

Institutional Legitimacy as the Missing Middle: Analysis of a Mediated Framework for Post-Merger Transitions in South Asia

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Abstract

Across South Asia, institutional reforms in conflict-affected regions raise a recurring question: how does the extension of formal authority contribute to locally accepted governance and durable peace? It is especially relevant in the context of Pakistan's former federally administered tribal areas which are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province since 2018. Within this transition, South Waziristan provides a setting shaped by conflict, displacement, overlapping authorities and

incomplete administrative consolidation. The article explores how institutional legitimacy may link governance and development interventions with peacebuilding in post-merger context. It constructs a framework from a purposive integrative review and conceptual theory synthesis that considers legitimacy as recognition of the rightful authority, trust as expectations of future institutional conduct and lived appraisal as assessments of specific institutional encounters. Governance mechanisms and development interventions are treated as distinct but potentially interacting reform inputs. Their effects on peacebuilding are proposed to operate partly through institutional legitimacy, with trust and lived appraisal forming parallel intervening pathways. The framework also allows for direct effects and reciprocal relationships.

South Waziristan has been used as a contextual plausibility illustration, complemented by mechanism-specific insights from other conflict affected regions like Bougainville, Sierra Leone and Liberia. These illustrations do not establish causal effects or validate the proposed sequence. Framework provides an approach to problem diagnosis that can help differentiate delivery problems, accepted authority, institutional reliability and everyday treatment. It proposes that the dimensions should be analyzed in post-merger assessment, in addition to changes in grievance, cooperation and non-violent conflict management. The article proposes that institutional legitimacy may conditionally mediate the relationship between governance and development interventions and peacebuilding. The strength and direction of these relationships remain open to empirical examination.

Keywords: Governance-development nexus, Institutional legitimacy, institutional trust, Peacebuilding, Post-merger transition, Institutional Reform

1. Introduction

Governance reform, delivery of development and peacebuilding are interlinked in societies transitioning from armed conflict or significant administrative restructuring (Lederach, 1997). Decline in organized violence can lead to negative peace, whereas positive peace depends on institutions and social relations that can deal with the problems of structural injustice and resolve conflicts without resorting to violence (Galtung, 1969). Governance influences the process of decision-making by establishing development priorities, resource allocation and citizen engagement in decision making. Development can increase administrative capacity, decrease

deprivation and foster regular interactions of public and institutions (Brinkerhoff et al., 2012). This is not a “natural” relationship. Improving infrastructure and services may improve the material conditions without strengthening public acceptance of the institutions responsible for them. Service delivery is likely to have more significant impact on legitimacy, if citizens value the service, accept the service provider and consider the allocation and procedures fair (McLoughlin, 2015). Reconstruction, however, might be centralized or security-driven, resulting in lack of participation and limited local ownership even if visible outcomes are achieved (Dawar & Ferreira, 2021). Expansion of formal institutions also provides legal authority but does not necessarily build trust in institutional competence, justice or future behavior (World Bank, 1992).

This article identifies institutional legitimacy as the missing middle in that explanation. Legitimacy is defined as a question of whether an institution's exercise of authority is considered appropriate within accepted norms (Suchman, 1995). In the political sphere, “Legitimacy denotes popular acceptance of government officials’ right to govern” (Levi et al., 2009, p. 354). It is different from capacity and trust in its analytical aspects. Capacity is the ability of an institution to carry out its functions. Legitimacy is about recognition of its right to exercise authority; however, trust involves beliefs regarding future behaviour. A given institution can therefore be constitutionally legitimate and have administrative capacity but be socially contested (Levi et al., 2009). This distinction is significant in the merger context of former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan in 2018. The Twenty-fifth Constitutional Amendment merged the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Provincial and judicial institutions were extended to the tribal areas under the Twenty-fifth Constitutional Amendment. Article 247 was omitted which removed the constitutional provisions governing their exceptional administrative status (Constitution Twenty-fifth Amendment Act, 2018). The process of integration began but it was not fully completed at administrative and institutional levels. Formal institutions entered into an area characterized by exceptional governance, armed conflict, displacement, with an uneven development and the enduring influence of jirgas, maliks, tribal networks and security actors (Wazir et al., 2023).

Significance of South Waziristan is particularly important because constitutional transformation and reconstruction have happened in parallel to the struggle over power and persistent security

issues. Research carried out about this district reveals the impact of armed intermediaries and locally negotiated dynamics on the day-to-day relationship with the state (Wazir et al., 2023). The study of displaced communities shows the long-lasting impact of war and military operations on social institutions and practices in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Political mobilization from Waziristan is also indicative that formal incorporation can coexist with ongoing claims of recognition and accountability.

This article asks: how might institutional legitimacy explain the relationship between governance and development interventions and peacebuilding in post-merger South Waziristan? It uses purposive integrative review to analyze a partly mediated framework. South Waziristan context is used to evaluate contextual plausibility and not to provide an original empirical test of the framework. Governance reconstruction frameworks link security, effectiveness and legitimacy (Brinkerhoff, 2005). Research for service delivery clarifies on how fairness and attribution determine legitimation (McLoughlin, 2015). The legitimacy scholarship looks at the rightful authority and voluntary compliance (Levi et al., 2009). This article brings insights together to link reform with peacebuilding in post-merger South Waziristan. It will try to make three contributions. First, it separates institutional legitimacy, trust and 'lived appraisal'. Secondly, it defines direct and mediated pathways. Thirdly, it aims to recognize observable implications and alternative explanations. These will allow stalled transitions to be analyzed as delivery, accepted authority, institutional reliability or everyday experience issues.

2. Review Approach and Framework Development

This study applies conceptual theory-synthesis approach and Purposive Integrative Review. Integrative review is appropriate when multiple theories and empirical studies need to be synthesized into an explanation and to clarify constructs (Snyder, 2019). The present study is not intended for exhaustive retrieval as performed in a systematic review nor for predetermined database protocols or reproducible screening count. A written search log was not kept. The literature base was drawn during preparation of the author's doctoral literature review, theoretical framework and has been re-organized here to address the narrower question raised in this article. This limitation is acknowledged to avoid presenting a purposive conceptual review as a systematic evidence synthesis. Sources were identified by searching the reference base created in the thesis

chapters, backward checking for sources and targeted checking of research that was specifically relevant to the constructs presented in the article and the context of the region involved.

