

Power, Morality, and the Strength of the State

The existence and stability of any state are anchored in two essential forces: the hidden strength of its institutions and the moral character of its leadership. On one side, the mechanism of governance, sometimes referred to as the “deep state,” ensures continuity, resilience, and protection against internal and external shocks. On the other flank, morality acts as the compass that directs the exercise of authority. When these two forces complement one another, nations rise to stability and prosperity. But when one is absent, the result is fragility or chaos.

The Essentials of Strong Inclusive Institutions: Throughout history, countries that developed robust state structures have endured crises more effectively than those without them. The Ottoman Empire, despite its decline, survived for centuries largely due to its administrative and military institutions. Similarly, modern states like Turkey and Egypt demonstrate how entrenched institutions—whether civilian or military—shape the durability of governance. In Pakistan, too, it is evident that without the hidden strength of its bureaucracy, military, and judicial structures, the state’s affairs would have long collapsed under the burden of political instability. These structures, while sometimes criticized, provide the continuity obligatory for governance. Political parties come and go, but the underlying framework of the state ensures that laws are enforced, security is maintained, and national interest is protected. Without such a backbone, the writ of the state cannot be consolidated, and governance becomes a mere experiment in survival.

The Menaces of Power Without Morality: Yet, strong institutions alone do not guarantee justice or order. Power that lacks moral restraint leads to tyranny and corruption. The 20th century saw regimes that, though structurally powerful, collapsed under the weight of their moral failures, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union being prominent examples. Their extractive institutions were vast and disciplined, but power was wielded without ethical responsibility, turning strength into oppression. Closer to our time, the Arab Spring illustrated how regimes with seemingly unshakable control fell apart because they neglected the moral importance of governance. Their power instilled fear but not loyalty, and when that power was challenged, chaos replaced stability.

The Balance of Power and Morality. For a state to truly prosper, its hidden strength must be balanced with visible moral leadership. When institutions ensure order, and morality ensures justice, governance becomes credible and sustainable. This balance allows citizens to trust the state, not out of fear, but out of conviction that power is being used for the common good of society. In Pakistan’s case, the debate over extractive institutional power versus democratic authority will only find resolution when leaders couple strength with moral responsibility. Without morality, institutions risk becoming instruments of control rather than guardians of the nation. Without inclusive institutions, morality alone cannot withstand the storms of geopolitics and internal strife.

Conclusion: The lesson of history is clear: power without morality creates disorder, while morality without strong institutions remains powerless. A nation achieves true strength only when both pillars support each other. The affairs of the state are consolidated by institutional depth, but society is stabilized by moral integrity. In this harmony lies the foundation of enduring governance.

Arshad Naeem Chaudhry: 26.9.2025