ORIGINAL ARTICLE

From pulpit to marketplace: The evolution of religious political parties in Pakistan

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Abstract

This article analyzes the extent of involvement of religious political leaders and their apparent, rather reluctant, acceptance by the Pakistani public seen in recent times. The study also analyzes the role of religious leaders in giving way to right-wing extremism or Islamic militarism and how this challenges the writ of the state. I hope to shed light on the state-religious scholars' nexus, forging a lasting impression in the minds of the public of their coexistence. Religious leaders have been seen to support or gain currency at the time of autocratic rulers, which is evident in the history of the martial law regimes of General Zia ul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf. This study also examines the compromise of weak democratic parties in the intervening period between the two dictatorships as well as the recent rise of political as well as religious extremism. I examine the coexistence of the state-religious scholars' nexus where religious sentiments, often leading to extremist views, are being played for political gains by the religious political leaders.

KEYWORDS

authoritarianism, democracy, Jamaat-i- Islami, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, Pakistan, politico-religious authority, religious political leadership

The political situation in Pakistan has always been precarious. Political and religious leadership in the country have both gone through considerable changes for the past four decades, with their collective mobilization of the masses through the use of political slogans and the incitement of religious sentiments. These changes have impacted the population, and their effects have transitioned across both rural and urban areas. Among these changes, the rise of autocratic and militant forms of political leadership in the religious sphere has been seen to be spreading in a dangerous manner. In a competition to win mass support and implement their agendas, political parties often try to undermine the ideas of the opposition, even resorting to labeling their opponents as "traitors," "antinational," and, in the case of political parties in Pakistan, "anti-Islamic" and "anti-Pakistani." The underlying subtext has been used so frequently that the line between calling someone "nationalist" and "islamist" is often blurred in Pakistan. The relationship between the country's religious political parties and the state has been determined by the concept of Islamic society, by military connotations associated with Islamic governance, and, most importantly, by Pakistan's ideology. Among all these factors, Pakistan's ideology has been the cement that has unified all—the religious and the authoritarian, be they military dictators or political oligarchs. In the domain of politics, religious leaders have attempted to implant their idea of Islamic society and governance, with the aid of an alliance between the state and religious scholars (or the ulema–state alliance), by casting Pakistan as the "citadel of Islam." And whenever required, they have used this ideology as the protective firewall against both real and perceived enemies of Islam and of Pakistan.

In light of the relationship between the ulema–state alliance and its impact on society in Muslim countries, Kuru (2019) has acknowledged that "authoritarianism in Muslim countries has deep historical roots based on the marginalization of the intellectual and bourgeois classes by the ulema–state alliance" and "Islamic actors have generally preached patriarchal understandings of Islam, which present men as more suitable for leadership positions from the state to family" (Kuru, 2019, p. 37). Many Muslim states, postindependence, have opted for democratic and secular constitutions. However, others have adopted less secular and more autocratic forms of government, amending their constitutions to make way for less democratic systems. This constitutional and legal transformation in some countries has followed two pathways, both lending credence to the Islamization of the polity propagated by religious scholars. In the first instance, the authoritarian leaders have tried to inject Islamic laws and jargon into their constitutions to gain legitimacy, gather the support of the religiously conservative public, and publicize effective countermeasures for dissidents. A second pathway is characterized by bottom-up Islamization efforts via sociopolitical mobilization combined with religious revivalism and authoritarian trends, leading to a loss of secular sentiments and, consequently, the political mobilization of the public led by the Islamists (Kuru, 2019; Mostofa, 2021a).

Pakistan exhibits a classic case of a pattern seen in postcolonial Muslim majority states where "the Islamic landscape is much more diverse, partly reflecting both the sometimes-unconstrained multi-party competition in some countries" where each party tries to "use various Islamic factions to further their own objectives, with various degrees of success. It is difficult under such conditions for a singular Islamic discourse to prevail and remain uncontested" (Otayek & Soares, 2007, p. 17). Continuing in Otayek and Soares' (2007, p. 17) rather appropriate words, "To use the market metaphor, there is a more plural religious market, with more options among which individuals can choose. This also applies to Muslims, with Islam increasingly an affair of individuals."