Search vocabulary included governance–development nexus, security–development nexus, state-building, institutional legitimacy, institutional trust, procedural fairness, local ownership, positive peace, post-conflict reconstruction, FATA merger, merged districts, Waziristan and South Waziristan. The review does not focus on a specific timeframe but on foundational research and selected context studies. The reference list is currently up to 2025. Thus, the review will not cover literature published in 2026. Four bodies were included in the research such as governance and development, state-building and legitimacy, trust and local ownership in peacebuilding and empirical studies on Pakistan's merged districts. Regional studies included those that focus on institutional reform, service delivery, reconstruction, authority, participation, security and everyday experience in erstwhile FATA or Waziristan. Focus was placed on direct studies in Waziristan districts. However, the research conducted in North Waziristan was utilized only as explicit comparative evidence which had been clearly identified as such because both districts shared a wider transition and yet had different local experiences. Those studies were not included which discussed conflict or development without an apparent connection to the constructs proposed or if they contained only general narration rather than providing any information that could be reproduced in a bibliography.

Each of the core analytical sources has a different purpose. In Propositions 1 and 2 Brinkerhoff (2005) and McLoughlin (2015) provide the relationships between governance, service delivery and legitimacy. Levi, et al. (2009) provides information about the difference between legitimate authority and institutional behavior in Proposition 3. However, this distinction does not independently establish that legitimacy precedes trust. Proposition 4 builds on the relational and experiential mechanisms outlined by Lederach (1997), Mac Ginty & Richmond (2013) and Millar (2014). Proposition 5 provides direct pathways as an alternative to mediation. The contextual conditions discussed in Proposition 6 are covered in Boege et al. (2009), Dawar and Ferreira (2021) and Blair (2022). These links are theoretical and not necessarily provide empirical support for the propositions.

Selected perspectives cover distinct but related explanatory tasks; institutional reconstruction, accepted authority and everyday peacebuilding. Competing or complementary explanations continue to be material provision, coercive stabilization and customary authority. They are considered as it is possible that welfare, security or cooperation may improve but not with a corresponding increase in legitimacy. Claims of the framework are restricted by the qualifying evidence. McLoughlin (2015) argues that there is not a necessary link between service delivery and legitimacy. But Millar (2014) doubts that institutional design will create foreseeable local experiences. Blair (2022) finds that wartime victimization can increase citizens' demand for state-provided security. These findings collectively inspire conditional relationships and raise a warning against assuming institutional hybridity or history of conflict as uniformly good or bad.

Five questions were used to extract information, which includes; how the source defined its main construct? what causal relationship does the source propose? what supporting evidence was provided? what contextual conditions changed? and what findings contradict the causal relationship? These were then broken down into reform inputs, intervening mechanisms, outcomes and moderators. Governance mechanisms and development interventions are considered as inputs, institutional legitimacy, trust and lived appraisal are considered as intervening constructs while living in peace are considered as the outcome. There were factors that were considered in addition to steps; in the case of historical conflict, militarization, traditional authority and incomplete administrative transition were termed as moderators. Framework was analyzed by applying a separate analytical function to three different theoretical perspectives and checking whether the concepts of these perspectives could be fitted into a coherent causal sequence. It is analyzed by conceptual differentiation, consistency of the evidence reviewed, observable implications, scope conditions and competing explanations, based on conceptual theory development guidance (Jaakkola, 2020). The review does not attempt to measure effect size or concludes that sequence is working in South Waziristan.

The analytical roles of the principal sources are summarized in Supplementary Table S1. Selection prioritizes conceptual relevance to institutional authority, service delivery and everyday experience, alongside contextual relevance to contested transitions. The synthesis distinguishes relationships discussed in the literature from extensions proposed in this article. Material provision, coercive stabilization and customary authority are retained as competing explanations

because they may influence peacebuilding without increased legitimacy. The proposed ordering and parallel pathways remain theoretical propositions requiring empirical examination. This matrix clarifies the use of the selected literature; it does not reconstruct the earlier undocumented searches or establish comprehensive coverage.

3. Theoretical Foundations

3.1. Governance and Development as Interacting Inputs

The governance-development nexus rejects the view of development as a purely technical activity. Public institutions have an impact on agenda setting, budgeting, coordination, accountability, political representation and implementation. These functions provide priorities, identify beneficiaries and evaluate the effectiveness of maintaining financial sustainability of development programs (Hettne, 2010). Governance in turn can reinforce development through increased civilian footprint, accountability and service provision, as well as display of administration's efficiency. The relationship can also be negative: if accountability is weak, it can lead to unequal allocation and if development taken up by dominant groups, it could feed into grievances (Stern & Öjendal 2010). Distribution of benefits is important because political discontent may be induced not only by scarcity but also by relative deprivation and inequality in the distribution of benefits. Thus, a project can have a positive impact on welfare but be seen as being inequitable (Siroky et al., 2020). In fragile settings, citizens may also end up not associating a service with the state or recognizing the value of a service without altering their conceptualization of state power (McCloughlin, 2015). Walton (2025) similarly argues that the relationship between social welfare and conflict depends on political settlements and context-specific patterns of inclusion and exclusion. This supports treating legitimacy as one potential pathway alongside social cohesion, inequality and economic development, rather than assuming that service provision necessarily strengthens peace. The nexus presents the interacting inputs of the framework, yet it does not completely clarify how the material and administrative performance turns into accepted authority.

