

FIGHTING INSURGENCY WITH POLITICS: THE CASE OF BIHAR

RACHEL KLEINFELD AND RUSHDA MAJEED

Poor and weak countries plagued by violence seem to face a chicken-and-egg problem: a lack of resources appears to constrain their ability to fight violence, while violence itself exacerbates poverty. Yet under Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, Bihar, one of India's poorest states, was able to significantly reduce an insurgency that has plagued the region for over forty years. Bihar shows how particular political conditions cause states to be poor, weak, and violent—and how careful application of political tactics can reduce violence even in places with few resources and low state capacity.

Key Insights From India

- Like many places facing violence from multiple groups, Bihar's state weakness, poverty, and violence were all rooted in a power structure that enabled extreme privilege and impunity for an elite few, politicized security forces, and outsourced the monopoly of violence to militia groups. Thus, Maoist insurgents, a multitude of militias, and state security forces were locked in a vicious cycle of retaliatory violence.
- Other Indian states failed to substantially reduce Maoist violence because counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategies could not work in politically compromised governments that didn't address the root problems of power.
- Bihar successfully combined counterinsurgency and counterterror tactics with a strategy that redressed the power equation.
- A failure to institutionalize Bihar's rule of law successes may be threatening gains. Sustainable reform needs a three-part program comprising policy, politics, and institutionalization.

Implications for Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency

- Countries facing multiple types of violence simultaneously are often not just weak, but complicit. An illegitimate power structure based in extreme privilege and impunity may be fueling the violence.
- In cases of such privilege violence, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency policies alone will fail. Counterterrorism assumes the existence of a functional state and can deepen the inequitable order by strengthening otherwise unchanged power relations. Counterinsurgency strategies assume that the poor can be turned toward the state, which fails when the state is seen as illegitimate.
- A political problem requires a political solution. Without measures to address the causes of violence inherent in power structures, results will be fragile.
- Elite pacts can be useful instruments to secure short-term reductions in violence. But they only buy breathing room; they are not solutions. The state must use the time gained to institutionalize measures that address state capacity and inequities in access to power; failing that, the state will return to violence.
- When violence is compounded, addressing one strand of violence at a time will not work. Instead, policymakers must advance a multipronged approach that tackles different strands in conjunction with each other.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rachel Kleinfeld is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Rushda Majeed consults on institutional and policy reform.

CONTACT

Christopher Dockrey
Government Affairs Manager
+1 202 939 2307
cdockrey@ceip.org

Clara Hogan
Media Manager
+1 202 939 2241
chogan@ceip.org

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

© 2016 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Endowment does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

CarnegieEndowment.org

 @CarnegieEndow

 [facebook.com/
CarnegieEndowment](https://www.facebook.com/CarnegieEndowment)