

Sovereign Networks under Pressure: Shared Authority, Authoritarian Incursion, and Urban Resistance in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract: Across the current authoritarian–neoliberal conjuncture, cities and regions have become central terrains on which national executives stage spectacular assertions of sovereign authority. Bulldozers in Delhi’s Jahangirpuri and armored ICE convoys in Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago target minoritized urban residents in the name of legal neutrality while performing sovereignty for audiences far beyond the immediate sites of enforcement. Existing work in critical urban studies and global city research has documented both the constrained position of cities within hierarchical state structures and their partial “de-nationalization” within global financial networks, but it lacks a relational account of how authority is actually organized across scales, and why central states turn to spectacular urban coercion during crises.

This paper develops such an account by theorizing shared sovereignty in representative, multi-level democracies as a networked architecture that binds national, regional, municipal, and civic actors into interdependent relationships of material exchange, symbolic recognition, and negotiated compliance. Building on Sassen’s account of global cities, Brenner’s analysis of “new state spaces,” and conjunctural theories of crisis from Gramsci, Poulantzas, and Bourdieu, we conceptualize cities and regions as structurally empowered nodes that provide the service delivery, legitimation, and everyday compliance on which higher-order authority depends. Bulldozer politics—demolition drives in Modi’s India and urbanized border enforcement under Trump—represents a crisis-specific strategy of sovereign reconcentration that attempts to bypass this distributed architecture by substituting coercive spectacle for distributive legitimation.

Through a comparison of Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party and Trump’s Republican administration, we identify two roads to reconcentration—differential incorporation and frontal assault—and show how their sequencing of positional accumulation and coercive deployment produces divergent patterns of urban resistance and compliance. While our empirical focus is the current authoritarian–neoliberal conjuncture, we argue that the framework of shared sovereignty breakdown can also illuminate earlier moments of crisis, including the 1970s U.S. urban crisis and India’s Emergency, when central bulldozers likewise went to war with cities. The analysis provincializes North Atlantic theories of unitary state sovereignty, showing that in representative, multi-level democracies, sovereignty is best understood as a precarious, periodically bulldozed network of relationships that is nowhere more visible than in the streets and neighborhoods of their cities.

Introduction

Across the contemporary global conjuncture, the city has become the terrain on which the central state stages its most spectacular assertions of sovereign authority. In Delhi's Jahangirpuri, demolition squads flanked by heavy police presence arrived without meaningful notice to raze the homes and shops of Muslim residents after a procession-turned-riot, even as legal challenges sought to halt the operation. In Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago, federal immigration enforcement moved armored vehicles and tactical formations into neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces that had not previously been treated as routine theaters of national enforcement. In both cases, the stated rationale invoked legality, order, and administrative necessity; in both cases, the operations targeted minoritized populations whose dispossession generated symbolic capital for nationalist projects while staging sovereignty for audiences far beyond the immediate site of intervention.

These practices raise a problem that existing theoretical frameworks address only partially. Critical urban scholarship has documented the constrained position of cities within hierarchical constitutional orders and the proliferating use of state violence against informally housed, racialized, and migrant populations. Yet prevailing accounts still tend to oscillate between structural narratives that cast cities as simple objects of higher-order authority and voluntarist narratives that celebrate urban resistance without specifying the conditions under which such resistance becomes possible, durable, and politically consequential. What remains underdeveloped is a relational theory of how authority is organized across scales and why urban and regional formations become privileged sites of both sovereign assertion and counter-hegemonic response.

This paper develops such a theory through the concept of *shared sovereignty*. Shared sovereignty refers to a multi-scalar architecture in which authority is not

concentrated in a single governmental center but continuously reproduced through the coordinated, contested activity of interdependent actors operating across national, regional, municipal, and civic scales. The argument applies most directly to representative democracies characterized by multi-level governance and meaningful subnational authority; within that broader universe, the analysis focuses on two federal systems—India and the United States—in which national executives have pursued authoritarian reconcentration against structurally empowered urban and regional nodes. The core claim is that cities and regions occupy privileged positions within this architecture because they concentrate service delivery, legitimation work, and everyday compliance, making them both indispensable to hegemonic order and especially vulnerable during conjunctural crises.