Religious leaders in countries like Pakistan have been understood to perform a dual role. They are, of course, spiritual guides to the masses as they lead prayers and solemnize wedding and funeral functions. They also interpret the holy book and Islamic laws. And their interpretations of the holy scripture and the sayings of the holy prophet overshadow the other role. Their opinion (fatwa) is not legally binding, but it is treated "as having the force of scripture," which has given religious scholars and, in turn, religious political leaders immense power for manipulation (Ullah, 2014, p. 102). It is useful to note at this point that the average illiterate Muslim leans toward religious scholars with the belief that a refusal to accept any fatwa will provoke spiritual consequences as hard as the wrath of God and damnation in hell. Like politically motivated sloganeering, the fatwa is also used to advance political (and often theological) agendas. The ensuing sense of belonging experienced by followers can and has allowed religious scholars to misuse and abuse their authority, since their opinions are often accepted without question. This kind of mix of religion and politics was exemplified when Maulana Mahmood Ahmed Mirpuri opined, ahead of the Pakistani 2002 elections, that

"It is the duty of all Muslims to work hard and achieve this golden purpose of implementing Islamic Shari'ah in Pakistan… Therefore, it is the duty of Pakistani citizens to use their right of vote for candidates who are true Muslims and who want to work for a better society and to implement Islamic law. It is dishonest to use the power of a vote in favor of unsuitable candidates." (Ullah, 2014, pp. 102–103)

Similarly, the politico-religious alliance played the same card and logic in Pakistan's 1946 election when it was vigorously announced on the campaign trail that "Those who vote for the Muslim League are Muslims, they will go to Heaven for this good act. Those who vote against the Muslim League are kafirs [nonbelievers], they will go to hell after their death. They were to be refused burial in a Muslim cemetery" (Iqbal, 1984, p. 38).

Masud (2005) characterizes the politically inclined groups of religious leaders in Pakistan into three broad groups (traditionalist, revivalist, and modernist) based on their interpretation and implementation of Islamic jurisprudence. Traditionalist religious leaders—represented by Jam'iyyatul 'Ulama Islam (Association of the 'Ulama of Islam; JUI), Jam'iyyatul 'Ulama Pakistan (Association of the 'Ulama of Pakistan; JUP), and Tahrik Nifadh Fiqh Ja'fariyya (Movement for the Enforcement of the fiqh of Ja'fari School; TNF)—reflect the ways things had been in the prepartition era where religious law worked "based on the consolidated doctrines of the various schools of Islamic law." These religious political parties have contested elections on the promise of bringing Pakistan's constitution under the ambit of Islamic jurisprudence. The revivalists, however, have striven for the implementation of Islamic law (sharia) as it was at the time of the prophet, rooting it in the Salafi tradition. This group is represented by Jam'iyyatul Ahl al-Hadith (Association of the People of Hadith; JAH) and Jama'at Islami (Islamic Group; JI). The reformist group is individualistic and hence is not represented by any religious political party, yet this does not mean they have no presence in the country's political landscape. They tend to mobilize the masses

through their own preaching and lectures. Religious political parties often join hands for a common cause of upholding the religious laws, thereby keeping secular political parties in check.

1 | POLITICAL MANIPULATION OR STRATEGY: COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

The rise of right-wing extremism in the South Asian context has been amply studied (see, e.g., Chacko, 2018; Chacko & Jayasuriya, 2018; Mostofa & Subedi, 2020.) However, in the specific case of Pakistan, less attention has been paid to the dissolution of the political process of democratization (even though this took place very late in the country's history) alongside the ongoing rise of religious extremism aided by far-right and terrorist organizations. The literature on religious authorities and their role in society generally highlights militarism and the extremist views of the ulema-state alliance (see, e.g., Abbas, 2005; Ahmed, 2012; Haqqani, 2005; Jalal, 2008; Mostofa, 2023). Zaman (2002) underscores the flexibility of the religious leadership to modern challenges, but his study focuses on those religious leaders or scholars who have excelled in their training surrounding religious texts and Islamic jurisprudence. Ullah (2014) classifies the voting patterns of the various political parties in Pakistan into three groups: socialists, nationalists, and Islamists. He argues that in "overwhelmingly devout Muslim Pakistan, few parties or politicians are likely to entirely jettison Islamic rhetoric or to pass up the chance to gain a few extra votes by appealing to Muslim values" (Ullah, 2014, p. 14). His argument is valid as there have been instances where Islam as a political slogan has been used by all three groups. Socialists, such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), introduced the novel concept of Islamic Socialism. The moderate-leaning Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz; PML-N) party was part of *Islami Jamhorri Itihad* (the Islamic Democratic Alliance; IJI) with *Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl* (JUI-F) and *Jama'at Islami* (JI). The major religious political parties, such as JUI, JI, or an umbrella politico-religious entity like *Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal* (United Committee of Action; MMA), have also pragmatically used Islam as a tool for political engineering.