3.2. State-building and Institutional Legitimacy

State-building is about the establishment or rebuilding of institutions that can ensure order, provide services and enforce decisions. Effectiveness, authority and legitimacy are not synonymous

(Brinkerhoff, 2005). Formal authority can be based on the law, while social legitimacy depends on the subjects' recognition of the right of the institution to exercise authority. International studies show that legitimacy is related to governance quality, democratic rights and welfare performance, but these correlations are subject to conditions (Gilley, 2006). Legitimacy can be derived through legality, performance, representation, accountability and consistency to locally recognized norms. Procedural fairness is especially critical since people assess the process of decision-making, not just whether or not their decisions are in their favour (Tyler, 2006). Fair and impartial procedures may foster voluntary compliance which is more enduring than obedience based solely on response to coercion or incentives (Rothstein & Teorell, 2008). Service delivery can be a source of legitimation in the conflict settings when it is available, can be credited to the service provider and can be materialized in an acceptable manner (McLoughlin, 2015). State building may also take place within the current sphere of authority. Formal, customary, religious, community and security institutions can exist in parallel, in competition or in cooperation (Brinkerhoff et al., 2012).

Studies on hybrid political orders warn that formal institutions do not necessarily replace customary institutions (Albrecht & Moe, 2015). The legitimacy of a new administrative arrangement thus hinges on its local practice as well as technical capacity (Boege et al., 2009). In post-merger Waziristan, the extension of formal state authority does not automatically establish institutional legitimacy, as residents encounter overlapping claims to authority from state institutions, customary leaders and armed intermediaries (Wazir et al., 2023). Legitimacy therefore remains contested where legal authority does not translate into locally accepted practices of decision-making, representation and accountability.

3.3. Trust, Lived Appraisal and Positive Peace

Peacebuilding theory sheds light on the reasons why violence reduction is not enough to qualify as sustainable peace. Positive peace involves less structural injustice, better relationships and better institutions that can deal with the conflict non-violently (Galtung, 1969). The “local turn” also highlights that institutions which have been designed externally or centrally may not be sufficiently embedded if communities have a weak influence over them. Local ownership is not necessarily inclusive but participation which has an impact on decisions can enhance relevance and legitimacy (Donais, 2009).

Institutional legitimacy and trust are analytically distinct: residents may recognize an institution's rightful authority while doubting its future conduct. Citizens can believe that a court or administrative body has legitimate authority while doubting its ability, consistency or impartiality. Trust is built when one builds up expectations through repeated performance (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013). Lived appraisal is employed as an analytical category for experiences of fairness, dignity, ownership, access, mobility and human security in the routine life. It distinguishes, what is to be expected from future behaviour? and what has been felt as a result of reform? This distinction is in reaction to evidence that formally hybrid institutions do not create uniform local experiences of justice, authority or peace (Millar, 2014).

These perspectives offer a division of theoretical labour. Governance–development nexus identifies interacting inputs, while state-building theory illuminates the factors that influence the emergence of accepted authority and peacebuilding theory elucidates how trust and lived experience can support positive peace. Table 1 presents this synthesis without implying that the three traditions originally formed a single model.

Table 1: Construct Definitions, Analytical Roles and Illustrative Indicators

Construct	Working definition	Analytical role	Illustrative indicators
Governance mechanisms	Institutional rules, procedures and practices governing decision-making, participation, accountability and implementation.	Reform input; shapes the design and delivery of development interventions.	Published eligibility criteria; consultation procedures; functioning complaint mechanisms; documented oversight and decision-making practices.
Development interventions	Delivered programs, services and infrastructure intended to improve material conditions and access to public provision.	Reform input; may influence legitimacy and peacebuilding independently and through interaction with governance.	Service coverage; distribution of benefits; operational facilities; infrastructure functionality; continuity of provision and maintenance.
Institutional legitimacy	Residents' recognition of an institution's right to exercise authority and make binding	Proposed mediator linking reform inputs to trust, lived appraisal and	Expressed recognition of rightful authority; acceptance of institutional jurisdiction; recognition

	decisions within its jurisdiction.	subsequent peacebuilding outcomes.	of the institution's right to decide even when particular decisions are unfavourable.
Institutional trust	Residents' expectations that an institution will act competently, reliably and impartially in the future.	Proposed parallel intervening construct; may also feed back into legitimacy over time.	Expectations that commitments will be fulfilled, decisions applied consistently, responsibilities performed competently and future cases handled impartially.
Lived appraisal	Residents' assessments of specific institutional encounters and their immediate consequences.	Proposed parallel intervening construct; may also feed back into legitimacy over time.	Reports of respectful or degrading treatment; opportunities to be heard; access barriers; procedural burdens; and safety during identifiable encounters.
Peacebuilding outcomes	Changes in conflict management, cooperation, grievances and social relationships that support sustained nonviolent interaction.	Outcome potentially influenced by both mediated pathways and direct reform effects.	Changes in nonviolent dispute resolution; cooperation across groups; recurrence or resolution of grievances; and patterns of constructive state–society engagement.

Note: Indicators are illustrative and are not validated measures. Governance and development should be assessed through documented procedures, practices and delivered interventions, triangulated with resident accounts. Legitimacy concerns recognition of rightful authority; trust concerns future expectations; lived appraisal concerns specific encounters. Fair procedures and favourable treatment may influence legitimacy but are not themselves indicators of legitimacy. Encounter-specific safety should be distinguished from broader peacebuilding outcomes. Trust and lived appraisal are proposed parallel pathways, with neither assumed to precede the other. Assessments should identify the institution, population and period concerned.

Source: Author-developed synthesis informed by Brinkerhoff (2005), Levi et al. (2009), Rothstein and Teorell (2008), McLoughlin (2015), Millar (2014) and Lederach (1997). The proposed ordering

and parallel pathways are the author's theoretical propositions rather than relationships established collectively by these sources.

These constructs differ with respect to what is measured and when. Governance related to institutional procedures; development related to the delivery of interventions and how they work. Lived appraisal involves residents' evaluations of individual experiences. Legitimacy is about recognition of rightful authority, trust is about expectations of future behaviour. Fair treatment can help maintain legitimacy but isn't considered a measure of legitimacy. In the same way, there are reports of safety in institutional experiences that are part of lived appraisal. Change in conflict management, cooperation, grievance and relationship is used as a measure of peacebuilding. It should not be used as a measure of an intervening construct and an outcome. These differences do not imply a rigid sequence of causes and effects but should be used as a basis for empirical evaluation.