Bulldozer politics names one strategy through which central executives attempt to resolve those crises. It is not simply a policy of demolition or deportation, nor merely a spatial shift in where coercion occurs. It is a crisis-specific strategy of sovereign reconcentration that seeks to bypass the distributed architecture of governance and substitute exemplary punishment for distributive legitimation. The bulldozer, whether literal or figurative, is thus both an instrument and a performance: it destroys targeted populations and simultaneously dramatizes the center's claim to unmediated power. The argument proceeds in five parts. The first revisits the relevant literature on critical urban studies, global city theory, state rescaling, and conjunctural crisis in order to define the conceptual intervention. The second develops the architecture of shared sovereignty and its dual positive-sum and zero-sum logics. The third introduces the concession imperative and the concept of *bulldozer politics* as executive reconcentration. The fourth compares two roads to reconcentration in Modi's India and Trump's United States:

differential incorporation and frontal assault. The conclusion returns to the present authoritarian-neoliberal conjuncture while arguing that the framework also helps illuminate earlier moments of shared sovereignty breakdown, including the 1970s urban crisis in the United States and the 21-month long suspension of constitutional democracy during the Emergency-era of the mid-1970s.

Cities, Regions, and the Spatial Organization of Sovereignty

Critical urban scholarship has long treated cities as subordinate units within hierarchical constitutional orders, emphasizing fiscal dependence, limited jurisdictional authority, and structural exposure to higher-scale decisions over investment, policing, and welfare retrenchment. Work on urban governance and dispossession has likewise shown how evictions, demolitions, and racialized enforcement remake urban space and citizenship from above. These literatures have generated powerful accounts of constraint and violence, but they do not fully explain why cities and regions repeatedly emerge as sites where central state authority is not only imposed but also destabilized.

One route into this problem comes from Saskia Sassen's work on global cities and the reorganization of territory, authority, and rights. Sassen's account of de-nationalization shows how the concentration of advanced financial and producer services in particular urban nodes creates capacities and institutional claims that are not fully contained by national territorial logics. In this perspective, global cities are not merely administrative subdivisions but strategic sites through which globalization produces new political geographies above and beyond the nation-state. The argument, shaped in part by a Weberian understanding of the city as a distinctive locus of market power, helped

establish the idea that cities can be structurally empowered nodes within wider transnational circuits rather than passive recipients of national command.

Neil Brenner extends this insight by shifting attention from global command cities alone to the active rescaling of statehood through what he calls new state spaces. States, on this account, do not merely react to globalization; they reorganize their own territorial architectures through strategic subnational spaces such as metropolitan regions, city-regions, and development corridors designed to manage crises of accumulation and legitimacy. This perspective widens the spatial lens beyond the central city and underscores that contemporary state power is increasingly organized through selective forms of urban and regional empowerment.

This paper builds on both Sassen and Brenner but shifts the analytic focus from global city-ness or state rescaling in themselves to the relational architecture through which sovereignty is reproduced. The issue is not only that cities and regions have become strategically important sites within new geographies of statehood, but also that they have become indispensable nodes within a distributed field of authority that central executives cannot easily override without damaging the very conditions of their own rule. This move requires a more explicit engagement with conjunctural theory and with the social mechanisms through which authority is accumulated, conceded, and contested.

Conjuncture, Field, and Shared Sovereignty

The framework developed here draws on Gramsci, Poulantzas, and Bourdieu to conceptualize sovereignty as a historically specific and relational achievement rather than a fixed legal possession. Gramsci's account of hegemonic crisis directs attention to conjunctures in which established arrangements lose legitimacy before a new settlement

has consolidated. Poulantzas helps specify the state as a material condensation of social relations rather than a unified actor standing outside them. Bourdieu's conception of the field clarifies how actors compete for different forms of capital within a structured space whose rules they did not individually choose and cannot fully control. Taken together, these traditions allow sovereignty to be understood not as a singular command lodged at the center, but as an always precarious accomplishment of interdependent nodes operating across scales.

