do not associate with this collective identity because it is illiberal, overbearing, and manipulated by powerful actors for their own ends. The reality is that Pakistan is a fragmented, polarized society where it is very difficult to forge a consensus on any issue. The insistence that Islam constitutes the collective basis of Pakistan is misguided and has caused a severe disruption in the nation’s path toward realizing the democratic ideal.
National integration is so important and vital for Pakistan that, if proper steps are not taken in time, the window of opportunity for democratic consolidation may once again close. Religion failed to galvanize the necessary nationalist sentiment to mend the cultural, linguistic, and class boundaries that dissect society; the most evident consequences being the succession of Bangladesh in 1971 and the current Islamist insurgency threatening the integrity of the state. Demonstrated in the previous segment is that the problematic aspects of political culture - elite control, poor institutions, and ethnic strife - are merely symptoms of the fragmented structure of society. Thus the role of a national identity in Pakistan must be considered as a significant factor to the state’s inability to institute a lasting form of democratic governance. This correlation underlies the major arguments presented by authors in regards to Pakistan, and can no longer afford to be disregarded.

For a state that has been under military rule for more than half its history and under corrupt civilian regimes for the rest, Pakistanis show a remarkable commitment to democracy (USIP). The desire for a return to democratic politics in Pakistan has been building for some time. The outburst of anti-Musharraf sentiment in March 2007 following his dismissal of the country’s Chief Justice is the most recent example of the public’s frustration with misgovernance. Despite many difficulties, some of them self-imposed, Pakistan is making a historic transition at this time. If Pakistan is to succeed in its transition to a continuous democracy there must be more discussion and reform regarding identity issues. If a consensus can be found on what it means to be Pakistani, then the chances that Pakistan can become a moderate, democratic, Muslim nation committed to equality and the rule of law increase dramatically. But if this does not
happen and a majority of the population remain ambivalent, if not antagonistic, to what
their nationality represents, then Pakistan is on a perilous course towards a reversion to
dominance by the military or, worse still, rule by radical Islamists.

In Pakistani society there is growing cynicism and skepticism about the legitimacy
of state authority. Stories of doom and gloom, and negative reporting are eroding
people’s confidence in the capability of the state to govern. The social aspects
underpinning these problems have been ignored for too long. A reinvention of the social
contract of Pakistani society based in terms of a liberal national identity could be a
solution to the crisis of confidence facing the state by creating social unity and providing
legitimacy. There can be two responses to the provided description of the Pakistani scene
today. One is to keep silent and take no notice of what is being written and continue to
view Pakistan’s ailments as entirely political in nature. The second option is to make an
effort to promote a more inclusive national identity based on secular-democratic values.
By combining national consolidation with democratization, state identity policy would
emphasize democratic principles of equality, pluralism, and the rule of law. In order to
ensure that Pakistan sets itself a permanent path of moderation and stability, the adoption
of such a model seems necessary.

Pakistan has been described in grave terms; a nation in turmoil, a failed state, and a
divided society (Traub). Such descriptions are essentially a commentary on the political
instability of Pakistan, reflected in its long military dictatorships and repeated
breakdowns of electoral democracy. Whether the country is really in such dire straits is
doubtful. Talbot evokes Mark Twain when he says, ‘reports of Pakistan’s death have
been greatly exaggerated’ (372). Even Cohen, a strong critic of the state’s policies,
concludes that; ‘This is a state not likely to disappear soon’ (2004: 267). Research upon Pakistani public opinion by the USIP concludes that while Pakistan is going through a serious crisis, one cannot underestimate the resilience of the polity to weather difficulties as they have in the past. Kux’s characterization of Pakistan as a flawed rather than failed state may be more appropriate. The flaw, essentially, was the manner in which Pakistan’s leaders chose to form their national identity.
Conclusion: Reevaluating National Identity and Democratization

There are prevalent fears that nuclear-armed Pakistan is tumbling into political anarchy just a year after democratic elections put an end to the long domination of General Musharraf. Congressman Ed Royce summarized the situation succinctly to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs:

‘Even under the best of scenarios Pakistan is going to remain a deeply troubled place. The challenges of rising Islamist militancy, an A.Q. Khan network that still may be active, 60 nuclear weapons, an intelligence agency that has been described as state within a state and frankly that is used frequently as a political police against secular and democratic forces, 12,000 active madrassahs, significant territory beyond the reach of the central government, and lastly a country where for the time being you have a military that owns the state politically and economically from owning banks to airlines to shopping malls to farmland, a country where 1.7 percent of that budget goes to education and 30 percent goes to the military.’

Pakistan’s success as a stable, moderate, prosperous and democratic nation is essential to the security of the region and the future of its 165 million people. This paper has made evident, that the state’s unwillingness to demonstrate the political will to deal with identity issues could inhibit the foundation of a successful democracy. The future of democracy in Pakistan requires, indeed hinges upon, addressing its identity crisis.

The case of Pakistan is an ominous warning about the accommodation of various forms of difference - ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural - in the structures of post-colonial states. Democratic scholar, Larry Diamond, described the 1999 military coup in
Pakistan as the ‘single most serious reversal of democracy during the third wave’ (356). He ominously predicts that Pakistan’s failure could be replicated across a host of what he calls ‘swing states’ if a proper model for dealing with divided societies is not created. Similarly, this essay calls for a reevaluation of why some nations in the ‘third wave’ stumble in the process of establishing and strengthening their democratic system with a renewed focus on the importance of a cohesive national identity. Hoover makes this point very clear: ‘The loss of identity that accompanies the collapse of totalitarianism, imperialism, and colonialism is now at the core of problems in the successor nations’ (39). The role of a national identity has not been adequately dealt with in the dominant scholarly discourse on democratization. While Pakistan may be a unique case where the factors combine to make the identity crisis that much more acute to democratic development, the pattern has the potential to repeat itself in states that are not more mindful of the form their national identity takes.
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