Blom (2011) identified six factors or "key mutations" among custodians of the Islamic faith in Pakistani society. First, state-sponsored religiously motivated policies have enabled the moral policing of the public, resulting in a "more volatile pattern of religious leadership." Second, there is a reluctance of political and religious leaders to allow a public voice in religious matters due to high rates of illiteracy. Indeed, with rising rates of religious school enrollment, permitting the right to question religious authority is seldom encouraged. Third, with modern communication technology and mass education in religious seminaries and private Islamic schools, there has been an environment of competition among religious scholars to attract people to their way of thinking—a competition leading to public appearances in higher frequency. Fourth, mass emigration (from rural to urban zones, due to high rates of unemployment) has created a new class of rural-educated preachers who have now taken over the urban areas. This has promoted a dangerous conflict of interest among their coeducators. Fifth, the brutal and violent strain exhibited by the religious student wing of a major religious political party has now taken root, and acceptance in jihadi organizations (including the sectarian outfits) has created an opportunity for the less educated to be taken advantage of under the guise of "Islamic Street Power." And finally, the slogans of "Islam in Danger" and "Western Hegemony designed to enslave the Muslim Ummah" have never lost currency, and with Hindu-centric (India has been synonymous with Hindu culture) state-backed policies, the public is swayed more easily to accept politico-religious leadership (Blom, 2011, pp. 131–43).

Religious political leaders differ in their attitudes and ideas, and their adherents tend to, in varying degrees, exhibit and mirror the attitudes of their leaders. This has led to a seeming authoritarianism in terms of interpretation of the religious scrolls by the learned ones, and even the lower tier of the religious seminaries has come to exhibit limited acceptance of any commentary. The political process of democracy through elections has been marred by accusations of corruption, rigging, and even manipulation by the establishment. Except for the elections held in 1970 and 1985 (albeit on a nonparty basis), no election in Pakistan can properly be labeled as free and fair, allowing the people to decide upon their representatives. To quote Cheeseman and Klaas (2018), Pakistani politicians have, in the current era, learned that

> "In the twenty-first century, elections will be rigged with strategies both old and new, because autocrats have learnt a simple but sad truth: it is easier to stay in power by rigging elections than by not holding them at all. For that reason, we must learn an even more uncomfortable truth: right now, those who rig elections are outfoxing not only their own people but also the international community. Unless we learn how to identify these strategies and address them, then election quality will continue to decline. Over time, this is likely to call the basic legitimacy of democracy into question, as people grow frustrated with elections that fail to usher in change." (Cheeseman & Klaas, 2018)

Although in the political history of Pakistan, religious political parties have not been overtly successful in gaining a strong presence, they have nevertheless emerged as an integral part of the political milieu. Exerting street power through the various religious schools, the religious political parties have revealed their muscles, and, when flexed, the country has seen an increase in violent activities. Reactions to the siege of Makkah in the 1980s, the recent Charlie Hebdo incident, the blasphemous caricature of Prophet Muhammad, or the Asia Masih case all show the power of religious political parties to rally the masses and demonstrate their true strength. However, when they attempt to overthrow a government without the support of the establishment, they have faced little or no success in Pakistan.

In recent times, religious political parties have accused the Pakistani government of using authoritarian tools to suppress the will of the people; this is partly due to the fact that, almost overnight, religious parties lost the support of the establishment due to over-reliance on it. From 1978 to 1988, President Zia wielded the support of religious leaders for the Islamization process and perceived them as allies of the regime, yet the religious leaders could not cash in on their support when it came to their presence in parliament. The Musharraf regime allowed the proliferation of religious activities in the then Federal Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as a concession to the MMA government. That alliance only lasted until the passage of the 17th Amendment of the Constitution of Pakistan. Later on, the MMA failed to generate mass support for its agitation against the drone strikes in the erstwhile FATA.

Over time, the political landscape of Pakistan has been garnished with increasing Islamic rhetoric. The most liberal and secular parties have also used it sparingly for mass appeal. With politician infighting amid political instability, the post-911 era saw a rise in the power of religious leaders to the extent of holding majority governments in those areas worst hit by the War on Terror. With the return to democracy in the second decade of the 21st century, political extremism nevertheless rose, a rise that has been ongoing in a context where state institutions are under increasing pressure to accept extremism as an alternative reality. In the contemporary era, the recent Pakistani regime led by a conglomerate of various ideological parties is being slated as the site of a battle for good over evil. In the battlefield of narratives, until he was ousted in 2022, the right-leaning Imran Khan (via his Movement for Justice, *Tehrik Insaf*) presented himself as the real savior, and even his rallies exhibited a more Islamic touch with their title of "*Amar Bil Maroof*" or "Standing with Righteousness" (Qureshi, 2022). Although Imran Khan had the support of religious leaders such as

Noor-ul Haq Qadari and even appointed a scholar to head the *Rehmat-ul-alimeen* Authority, he failed to appease the religious factions led by the various sectarian political parties. His staunchest opponent was Maulana Fazl Rehman, who led the JUI and eventually led the Pakistan Democratic Movement coalition that ousted Khan in 2022. Rehman accused Khan of being an agent of a Judeo-Christian alliance, while Khan accused Rehman of being a danger to Pakistan and, in his speeches, often called Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari, and Fazal Rehman the "three stooges." Out of office, any political leader—religious, ethnic, or otherwise—will often retaliate toward successors who have destroyed what they have worked hard to construct. This seldom happens in Pakistan as the political leaders accusing each other as political rivals may well be forced to reach a compromise and join hands as allies in the future.