Shared sovereignty names this arrangement. In representative, multi-level democracies, no single actor—executive, legislature, court, municipal government, regional government, party apparatus, or civil society organization—commands sufficient authority to govern unilaterally. The sovereign order is instead reproduced through a network of material interdependencies, shared symbolic recognitions, and continuous compliance calculations that bind heterogeneous actors into a governance architecture that appears pluralistic and responsive even as it remains profoundly unequal. The distribution of authority is therefore not incidental to liberal constitutionalism; it is one of the principal mechanisms through which consent is organized.

Cities and regions occupy a privileged place within this arrangement. They are where infrastructures are delivered, legality is mediated, populations are classified, and the everyday routines of governance are translated into territorially legible form. Their significance is not reducible to formal jurisdiction. It also rests on their role as dense concentrations of organizational capacity, civic brokerage, and territorial legitimacy. That is why they repeatedly emerge as both linchpins and fault lines of shared sovereignty: they help reproduce the sovereign order in ordinary times, and they expose its fractures when that order enters crisis.

The historical frame matters here. The empirical focus of this paper is the present authoritarian-neoliberal conjuncture, in which welfare retrenchment, racialized insecurity, punitive nationalism, and executive aggrandizement have intensified pressures on the distributed architecture of governance. But the framework also suggests a way of re-reading the 1970s as an earlier conjuncture of shared sovereignty breakdown. In the United States, the urban crisis of the 1970s revealed the fragility of a positive-sum bargain that had tied municipal elites to the federal project. In India, the Emergency suspended constitutional protections and sharply reduced the institutional channels through which urban populations could contest state action. The present moment is therefore not treated as wholly unprecedented; rather, it is a new conjunctural configuration in a longer history of crisis-ridden struggles over how sovereignty is territorially organized.

The Architecture of Shared Sovereignty

Sovereignty in representative multi-level democracies is not a possession concentrated in a unitary center but a relational achievement continuously reproduced through the coordinated activity of interdependent actors distributed across multiple institutional scales. No single actor commands enough authority to govern unilaterally for long. The ensemble of coordinated and contested interactions among federal agencies, regional and municipal governments, neighborhood organizations, philanthropic actors, courts, unions, and party organizations constitutes the sovereign order by organizing legitimate coercion, symbolic classification, and the material conditions of rule. This architecture can be understood as a political field in the Bourdieusian sense. Each node occupies a position defined by the volume and composition of capital it commands, the density of its connections to other nodes, and the constituency from which it draws

recognition. Some actors command concentrated fiscal or coercive resources; others control territorial access, legitimacy, local knowledge, or organizational mediation. No node is sovereign in isolation. Each derives its capacity from its embeddedness within the network as a whole.

Three mechanisms hold this network together. Material interdependencies bind nodes through resource flows that make each dependent on the others: federal grants sustain municipal agencies; local organizations furnish ground-level legitimacy; regional bureaucracies translate national directives into actionable territorial practice. Shared symbolic recognition gives actors reasons to accept one another's authority as legitimate rather than merely submitting to force. Continuous compliance calculations lead subordinate nodes to assess whether cooperation with superior nodes yields greater material and symbolic returns than resistance or defection.

The network's durability depends on what can be called structured lanes of the political field. Each actor occupies a recognized sphere of activity from which it delivers goods, recognition, and protection to a constituency and thereby accumulates symbolic capital. A municipal government that secures housing protections strengthens its position within the broader field; a community organization that becomes the recognized broker of local claims acquires leverage vis-a-vis agencies and elected officials. In each case, participation in the collective arrangement is incentivized because the node's authority depends on its ability to serve a constituency while remaining plugged into the wider network.

Positive-Sum and Zero-Sum Logics

The sovereignty network generates two analytically distinct but structurally interdependent logics of exchange. The first is positive-sum. Nodes derive benefits from

participation that would be unavailable in isolation: funding, legitimacy, policy access, infrastructural support, and the symbolic recognition attached to membership in governance arrangements. This is the basis of hegemonic consent. The network sustains itself by making cooperation more rewarding than resistance for most actors most of the time.

The second logic is zero-sum. Nodes do not merely seek to maintain their existing position; they seek to improve it, and positional advancement by one often occurs at the expense of others. A federal agency that expands into spaces formerly governed by cities acquires jurisdictional power that municipal actors lose. A local coalition that successfully blocks a federal incursion can accumulate symbolic capital at the expense of the executive. The field is therefore competitive as well as cooperative.