4. Mediated Framework

Proposed framework is an original synthesis and not a model reproduced from a previous study. Governance mechanisms and development interventions are interacting reform inputs. They might create institutional legitimacy when citizens feel that institutions are effective, lawful, representative, accountable and procedurally fair. Institutional legitimacy may then reinforce trust in institutions and positive lived appraisal, which may in turn help to alleviate grievances, foster social cohesion, enhance state–society relations and prevent the use of violence in conflict management. The sequence is an analysis and not necessarily a determination. Governance and development can have direct impact on peacebuilding: livelihood enhancement can reduce material pressures, development of roads can improve mobility and functioning courts can offer non-violent dispute resolution. Fostering trust and positive experience can also work as positive feedback to legitimacy. The model thus suggests that mediation does not necessarily need to follow all effects; it suggests mediation to be partial and conditional. Following propositions express the framework's main claims:

1. Governance mechanisms influence peacebuilding partly by shaping the selection, delivery, attribution and perceived fairness of development interventions.

2. Responsive governance and locally relevant development are more likely to generate legitimacy when their procedures and distribution are accessible, participatory and impartial.
3. Recognition of institutional authority may strengthen expectations of reliable future conduct and shape assessments of subsequent institutional encounters. These relationships are conditional: legitimacy can coexist with distrust or adverse lived appraisal.
4. Institutional trust and lived appraisal constitute parallel pathways through which legitimacy may contribute to nonviolent conflict management, cooperation, reduced grievances and improved relationships. Changes in expectations and encounter-based assessments may, in turn, strengthen or weaken legitimacy over time.
5. Governance and development may also produce direct material or institutional effects on peacebuilding; the relative importance of direct and mediated paths is an empirical question.
6. Historical conflict, militarization, traditional authority and incomplete administrative transition condition the strength and timing of individual relationships.

Figure 1 presents institutional trust and lived appraisal as distinct, parallel intervening constructs. Trust concerns expectations of future institutional conduct, whereas lived appraisal concerns assessments of specific encounters and their immediate consequences. The framework proposes that legitimacy may shape both expectations and interpretations of encounters, without assuming that acceptance of authority improves actual treatment. Each construct may subsequently contribute to peacebuilding outcomes. Neither is assumed to precede the other. Expectations and encounter-based assessments may also reshape legitimacy over time; these feedback relationships represent alternatives to a strictly forward sequence. Governance and development may additionally affect peacebuilding directly. All pathways are propositions for empirical examination.

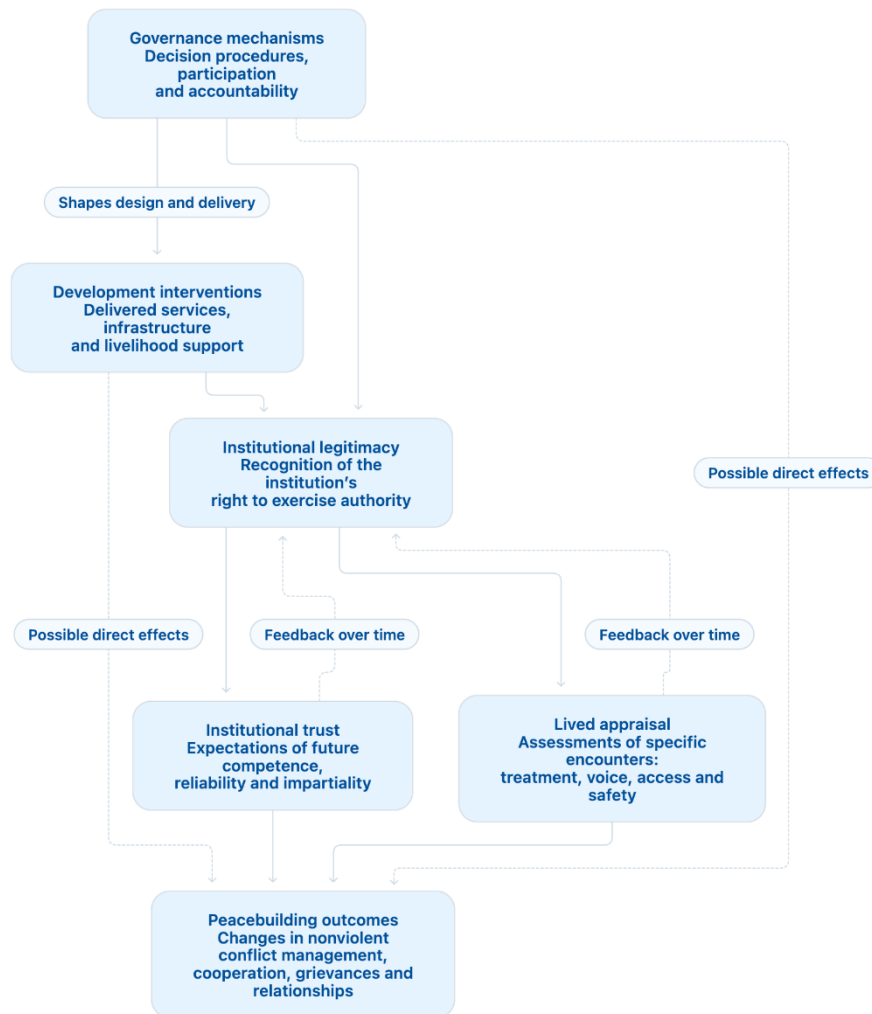


Figure 1: Proposed conditional pathways linking governance and development to post-merger peacebuilding

Note: Solid arrows indicate the principal proposed pathways; dashed arrows identify possible direct effects and feedback over time. Traditional authority and administrative consolidation may condition the input–legitimacy relationships. Conflict history and militarization may condition subsequent relationships. These contextual influences require separate examination rather than an assumed uniform effect. Peacebuilding outcomes are assessed independently of institutional beliefs and encounter-specific appraisals.

Source: Author-developed this framework with distinct constructs, possible direct effects and link-specific moderators for post-merger South Waziristan.

