ORIGINAL ARTICLE

State of forgiveness: Cooperation, conciliation, and state formation in Mughal South Asia (1556–1707)

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Abstract

This paper contributes to a growing literature on state capacity with reference to the early modern Asian empires. The historiography of these states, and especially the Mughal empire of South Asia, has moved away from an image of unrestrained despotism towards that of a constrained state, but has yet to explore fully what these constraints were and what the state did to overcome them. Using a new dataset on conflicts in Mughal South Asia, and an analytical model, the paper shows how forgiving rebel leaders was used as a strategic tool to secure stability, in a setting where high information costs made intermediaries indispensable to the state. The paper also offers some comparison between Asian empires on the role of intermediaries in shaping state constraint and fiscal policies.

KEYWORDS
Asian Empires, early modern, elite–state relationships, Islamic Empires, precolonial, South Asia, state capacity, tax revenue

Although the state capacity literature has developed substantially in recent years, precolonial South Asia remains relatively unexplored. The Mughal empire (1556–1707) presents a valuable case study for understanding how coercion costs and state–elite relationships impacted state capacity development. The state exhibited highly constrained behaviour through the course of the dynasty, reinstating and sometimes even promoting rebel leaders that attempted to secede, defect, or take territory by force. The state also adopted an unusual practice of returning

confiscated wealth, where confiscation has increasingly been seen as a tool used by states to increase funds.[1] Moreover, rebels often felt confident the state would reinstate them without exacting retribution at a later date.

This paper will attempt to answer two questions: why the Mughal government forgave as many rebels as it did, and why rebels returned to the state after rebellions with confidence that the state would honour that forgiveness. By answering these questions, I argue that the Mughal empire was a constrained state that chose to forgive and negotiate with rebellious intermediaries to maintain its revenue and increase its state capacity. These intermediaries could administer localities with lower information costs than the state because of their better influence within and understanding of specific ethnic groups, religions, and localities. The high level of administrative capacity of the rebels made them difficult to replace without incurring substantial costs, and the constant conflict and high costs of administration prevented the state from adopting more direct control of all regions.[2] Consequently, the state adopted more inclusive and constrained political policies towards rebellious intermediaries to achieve a higher total revenue and greater control at the expense of sharing a larger portion of revenues and autonomy with these intermediaries. As the intermediaries were aware of their bargaining power vis-à-vis the state, they were able to demand more from it and they became difficult for the state to control. The bargaining power of intermediaries was not always equal, and the ability of the intermediary to negotiate would depend on their value to the state, as well as the threat they posed. Despite often conceding to rebel demands, by following these policies the state was able to command a strong and adaptable military force capable of withstanding large conflicts.

Sections I and II of this paper provide a review of the debates in the literature and a background of the Mughal state. Section III discusses the methodology adopted in the paper, and section IV discusses forgiveness as a policy of the state. Sections V and VI develop a framework for explaining rebel forgiveness built from the data and sources. Sections VII and VIII test the framework both statistically and using analytical case studies. Section IX concludes.

I | LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper aims to contribute to two literatures: the comparative global state capacity literature which has expanded in recent decades, and the Mughal economic history literature which has focused on the state. Despite covering similar topics, these literatures have not engaged with one another in much depth.

Increasingly, the state capacity literature has focused on the role of intermediaries in managing the administrative capacity of early modern governments.[3] Once framed as extractive and absolutist regimes, these states are now modelled as limited by and reliant on the intermediaries they employed to govern.[4] The literature has particularly emphasized the difficulties states faced

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[1] Arslantaş, Pietri, and Vahabi, 'State predation', p. 427; Ma and Rubin, 'The paradox of power'.

[2] 'Administrative capacity can be considered the ability implement or counteract policy choices of the government, including the ability of raising raise taxes and managing local regions efficiently.' (See Greif, 'The impact of administrative power'.)

[3] North, Wallis, and Weingast, *Violence and social orders*; Dincecco and Wang, 'Violent conflict and political development'; Greif, 'The impact of administrative power'.

[4] Yun-Casalilla, O'Brien, and Comín, *The Rise of Fiscal States*; Grafe and Irigoin, 'A stakeholder empire'; Choon, 'The Ottoman postmaster'; Johnson and Koyama, 'States and economic growth'.

with regards to the high costs of monitoring elites and resolving the principal agent problem of governance.[5] Rulers had to make decisions regarding the contractual form of governance they would take paired with the costs and benefits of adopting any system.[6] High costs of conflict especially incentivized policy decisions and institutional structures. Where external conflict had a centralizing effect, internal conflict limited state capacity development by disincentivizing investments and tax increases.[7] The centralization (or lack thereof) and low per capita revenue generation in Asian empires have been attributed to the complexities of managing internal constraints, especially with regards to the principal–agent problem of governance.

One of the most central debates within the Mughal state history scholarship relates to the degree of centralization and state capacity of the empire between 1556 and 1707. Where the 'Aligarh School' modelled the empire as highly centralized and structured, 'Process' school scholars such as Alam and Subrahmanyam have emphasized the state's flexibility in administration.[8] This revisionist scholarship has come to see rebellion and the subsequent negotiation with rebel groups as evidence of the state's inability to enforce a structured regime over the populace. For instance, Wink sees *fitna* (sedition) as a tool elites used to adjust the power dynamics between the state and local groups.[9] Faruqui has similarly emphasized the state's need to conciliate and cooperate with local groups for political legitimacy.[10] Yet whilst the state's frequent forgiveness of rebels is widely acknowledged,[11] there has been little consideration of why the stated adopted such a policy, and why it worked so well despite the risks of repeated rebellion. Moreover, there has also been little attempt to try and assess the extent to which the state followed conciliatory policies. This article studies rebel forgiveness as a way of better understanding the relationship between the Mughal government and intermediaries, and the factors which influenced state building through conciliation. Unlike other early modern states, the effect of conflict on the state capacity of the Mughal government has not been studied in depth, especially from a focus of the wider comparative political economy implications.[12] This article aims to fill this gap.

II | BACKGROUND OF THE MUGHAL STATE

Whilst the Mughal state was one of the largest and most militarily powerful empires in the early modern world, the structure of government varied considerably across provinces.[13] In some

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[5] Sng, 'Size and dynastic decline'; Zurndorfer, 'Violence and political protest'; Greif and Tabellini. 'The clan and the corporation'; Ottoman literature outlined in Dagli, 'The limits of Ottoman pragmatism'.

[6] White, 'From privatized to government-administered tax collection'.

[7] Karaman and Pamuk, 'Different paths to the modern state'; Gupta, Ma, and Roy, 'States and development'; Sheth and Zhang, 'Locating meritocracy'; Dincecco and Wang, 'Violent conflict and political development'. For broader literature, see: Besley and Persson; Gennaioli and Voth, 'State capacity and military conflict'.

[8] Alam and Subrahmanyam, The Mughal State; Habib, 'Evolution of the Afghan tribal system'.

[9] Wink, 'Sovereignty and universal dominion', p. 826.

[10] Faruqui, *Princes*, p. 325.

[11] Faruqui, *Princes*, p. 325.

[12] A few recent articles have looked at precolonial Indian warfare, though not Mughal specifically. See: Dincecco, Fenske, Menon, and Mukherjee, 'Pre-colonial warfare'; Ticku, Shrivastava, and Iyer, 'Economic shocks and temple desecrations in medieval India', Cambridge working papers in Economics (unpublished, 2018); Gupta, Ma, and Roy, 'States and development'.

[13] Sharman, *Empires of the weak*; Findlay and O'Rourke, *Power and plenty*, pp. 262–9.

localities, the state established direct control of the administration and tax revenue collection (*khalisa* lands), whereas in others greater autonomy was afforded to local rulers and groups.[14] At its greatest extent, the empire included most of what is modern day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, which encompassed highly differentiated ethnic groups and communities. With differentiated terrain of swamps, jungles, and mountains, and of both agricultural and pastoral communities, the state's management and taxation policies varied, making the state highly reliant on intermediary administrators.[15] The characteristics of and the state's relationship with these intermediaries were diverse; however, the literature broadly recognises two main types of intermediaries.[16] The first are the *Mansabdars*, who were higher level nobles incorporated into the government by the awarding of ranks (*Mansabs*).[17] In exchange for military and administrative service, these nobles were given non-hereditary rights to collect revenue from parcels of land known as *jagirs*. The second are the *Zamindars*, which included a wider and more varied group of local elites with differing degrees of wealth and political power; some of them were more like local rulers and others more akin to upper-class peasants.[18] Though often referred to as 'tax collectors' by the Mughals, *Zamindars* took a portion of the tax revenue for themselves.[19] *Zamindars* often had more permanent and hereditary rights to their land and a greater connection to their localities.[20] Whilst *Mansabdars* have been considered more distinctly a part of the central state, the distinction between these two groups would also blur as several *Zamindars* were also awarded *Mansabs* and appointed to administrative roles.[21]

All intermediaries to some degree encompassed a civil and military role in which they were required to maintain armed contingents and could be called to war at any time. These intermediaries were also highly rebellious. Being armed, influential, and often wealthy, the *Mansabdars* and especially *Zamindars* posed considerable and frequent challenges to the state. How the empire managed these challenges is the concern of this paper.

III | METHODOLOGY AND FORGIVENESS DATA

Given the difficulty in measuring state and administrative capacity, this paper adopts a mixed methodology. The paper first uses statistical data and central government sources to build a model which explains rebel forgiveness. The model is then tested both statistically and with the use of case studies.