These two logics are recursively related. The positive-sum benefits that make membership attractive also generate the capital nodes deploy in zero-sum positional competition. Actors accumulate resources and legitimacy by serving the network's collective functioning, and then convert those gains into leverage for expanding their own authority. The shared sovereignty network persists because cooperation and rivalry are simultaneously in play. A purely cooperative arrangement would generate little dynamism; a purely competitive one would destroy the collective goods on which all depend.

The Concession Imperative

The most counterintuitive feature of shared sovereignty is that the capacity to exercise power depends on the willingness to concede it. This is not a normative claim

about democratic virtue but a structural observation about how authority is reproduced in a distributed field. Because no node can govern effectively on its own, each must rely on the cooperation of others for intelligence, legitimacy, logistics, territorial access, and implementation. The stronger node therefore remains dependent on the weaker one in ways that ordinary accounts of sovereignty tend to obscure.

The concession imperative clarifies both rule and resistance. Dominant nodes maintain power by expanding their authority while preserving the appearance, and partial reality, of distributed participation. Subordinate nodes accumulate capital by operating through recognized institutional channels even as they contest their outcomes. But once a dominant actor violates the terms of the arrangement too visibly—demanding compliance without compensation, bypassing established lanes, or imposing costs on subordinate actors without preserving their authority—the compliance calculations of the latter begin to shift.

This is the structural basis of urban resistance. Sanctuary city struggles illustrate the point. When municipal governments withdraw cooperation from federal immigration enforcement, they expose the extent to which federal power had always depended on local compliance rather than unilateral command. What appears as defiance is also a revelation: the central state cannot exercise its authority effectively without the distributed network it has sought to subordinate.

Bulldozer Politics: Reconcentration in the Current Conjuncture

Bulldozer politics emerges when the distributed architecture of shared sovereignty enters legitimacy crisis. When the network fails to deliver the goods, protections, and

recognitions that sustain consent, ruling formations face a dilemma. They can attempt to restore legitimacy through reform and renewed concessions, or they can seek to bypass the architecture's distributed channels by asserting direct executive authority over stigmatized populations and strategic territories. Bulldozer politics is the second strategy. In this sense, bulldozer justice is not primarily an enforcement policy directed at illegal construction or unauthorized presence. It is a strategy of sovereign reconcentration through which the executive seeks to substitute coercive validation for distributive legitimation. The bulldozer is its emblem because it operates simultaneously as a material instrument of destruction and a symbolic performance of unmediated power. In the Indian case, Muslim working-class neighborhoods are constituted as illegal encroachments internal to the nation. In the American case, undocumented residents are rendered perpetually deportable outsiders regardless of duration of residence or social incorporation. In both contexts, illegality is not simply discovered by enforcement; it is produced and stabilized through enforcement's spectacle.

The political importance of these operations lies not only in their coercive content but in their multi-audience character. Bulldozers and ICE raids communicate to supportive constituencies that the state can discipline internal enemies. They warn resistant municipal actors that their authority is contingent and revocable. They pressure brokers within the governance architecture to reassess whether maintaining their existing lanes remains worthwhile. Yet these same performances can backfire. By bypassing the distributed nodes on which governance depends, they shift compliance calculations and generate coalitions among municipal officials, neighborhood groups, lawyers, and advocacy organizations whose cooperation had previously been routinized and politically diffuse.

This is why bulldozer politics is structurally self-undermining over time. In the short run, spectacular punishment can generate symbolic capital for ruling formations facing legitimacy crisis. In the medium run, however, the very strategy designed to reconcentrate sovereign authority corrodes the network relations on which authority depends. It either forces executives into escalating cycles of coercive validation or triggers counter-hegemonic consolidation among the urban and regional nodes it has sought to discipline.