2 | ISLAM OR AUTOCRACY?

Postpartition, apart from Jinnah's inaugural address as the president of the Legislative Assembly in 1947 declaring the secularist nature of the constitution, scant attention has been paid to the inclusion of religious political leaders and scholars during and after his demise. Jalal (1985) has tried to dispel her initial thesis of Jinnah not wanting the division of India but a composite nationalism based on a separate electorate. However, his penchant for backing staunch supporters of the Islamic State (such as Maulana Ashraf Thanvi and Maulana Shabir Usmani) suggests otherwise. Jinnah was an enigmatic personality who, being a constitutional expert, chose to accept two roles for himself: head of the government as Governor General and president of the Legislative Assembly. His persona as a leader of high caliber was nevertheless dented by his prominent absence from legislative business, and his authoritarian side showed more prominence when, within two months of assuming power, he dismissed two governors,[1] promoting more centralized rule. This act was repeated at various historical junctions, giving the impression that, if a leader as great as Jinnah could do that, it was considered legitimate, if not sacrosanct. Wearing two hats has thus become common practice with the party leader taking the reins while the opposition vehemently asks them to vacate the party head position for another suitable candidate so they can better serve as the head of the government instead. This trend has been common to political office holders—religious or not.

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[1]The governors of Punjab and Sindh were dismissed on corruption charges (Aminullah Chaudry, *Political Administrators: The Story of the Civil Service of Pakistan*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2011).

Maulana Shabir Usmani threw his support into his own party for the creation of Pakistan, the JUH, despite opposition. His influence was vivid (Younus, 2014) when an objective resolution was compiled in draft, vetted by himself (Hassan, 2019), and presented by Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. The idea of a separation of the "polity where spiritual and ethical values should play no part in the governance of the people" was an idea contradictory to Islam, and Maulana Shabir Usmani proposed in the preamble that it was delegated authority to the people of Pakistan, delegated by Almighty God, so "that it does not become an agency for tyranny or selfishness" and the real power lay with public as it was "for the people to decide who will exercise that authority" (Government of Pakistan, 1949, p. 2). Mr. Birat Chandra Mandal, a minority representative of East Bengal, spoke of the dangers that would befall of the people if a "serious blunder" were to be committed. Maulana Shabir Usmani held that Jinnah, who repeatedly mentioned the framework of the constitution to be based on the Holy Book Quran, even encouraged the Muslims to "possess a copy of the Quran and study it carefully so that it may promote our material as well as individual welfare." (Government of Pakistan, 1949, p. 44).

The passage of the objective resolution gave impetus to the religious leaders present in the Assembly to propose a law they thought could give them an added advantage—since there was no one better than religious leaders to interpret and advise on matters of public import. Hence, the JUI proposed that the constitution should stipulate that a board of religious scholars would serve as the final arbiter of any proposed legislation's compatibility with Islamic law. The proposal, debated furiously in the National Assembly, was not adopted by a majority vote of 276 to 91 (Malik, 2009, pp. 154–55). The distrust of the religious scholars was shared by a majority of the Muslim League leaders who saw the acceptance of religious scholars in the legislature and polity as questionable. Iskandar Mirza ended the debate with his clarification that "we can't run wild on Islam; it is Pakistan first and last." (Ullah, 2014, p. 61)

The Anti-Ahmadiyya riots of 1953 and the subsequent inquiry conducted by Justice Munir Ahmad shed light on the internal friction and the goals of the various religious political factions and the use of religion as a slogan for political gain. The Munir Report of 1954 is an interesting read. The report's words are valid today in that, "If there is one thing which has been conclusively demonstrated in this inquiry, it is that, provided you can persuade the masses to believe that something they are asked to do is religiously right or enjoined by religion, you can set them to any course of action, regardless of all considerations of discipline, loyalty, decency, morality or civic sense" (Justice Muhammad Munir, 1954, p. 231). The report also noted that,

"Keeping in view the several definitions given by the ulama, need we make any comment except that no two learned divines are agreed on this fundamental. If we attempt our own definition as each learned divine has done and that definition differs from that given by all others, we unanimously go out of the fold of Islam. And if we adopt the definition given by any one of the ulama, we remain Muslims according to the view of that *alim* but *kafirs* according to the definition of everyone else." (Justice Muhammad Munir, 1954, p. 218)