For the statistical analysis, I use the newly developed Mughal Conflict Database which records conflicts within contemporary state histories funded by the central government. A full discussion of the methods and sources involved in compiling this database are available in appendices 1–5; however, it is worth including a short discussion here. As the histories used are

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[14] Roy, 'Law and economic change'; Parthasarathi, *Why Europe grew rich*; Moosvi, *The economy of the Mughal empire*, p. 177; Sood, 'A political sociology of empire', p. 1293.

[15] Nath, *Climate of conquest*, p. 272; Singh, 'Conformity and conflict'; Habib, 'Evolution of the Afghan tribal system'.

[16] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*; Habib, *The Agrarian system*, p. 169.

[17] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, pp. 3–5

[18] Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals', p. 284.

[19] See Guha, 'Rethinking the economy'.

[20] Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals', p. 292; Habib, *The Agrarian system*, pp. 173–4.

[21] See Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals', p. 289.

chronological, centralized, and highly detailed, they give a very good perspective of the major conflicts the state faced and allow us to track how conflicts changed over time. Since this paper is concerned with studying the Mughal state specifically, these sources also provide a representative sample of the conflicts that affected the state the most, and provide an insight to the state's view of the conflicts. As with any historical dataset, there are limitations to these data's representativeness since there are many rebellions which are not covered. Peasant rebellions especially might be under-represented as the central government would only record the largest of these.[22] However, for the purposes of this study, the database provides a better state-wide representation of conflicts than alternative datasets.[23] To ensure consistency regarding the labelling of conflicts, methods of categorizing conflicts are outlined in appendix 5.[24]

To measure forgiveness, this paper looks at a sample size of 274 rebels within the database. Although the database recorded 390 rebels, only those rebels were included for whom it was possible to know what happened to them post-rebellion. For the sake of clarity and the purposes of quantitative analysis, forgiveness is defined as when after the rebellion has ended, the rebel is given the same (or higher) social position as they had at the point of rebellion, that is, a *Mansabdar* remained a *Mansabdar* under state employment with a reinstatement of his *Mansab* and *jagirs*. The case studies provided are derived from the histories as well as additional sources and secondary literature which provide a deeper and broader perspective.

IV | REBELLION FORGIVENESS IN THE DATA AND SOURCES

Table 1 provides a summary of the rebellion data in appendix 2 and demonstrates that the empire faced at least 282 major conflicts, of which 177 were rebellions, 35 were conflicts with Vassal states, and 65 were wars. The high number of internal conflicts indicate the South Asian state conflict experience was far more comparable to early modern China than previous work has demonstrated.[25] Moreover, although less than the number of rebellions, the number of wars the state faced were not insignificant. Relevantly, figure 1 shows that the majority of rebellions in the state were led by *Mansabdars* and *Zamindars,* the latter increasingly so over the dynasty.

TABLE 1   Number of conflict types.

Decade start	Protest/riot	War	Vassal state[a]	Rebellion	Total
Total	5	65	35	177	282
% of Total	2	23	12	63	

Source: Constructed from the Mughal Conflict Database.

[a]Vassal state refers to the Deccan Sultanates of Berar, Bidar, Golconda, Bijapur, and Ahmednagar. These states had their own governments; however, they paid tribute to the Mughal empire and were required to have all official appointments approved by the Mughal court. They were eventually incorporated into the empire. Percentages rounded to whole numbers.

[22] For a full discussion of the representativeness of the data, see apps. 3 and 4.

[23] See app. 3 for more details.

[24] For challenges related to categorizing rebellions, see Dardess, Parsons, Simonovskaia, and Wen-Chih, 'The Late Ming rebellions'; Wakeman, 'The study of popular movements'; Singh, 'Conformity and conflict', p. 427; Nadri 'Mughal administration', p. 320.

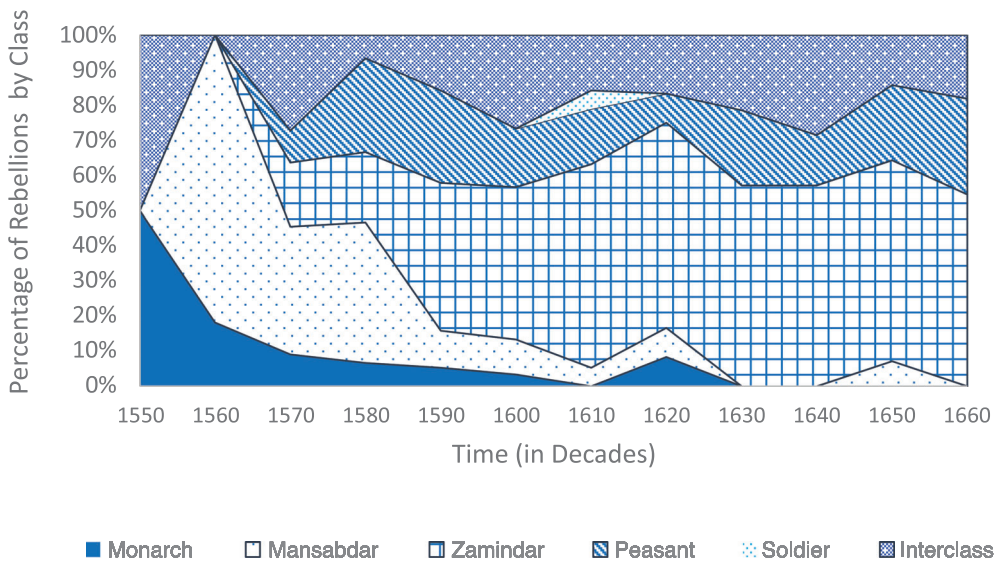[25] Gupta, Ma, and Roy, 'States and development'.

FIGURE 1 Percentage of rebellions led by class type. *Source*: Constructed from the Mughal Conflict Database. Data represent the percentage of rebellions led by each class group. Monarch refers to any dynastic rebellions where leaders had a claim to the throne. Interclass refers to rebellions where leadership came from more than one class group. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 2 Forgiveness by class group.

	No. of rebels	No. forgiven	Percentage forgiven
Monarchs (dynastic rebels)	13	9	69
Mansabdars	95	43	45
Zamindars (local intermediaries)	105	55	52
Soldiers	9	3	33
Peasants	45	11	24
Total	267	121	45

Source: Constructed from the Mughal Conflict Database. This only includes data for which we know what happened to the rebels, and for which we know their class status. Percentages rounded to whole numbers.

Table 2 presents the number of rebels from each class group and how many were forgiven. It shows that from this sample, 45 per cent of rebels were forgiven. Table 2 also presents the *Zamindars* and *Mansabdars* as being amongst the largest group of rebels and had high rates of forgiveness – 52 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively. Moreover, table 3 presents only 14 per cent of all rebels as being executed, with similar proportions being imprisoned or dying in battle, meaning non-forgiveness did not necessarily mean execution.[26]

Rebel forgiveness was such a frequent occurrence that forgiveness and conciliation can be considered a part of state policy.[27] In a collection of standardized employment contracts for the

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[26] The proportion of total rebels who died is 27%.

[27] Faruqui, *Princes*, p. 259.

TABLE 3 Number and percentage of rebels with consequences different from forgiveness.

Consequence	Number of	Percentage of rebels with other consequences
Executed	39	14
Not executed	235	86
Imprisoned	41	15
Not imprisoned	233	85
Died in battle	35	13
Did not die in battle	239	87
Punished	27	10
Not punished	247	90
Total	274	

Source: Constructed using the Mughal Conflict Database, participants table. Rebels can have multiple consequences. Percentages rounded to whole numbers.

Mughal empire, several mid- and higher-level officials were given clear instructions to avoid punishing rebels as much as possible, and instead to conciliate them.[28] Moreover, these documents guide state officials to first try to engage in negotiations, and only if these failed was force of arms acceptable.[29] The empire's proclivity to rebel forgiveness is widely acknowledged in the literature, albeit sometimes termed in different forms. Streusand refers to tax-related conflicts in the empire as 'revenue wars', where revenue settlements were made as a process of bargaining between the state and *Zamindars*.[30] It is also highly evident in source material, where Mughal chroniclers were explicit. For example, the *Mir Bakhshi* (Head of the Military) during Akbar's reign wrote the following poem:

> 'When the enemy with humility enters your door;
> You should not then, from him, for vengeance seek.
> When the offender, for pardon comes to thee,
> If thou pardonest not, thou wouldst the offender be.'[31]

Forgiveness was not only limited to the crime of rebellion, but also to more minor offences. The chronicler Khan lamented that sub-provincial government officials known as *Faujdars* who were caught embezzling tax revenues or collecting surtaxes were only punished for short periods of time, returning to their posts soon afterwards.[32] The Mughals instituted an annual prisoner release programme, where numerous prisoners with minor offences were released and their records expunged.[33] In one incident, the Chief Revenue Officer of Lahore forgave the debt payments of all prisoners who had tax arrears of 20 000–30 000 rupees on the condition that

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[28] Richards, *Document forms,* p. 38.

[29] Day, *The Mughal government*, p. 81.

[30] Streusand, 'The process of expansion', p. 357.