Bulldozer Justice in India's Reconfigured Sovereignty Network

From this vantage point, the recent waves of bulldozer justice in India do not simply repeat earlier episodes of central-state intrusion into city life, such as those undertaken in the mid-1970s, in Emergency-era Delhi, by Indira Gandhi and her son. Contemporary bulldozer justice is unfolding in a sovereignty field that has been fundamentally reconfigured by three decades of decentralization, neoliberal urbanism, and Hindu nationalist politics. Decentralization under India's 74th Constitutional Amendment did not simply devolve power to local bodies; it installed a more densely layered architecture of urban authority in which metropolitan development authorities, planning committees, and parastatal agencies sit alongside weakly empowered urban local bodies, high courts, central ministries, and a proliferating array of neighborhood associations and legal NGOs. In Delhi, this architecture now includes multiple municipal corporations, the Delhi Development Authority, statutory construction agencies like the NBCC, the elected Delhi government, central ministries that retain key land and policing powers, and dense civil-society networks that have learned to navigate and exploit the city's overlapping legal and fiscal channels.

Neoliberal urbanism has operated through this architecture by carving out territorial and institutional exceptions rather than dismantling the network as a whole. In Hyderabad's IT and financial corridors, Industrial Area Local Authorities peel capital-rich enclaves out of municipal jurisdiction and hand planning and service powers to quasi-autonomous state–corporate formations, governed under the language of participatory “self-governance” and performance but largely insulated from wider urban claims. In Delhi's Bhagidari program, the Delhi government created a parallel governance lane that privileged certain middle-class Residents Welfare Associations with routinized access to bureaucrats, effectively gentrifying state space by giving formal voice to homeowners while displacing informal settlement leaders and their organizations from long-standing channels of negotiation. In both cases, the state recalibrates exchange rates, revaluing middle-class organizational forms and corporate investment while devaluing the territorial capital embodied in long-established working-class and informal settlements. Shared sovereignty persists, but its benefits and burdens are redistributed.

Hindutva, finally, works through the same shared-sovereignty architecture by recoding the criteria of inclusion and exclusion along explicitly religious lines. Documentation regimes, welfare programs, and policing are reoriented so that access to protection and resources depends increasingly on alignment with a Hindu majoritarian project. In this context, legality and illegality are no longer simply matters of land-use regulation or tenure status; they become refracted through communal categories that mark some urban residents as permanently suspect and others as presumptively entitled. Bulldozer operations in Delhi and other BJP-governed jurisdictions thus do more than enforce planning rules. They make visible a new pattern of selective protection and targeted disposability in which certain Muslim-majority neighborhoods are systematically

stripped of the network's protective functions—procedural regularization, legal forbearance, discretionary stays—while adjacent areas retain them.

Jahangirpuri, in North Delhi, illustrates the more frontal edge of this pattern in schematic form. Three days after a Hindu religious procession devolved into violence, demolition squads arrived with bulldozers draped in saffron flags and a massive police escort, razing Muslim homes and shops even after the Supreme Court issued stay orders. The operation bypassed ordinary municipal deliberation and judicial oversight, explicitly staging central and state executive power over both local authorities and constitutional constraints. Yet it did not occur in an institutional vacuum. Because the neighborhood was embedded in Delhi's dense network of welfare programs, party brokers, and legal NGOs, the frontal assault quickly activated emergency petitions, media scrutiny, and opposition interventions. What looked like a simple assertion of central sovereignty was, in fact, an attempt to reverse years of negotiated coexistence in a shared sovereignty field—and it immediately encountered the field's latent resistance capacities.

A quieter, but no less telling, illustration comes from Israel Colony, a long-established Muslim settlement on forest land in South Delhi. Here, RSS activists and a local BJP legislator labeled residents “Bangladeshi infiltrators” and “terrorists” in letters to senior officials, while neighboring colonies on the same Forest Department land were left untouched. When bulldozers and police finally arrived without warning, the MLA reportedly told the residents that because they had not voted for him their houses could be broken. The withdrawal of protection was explicit. What had once been a relationship of contingent tolerance, mediated by local brokers and periodic regularization drives, was converted into a condition of permanent evictability, justified through communal rumor and selective enforcement. The shared-sovereignty architecture remained formally intact

—municipal bodies continued to function, courts remained open—but within it, specific neighborhoods were recoded as outside the circle of those whom the network was obliged to protect.