Leading scholars such as Mawlana Zafar Ahmad Thanwi, the eminent Islamic scholar Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, members of the JUI, along with the JI, and 31 other scholars of repute presented their own 22 principles of the Islamic Constitution, demanding the government to strive for the creation of an Islamic state. The political compromise between the two polities was reached in the promulgation of the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan on March 23, 1956. Pakistan was declared an Islamic Republic, and an Advisory Commission of Religious Scholars was established under Articles 197–198 "to make recommendations for the measures for bringing existing law into conformity with the injunctions of Islam, and compile in suitable form, for the guidance of the National and Provincial Assemblies, such Injunctions of Islam as can be given legislative effect." This, however, was not implemented as the first constitution lasted only two years, ending with the first of many bouts of martial law and the abrogation of the constitution.

Ayub Khan's military government came with the promise "to give people access to speedier justice, curb the crippling birth rate, and take appropriate steps, including land reforms and technological innovation, to develop agriculture so that the country could feed itself" as the "ultimate aim" of the military regime was to "restore democracy" but a democracy that "people can understand and work" (Jalal, 2014, p. 99). Ayub Khan did not want to grant the religious parties too much freedom, and thus, his plan was to distance himself from them. However, he discovered the hard way that "there was nothing to prevent politicians from coalescing with the ulema to undermine his vision of stability and progress" (Jalal, 2014, p. 109).

Ayub, in fact, held the self-appointed guardians of Islam in utter contempt. He believed they distorted the spirit of Islam, "flourish[ed] on the ignorance of the people," and were the "deadliest enemy of the educated Muslim" (Jalal, 2014, p. 109). Though he never wavered in his low opinion of those who peddled religion for popular consumption, his determination to resist the ulema visibly weakened after an initial spurt of modernist reforms. Using the cover of martial law, in

March 1961, Ayub introduced changes to the Muslim family laws. These strengthened women's rights by imposing restrictions on polygamy and the verbal pronouncements of divorce. The ulema raised a storm against this unwarranted interference in Muslim law that, following colonial practice, they believed was their jurisdiction. Ayub remained steadfast in the face of agitation against the family law ordinances, though he later consented to change Pakistan's name to an Islamic republic and constituted the advisory Council of Islamic Ideology in August 1962. The Institute of Islamic Research was also established in the same year (Jalal, 2014, p. 111). In his runoff presidential election in 1964, the ulema responded in kind with *fatwa* issued by various seminaries that a woman cannot be head of the state, despite the JI putting all its political weight in favor of Fatima Jinnah (Ahmad, 2017; Khan, 2017, p. 162). Although Ayub won with 64% of the vote, the JI under Maududi showed its true strength as the religious political party (Mostofa, 2021b), whereas the JUI and JUP supported neither candidate (Pirzada, 2000).

3 | POLITICO-RELIGIOUS COMPROMISE

The Democratic Action Committee (DAC)[2] was composed of an interesting mix of politico-religious parties that led to the student agitation, which culminated in Ayub Khan's resignation and another bout of martial law in the country. This time, the mantle of governance was formally handed over to the military by an ex-military man. The constitution was abrogated by the same individual who promulgated a custom-made constitution to implement his own vision. Like his predecessor, the new Martial Law Administrator, General Yahya Khan, vowed to conduct elections, and he did so in a fair manner. Interestingly, these were the first-ever adult franchise-based elections held in the history of Pakistan, and the religious parties (the JUI, JUP, and JI) were confident of the outcomes as their campaigns were "painted in the media as a battle between supporters of godless ideologies and the defenders of Islamic values" (Haqqani, 2018). The outcome of the election for "Islam Loving" political parties was not encouraging and showed that their popular acceptance was poor. The JUP ended up with seven seats, while the JI managed only four seats. The Islamic parties' share of the popular vote was around 10% nationwide.

In East Pakistan, the Awami League, under the leadership of Sheikh Mujeeb, won a landslide victory, whereas, in West Pakistan, the majority of the seats in the National Assembly were grabbed by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party, with JUI clinching the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) government in alliance with the National Awami Party. Although it was a short-lived alliance (May 1, 1972—February 15, 1973) culminating in the resignation of Chief Minister Mufti Mahmud, it showed the reach of religious factions in the formulation of religious polity and the workings of politico-religious parties in public policy. The initial stream of the Islamization process started with the JUI's win and the formation of their government. After taking an oath, Mufti Mahmud declared that "his government considered the establishment of a true Islamic order in the province as their major priority," and with this, he announced the establishment of a board of religious scholars to bring the existing laws into conformity with the Holy Quran and Sunnah (Pirzada, 2000). He tried to impose Urdu as the official language in government offices despite resentment and opposition from his partner party, the NAP. He announced a ban on the