[31] Ahmad, *Tabaqat*, p. 307

[32] Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 94

[33] See another example in Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 212.

they would repay the sums in instalments of 2000–3000 rupees.[34] Despite being an absolutist and militaristic state, the Mughal government exhibited significant restraint against disobedient officials.[35]

Given the very high number of internal conflicts and their negative effect on revenue, it is perhaps unusual that a monarchic and militarily powerful state chose to forgive as many rebels as it did. Forgiveness could potentially encourage repeated rebellion where rebels might be emboldened by low risks, and rebellions can threaten the incumbents' control and their lives. Forgiveness additionally means that the state reinstated confiscated wealth and status rather than appropriating it or passing it to more loyal subjects. Studies of the Ottoman and Qing confiscation records have argued that confiscation of wealth in these states is a comparable metric for understanding state restraint in predatory behaviour on taxpayers.[36] A similar case could be made for the Mughal empire, where land grants and assets were confiscated as a form of punishment for elites. Confiscation was a tool of reducing rebels' resources during the course of rebellion, and the value of confiscated goods could be substantial. The seized wealth of Jujhar Singh Bundela, for example, was a sum of one *crore*[37] rupees.[38] However, when rebels were forgiven, the vast majority of their wealth and status was returned to them.[39] In fact, in some cases, the rebels received a higher social status and greater rewards than they had prior to rebelling.[40]

What kind of rebellions were forgiven? Rebellions can be motivated by a variety of reasons, such as against taxes or because of political policies. The chronicles, however, provided some level of consistency with regards to what the motivations of rebels were. In an attempt to quantify these motivations, table 4 presents the inferred motivation data expressed in the histories from the perspective of the chroniclers. To be clear, these data do not mean these were the actual motivations of the rebels, but they are representative of the state's interpretation of rebel motivation. The data are given on the five main motivations which seemed evident in the sources. Of these five motivations, the motivations relating to territory, taxation, and social mobility were by far the highest at 35 per cent, 21 per cent, and 24 per cent, respectively. Forgiveness rates across all motivations do not seem to differ substantially, but tax motivation and social mobility motivations are the highest at 59 per cent and 51 per cent, respectively. The patterns in these data are consistent with what has been identified in the broader literature, where territorial and tax competition with the *Zamindars* and *Mansabdars* are referred to.[41] The model below focuses on explaining how the Mughal forgiveness policies related to these rebellions.

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[34] Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 265.

[35] In this way, absolutism in the Mughal state better follows Epstein's understanding. See Epstein, *Freedom and growth*, pp. 13–4.

[36] See Ma and Rubin, 'Paradox of power'; and Arslantaş, Pietri and Vahabi, 'State predation'.

[37] A *crore* is 10 million.

[38] See Singh, 'Jujhar Singh's rebellion', p. 236.

[39] Sometimes rebels were expected to pay an indemnity to make up for the losses.

[40] See three examples in Jahangir, *Tuzuk* pp. 40, 56, 406. See also the rewards offered to defectors to encourage their return in Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 337.

[41] See, for instance Rana, 'Agrarian revolts in northern India'; Habib, *Agrarian system*; Alam, *The crisis of empire*.

TABLE 4 Rebel forgiveness by inferred motivation.

	Number of rebels with the motivation	Percentage of rebels with this motivation data	Number of rebels forgiven with this motivation	Percentage forgiven with this motivation
Territory motivation (capture/secede territory)	67	35	27	40
Tax/tribute motivation (refuse to pay taxes)	41	21	24	59
Social mobility motivation (desire higher social status)	47	24	24	51
Plunder motivation (plundering other lands)	21	11	8	38
Policy motivation (rebellion against Mughal laws/policy)	26	13	12	46

Source: Derived from the Mughal Conflict Dataset. Proportion of motivations calculated from the 194 rebels for whom there is motivation data (so percentage of territory motivation is 67/194*100). Percentage forgiven refers to the percentage of rebels with motivations who were forgiven. Motivations were not mutually exclusive (i.e. multiple motivations could be recorded for one rebel if supported in the sources). Percentages rounded to whole numbers.

V | FORGIVENESS AS COST MANAGEMENT

One of the less explored aspects in Mughal historiography is how the costs of rebellions influenced Mughal policy. If we consider the administrative structure of the empire and the motivations the Mughals expressed in the sources, it is possible to present a framework to explain rebel forgiveness. Every rebellion, and especially those from influential *Mansabdars* and *Zamindars*, would pose costly to the state.[42] Like wars, fighting rebellions was costly in terms of mobilization of armed forces and the destruction of crops and infrastructure. Unlike wars, rebellions posed additional costs related to the state's reduced ability to collect taxes and manage the empire. These costs could come in the form of a direct loss in tax revenue, or more indirectly in terms of the higher costs of managing the empire. For example, when the *Zamindars* who collected taxes or paid tribute to the state rebelled, it would mean they were not paying taxes for the duration of their rebellion, which would be a direct cost. Conversely, if the rebel normally played an important administrative role in the empire, such as being an especially efficient administrator, or being highly effective in battle, the loss of these skills would make these tasks more costly or inefficient whilst the rebel was not a part of the state.[43] The vertical linkages between the *Zamindars* and the peasantry could especially create substantial difficulty for the state's ability to collect revenue and manage diverse regions.[44] To simplify the model, and keeping in mind that a large portion of the rebellions were motivated by tax and territorial concerns, this framework will focus on the loss of tax arrears. A linear relationship between the costs of conflict and time is assumed so the costs of conflict can be considered as a function of time.

Figure 2 graphically shows the scenario the Mughals faced. The *y*-axis represents the net tax revenue the state hopes to recover from the rebel after rebellion, where the intersection with the curve indicates the total amount recoverable. The *x*-axis represents the total cost the state faced

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[42] Streusand discusses high costs of conflict. See Streusand, 'The process of expansion', p. 348.

[43] *Mansabdars*, who did not strictly pay taxes but could be important administrators, tend to fall in this category.

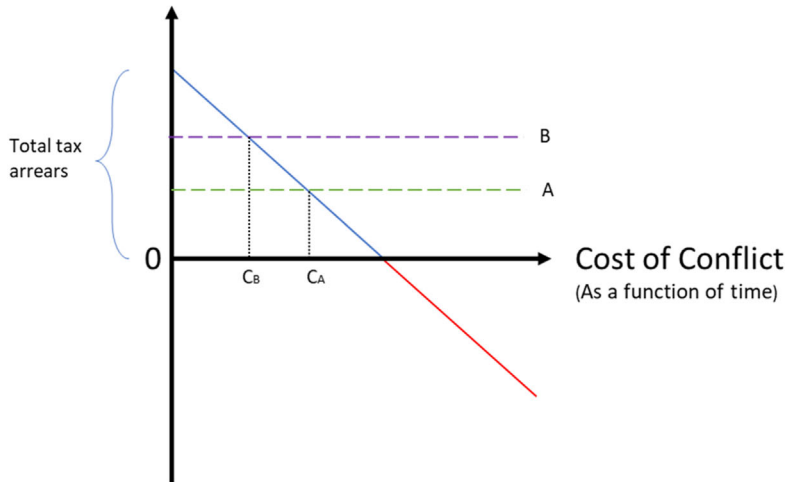[44] Badhra, 'Two frontier uprisings in Mughal India', pp. 486–7.

FIGURE 2 Graphical representation of rebel forgiveness. *Source*: Author's own creation. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

when putting down the rebellion, including both military and cost of public goods destruction as a function of time. If the cost of conflict was zero, meaning there was no fighting or mobilization of troops before the rebellion began, the state might have been able to recover all the revenue, as the rebel would have continued their service. Conversely, the longer the rebellion went on, the cost of rebellion increased, and the proportion of the net tax revenue that could be recovered decreased. If a conflict goes on long enough, the cost of putting down the rebellion would eventually outweigh the tax arrears that could be recovered, meaning the state would lose more than the tax arrears. Of course, the state might try to recover these losses from the rebel, for example, the Mughals did often ask the rebels to pay an indemnity.[45] However, given they had just fought an expensive conflict themselves, it was not likely the rebel could pay the full amount.[46] Moreover, even if they promised to pay, there was no guarantee the rebel would keep their word.[47] Mughals would therefore be unlikely to recover all the losses even if they won. Equation (1) therefore demonstrates the state's perspective on how rebellions impacted revenue.

$$\text{Net Tax Revenue from Rebel} = \text{Taxes Arrears} - T * C \tag{1}$$

where T is time and C is the cost of prolonging war (i.e. military costs and destruction of public goods).

Given these parameters, the state would be incentivized to forgive the rebel well before the costs of conflict depleted the revenues. This is because the state would likely have a minimum

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[45] Khan, *An abridged history,* p. 29.

[46] For example, Adil Khan asked the emperor to remove his troops to encourage peasants to return. See: Khan, *An abridged history,* pp. 68, 189.

[47] For example, the rebel Parya Naik promised payment a number of times but did not produce it. See Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 526. See also Nayeem, 'Mughal and Asafia documents'.

requirement for how much revenue will need to be realized to sustain its military expenses and it would want to recover at least that much in tax. This minimum amount of revenue can be represented by line A, where the state will forgive the rebel before costs reach this point, and Ca represents the maximum cost the empire is willing to take. Of course, one might argue that the ideal point of forgiveness is at the beginning of the rebellion, when the cost of conflict is zero. In fact, in some instances the state would begin negotiations at the beginning of their rebellions.[48] However, given the rebellions were likely motivated by other means, the rebel would not likely end their rebellion without first being offered some kind of concession. The state would want to minimize the amount of compromise made to retain the highest revenue. Therefore, it is unlikely the state would have forgiven the rebel until cost of conflict surpasses the amount that would be lost through compromise, this being represented by line B. The state would instead prefer to engage in a quick and decisive battle with a minimum loss in power and the maximum revenue retained. The likely point of forgiveness for the state, therefore, is somewhere between points Ca and Cb where the maximum revenue can be obtained with the least compromise. Consequently, by forgiving the rebel the state is able to ensure the recovery of a minimum amount of the total revenue that would otherwise be lost.