If Jahangirpuri and Israel Colony illustrate how bulldozer politics exploits and reshapes India's reconfigured sovereignty field, another trajectory—exemplified by Arjun Das Camp in Kidwai Nagar—shows what it means to remain inside the network under adverse conditions. There, residents and activist allies spent more than a decade navigating the same dense architecture of agencies, courts, commissions, and parastatal developers, using legal tools and alliances to convert long-term occupation into recognized entitlements within a flagship, cross-subsidized redevelopment project. Their strategy accepted the inevitability of redevelopment and the broader exchange-rate regime that privileged “world-class” urbanism, but insisted that the state's own cut-off dates, documentation criteria, and right-to-housing jurisprudence be honored. The outcome—the allocation of flats in the new complex for hundreds of households—shows that even under neoliberal and ethnonationalist recalibration, shared sovereignty retains channels through which organized residents can compel the state to convert territorial capital into quasi-proprietary claims. Bulldozer politics and negotiated inclusion thus appear as two sides of the same sovereignty architecture.

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This is why bulldozer politics is structurally self-undermining over time. In the short run, spectacular punishment can generate symbolic capital for ruling formations facing legitimacy crisis. In the medium run, however, the very strategy designed to reconcentrate sovereign authority corrodes the network relations on which authority depends. It either forces executives into escalating cycles of coercive validation or triggers counter-hegemonic consolidation among the urban and regional nodes it has sought to discipline.

Trump's Frontal Assault on the U.S. Sovereignty Network

The United States presents a differently configured, but structurally comparable, sovereignty field. The postwar federal–municipal settlement in the United States was a classic shared-sovereignty regime: through housing, transportation, and antipoverty programs, the federal government valorized municipal institutional capacity and alignment with national priorities, while cities converted federal resources into territorial legitimacy among local constituencies. Mayors who mastered grant regimes and program design became archetypal chartered brokers, their authority grounded in the reliable exchange of institutional capital from Washington into neighborhood services, jobs, and infrastructure. For decades, this positive-sum arrangement bound municipal elites tightly into the federal project. The urban crisis and fiscal restructuring of the 1970s revealed its fragility, but did not overturn the basic logic.

Immigration federalism and the rise of sanctuary politics exposed its contemporary fault lines. Federal immigration agencies, and under President Trump the White House itself, sought to deploy coercive tools—threats to withhold funds, public denunciation of “anarchist” cities, the use of ICE and Border Patrol in ordinary policing operations—to

discipline municipalities that refused to cooperate with mass deportation campaigns. In doing so, they attempted a frontal assault on the sovereignty network: bypassing functional interdependencies by operating without municipal consent, crashing exchange rates by threatening to devalue cities' institutional capital overnight, and contesting the very status of urban governments as legitimate authorities. ICE and Border Patrol deployments into immigrant neighborhoods were as much messages to mayors and police chiefs—your jurisdiction is contingent and revocable—as they were enforcement actions against individuals without status.

The Los Angeles case, in this register, is not primarily a story about one set of raids but about the structural consequences of frontal assault. When ICE escalated operations in 2025, it encountered a sovereignty network whose nodes—municipal governments, neighborhood organizations, immigrant rights groups—remained organizationally intact. Rather than inducing compliance, the assault triggered a rapid consolidation of community surveillance and mutual aid infrastructure across multiple organizations, alongside political repositioning by municipal officials who recognized that their territorial capital now depended on resisting federal overreach. The same architecture that had once facilitated cooperative enforcement was reactivated as a basis for defense. Where India's BJP had spent years differentially incorporating or marginalizing resistant nodes before deploying bulldozers, Trump's administration attempted to impose bulldozer politics on an unweakened network—and, predictably, activated its latent resistance capacities rather than securing submission.

Comparative Logics: Two Roads to Reconcentration

The contrast between Modi's India and Trump's United States highlights a broader sequencing proposition. When authoritarian reconcentration proceeds through what can be called differential incorporation—gradual recalibration of exchange rates that rewards compliant nodes and starves resistant ones without dismantling the network's formal architecture—it can erode the organizational bases of resistance before spectacular coercion is deployed. Bulldozer campaigns in such contexts may find local authorities and civic actors too weakened or divided to mount effective opposition. When reconcentration takes the form of frontal assault—instantaneous devaluation of institutional capital and visible bypassing of interdependencies—it tends to crash the exchange rate too quickly for rulers to manage, pushing chartered brokers toward territorial rather than institutional capital and encouraging them to side with their constituents against the center.