> "manufacture, use, and trade of alcoholic drinks; made the reading of Quran with translation compulsory for admission in universities; declared Arabic as a compulsory subject; forbade the free movement of women in commercial centers without observing veil; made the Pakistani dress, *shalwar* and *qameez*, obligatory for government servants; banned dowry; completely prohibited gambling in all its forms; ordered observing of the sanctity of Ramadan." (Pirzada, 2000, p. 67)

But his party's most visible contribution toward Islamization was the declaration of Ahmadiyya as non-Muslims through Second Constitutional Amendment. This was not the only time the liberal-minded Bhutto conceded to the religious leaders' demands. In the 1977 elections, the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA)[3] relied almost entirely on appeals to religion, as seen in its slogan, which promised a *Nizam-i-Mustafa* (system of the Prophet). After their loss and call for a re-election, Bhutto went to the negotiation table with the PNA. Their initial demand involved the reconstitution of the ECP, the dissolution of the assemblies, and the resignation of Bhutto. However, the dialogs that started on June 3, 1977, were never concluded when, on

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[2]The composition of the DAC comprised eight political parties: the Awami League (Mujibur Rahman group), the Awami League (Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan group), the Council Muslim League, the National Awami Party (Requisitionists), the JI, the JUI, and the JUP.

[3]PNA membership included Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, the JIP, the APJUI (Mufti Group), the Khaksar Tehrik, the National Democratic Party (NOP), JUP, the PDP, the PML, and the TI; Mufti Mahmud was made president.

July 5, 1977, Prime Minister Bhutto and the PNA leaders were arrested by General Zia ul Haq, the Chief of Army Staff, through a bloodless coup d'état.

4 | STATE-RELIGIOUS PARTIES: A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE

An admirer of the founding father of JI, General Zia ul Haq[4]—who promised to conduct elections in 90 days and return to the barracks—went on to implement Maududi's playbook, paving the way to an Islamic state. Through various ordinances and legal instruments, he Islamized the polity and, after having his actions sanctioned by then Chief Justice Anwar Ul Haq, he accepted help from the JI cadre. His intellectual mentor, Maududi, had retired and was succeeded by Mian Tufail. The main point to make here is that his partnership with the JI in his Islamization quest was due to hatred toward the socialist policies of the PPP by the JI and General Zia's fear of retribution from PPP leaders for the coup. The JI became the political and social arm of the Zia regime as many of Zia's cabinet members were either affiliated with the JI or were in its central council. Makhdoom Javed Hashmi was one of them (Alam, 2014).

Zia's regime was different from previous martial law regimes. He appeased the religious leaders and, using his leveraging force to include religious scholars in the public domain, he increased the Council of Common Interest membership as well as established parallel Federal Shariat Courts to be manned by learned religious leaders who "had to take an oath of allegiance to the president like any other judge" (Jaffrelot, 2015, p. 470). Zia's famous reforms, included in his *Nizam-e-Islam* (Islamic rule) program, were the enforcement of *hudud* punishments through Islamic provisions in the penal code, the establishment of Quran Academies throughout the Higher Educational Institutes, and the acceptance of *Dini Madaris* (Religious Schools of learning) degrees as equivalent to those from other educational institutes throughout Pakistan. Indeed, the *Dini Madaris* established in Zia's 11-year rule was nothing short of exponential in terms of spurring student enrollment. Their growth has also been seen to introduce the extremist element into Pakistan's society. The long-standing legal amendment was made in Pakistan's Penal Code, Section 295-C, but this was not by Zia, rather the religious element in the *Majlis-Shura* (parliament) demanded that "the omission of the death penalty was unacceptable to them and that there was a consensus (*ijma*) among various schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) on the death sentence being the

only punishment for blasphemy towards the Prophet (may peace be upon him)" (Ahmed, 2018). Hailed as the legal measure where, "in future, no one will dare commit blasphemy of the Holy Prophet" (Ahmed, 2018), the reported incidents after the promulgation of Section 295-C unequivocally evidenced its failure. Instead of being a fail-safe measure, it "resulted in the multiplication of real and perceived blasphemous content. Every accusation and allegation, whether a genuine one or a false one resulting from misconceptions, misunderstandings, socio-religious differences or plain malice, gets repeated and reproduced in newspapers, judicial documents, digital media and in individual conversations" (Ahmed, 2018).