That the cost of conflict was a significant motivating factor in rebel forgiveness is very much evident in the sources. For instance, the chronicler Abu'l Fazl, who was heavily involved in developing administrative institutions, advised governors to 'conciliate the *Zamindars* with presents' because 'it is cheaper to keep them in hand thus than to repress them with troops'.[49] Moreover, the chronicles are filled with couplets and statements which praise administrators who persuade rebels to return. For example, Khan wrote

> 'One who is really wise, puts things, with a word, aright,
> That a hundred warriors bold can ne'er achieve.'[50]

Whether the rebel would return would also likely depend on their willingness to compromise, where negotiations could break down over unacceptable terms for either side.[51] Conversely, sometimes the government officials refused to negotiate themselves if they felt the rebel was too dangerous or not worth reincorporating into the state.[52] Why some rebels were able to return with the confidence of their safety is the subject of the following section.

VI | CREDIBLE FORGIVENESS – THE RISK OF RETURNING TO THE STATE

Whilst rebel forgiveness can be beneficial for the state, forgiveness can still be impeded by a dynamic inconsistency problem of long-term trust between the state and the rebel.[53] The rebel

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[48] Ahmad, *Tabaqat*, p. 462.

[49] Day, *The Mughal government,* p. 74; Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, p. 107.

[50] Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 462. In another instance, Ahmad wrote, 'As long as you can instruct him with a stick, Don't with the sword or poison or lasso him slay'. (Ahmad, *Tabaqat*, p. 389.)

[51] For instance, Raja Jagat Singh revolted again when his demands were refused. See Khan, *An abridged history,* p. 287. See also Ahmad, *Tabaqat*, p. 307.

[52] Examples given in the case studies.

[53] Glassmyer and Sambanis, 'Rebel: military integration'.

might re-engage in rebellion at a later date, and the state might renege on its deals to forgive the rebel. For the rebels, the risk of returning to the state could be high, where they could face execution or imprisonment. It might have been beneficial for the state to reinstate rebels; however, it would have been difficult to persuade them to return. This was a fairly common problem for early modern states, including for the European navies of the seventeenth century facing mutinous sailors.[54]

In the wider comparative literature, state forgiveness and incorporation of rebellious elites has been modelled as a form of risk aversion. Levi has argued that whilst states do aim to maximize tax revenues, another important aim of empires is retaining power.[55] Where incumbents perceive real and significant threats to their rule, policies that maximize rule over revenue are more likely to be adopted. In states where incumbent powers are threatened by internal discord, they are less likely to adopt policies that could increase discord.[56] Appeasement of rebels to diminish threat of losing power and potential execution are then motivating factors in negotiations, and forgiveness is credible because the rebel is aware of this. This has been a more common argument used to explain non-extractive behaviour of states, especially within Asian empires. Chan and Deng, for instance, have both made the argument that premodern Chinese empires avoided increasing taxation for fear of revolt.[57] A similar argument has been given for the Ottoman empire, where state revenue extraction is seen as a function of political security on the part of the ruler.[58]

Keeping in mind that motivations for rebellion management are not necessarily mutually exclusive or exhaustive, there are a few rebellions of the scale and nature within the Mughal state that would explain this kind of rebel forgiveness, especially dynastic rebellions where competing princes were capable of amassing significant support that posed serious and overwhelming threats to the incumbent emperor.[59]

However, few rebellions in the empire posed a direct threat to the state. Dynastic rebellions only represent a small sample of total rebellions, whereas in the Mughal state even smaller *Zamindars* and peasants were forgiven regularly. The reality was that the majority of rebellions against the state were not large enough or close enough to the capital to indicate a real threat to the ruler's security. In fact, many rebels themselves knew their chances for success against the empire were low, and, on many occasions, rebels were the first to request a negotiation with the state.[60] That is not to say these rebellions were inexpensive, especially as they often included formidable fighting forces that could take years to defeat. Rather, the rebels were not often realistically powerful enough to overcome the entire state military, and the Mughals were often better able to collect larger forces than their opponents. Reinforcements were rarely exhausted, and there were nearly always *Mansabdars* and *Zamindars* competing for a chance to prove themselves in battle.[61]

Perhaps the best evidence to show forgiveness was not predicated on risk aversion is the state's reinstatement of rebels after they were captured or imprisoned and at a time when they were no longer capable of continuing their rebellion. For example, years after the Rathore rebellion had

[54] Pfaff and Hechter, *The genesis of rebellion*, p. 214.

[55] Levi, *Of rule and revenue*, pp. 13, 33.

[56] Gupta, Ma and Roy, 'States and development'.

[57] Chan, 'Foreign trade'; Deng, *The premodern Chinese economy*.

[58] Arslantaş Pietri, and Vahabi, 'State predation'.

[59] For instance, Akbar when facing Jahangir's rebellion. See Faruqui, *Princes,* p. 196.

[60] See footnote 46 for examples.

[61] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, pp. 93–4.

been quelled, the lead instigators returned to the court only to be forgiven by the same emperor they attempted to overthrow.[62] If longevity was the prime motivation for forgiveness, the state would have had the rebels executed or imprisoned for life instead of reinstated, eliminating any future threat of rebellion from them.

A better explanation for the credibility of state forgiveness across most rebellions relates to the administrative capacity of the rebels. Where rebels had high levels of administrative capacity, they were able to bargain with the ruling power for a greater share of the revenue and more say within the decision-making process of the empire. Rebellion for these administrators was a bargaining chip that allowed them to negotiate higher salaries, more prestigious positions, or a greater share of the revenues, if even for short periods of time. Significantly, the skills of the intermediaries would have been highly specific to the location or job type of administrative capacity required.[63]

Specific skillsets of intermediaries affected the long-term consequences of losing administrators, where the cost of managing a region was greater without the rebel. If the state executed such rebels, it would have had to rely on alternative administrators with less influence in the region, or else make substantial investments in a region at very high costs for limited regions of land. Often the costs of building infrastructure to limit these costs were prohibitively high, especially relative to potential revenues. Asset specificity additionally would have limited the risk a rebel posed to the state. The skills of the rebel would have been restricted to parameters that though highly useful to the state administrative machinery, would not be capable of taking control of the wider empire. For example, if a rebel was only skilled at administering a specific city far from the capital, or had influence with the peasantry of a certain locality, the state would be reassured by knowing the rebel would not threaten the ruler's control of the wider empire.

From the rebel perspective, asset specificity both reduced the risk of the state reversing on its promises and also would have made returning to the state more attractive. The Mughal state offered the highest income relative to all the other potential rivals. Whilst there were a number of alternative polities the rebels could defect to, none would have been able to offer the levels of protection and tracts of land the Mughals were capable of securing. Other polities additionally would not have had the incentive to retain the rebel as much as the state could, especially if the rebel's higher administrative capacity was specific to a single region. The rebel therefore was only able to secure higher renumeration or revenue shares in the locality where they had greater influence or knowledge. The best opportunity for the rebel was to return to the state if they could guarantee their safety.

The greatest risk of returning for the rebels was therefore the risk that the state would replace them at a future date after developing suitable replacements. For this reason, there were specific conditions that were required which minimized this risk. Firstly, the Mughal state had to be sufficiently and relatively strong enough not to consider the rebels a threat to their power. Whilst a costly rebellion is unwanted, the state would not have had an incentive to remove the rebel at a future date knowing the rebel was not realistically able to take more power.

Secondly, the consistently high levels of conflict in the region prevented the state from being able to focus their resources in any single region. The constant need to fund ongoing wars or internal rifts made it less likely the state would expend resources, gaining direct control unless the

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[62] Richards, *The Mughal empire*, p. 254.

[63] Human asset specificity 'could be characterized as unique technical skills and experience required in carrying out the activity being transacted. It has also been described as knowledge-specific assets that arise from learning-by-doing and which are not easily transferable, owing to their limited application in other work settings'. (De Vita, Tekaya, and Wang, 'The many faces of asset specificity', p. 334.)

returns for doing so were substantially high. The differentiated environment and cultural norms could additionally make developing direct control very costly for little return.

Finally, the existence of alternative polities or the diversity in the domestic environment gave rebels reasonable means of escape and increased the bargaining power of rebels. These rival states would be happy to accept the rebels as a means of strengthening their own forces, as well as weakening Mughal capabilities. Alternatively, the Mughals needed strong and stable administrative capacity precisely because the rival states would otherwise invade. Competition between states for skilled intermediaries kept the bargaining power of elites high, allowing them to increase their demands.

VII | STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

With the available data, there are two ways to statistically test whether intermediary administrative capacity explains rebel forgiveness. First, we can test the relationship geographically by seeing whether the provinces where rebel forgiveness were most likely to occur were those where the state would be expected to have lower administrative capacity. For instance, as the Mughals invaded from the Northern regions, we should expect to see greater proportions of rebel forgiveness in provinces further South of the capital which were last to be conquered and consisted of ethnicities quite different from the Timurid government.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of rebels forgiven across the provinces. There is a clear relationship between rate of forgiveness and provinces further South. Rebels in the regions of Lahore, Multan, Delhi, and Bengal had a range of forgiveness between 21 per cent and 46 per cent, with these all being Northern provinces known to have a higher incidence of taxation and greater government presence. Conversely, the Southern provinces of Berar, Khandesh, Gujarat, and Malwa have relatively higher proportions of forgiven rebels.