In both cases, bulldozer politics is self-undermining over the medium term. Differential incorporation corrodes the very positive-sum arrangements that once made compliance attractive, forcing rulers to resort increasingly to coercive spectacle. Frontal assault generates counter-hegemonic coalitions that draw their strength from the same interdependencies the executive has tried to deny. Seen through an urban and relational lens, then, bulldozer justice is neither an aberrant deviation from an otherwise uniform sovereignty nor a simple expression of a timeless centralized will. It is a crisis-specific strategy within a shared sovereignty architecture that central states themselves have built and on which they remain dependent.

Cities sit at the heart of that architecture as both linchpins and fault lines: they reproduce sovereign authority through everyday governance, and they expose its fractures when rulers seek to reconcentrate power through destruction. The comparison between

India and the United States helps provincialize North Atlantic theories that presume coherence and uniformity in state sovereignty. It suggests instead that sovereignty in contemporary liberal democracies is best understood as a precarious set of negotiated relationships—uneven, contested, and periodically bulldozed—that are nowhere more visible than in the streets and neighborhoods of their cities.

Historical Extension: The 1970s as an Earlier Breakdown

Although the paper's primary empirical focus is the current authoritarian-neoliberal conjuncture, the framework also helps illuminate earlier moments of shared sovereignty breakdown. The 1970s in both the United States and India can be read as a prior conjuncture in which established arrangements of authority fractured and central states turned sharply toward cities.

In the United States, the urban crisis of the 1970s exposed the fragility of the positive-sum arrangement that had bound municipal elites into the federal project. Fiscal crisis, retrenchment, and territorialized racial conflict revealed that the federal-municipal bargain could quickly become disciplinary once cities were reclassified as liabilities rather than development partners. In India, the Emergency suspended constitutional protections and dismantled many of the institutional channels through which urban residents and local actors could contest state action. In that setting, coercive campaigns against informal settlements encountered a sovereignty network whose resistant capacities had been sharply curtailed.

These earlier episodes are not identical to the current conjuncture, nor are they simply precursors to it. They do, however, clarify the broader analytical value of the framework. Shared sovereignty breakdown is not unique to contemporary authoritarian

nationalism. It is a recurrent possibility built into representative, multi-level democracies whose legitimacy depends on distributed cooperation but whose crises repeatedly tempt executives to substitute coercive concentration for negotiated rule.

Conclusion

Seen through an urban and relational lens, bulldozer justice is neither an aberrant deviation from an otherwise uniform sovereignty nor a simple expression of timeless central will. It is a crisis-specific strategy within a shared sovereignty architecture that central states themselves have built and on which they remain dependent. Cities and regions sit at the heart of that architecture as both linchpins and fault lines: they reproduce sovereign authority through everyday governance, and they expose its fractures when rulers seek to reconcentrate power through destruction.

The comparison between India and the United States does more than juxtapose two national cases. It helps provincialize North Atlantic theories that presume coherence, territorial uniformity, and unitary command in state sovereignty. The point is not that sovereignty has disappeared, but that in representative, multi-level democracies it is best understood as a precarious set of negotiated relationships among interdependent nodes whose authority is continually reproduced, strained, and sometimes bulldozed.

This formulation places the current authoritarian-neoliberal conjuncture in a broader historical frame. It suggests that what varies across conjunctures is less the existence of conflict over urban and regional authority than the sequencing through which central states seek to reconcentrate power and the condition of the shared sovereignty networks they confront when they do so. The 1970s urban crisis in the United States and the Emergency in India represent earlier moments when the breakdown of shared

sovereignty threw cities into the center of struggles over authority. The present conjuncture intensifies and reworks those dynamics, but it does not invent them. What it reveals with unusual clarity is that the streets and neighborhoods of cities remain among the most consequential terrains on which the contradictions of contemporary sovereignty are made visible.