In these events, instead of contributing toward the positive amalgamation of religion with state affairs, religious scholars further aggravated matters. The ulema not only became more political; but they also became the vox populi. Zia provided "the Islamist parties a power-sharing arrangement in which the state would act as the senior partner, but the Islamic forces would gain from state patronage" (Nasr, 1995, p. 188). Zia's inclination toward the inclusive religious polity can be understood when he insisted that all these political parties should work toward establishing an Islamic order because "this country had been created in the name of Islam and will survive only by holding fast to Islam" (Text of Gen. Zia's Address to the Nation, 1977). In his view, had the Islamic system been allowed to establish, "all the basic necessities of every citizen would have been met easily" (Text of President's Address to the Nation, 1977). Zia thought of himself as the leader of the Muslim Ummah and thereby considered himself allowed to address the United Nations General Assembly as the representative of the Muslim Ummah.

The Zia regime was aided by the influx of refugees from the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the tri-party covert alliance between the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Through training various factions and financial support, the occupation ended as a failed enterprise. Al-Saud (2021) narrates that, on the day the Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, General Zia was the first person to contact Saudi King Khalid, with both countries vowing to share intelligence reports as well as financial requirements for the guerilla war to be fought by the Afghan factions, namely the Peshawar Seven. The helping hand of Saudi Arabia in enriching the religious factions cannot be underestimated, given the increasing incidents of sectarian violence since the birth of Pakistan. Zia managed to create a semblance of democracy—but with a twist. Besides a referendum on his extension, he allowed nonparty-based elections where he could nominate the prime minister of his choice, provided he held the confidence of the majority of the national assembly membership. Only the JI, the party closely associated with the dictator, was allowed

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[4]Zia, as Chief of Army Staff, would present a copy of *Tafhimu'ʟ-Qur'an* (Understanding the Qur'an) as a prize to the winning debate team among officers of the Army Education School (see Nasr, 1995, p. 172).

to compete as a party. The results were overwhelmingly positive, albeit for the religious section with ties to the martial law regime; they nevertheless suffered a strong rejection from the public.

With Zia's assassination, the PML faction led by Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) joined hands with the JI to form the IJI (the Islamic Democratic Coalition) to contest against the PPP led by Benazir Bhutto. For the next decade, both parties (the PML-N and the PPP) fought it out in between, and from 1988 to 1999, elections had been conducted thrice, each time either of the parties came to power. This charade of democratic chair pulling was ended by the military rule of General Pervaiz Musharraf.

The attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, in New York opened new political avenues for the ulema. With the rise of anti-American sentiments and the American leadership asking Pakistan to be an ally in the War on Terror, the religious parties formed the MMA.[5] The JUI and JI had been part of IJI a decade earlier, but this time they did not partner with any political party. Rather they created an umbrella organization of politico-religious parties. It was the first instance in the history of Pakistan where politico-religious parties had solely formed a coalition among themselves without any external support of the established political parties. This was also the first time in Pakistan's history that the politico-religious parties had shown the advantage of earning the trust of the masses, winning over 50 seats in the National Assembly, and having a government in North West Frontier Province (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Rais (2002) accurately portrayed the sentiments of the people of Pakistan in voting for the religious parties:

> "Never have the people of Pakistan voted in such large numbers for the religious parties before… Again, this change is not confined to the old, ignorant, rural people, but young, urban and professional class seems to be tilting toward the religious parties… But the trend is visible and, if the mainstream political parties continue to ignore the fundamental issues of good governance, good state and society, the general public including the middle class may embrace the fold of religious parties." (Rais, 2002)

Despite opposing the Musharraf regime and calling for democracy to hold, the MMA was called to be granted a favor from the same regime from "the pre-poll scheming

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[5]MMA included a mixed band of religious parties from every sectarian outfit. The Deobandi JUI (F and S); the modernizing JI; the sufi-oriented Barelvi party; the JUP; the Jamiat Ahle Hadith, Wahhabi, or Salafi party; and the Islami Tehrik Pakistan, the Shia party.