The second method of testing is to see if certain ethnicities and religious groups which were more differentiated from the Mughal rulers were likely to be forgiven. Being a majority Muslim government which originated in Central Asia, the Mughals would have had less knowledge about and influence over ethnic groups which were differentiated from itself.[64] Therefore, the state would have had to have relied on local leaders of these groups more heavily than in other regions. This is especially the case for ethnic groups such as the *Rajputs* and the *Deccanis*, who would not only have used different languages, but who would also have had different cultural norms.[65] Conversely, we should expect *Afghans* and Central Asian rebels, who largely consisted of Muslims who were closer in ethnicity to the Mughal state, to be less likely to be forgiven. It has been possible to classify rebels into four categories: *Rajput*, *Deccani*, *Afghan*, and 'Other' (which largely consists of Central Asian officials).

Table 5 shows four logistic regressions (employing odds ratios instead of coefficients) with and without provincial controls for ethnicity and religion with *Afghan* and Muslim as the reference groups. Without provincial controls, regression 1 shows *Rajputs* and *Deccanis* were respectively 3.6 and 2.63 times more likely to be forgiven than *Afghans*, with both coefficients as statistically significant. Conversely, 'Others' were only 1.69 times more likely to be forgiven. Regression 2, which includes provincial controls, shows *Rajputs* and *Deccanis* were respectively 5.84 and 1.68

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[64] Richards, *Power, administration, and finance*, pp. 99–107; Ziegler, 'Some notes on Rajput loyalties'.

[65] Ziegler, 'Some notes on Rajput loyalties'.

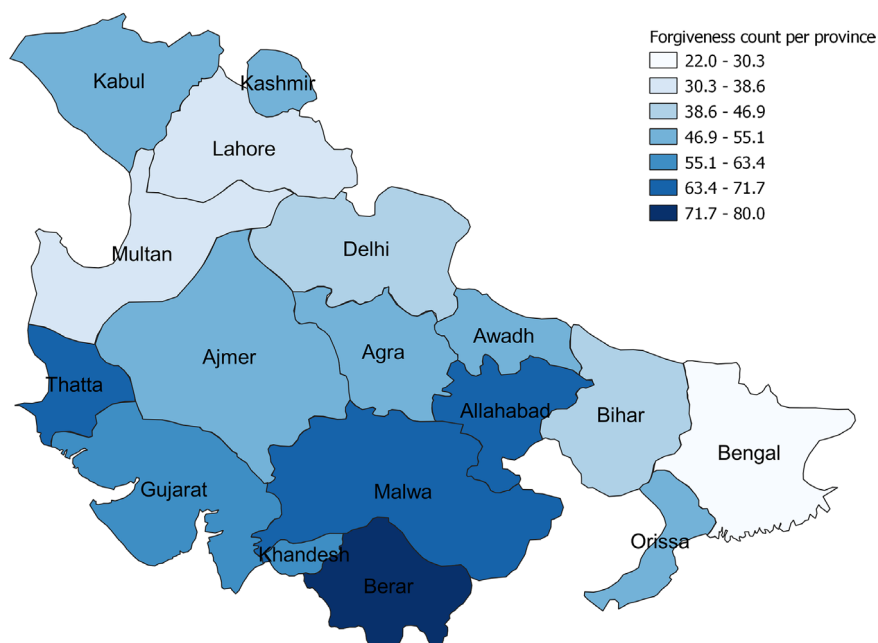## % of Rebels Forgiven by Province

FIGURE 3 Percentage of rebels forgiven by province. *Source*: Created using the Mughal Conflict Database and Irfan Habib's *Atlas of Mughal India*. Darker blue indicates higher levels of forgiveness. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

times more likely to be forgiven. The *Deccani* coefficient is no longer statistically significant; however, this can be attributed to the fact that the group is related to the Deccan region, and therefore captured by the Deccan dummy. We can see that rebels in the Deccan were 13.47 times more likely to be forgiven, and this is statistically significant at the 5 per cent level. It is also interesting that Kabul, Malwa, and Kashmir have large and statistically significant odds ratios, all being regions the Mughals had less direct access to. With regards to religion, regression 3 shows that non-Muslims were 1.79 times more likely to be forgiven, and the coefficient is significant at the 10 per cent level. However, when provincial controls are added in regression 4, the non-Muslim coefficient remains positive but loses its significance. This likely indicates religion was not as large a factor in determining rebel forgiveness as ethnicity was.[66] In fact, the patterns arguably go against what have conventionally been seen as Islamic practices of prioritizing Muslim forgiveness, indicating religion was not as important a factor in rebel forgiveness.[67] Collectively, the regressions show that rebels with ethnicities and religions different to the Mughals were more likely to be forgiven, indicating that rebels' specific administrative capacity within their communities influenced their forgiveness. Given the limited insight which can be developed with these regressions, especially for a nuanced concept of administrative capacity, the following case studies aim to explore these mechanisms more closely.

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[66] It is worth noting that religious policies are not likely related to rebel forgiveness either.

[67] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, p. 105.

TABLE 5 Impact of ethnicity and religion on forgiveness (odds ratios).

	1. Logistic regression of ethnicity	2. Logistic regression of ethnicity (province controls)	3. Logistic regression of religion	4. Logistic regression of religion (province controls)
Rajput	3.60***	5.84***	–	
	(0.003)	(0.003)		
Deccani	2.63*	1.68	–	
	(0.107)	(0.488)		
Other (Central Asian)	0.169	2.26**	–	
	(0.17)	(0.079)		
Non-Muslim	–	–	1.79**	1.72
			(0.066)	(0.191)
Jahangir (1607–27)	0.447**	0.484*	0.55	0.57
	(0.064)	(0.108)	(0.166)	(0.221)
Shahjahan (1628–57)	1.13	0.886	1.13	0.892
	(0.715)	(0.735)	(0.737)	(0.784)
Aurangzeb (1658–1707)	1.02	0.75	1.03	0.644
	(0.956)	(0.515)	(0.942)	(0.409)
Lahore	–	2.33	–	1.83
		(0.489)		(0.658)
Multan	–	2.19	–	1.82
		(0.599)		(0.722)
Agra	–	3.45	–	2.898
		(0.288)		(0.421)
Kabul	–	7.68**	–	3.07
		(0.083)		(0.418)
Kashmir	–	6.73*	–	0.89
		(0.116)		(0.946)
Awadh	–	5.71	–	3.87
		(0.336)		(0.487)
Allahabad	–	9.86**	–	5.12
		(0.072)		(0.267)
Bihar	–	3.71	–	3.28
		(0.261)		(0.378)
Bengal	–	3.30	–	1.33
		(0.317)		(0.837)
Ajmer	–	5.38	–	6.38
		(0.169)		(0.184)
Malwa	–	9.266*	–	4.94
		(0.114)		(0.284)

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	1. Logistic regression of ethnicity	2. Logistic regression of ethnicity (province controls)	3. Logistic regression of religion	4. Logistic regression of religion (province controls)
Gujarat	–	3.49	–	1.88
		(0.292)		(0.652)
Deccan	–	13.47***	–	5.17
		(0.025)		(0.230)
Constant	0.45***	0.077***	0.653**	0.258
	(0.029)	(0.035)	(0.061)	(0.310)
Number of observations	247	246	212	211
Notes				
Reference groups	Afghan and Akbar	Afghan, Akbar, and Delhi	Muslim and Akbar	Muslim, Akbar, and Delhi

The dependent variable is Forgiveness (i.e. whether the rebel is forgiven). *p*-Values given in brackets below the odds ratios.

***Indicates the coefficient is statistically significant at the 5% level.

**Indicates the coefficient is statistically significant at the 10% level.

*Indicates the coefficient is statistically significant at the 15% level. Rajput refers to rebels either identified as Rajput by chroniclers or powerful Zamindars from central provinces of Ajmer and Malwa. Deccani refers to rebels identified as Deccani or Abyssinian by the chroniclers. Non-Muslims are rebels with non-Muslim names or identified as non-Muslim. Thatta was omitted with provincial controls due to only one observation.

VIII | CASE STUDIES

This section adopts an analytical narrative approach, where we test the applicability of the model to real examples as gleaned from the sources. What we are most interested in identifying are the following: evidence of the location- or community-specific skillsets which made intermediaries valuable and the perceived benefits to the state of reinstating these intermediaries. We are also interested in identifying the conditions and implications where possible, namely: the high-cost environment and the bargaining power of the rebels. The case studies are chosen specifically with the interest of highlighting these attributes, and therefore cases 1-6 are grouped according to the type of attributes being discussed and the examples which pertain to these. To be clear, the aim is not to demonstrate that every rebellion in the empire fit the model exactly, but rather that a substantial subset of the rebellions did.

Case 1 highlights the difficulty state-actors often faced in finding suitable administrators with reference to Nazar Muhammad Khan's return to tributary rule. A frequent feature of Mughal conquests could be the difficulty in finding competent administrators who were willing to take over the administration of regions far from the larger cities. The most telling example was the Mughals' invasion of Balkh and Badakhshan. Whilst the invasion was primarily motivated by the desire to maintain stability on the Northern frontiers, the emperor had a strong dislike for Nazar Muhammad Khan, the ruler of Balkh, because he had been supporting rebels on Northern Mughal soil.[68] After a costly 2-year campaign, however, Khan, who was once described as treacherous and had fought against the Mughals himself, was reinstated as a local tributary leader with the support

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[68] Ali, 'The objectives behind the Mughal expedition'.

of the Mughal emperor. This is because there were no experienced or capable officers willing to take over the governance of the region, citing the harsh climate and prevalence of violence.[69] The state struggled to find suitable replacements willing to administer the low revenue region. When nobles requested to leave the campaign, they had to be threatened with confiscation to prevent their abandonment.[70]

For his own part, Nazar Muhammad Khan both knew he would be incapable of fighting the Mughals should he refuse their offer to reclaim regency, and at the same time saw this as an opportunity to regain rule over land he would have otherwise lost entirely. He was still highly suspicious of the Mughals' request for interview, and despite strict orders to return himself, he instead sent his grandson to interview in his place. The Mughal prince in charge accepted the replacement so he and his retinue could leave sooner and avoid poor weather which would making returning difficult.[71]

An important aspect of this case study is that the level of risk to the Mughal state of reinstating Nazar Muhammad Khan was low. Khan had already been defeated in battle and would not be able to regain his strength quickly. At the same time, his regional knowledge, sway with the locals, and desire to remain in the region made him the effective alternative to direct Mughal rule.[72] Relevantly, the number of capable alternatives willing to administer the region was low, and the uncertain weather made it important for the issue to be resolved quickly, leading the Mughal leaders to compromise.