4.1. Causal Logic and Points of Interruption

The first relationship is between governance and development inputs, with institutional legitimacy. It is more than just a performance legitimacy in the form of approval after successful delivery. Citizens can think about the legality of an institution, fairness of its procedures, accessibility, representation and how the institution fits in with accepted norms. Legitimacy can be reinforced with service provision but it also highlights institutional weakness (Brinkerhoff et al., 2012). A new facility that is not available; a project that went through a dense procedure; a court that does not uniformly apply its rules; all these cannot lead to legitimation but just disappointment within community. Therefore, the question is not just whether an output exists but whether people link it to an institution and think that the function of institution is appropriate (McLoughlin, 2015). In this framework, governance and development are regarded as two complementary but distinct inputs. Governance influences the design, allocation and accountability for development whereas development offers environments for experience with and assessment of governance. This does not mean that the two inputs have same effect. Even in the absence of development, there can be some legitimacy created from strong administration. On the other hand, a livelihood intervention can enhance welfare even in the absence of strong administration. Proposition 2 thus implies that responsive Governance and development may reinforce one another, while each may also exert independent effects.

Second relationship relates legitimacy to trust. Legitimacy of an institution can help to decrease the necessity of ongoing coercion through the adoption of decisions that are freely accepted by all parties involved (Levi et al., 2009). But trust must be built on expectations of behavior in the future. A newly expanded court system could be considered the legitimate venue for a problem, but citizens don't know if it is slow, corrupt, accessible or enforced. The sequence can thus end with legal/ normative acceptance. When performance is consistently successful, legitimacy can be converted to trust, while if it is not consistent, it may keep the distinction (Tyler, 2006). Alongside trust, lived appraisal constitutes a separate proposed pathway between legitimacy and peacebuilding. Through engagements, institutions gain their social meaning. For example; when applying for documentation, claiming justice, traversing security structures, accessing health services or trying to affect a development decision. These interactions can either confirm or contradict what is generally thought. The notion of 'lived appraisal' is not synonymous with

'satisfaction'. It documents experience of the reform in terms of dignity, fair treatment, meaningful influence, mobility and human security. The category is intentionally broken down in such a way that an improvement in one dimension does not mask a decline in the other.

Last relationship is about positive peace. Favourable daily experiences and a sense of trust can diminish grievances, enhance cooperation and make non-violent institutional channels more credible (Lederach, 1997). But positive peace also relies on distributional conditions, social relations and security that are not limited to attitudes towards institutions (Galtung, 2010). The framework thus does not assert that legitimacy is a necessary precondition to peace. It argues that the legitimacy of the governance and development inputs helps shed light on why similar governance and development inputs can have different political and relational implications. Partial mediation also offers some protection to the structure from an unrealistic exclusive claim. A working road can enhance market access, before citizens change their perception of public authority. Security intervention can decrease immediate violence even in the context of low trust. Escalation can be prevented by making a dispute-resolution mechanism available. Such direct interventions can be significant in the short-term. It is expected that the mediated paths will be especially significant for durability, that is whether or not cooperation continues, whether grievances diminish and whether or not institutions become socially entrenched once their immediate material and security benefits have been reduced.

4.2. Moderators and Scope Conditions

Traditional authority is the main moderator between governance, development performance and legitimacy. Constitutional status will provide legal authority to formal institutions but social recognition of the same could be spread out across jirgas, maliks, religious leaders, community networks and security institutions. Customary institutions can link formal reforms with local norms, enhance access or can re-create exclusion and unequal representation. The impact of these depends on who is represented and the relationship between customary and constitutional institutions (Albrecht & Moe, 2015). Completeness of administrative transition impacts the same link. Competency and fairness of institutions can only be assessed if they have staff, resources, a clear jurisdiction and repeated public interactions. Weak legitimacy at the beginning can be interpreted as limited exposure while long-term weak legitimacy can lead to negative expectations

(Boege et al., 2009). Thus, there is a need to differentiate between constitutional incorporation and functional consolidation in the analysis.

Historical conflict and militarization shape communities' interpretations of institutional performance and the extent to which the legitimacy becomes trust and positive lived appraisal. Security operations could lower the threat from the territory, but they could also be felt as intrusive or restrictive (Dawar & Ferreira, 2021). Territorial stabilization and human security can then go in different directions. Here the case of reconstruction in North Waziristan is only used as comparative evidence as it exemplifies how visible development can coexists with centralized planning and challenging community participation (Makki & Iftikhar, 2022). The framework is most relevant in situations where a formal territorial or administrative transition has started and where governance and development interventions can be identified and authority is fragmented or incompletely consolidated. It is a boundary that is based on functionality, not a set number of post-transition years. It is not for the purpose of predicting outcomes across all post-conflict societies, rather it is designed to be used for within-case analysis and structured comparison.

5. Discussion: International Evidence and South Waziristan

Analytical strength of the framework is that it can account for the different social outcomes that can result from similar institutional changes. Three international settings are discussed to highlight specific relationships, but it is not to suggest that these are equal to South Waziristan. Bougainville is a case in point of the importance of hybrid authority. There, the post conflict legitimacy was repeatedly negotiated between formal, customary and other actors and was not monopolized by one state institution (Boege, 2014). This helps to substantiate the claim that institutional plurality acts as a moderator for the formal performance becoming accepted authority. It also warns against the automatic assumption of legitimacy for traditional institutions; legitimacy is a feature of relationships and practices, not just the word “local.” In South Waziristan, relationship between provincial institutions, jirgas, maliks and community networks cannot be taken for granted as being either necessarily competing or complementary.

Sierra Leone is a good example of the value of lived experience. Millar (2014) demonstrates that hybrid institutions do not create predictable local experiences in terms of justice, empowerment or

peace. Institutional design may appear to be inclusive but may be understood differently in different communities. This evidence is indicative of the separation of legitimacy, trust and lived appraisal. The presence of a court, police office or development program is not a measure of whether or not the people of South Waziristan find it accessible, fair or dignified.