and restrictions imposed by General Musharraf which rendered the mainstream parties orphaned and mauled" and encouraged "the militants of jihadi groups to join one religious party or the other" (Misra, 2003). The MMA government was perceived to be tolerant of the "Talibanization" of the provinces, and the JUI-F, led by the son and heir of Mufti Mehmed, Maulana Fazl Rehman, started work on the Islamization policy left unfinished by his father's government. The then NWFP passed the *Hisba* law "on the themes of Islamic jurisprudence and accountability," where the office of *Muhtasib* (ombudsman) would be held by a qualified religious scholar within the seminary education system (Quraish & Fakhr-Ul-Islam, 2018). This new parallel system was to alleviate the grievances of the public regarding un-Islamic behavior in the government and society at large (Quraish & Fakhr-Ul-Islam, 2018). *Hisba* law, enacted by the Provincial Assembly, was struck down by the Supreme Court of Pakistan as being "vague, overbroad, unreasonable, based on excessive delegation of jurisdiction, denying the right of access to justice to the citizens and attempting to set up a parallel judicial system" (White, 2008). Meanwhile, inherent support shown by the MMA-led government proved to be fatal as in areas such as Swat and Waziristan the rise of militant organizations—including *Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariati Muhammadi* (Movement for Enforcement of Law of Muhammad) and *Tehrik-e-Taliban* Pakistan (The Student Movement in Pakistan)—was of an element that proved to the world that Pakistan was a dangerous country. Although it was from the opposition benches in the National Assembly and parliament, the MMA lent support to the 17th Amendment of the Constitution, giving Musharraf a carte blanche. In terms of a second consecutive win in the electoral field, the MMA (or religious parties, for that matter) did not come close to winning or even being accepted as a unified front, as the 2002 elections demonstrated. For the next two elections (2008 and 2013), the politico-religious parties retained their lower-tiered position as the PPP and PML-N led the national governments. In both tenures, JUI-F was their preferred partner. The JI and other parties either refrained from participating or were not in the winning position.

5 | THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC EXTREMIST POLITY

Amid a controversy ignited by a constitutional amendment of oath taken by MPs, the *Tehrik Labaik Ya Rasool Allah* (TLYR; Movement for Calling of Messenger of Allah, later known as *Tehrik Labaik Pakistan*; TLP), staged a protest in the heart of the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi in 2017. The procession, led by a handicapped proclaimed religious leader of the Barelvi sect, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, had opposed the

proposed amendments to Article 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, demanding the death penalty by beheading for blasphemy convicts. The main slogan of TLYR is: "*Gustakh-e-Rasool ki aik saza, sar tan say juda*" (There is only one punishment for a blasphemer: beheading). Although the TLYR did not endorse any violent incidents, for them, Mumtaz Qadri was a martyr as he faithfully executed and assassinated the then governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, for protecting the Christian blasphemer Asia Bibi (Suleman, 2018).

The extent of the reach of the TLP to promote their brand of extremism can be gauged from the number of violent incidents where frenzied mobs killed people under the pretext of blasphemy charges. In some incidents, the accused is not a minority but from the majority—a Muslim. One such example is that of Mashal Khan, a student of the Mardan campus of Abdul Wali Khan University. An alarming fact is that TLP registered itself as a politico-religious party with an extremist mindset and won fourth place in terms of popular votes in the 2018 elections. In the early months of 2021, the party protested the Islamophobic attitude of the French government and demanded the expulsion of the French Ambassador. This led to the arrest of the chief of the party, the son of Khadim Rizvi, Saad Rizvi, which caused massive outrage and violent clashes between Rizvi's supporters and law enforcement, killing two policemen. The incident concluded with not only the release of Rizvi but also an agreement between the TLP and the government, signed by two federal ministers. The TLP has also been instrumental in influencing the government to change its stance on various matters. One such event in recent history was the removal of Princeton economist Dr. Atif Mian from the government's Economic Advisory Council. The reason had been the faith of Dr. Mian—he belongs to the Ahmadiyya faith.

6 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

The political scenario for Pakistan is still uncertain as to whether it will continue to be determined by political-religious parties. It remains to be seen whether Pakistan—often viewed as the country with the most Islamic credentials—can get its religious leaders to define what an Islamic state means in the country's context. Political leaders have been known to take advantage of igniting public sentiments, and, in a country like Pakistan with phrases such as "jihad," "the glory of Allah," and "protecting the sacred name of Prophet Muhammad," this generally works like magic. The religious leadership in Pakistan has not learned to participate politically in a democratic way of governance and they seem a long way from the point where they could present themselves as a viable and long-term solution compared to the corrupt politicians and alleged rigged system of elections. The religious leaders have been granted multiple chances to demonstrate their thinking into action. However, their indifference to public grievances has led to mere disappointment. Despite having a platform of religious sermons, seminaries, and wide circulation of religious literature in the form of newspapers and periodicals, religious political leaders have always tried to underplay their role, relying either on the support of democratic autocratic governments or regimes led by the military. These patterns have been seen during and after the Zia-ul Haq regime where the ulema tried to contest elections and impose their own will, although this failed miserably. However, the religious scholars and religious political parties who have contested elections as a united front under the banner of the MMA have verified to the world that political achievement can only be obtained when differences are set aside and people work together on a unified agenda. Another reason for religious political parties' success in politics concerns the inflexibility of the religious leaders who tend to hold fewer democratic values regarding accepting the views of minorities and stick to the same jargon they have used since the conception of the party. This is one reason there has been limited success of religious leaders' acceptance in the political arena.

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