Case 2 focuses primarily on the rebellion of Bhim Narayan, the local tributary ruler of Kuch Bihar who rebelled against the Mughals, was defeated, and fled far away to an unreachable location. This provides a fascinating example of peasants' trust and attachment to local rulers. Once Narayan had fled and the land had been seized, the Mughals focused on developing local support to rule effectively and installed popular policies designed to develop trust with the locals.[73] Rather than allowing the plunder of local goods, the Mughal governor made the wrongful appropriation of civilian property punishable by the cutting off of the hands of perpetrating Mughal forces.[74] The state additionally installed Narayan's son as a replacement administrator to try and appease locals.[75] However, when the new imperial government attempted tax changes, the people rose in revolt again.[76] Facing a large, populous rebellion and the onset of the rains, the imperial army struggled to keep a hold on the region. Dissatisfied with the Mughal administration, the peasantry searched for Bhim Narayan and asked for his return. Recognizing his limited capabilities of fighting the state, Narayan requested to return to becoming a vassal and offered to pay an indemnity of 500 000 rupees.[77] The Mughal commander accepted Narayan's offer due to his concerns of larger ongoing conflicts.[78]

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[69] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 356.

[70] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 357.

[71] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 399.

[72] Khan, *An abridged history*, pp. 375, 419.

[73] Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, pp. 303, 306.

[74] Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 138

[75] Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 143

[76] Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 308.

[77] Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 310.

[78] Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 302.

Narayan's success in regaining control should not be attributed to his strength in arms, but in his relationship with the local population and the high frequency of conflicts in the empire. Had Narayan posed a real threat to the Mughal state revenues, it would be unlikely that the state would have allowed his return. Instead, the Mughal commanding officer balanced aims. Rather than engage in a costly conflict which could take years to defeat, the state prioritized focusing resources where the threats were greater.

Relevantly, it was not Narayan himself who drove the Mughals away, but the unruly locals whom he had cultivated a loyalty with. It was difficult for the Mughal government to develop the same or even similar relationship with locals, especially since it would take time to build trust. Narayan was more efficiently able to retain control and govern the region than any alternative, making him more valuable as an ally than dead or imprisoned, so long as he agreed to continue supporting the state.

The value Mughals placed on the ability of intermediaries to administer and influence local populations is evident across a multitude of sources and well recognized in the literature.[79] For example, in one conflict the government used *Tibatis* employed by the state to 'try and persuade the *Tibat* soldiery to tender their allegiance to His Majesty by inspiring hopes of rewards and favours'.[80] Where intermediaries were exemplary in their management, they were often rewarded and chosen to administer the most important regions.[81] Conversely, if intermediaries were found to be incapable of maintaining a good relationship with either the locals or the forces they chose, they were replaced and censured.[82] For example, when it was found that peasants in Gujarat were being harassed by family members of the incumbent governor, said governor was immediately replaced for being considered incompetent.[83]

Case 3 provides examples of cases where intermediaries' skills and abilities influenced how they were treated by the central government. It focuses on two examples, namely the influence and value of the *Rajput* leader Karan Singh and the Abyssinian admiral Sidi Yaqut. The Mughals often invested in relationships with administrators despite their rebellions, and usually with a larger long-term goal in mind. The *Rajputs* especially were considered to be a significant fighting force worthy of conciliation because of their military strength. After his father conceded defeat to Mughal forces, Karan Singh, the son of the *Rana* of Mewar, was sent to the emperor's court. Karan was shown a new favour every day, culminating in the award of the emperor's personal weapon and the building of his statue in royal gardens. In explaining the special attention he offered Karan, Jahangir wrote the following:

> 'It was necessary to win Karan's affection, but he was wild by nature and had never seen a royal court, having been raised in the mountains. Therefore, I showed him a new favour every day.'[84]

Due to his wealth, strength in numbers, and the skills of the *Rajput* forces, Karan would go on to play an important role in the conquest of the Deccan.[85] By playing the long game, Jahangir

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[79] Bhadra, 'Two frontier uprisings'; Husain, 'The "Zamindars"', pp. 319–20; Jain, 'The centre and the "locality"'.

[80] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 215.

[81] See the case of Inayat Allah Khan in Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 375.

[82] See, for example, Richards and Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India'; Shafqat, 'The position and functions'.

[83] Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 100.

[84] Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 167.

[85] Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 176.

gained a powerful asset to his administration. More generally, *Rajput* forces were seen as essential for fighting wars, especially in the larger and more challenging battles with North-Western states. After being forgiven of his rebellion and reinstated to the court, Raja Jaghat Singh proved invaluable in the invasion of Balkh and Badakhshan.[86] The *Rajput* forces were also essential for the defence and occupation of Qandahar from the Safavid empire, a valuable stronghold for the Mughals.[87] The *Rajput* leaders' abilities in commanding the loyalty of skilled clansmen was an essential element to this strategy.[88]

Specific local knowledge of *Zamindars* was also considered essential for fighting in localities unfamiliar to the Mughals. On a number of occasions, *Zamindars* were chosen to join campaigns and enlisted because of their familiarity with the regions.[89] The Mughals recognized the value of these skills and local know-how that were only available from people who lived their lives in these regions and understood the cultures.[90] For example, Sidi Yakut, an admiral of African descent who had defected from Bijapur, requested to join the Mughal service, citing his superior ability in managing the region relative to previous administrators in his letter.[91] Sidi was a highly skilled administrator and military commander and was instrumental in the defeat of the British East India Company during Child's war of 1690.[92] When the court considered replacing Yakut's men from local administration, the chronicler recorded the following:

> 'The chief nobles, however, submitted that only the Abyssinians and particularly those trained by Sidi Yaqut, could administer those mountainous regions, command the fort of Rahiri and keep the sea passage to [Mecca] open.'[93]

It is worth noting that during the war, the English responded to Sidi's forces by employing Black soldiers of their own and noting that their 'black people… are indeed as good as the enemy's. But we cannot expect 2000 should fight with 12 000 of the same color and we believe they have more than 14 000 men on the island'.[94] Contemporary English observers further noted that an important component of Sidi's success was the high wages he gave his men.[95] Conversely, the English-employed Black soldiers would mutiny if they did not receive their pay, and they found 60 Europeans had joined and been paid by Sidi in the course of the conflict.[96]

This example speaks not only to Sidi's skillsets in managing the region and the Mughal recognition of it, but also to the relationship between Sidi and his men and the role monetary incentives played in adopting these skills. It is unlikely Sidi would have defected from Bijapur or joined

[86] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 331.

[87] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 413.

[88] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 450.

[89] Khan, *An abridged history*, pp. 283, 486; Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 67.

[90] Ashfaque, 'Relations of Kashmir', p. 269.

[91] Sarkar, *Anecdotes of Aurangzib*, p. 134.

[92] Sharman, *Empires of the Weak,* p. 85.

[93] I have used Mecca in square brackets as opposed to the original text which states 'The House of Allah' to clarify the location for readers. See Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 506.

[94] Hunt, Stern and Hilton, *The English East India Company,* p. 51.

[95] Hunt, Stern and Hilton, *The English East India Company,* p. 148.

[96] Hunt, Stern and Hilton, *The English East India Company,* pp. 92, 146.

Mughal service without prospects of higher renumeration, and his own men were similarly drawn to the wages offered to them. The strength here laid with Sidi and his men specifically.

Case 4 refers to rebels who were not forgiven by the state, of which two are worth discussing in some detail. The first example is the rebellion of Champat Bundela, the supporter of Jujhar Singh Bundela, the latter being killed by *Gonds* during his escape from Mughal pursuit.[97] Revolts in the Bundela *Rajput* clan were a common occurrence, though in most cases rebellions involved specific clan members as opposed to a united group.[98] Whilst princes of this clan frequently revolted, it was common for the Mughals to send relatives of the rebel to quell the insurrection, several of whom were happy for the opportunity to increase their status.[99] After Jujhar Singh Bundela's death, Champat resented the Mughal appointment Raja Debi Singh and led a revolt against him. In the face of these oppositions, Shah Jahan removed Debi Singh, who was unable to suppress the revolt, and instead appointed Pahar Singh Bundela, son of Bir Singh Deo, as ruler of Orchha, a decision which successfully diminished the support of Champat within the Bundela clan given Pahar Singh's ancestry. After supporting Aurangzeb in the war of succession and then rebelling against the emperor again, Champat was eventually executed by Aurangzeb's government, with the execution occurring at the hands of Bundelas who remained loyal to the state.[100]

There are two significant aspects regarding Champat's execution; firstly, Champat was only executed after he had rebelled and been reincorporated into the empire multiple times. His consistent rebellion and the turmoil posed by him eventually wore down the benefits of forgiveness relative to his removal.[101] Secondly, when he was executed, it was by other members of the Bundela clan themselves, and only after he had lost wider support within his own community. His value to the state was diminished by the lack of support he received within his own community, many of whom found his rebellions troublesome.