Liberia is an example of a country where history of conflict can change the need for state authority. Blair (2022) discovered that the one who had been most directly and negatively impacted by violence of civil war were those who most likely desired state-provided security over non-state security options. Conflict exposure thus does not inevitably lead to distrust but can under certain circumstances, lead to a greater demand for centralized protection. This helps to consider the history of conflict as a moderator and not a cover for negative impact. Conflict experience can at the same time raise the demand for order and make the institutions that deliver order, subject to greater scrutiny in South Waziristan.

The comparison also reveals the limits to transferability. Bougainville is about a unique peace and state-formation process, Sierra Leone's findings relate to certain hybrid peacebuilding institutions, and Liberia's findings relate to post-war demand for security. None of these replicates the constitutional and provincial merger occurred in Pakistan. They are mechanism-specific: Bougainville is an example of negotiated legitimacy under plural authority, Sierra Leone an example of variation in everyday institutional experience and Liberia is an example of how violence can shape preferences for state protection. These cases do not prove that the whole sequence is passed on without change.

In combination, the comparisons focus three expectations for South Waziristan. Firstly, the formal customary interaction should not be treated as a general phenomenon of hybridity but should be looked at in the context of individual decisions. A similar jirga-administration dynamic can enable one service and prevent residents from accessing another. Second, institutional experiences should be broken down by location, gender, age and extent of displacement, as well as relationship to customary authority. There may be very different experiences within a district-level statement of public confidence. Third, conflict history should be considered an interpretive condition and not just a background variable. The same security or administration may be judged differently by residents based on their past experiences, threat and expectations of security.

These expectations do not allow comparison to become decorative. International cases are not just evidence of the challenge of post-conflict transitions. They outline the type of evidence to be looked for in South Waziristan: conflicting claims to authority, differences in daily life and in demands for state protection. Without these patterns, the comparative mechanisms would not be of much explanatory value. If they exist, they will help in determining which relationships in the proposed framework should be changed for the post-merger situation. All of these analytical issues are present in the post-merger setting. Constitutional integration took place at a fast pace, while administrative consolidation and public assessment are a gradual process. Based on direct evidence from South Waziristan, Khan et al., (2023) found that the conflict and military operations affected social life and customary practices of the displaced communities. Wazir et al. (2023) record the blurring lines between state and non-state authority by Aman Committees and armed intermediaries. According to Mahsud (2024), securitization experiences and perceived discrimination were factors that led to non-violent mobilization for rights and accountability. These studies, as a whole show that the state–society relations in Waziristan cannot be deduced from the formal merger or infrastructure.

This constitutional change should thus be divorced from its administrative and social implications. Amendment formally changed the location of power but citizens face merger in specific institutions, procedures and services. Consolidation of courts, police, district administration and development departments can happen at varying rates. They may also vary in visibility from one social group to another and from one settlement to another. A single term to describe 'the merger' can thus obscure variation in access and experience. Framework focuses the analysis on the institution where the decision was made, decision-making process, group impacted and the time of encounter.

Traditional authority further adds to the problem of attribution. The decision to develop can include provincial departments, security actors, contractors, elected representatives and tribal intermediaries. Residents can give credit or blame to various actors for the same intervention. If customary authorities permit access, they can help to enhance the local acceptance of formal programs. In the context of a limited participation of established elites, the same structure might undermine inclusion. The point is not whether there are jirgas or maliks, but how their presence affects the representation, fairness and legitimacy of final decisions.

There is also direct evidence from South Waziristan that lived appraisal should continue to be a separate process. Khan et al. (2023) write about the transformation of social practices in the aftermath of conflict and displacement. Wazir et al. (2023) write about daily life in the context of contested security arrangements. These studies are not just about the approval of government in general. They look at the impact of conflict and authority on social relations, mobility, customary practices and perceptions of protection. Even if residents are willing to accept the constitutional principle of integration, it is these experiences that can influence trust.

There is another qualification from Mahsud (2024) in his analysis of non-violent mobilization. Mobilization over perceived injustice may be a sign of ongoing grievances but it may also be a sign of commitment to non-violent political engagement. It should not necessarily be interpreted as failure of peace building or rejection of the state. The framework would involve the question of whether the mobilization represents demands for more responsive institutions or rejection of institutional authority or both. This example illustrates the need to interpret observed behaviour that neither compliance nor protest alone establishes acceptance or rejection of institutional authority.

There is no empirical evidence to support the suggested order. They confirm its credibility and find alternative explanations. Failure to achieve peacebuilding outcomes may be due to poor inputs, unequal development, weak administration, ongoing insecurity or lack of time. Or reforms can enhance material welfare without affecting legitimacy. Fieldwork in South Waziristan will establish this if the residents believe that the institutions of the province have improved and if they accept the authority, trust the future action of the institutions and believe that they will experience positive reform. Evidence from North Waziristan should be kept on a comparative basis. Dawar and Ferreira (2021) observed that reconstruction planning that aimed to link communities and the state continued to be influenced by a state-security-first approach and a limited local voice.

As demonstrated by Makki and Iftikhar (2023), territorial stabilization does not necessarily go hand in hand with uncontroversial societal security. These studies inform the framework's contextual plausibility but cannot replace the evidence from South Waziristan, where the tribal makeup and the course of conflict and institutional relationships are different. The framework also defines what is meant by a "stalled transition. When services improve but legitimacy does not, the

issues might involve attribution, procedural unfairness or competing authority. When legitimacy increases but trust does not, institutions can be accepted but they can be unreliable. When trust increases without peacebuilding, inequality, trauma or insecurity can prevent the final relationship. This diagnostic reasoning is summarized in Table 2.

It distinguishes interruptions within the proposed pathway from explanations that challenge its causal ordering or explanatory importance. Evidence of direct effects would qualify, rather than automatically reject, partial mediation. The central claim would be weakened if sustained peacebuilding improvements repeatedly occurred without changes in the proposed mediators and were better explained by material, coercive or customary mechanisms. Reverse temporal ordering would require revision of the proposed sequence. These assessments require evidence of how change occurred, rather than the simultaneous presence of favourable institutional perceptions and peacebuilding outcomes.