The second case worth discussing is the refusal of Aurangzeb to negotiate for peace with Abu'l Hasan, the ruler of Golconda. A *farman* from the emperor expresses multiple reasons for refusing the request, and two in the second half of the letter stand out. First was Abu'l Hasan's failure to listen to the emperor despite several attempts at communication from the emperor. As in Champat's case, there seems to have been a limit on the emperor's forgiveness when rebellions were repeated. Secondly, and significantly, Abu'l Hasan had 'sent a *lakh* of huns to the wicked Sambha'.[102] It seems Aurangzeb was especially concerned about the financial support Abu'l Hasan was providing Sambha, the Maratha ruler who was considered to be a genuine threat.[103] Sambha's plundering raids and attacks on merchants were creating a political crisis and loss of public support for the empire.[104] Despite the high costs the state incurred by invading Golconda (including petitions from *Mansabdars* for the emperor not to proceed), the perceived

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[97] Jujhar Singh refused the emperor's offer of a pardon twice. (Singh, 'Jujhar Singh's rebellion', p. 237.)

[98] Ahmad, 'The Bundela Revolts', p. 439.

[99] Ahmad, 'The Bundela Revolts', p. 440.

[100] Ahmad, 'The Bundela Revolts', p. 442.

[101] Jahangir says as much for one rebel: 'Since he had repeatedly misbehaved, he was executed, and his death served as a good example to other miscreants'. (Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 156.)

[102] Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 331.

[103] Sambha is regularly depicted as a formidable opponent. For instance, see Khan, *Muntakhab*, pp. 424, 462–3. After taking over the Maratha kingdom, he is seen as a Vassal state participant.

[104] Richards, *The Mughal empire*, pp. 218–9.

risk of not doing so played a role in the state's decision not to negotiate.[105] When Sambha was captured he is said to have insulted the emperor in court despite being in chains, indicating his unwillingness to negotiate with the state.[106] Sambha's subsequent torture and public execution was deliberately made humiliating as a show of the emperor's strength and to instil fear in other rebels. There was no room for negotiation in this case.

Case 5 highlights examples of cases where intermediaries were able to use their bargaining power to negotiate with the state. Local elites were very aware of their value to Mughal interests, and they used this value as leverage against the state. A strong example of the use of this leverage is perhaps the response of the rebel Sanatan Sardar to a proposal of peace from the Mughal officer. After peasants and *Zamindars* rebelled, the Mughals offered to replace the *Karoris* found to be oppressive.[107] To this, Sanatan responded with the following:

> 'Now the [peasants] do not possess the power and ability to turn their attention to the payment of revenues. Two of our noble *Rajas* accepted imperial vassalage and gave *lakhs* and *crores*. What benefit have they derived which I may consider an advantage? I shall hand over one of my brothers for Your Excellency's service on the condition that first, stern punishment should be meted out to Shaykh Ibrahim; secondly, the revenue should be remitted for full one year; thirdly, the Mughal soldiers will have to return to Gilahany; fourthly, the allowance of the *Paiks* should be paid direct to them and should not be made as an addition to the revenue due to the government.'[108]

The *Mirza*'s response was also significant: 'Your demand for the dismissal of Shaykh Ibrahim and the appointment of another official in his place can be very easily complied with. But the proposal of the remission of revenue for a year and the withdrawal of the imperial officers to Gilahnay are impossible terms'.[109] After negotiations had broken down, Sanatan decided to escape to Jutia, which was 'situated in the midst of a dense forest'[110] and therefore less accessible to the Mughals.

Sanatan's demands not only reflected the support he had from the peasantry, but also the relevant fact that he asked for more than previous *Rajas* had received. The Mughal response is also telling – they were happy to comply with political changes, but not with the economic ones. The continuation of payment of taxes in the following year was key.

It is also notable that Sanatan was able to take advantage of the local environs to escape the Mughals and make his capture more difficult. The use of the subcontinent's geography to escape the empire was a common occurrence; in another rebellion, the Jahangir commented that the 'difficult roads and thickness of the forest' led the army to 'contend with taking two or three diamonds and left [the *Zamindar*] in his former condition'.[111] The climate also played a role, where on more than one occasion, rebels were able to defeat the Mughal armies simply by dragging

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[105] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, pp. 107–9.

[106] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, p. 222.

[107] Nathan and Borah, *Bahāristān*, p. 369. This case is also studied in Bhadra, 'Two frontier uprisings', p. 479.

[108] Nathan and Borha, *Bahāristān*, p. 370.

[109] Nathan, *Bahāristān*, p. 370.

[110] Nathan, *Bahāristān*, p. 382.

[111] Ansari, 'The nature of relationship', p. 321.

out battles long enough to ensure their supply line was cut by bad weather.[112] Conversely, when intermediaries had less influence, they would be the ones more willing to pay for peace: on one occasion, European merchants had paid one *lakh* rupees as a preliminary arrangement for peace; thereafter, negotiations broke down and they were taken prisoner.[113] Moreover, if the *Zamindars* could not control the region, they were less likely to be rewarded.[114]

Rebels would also attempt to escape to neighbouring polities, some of which would be happy to welcome them to weaken the Mughal forces.[115] Shah Shuja's protection from the Mughal emperor by the Kingdom of Arakan was, for instance, partially motivated by the jewels he brought.[116] The reverse was also true: where the Mughal state or its rivals wished to reduce the strength of their enemies, poaching intermediaries would weaken their opponents, making them easier to fight.[117] In fact, for many intermediaries, the most powerful element of their administrative capacity was their ability to conciliate and round up troops and locals for their cause.[118]

At times, the bargaining power of the rebel lay not with themselves but in the locations of the forts which they commanded. Rather than engage in costly battles that lost the lives of men and damaged well-built forts, the Mughals negotiated surrenders with fort commandants, sometimes even providing compensation for their capture.[119] They often noted the impregnability of the fort and their value if intact.[120] In one Northern conflict, the chronicler wrote that only one fort in the region had been captured by force of arms without any negotiation nor correspondence.[121] In another instance, it is noted that a Mughal commander avoided the use of destructive weapons because 'if other mines were sprung and all the bastions demolished, the fort would be desolated; so that after capturing it, the rebuilding of them anew would be a source of endless delay'.[122]

Case 6 provides examples of how the bargaining power of intermediaries affected the state's legal capacity and ability to enforce the law. The state's reliance on intermediaries created an environment in which it was difficult to control them. The Mughals clearly understood the importance of security and property rights in helping to foster economic growth and increase revenue.[123] More often than not, the laws and practices of the state went out of their way to encourage and increase security in an environment of unrest.[124] Aside from tax remissions and investment

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[112] Khan, *An abridged history,* p. 399. In another example, a Mughal noble does not punish a rebel because of the rainy season. See Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol 3, 1232.

[113] Khan, *An abridged history,* p. 84.

[114] For instance, see Ansari, 'The nature of relationship'; Ahmad, The Bundela Revolts'.

[115] See, for instance, Jadhav, 'Nature of factionalism'; Hallissey, *The Rajput rebellion*, p. 73.

[116] Ray, 'A contemporary Dutch account'.

[117] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 511.

[118] Khan, *An abridged history*, pp. 306, 368.

[119] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 501.

[120] Khan, *An abridged history*, pp. 114, 156; Singh, 'Jujhar Singh's rebellion', p. 237.

[121] Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 514.

[122] Khan, *An abridged history,* pp. 192–4. It is worth noting that the Mughal officers equally saw the destruction of forts as an important means of preventing rebellion. (Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 501.)

[123] Husain, 'Aurangzeb's first viceroyalty', pp. 312–3; Shafqat, 'The Position and functions', p. 347; Anjum, 'Security on the routes', p. 450.

[124] A number of examples are provided in local sources covered in the following article: Shafqat, 'Imperial control of our provinces', p. 255.

subsidies, the state enacted numerous policies to increase the welfare of the people and peasantry.[125] Extensive efforts were made to provide food to districts in time of famine, and overbearing intermediaries were removed.[126] The state even worked at restoring the loss of agriculturalists and forgiving debts to encourage cultivators to stay after times of unrest.[127] In an attempt to encourage commercial activity, the state not only committed to returning plundered goods, but also to insuring compensation from the administrator's own pocket if the goods were not retrievable.[128]

Although it enacted various laws designed to constrain intermediary predation, the government found itself struggling to dissuade this behaviour.[129] For example, when the *Mansabdar* Aghar Khan and his men were reprimanded and not permitted to return to court because they had disobeyed orders to refrain from plunder, their response was to threaten the commanding imperial officer and return to court in any case. Despite this clear disobedience of authority, Aghar Khan's *Mansab* was confiscated for a short period of time, only to be returned to him when he was sent to Kabul as reinforcement.[130] These intermediaries, who were too indispensable to be dismissed, could still behave in ways that were contrary to the state's interest; namely, by increasing discord and insecurity. The Mughals consequently were often forced to make overtures to merchants and cultivators that were affected by instability. Destruction of crops and disturbance of merchants were frequent concerns within the chronicles.[131]

Despite this, the consequences of not forgiving rebels could be more substantial. When the emperor Akbar was overly harsh to a number of Central Asian nobles, it instigated a large rebellion which ended in an apology from the emperor in the form of an edict.[132] In another example, after convincing Shivaji to join the Mughal court, the emperor's unwillingness to provide him and his retinue with a high *Mansab* led to his rebellion and the formation of the Maratha state.[133] In his letters, Aurangzeb reflected on the outcome:

> Negligence for a single moment becomes the cause of disgrace for long years. The escape of the wretch Shiva took place through carelessness, and I have to labour hard [against the Marathas] to the end of my life [as the result of it].[134]

There were additional financial consequences. When intermediaries were not paid well, they became disloyal. A Mughal noble who had caught the rebellious Shivaji was easily bribed with jewels to release the latter ahead of the arrival of the central army troops. When explaining his actions, the chronicler notes that the intermediary 'preferred prompt payment to a credit about which there was nothing certain'.[135] On a number of occasions intermediaries would refuse to

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[125] Parker, *Global crisis,* p. 305.