Table 2: Competing Explanations, Discriminating Evidence and Implications for the Proposed Framework

Observed pattern	Competing explanation	Evidence favouring the explanation	Observation weakening the mediation claim
Governance and development improve, but institutional legitimacy does not.	Residents attribute improvements to other actors or contest the responsible institution's procedures or authority.	Residents acknowledge improved provision but credit customary leaders, security actors or external agencies; encounter accounts document exclusion or procedural unfairness.	Sustained peacebuilding improvements occur despite unchanged legitimacy, including where residents correctly identify the responsible institution.
Institutional legitimacy improves, but trust or lived appraisal does not.	Recognition of rightful authority coexists with unreliable performance or adverse encounters.	Repeated accounts distinguish acceptance of authority from expectations of unreliable conduct; service records and encounter reports corroborate these concerns.	Increases in legitimacy consistently fail to precede changes in trust or lived appraisal despite sufficient time and repeated institutional contact.

Peacebuilding improves without increased legitimacy or trust.	Material benefits, coercive stabilization or customary dispute resolution operate through alternative pathways.	Reduced grievances follow livelihood gains; reduced violence tracks enforcement; or disputes are resolved through customary institutions without increased acceptance of formal institutions.	Improvements persist across repeated observations while the proposed mediators remain unchanged or decline, and evidence traces outcomes to alternative mechanisms.
One reform input improves while the other remains largely unchanged.	Governance and development operate independently rather than through mutually reinforcing effects.	Comparative or temporal evidence links legitimacy changes to procedural reform without additional development, or to service improvements without governance reform.	This challenges any claim that both inputs are necessary, but does not by itself exclude interaction effects. Mediation is additionally weakened if peacebuilding improves without corresponding changes in legitimacy, trust or lived appraisal.
Trust or lived appraisal improves before legitimacy.	Reliable conduct and favourable encounters generate legitimacy; causal ordering differs from the proposed sequence.	Dated accounts, repeated interviews or panel evidence place changes in experience and expectations before recognition of rightful authority.	The reverse sequence recurs, while prior legitimacy does not explain subsequent changes in trust or lived appraisal. This weakens the proposed ordering, although legitimacy may still mediate later outcomes.
Similar reform inputs produce different peacebuilding outcomes across settings.	Pre-existing cohesion, conflict exposure, customary authority or other contextual conditions explain the divergence.	Comparative evidence shows that outcomes track these conditions despite similar inputs and similar levels of legitimacy, trust and lived appraisal.	Outcome differences are better explained by contextual mechanisms, with little evidence that changes in the proposed mediators transmit the effects of reform.

Note: These are proposed evidentiary tests, not findings from South Waziristan. Assessments should concern identifiable institutions, affected groups and specified periods. Temporal ordering should be examined through repeated observations and triangulation of resident accounts,

institutional records and documented events. Direct effects do not, by themselves, disprove partial mediation. The central mediation claim is weakened when sustained outcomes are repeatedly explained by alternative mechanisms and the proposed mediators show little evidence of transmitting reform effects.

Source: Author-developed analytical tests of the proposed framework.

6. Policy Implications

Future studies should maintain the conceptual differences set out in the framework. What was introduced and delivered can be determined by policies, budgets, administrative records and project evaluations. They cannot independently create legitimacy, trust or lived appraisal. Those constructs need to be understood through the lens of resident accounts of authority, attribution, fairness, reliability and everyday experience (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Triangulation of evidence should be done within official documents, institutional actors, community accounts and critical incidents. Temporal evidence is crucial as mediation involves order. Process tracing could investigate whether or not governance or development improvements occurred before legitimacy, whether or not legitimacy occurred before trust and lived appraisal and whether or not changes in governance or development occurred before peacebuilding outcomes (Collier, 2011). Negative cases would be particularly interesting, communities that had similar inputs but different legitimacy; or institutions that were seen as legitimate but not trusted.

The framework suggests that post-merger evaluation should go beyond expenditure, infrastructure and institutional presence as far as policy is concerned. While delivery indicators are important, they should be complemented by indicators of attribution, public acceptance, procedural fairness, reliability, meaningful participation and human security. In countries with low levels of legitimacy, extra infrastructure can have limited political impact. When there is legitimacy but low trust, consistency of performance, accountability and the availability of grievance mechanisms take precedence. If trust grows in the absence of broader peacebuilding, then perhaps other issues of inequality, trauma, insecurity or social fragmentation need to be addressed separately (Levi et al., 2009). The framework does not spell out the substitution or passive incorporation of customary institutions. It focuses on the impact of various authorities on inclusion, rights and access. It also doesn't mean that security institutions are incapable of contributing to peace. Instead, it needs to

be evaluated separately in terms of territorial security, civilian institutional legitimacy and lived security of the residents.

Evaluation of policies should also be institution-specific and temporally realistic. The satisfaction with “government” cannot indicate whether the residents differentiate between courts, police, district administration, elected representatives, development departments and security actors. Every institution may have varying levels of capacity, legal authority, legitimacy and trust. There is a need for repeated assessment because initial expectations after constitutional change might be different from the ones that are developed after prolonged institutional contact. Evaluation should thus include output indicators, disaggregated community evidence, evidence of who delivers and evidence of community participation influencing decisions. This would enable policy makers to determine if a poor result is due to lack of resources, unfair procedures, unclear institutional accountability or to a more fundamental rejection of authority. It would also deter the notion of peacebuilding success merely because of the completion of infrastructure or a temporary decrease in violence.

7. Limitations

There are three limitations of the article. First, the review is not systematic but instead is a purposive review. Its literature base was built up because of the author's doctoral research and supplementary targeted searching. There was no formal search log or screening count kept. The article thus makes a conceptual contribution and does not pretend to be exhaustive. Future systematic or scoping review could be conducted to examine if other literatures change the proposed constructs or relationships.

Secondly, information about South Waziristan is still scarce. The article gives preference to the limited research done in the district and categorizes the findings of North Waziristan as comparative. Even direct studies focus on specific communities, times and issues; they can't determine district-wide attitudes or causal change after merger. The plausibility illustration should therefore not be interpreted as an alternative to field research.