[126] Fazl, *Akbarnama*, vol. 3, p. 111.

[127] Khan, *Muntakhab* pp. 265, 537.

[128] Richards, *Document Forms,* p. 38. A strong account of the state's conciliatory relationship with mercantile groups can be found in Husain, 'Aurangzeb's first viceroyalty'; Eaton, 'Temple desecration', p. 297.

[129] Shafqat, 'Imperial control of our provinces', p. 255.

[130] Khan, *Muntakhab*, pp. 162–4.

[131] See for instance Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 454.

[132] Ahmad, *Tabaqat*, pp. 526, 531.

[133] Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 193.

[134] Quote is taken from Pearson, 'Symposium: decline of the Mughal empire', p. 230. See also, Khan, *Muntakhab,* p. 220.
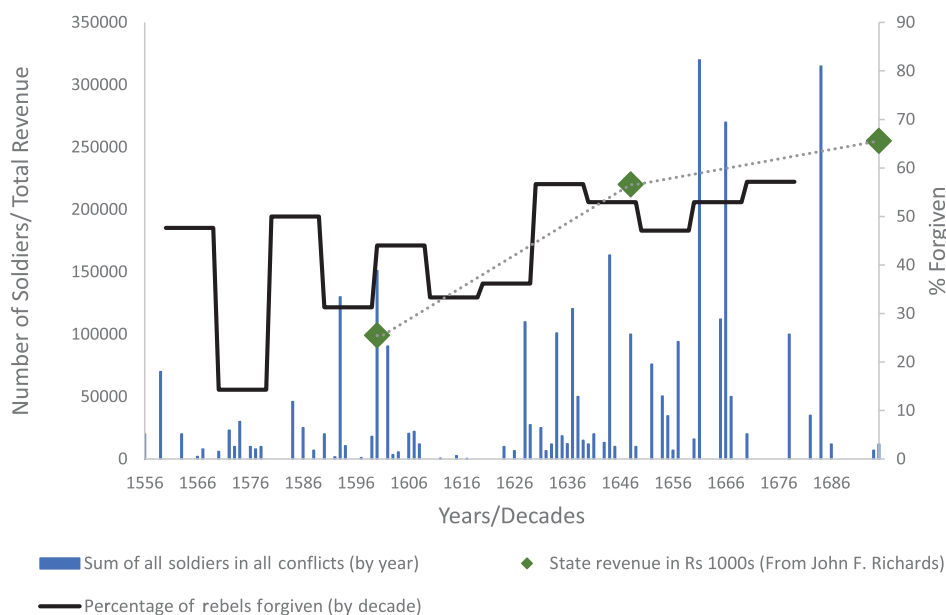
[135] Khan, Muntakhab, 220.

FIGURE 4   Rate of forgiveness (percentage forgiven) compared with conflict size over time. *Source*: Forgiveness rates and number of soldiers from the Mughal Conflict Database. State revenue from Richards, 'Fiscal states in Mughal and British India'. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

join in battle without being paid first.[136] The greater the bargaining power of the intermediary, the higher the cost to the state.

How did the bargaining relationship between the intermediaries and the state change over time? Forgiveness remained a consistent policy over the period, and according to Richards' estimates the state's revenues were not completely depleted despite the Maratha wars, though the empire was under financial strain.[137] As figure 4 shows, both the size of conflicts the Mughals faced and the percentage of rebel forgiveness increased substantially over the seventeenth century. This can partly be explained by the Mughal expansion southward where distances made governing difficult and partly by reflecting a change in the dynamics of the relationship between the intermediaries and the state.

Whilst the literature widely recognizes the changes to the state's relationship with intermediaries, the cause of the change is debated. Ali believed the incorporation of new officials from the Deccan led to a scarcity of *jagirs* and a crisis in the nobility.[138] Pearson contends the nobility lost faith in the government.[139] Alam suggested there was increased tax resistance of a more powerful *Zamindar* class, a notion perhaps supported by the higher percentage of *Zamindar* rebellions in the seventeenth century (see figure 1).[140] What is clear was that the state was facing larger and more populous rebellions and protests unlike it ever had seen before, and the

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[136] Khan, *An abridged history*, p. 335.

[137] Richards, 'Fiscal states in Mughal and British India', pp. 414–6.

[138] Ali, *The Mughal nobility*, p. 107.

[139] Pearson, 'Symposium: decline of the Mughal empire'.

[140] Alam, *The crisis of empire*.

Mughals increasingly had difficulty controlling intermediaries. In conflicts, plunder and monetary compensation was prioritized by rebels.[141] Powerful Maratha leaders ransomed Mughal *Mansabdars* instead of killing them.[142] Most significantly, peasant participation in rebellions seemed to increase with more populous armies and larger peasant uprisings. The structural shift evident in conflict-based sources are possibly linked to wider economic patterns. New research has found evidence of a steep decline in labour wages and falling GDP in the seventeenth century.[143] Perhaps greater uncertainty and scarcity drove intermediaries to increasingly prioritize monetary concerns. Further research is required to better understand these changes.

IX | CONCLUSIONS AND WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Pre-colonial South Asia has remained relatively less explored in debates on state formation. This is a shame, as the study of the empire has much to offer for our understanding of centre-periphery relationships, especially on how the state overcame high information costs of governance. This article has shown that Mughal state building heavily involved conciliation of influential and skilled local elites who were essential for the effective governance of the empire.

The relationship has been demonstrated in two ways. Statistically, the analysis shows rebel forgiveness was not random but related to high information and transaction costs. Rebels in the Southern provinces where the state's influence was not as strong were much more likely to be forgiven, as were rebels of ethnicities and religions more distinct from the Mughal rulers. In these cases, the state relied more on intermediaries for effective governance, explaining higher forgiveness rates. Secondly, case studies examined using contemporary state sources reveal the value the Mughal government placed on skills, knowledge, and influence of rebels among locals. The consistency in patterns of rebel forgiveness within these case studies makes clear that these intermediaries had bargaining power to negotiate with and could even disobey the state with little consequence. In this regard, the empire was certainly constrained by its strategic choice to conciliate rebellious intermediaries, especially in its ability to enforce its laws and policies. However, in most cases it was not a literal inability of the state to execute or punish these rebels, but a considered long-term strategy. Despite its eventual decline, the empire remained resilient against a very high number of internal and external challenges. Given the high costs of governance, direct control of the wider empire was likely untenable to begin with. As such, it is difficult to conclude that the state decline was a result of an inherent flaw in the state institutional design.

There are important takeaways from this article for the wider state formation literature. Firstly, the findings highlight some of the pitfalls of looking at state institutional development as a top-down narrative or as either 'efficient' or 'inefficient' in absolute terms. The tendency of the literature has been to define Asian empires in black and white terms with regards to the quality of their institutions, however, the duality of the state as being both 'weak' and 'powerful' raised by Farhat Hasan is clearly evident in the interaction between the central government and its administrators.[144] The relationship between the state and intermediaries was not simply a question of being 'rivals' or 'allies' with peripheral elites, but rather a negotiation of interests which developed

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[141] See Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 451.

[142] See Khan, *Muntakhab*, p. 451.

[143] De Zwart and Lucassen, 'Poverty or prosperity?'; Broadberry, Custodis, and Gupta, 'India and the great divergence'; Seshan, 'Wages and prices'.

[144] Hasan, *State and locality*, p. 127. See also Choon, 'The Ottoman postmaster', p. 251.

into a social and economic cultural space with long-lasting implications. As Stewart Gordon has found, this system of state building was adopted by the subsequent *Maratha* empire and perhaps at least in part by the British colonial governments.[145]

The second takeaway is the implications of these findings for other states facing precarious principal agent relationships. Rebel forgiveness was not a practice unique to the Mughal state; however, the degree to which rebels could negotiate does not seem to have been universal either. Ma and Rubin, for instance, have argued the premodern Chinese state adopted a low-wage, low-tax model because the empire could not commit to no confiscation, a problem the Mughal empire clearly did not face.[146] Conversely, Pfaff and Hetcher have found mutinous pirates and sailors were pardoned increasingly more often by the British navy.[147] Rebel forgiveness tells a wider story of bargaining power of intermediaries influencing institutional design.

Finally, we must contextualize the rise and decline of the Mughal state within the wider economic transformations of the period. Recent studies have identified the seventeenth century as the start of the Great Divergence between South Asia and Europe.[148] We must ask whether the Mughal government's institutional design truly caused the decline or was a victim of wider forces yet to be uncovered.

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[145] Gordon, 'The slow conquest', p. 225.

[146] Ma and Rubin, 'The paradox of power', p. 4.

[147] Pfaff and Hechter, *The genesis of rebellion,* pp. 223, 227.

[148] De Zwart and Lucassen, 'Poverty or prosperity?'.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.