Thirdly, the framework reduces social processes to a level of simplicity which makes causal examination possible. Lived appraisal, legitimacy and trust can emerge in a reciprocal manner and

not necessarily in a fixed sequence. Institutions may also have different sequences occurring simultaneously. The model should thus be applied to particular institutions and times, focusing on feedback, negative cases and alternative explanations. Its value lies in disciplined diagnosis and not on the universal prediction.

8. Conclusion

This article addressed a gap in traditional discussions between governance and development nexus. It assumes that institutional reform and material development are linked but fails to specify how these inputs are given political approval for sustainable peace. Using method of theory synthesis, the article proposes institutional legitimacy as a conditional mediating mechanism connecting governance and development interventions with peacebuilding outcomes. Framework separates legitimacy from capacity as well as trust and lived appraisal. Governance mechanisms and development interventions are inputs that interact with each other. How citizens perceive institutions as rightful, procedurally appropriate and responsive is a key determinant of their role in peacebuilding. Legitimate authority can then foster positive experiences of fairness, dignity, ownership, access, human security and trust. These processes can help reduce grievances, enhance state–society relations, social cohesion and non-violent conflict management. Framework also allows for direct effects, reciprocal relations and interruptions. It proposes conditional and partial mediation instead of a universal sequence.

These differences are relevant in the case of South Waziristan. Process of constitutional integration took place in a conflict context that was marked by displacement, militarization, incomplete administrative consolidation and overlapping authorities. Presence of institutions or the output of development programs therefore cannot be considered as sufficient proof of legitimacy, trust or positive peace. Evidence from South Waziristan provides a basis for the plausibility of this problem but does not verify the proposed mechanism. Framework should be tested in future empirical research by means of community accounts, institutional and project records and temporal process tracing. Key policy takeaway is that success following a merger should be measured in terms of acceptance, procedural fairness, reliability, participation and daily human security as well as expenditure and expansion. Formal integration, embedded in the communities it serves is most likely to lead to sustainable peace.

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Supplementary Table S1: Principal Analytical Sources, Proposition Links and Qualifications

Proposition	Principal sources	Contribution to the synthesis	Qualification or competing interpretation	Implication for the framework
P1. Governance shapes the development pathway to peacebuilding.	Brinkerhoff (2005); Brinkerhoff et al. (2012); McLoughlin (2015)	Connect governance functions and service provision with processes of legitimation; draw attention to how delivery is organized and attributed.	Delivered services need not produce acceptance of the responsible institution or subsequent behavioural change.	Distinguish delivered outputs from their attribution and political interpretation. Treat the extension to peacebuilding as a proposed relationship.
P2. Responsive governance and relevant development may generate legitimacy under specified conditions.	McLoughlin (2015); Tyler (2006); Rothstein and Teorell (2008)	Inform the treatment of service provision, procedural fairness and impartiality as potential influences on institutional acceptance.	Fairness and impartiality are institutional characteristics or assessments, not equivalent to recognition of rightful authority. Independent effects do not establish interaction between governance and development.	Measure legitimacy separately. Treat complementarity between inputs as a proposition rather than assuming mutual necessity.
P3. Legitimacy may shape trust and assessments of encounters.	Levi et al. (2009); Millar (2014)	Inform distinctions between legitimating beliefs, evaluations of institutional conduct and experiences of institutional arrangements.	Levi et al. position governmental trustworthiness and procedural justice as antecedents of legitimacy. Millar challenges predictable connections between institutional design and local experience. Neither establishes the proposed forward ordering.	Identify legitimacy-to-trust and legitimacy-to-appraisal as author-proposed pathways. Examine reverse ordering and distinguish perceived treatment from the circumstances of encounters.
P4. Trust and lived appraisal	Lederach (1997); Mac	Support attention to relationships,	These works do not collectively establish	Retain separate constructs and

may operate as parallel pathways to peacebuilding, with feedback to legitimacy.	Ginty and Richmond (2013); Millar (2014)	local agency and everyday experiences in peacebuilding.	the proposed parallel mediation structure or demonstrate that favourable institutional perceptions produce community-level peacebuilding.	outcome indicators. Treat parallel pathways and feedback as theoretical extensions requiring temporal and contextual evidence.
P5. Governance and development may also influence peacebuilding directly.	Brinkerhoff (2005); Lederach (1997), read alongside McLoughlin (2015)	Inform consideration of institutional functioning, material provision and conflict-management practices beyond changes in legitimacy.	The absence of legitimation following service delivery does not itself demonstrate a direct peacebuilding effect. Coercive reductions in violence may not improve cooperation or grievances.	Retain direct effects as competing pathways. Require evidence tracing outcomes to material, security or dispute-resolution mechanisms.
P6. Context conditions particular relationships.	Boege et al. (2009); Albrecht and Moe (2015); Boege (2014); Dawar and Ferreira (2021), <i>State-security first</i> ; Blair (2022)	Inform attention to plural authority, security-driven reconstruction and conflict-related preferences for state protection.	Customary authority may facilitate access or reproduce exclusion. Blair examines demand for state security rather than increased state provision. Findings from other settings do not establish moderation in South Waziristan.	Specify the relationship each contextual condition may affect. Avoid assigning uniformly positive or negative effects to hybridity, militarization or conflict exposure.
Contextual plausibility across propositions	Khan et al. (2023); Wazir et al. (2023); Mahsud (2024)	Inform the discussion of conflict-related social change, contested authority and nonviolent mobilization in Waziristan.	The studies address different populations, periods and questions. They do not jointly test the proposed mediation structure or establish district-wide post-merger effects.	Use them to identify relevant contextual questions and alternative interpretations, not to validate the framework.

Note: This table identifies principal sources used in the conceptual synthesis, rather than an exhaustive inventory of the literature. “Contribution” indicates the analytical use of a source and does not imply that its authors endorse the complete proposed framework. The methodological works cited in the article guide review design and construct clarification; they do not provide substantive evidence for the causal propositions.

Source: Author’s mapping of the literature used in the article.