

Political Islam and State Power in Pakistan: Islamization Policies as a Tool for Political Legitimacy

Zahra Ejaz¹, Romaza Amjad², Adil Ahmad³

Abstract

This paper examines state-led Islamization policies as a key variable shaping the relationship between political Islam and state power in Pakistan. Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has experienced recurring efforts by political and military elites to employ Islamic ideology as a source of political legitimacy and social control. Focusing primarily on the period of General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization (1977–1988) and its long-term institutional impacts, the study analyzes how constitutional amendments, legal reforms, and religious symbolism were integrated into governance structures. The paper further explores how these policies influenced democratic development, civil–military relations, and the role of religious political parties. Using qualitative analysis of legal documents, policy decisions, and secondary literature, the study argues that Islamization in Pakistan functioned less as a grassroots religious movement and more as a top-down political strategy. The findings suggest that while state-led Islamization strengthened regime legitimacy in the short term, it produced enduring challenges for pluralism, minority rights, and democratic consolidation. By isolating Islamization policies as a focused variable, the paper contributes to broader debates on political Islam by highlighting the instrumentalization of religion within hybrid political regimes.

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Corresponding Author *

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Introduction

The interaction between religion and political authority has remained a central concern in political theory, particularly in states where religion plays a foundational role in national identity. Pakistan represents a distinctive case, as its creation was explicitly linked to Islamic identity. However, the extent to which Islam should shape governance has been subject to continuous debate. This article examines how Islamization policies were deployed as a mechanism of political legitimacy during the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq. Following the 1977 military coup, Zia faced a critical legitimacy gap due to the absence of electoral endorsement. In response, he initiated a comprehensive Islamization program aimed at restructuring state institutions and aligning them with Islamic principles. This study argues that Islamization was not merely an ideological undertaking but a strategic political response to authoritarian constraints. By embedding religious norms into legal and political systems, the regime sought to legitimize its authority and consolidate power. Politics and religion have longstanding relation with Pakistan. The history of Pakistan is correlated with religion. The Muslims of subcontinent succeeded to achieve self-determination while ensuring their distinctive identity as Muslims. Hence the ideology of Pakistan is based on Islam. However, the use of religion for politics is legacy of Pakistan. In the response of congress, all India Muslim League emerged as the sole representative party of Muslim community in the subcontinent. Muslim league

¹ Lecturer Political Science at Higher Education Department, Lahore, Government of the Punjab, Pakistan, Ph.D. Scholar. Zaraejaz863@gmail.com

², Lecturer in Philosophy at Kinnaird College for Women Lahore. romaza.amjad@kinnaird.edu.pk

³, Lecturer International Relations at Gift University, Gujranwala. adil.ahmad@gift.edu.pk

demand for separate homeland, on the base of Islam, clearly exposed in Allahabad address in 1930. Subsequently, this idea transformed into movement in 1940. Eventually the movement known as Pakistan movement resulted in the favors of Muslim, and a new state appeared on the map of world on the name of Islam. Since then religion – Islam has become leading force in political realm of the country. From the very beginning to today, Islam has lingered a central point in the political, constitutional, economic and social debates of the country. All the regimes of Pakistan, whether democratic and military rule, the use of Islamic card as Pakistan ideology is being manipulated by them for power politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discourse on Pakistan's Islamization reflects two dominant perspectives: ideological and instrumentalist. Early analyses interpreted Islamization as an attempt to align the state with Islamic principles. However, later research emphasizes its political utility. From the very beginning to today Pakistan has face many debacles which occur due to amalgamation religion with politics. Ullah (2013) maintains solid argument to discuss the driving forces of extremism in Pakistan in his book, "Vying for Allah's Vote: Understanding Islamic Parties, Political Violence, and Extremism in Pakistan". His firsthand knowledge about the country exposes the actual dilemma in the book. He has done great job to report the detail about Pakistan's Islamist parties, though they are relatively small in size, their role in politics and polices of Pakistan is obscure. Similarly, they affect the geopolitics of South Asia writ at large. Pakistan is a rare case where unresolved issues about relations of Islam to politics intersect with democratic development. Vying for Allah's Vote provides a valuable glimpse into how Islamic party politics in Pakistan has influenced the development of political platforms and how Islam and democracy are likely to impact one another. He develops a new typology for understanding and comparing the discourses put forth by these parties in order to assess what drives them and what separates the moderate from the extreme. A better understanding of the range of parties is critical for knowing how the US and other Western nations can engage states where Islamic political parties hold both political and moral authority. Pakistan's current democratic transition will hinge on how well Islamic parties contribute to civilian rule, shun violence, and mobilize support for political reform.

The role of Islam in past politics of Pakistan proved fatal, in the decades of Soviet- Afghan war Pakistan's policy of strategic depth blatantly failed when Islam is used for power politics .Religious extremism penetrated in the society in this era .On other hand, Musharraf conflicting and deviant policies towards radical groups made the state a hub of controversies and calamities. In the contrary, if the politics of one man show replace with well-organized democratic system, and Islam can be materialize to unite the heterogeneous society ,the future of the country will be safe. (Haqqani, 2004)

Appelbaum (2008) thesis in his study confirms that Pakistan and Israel both states use extremism to pursue self-interest in conflict and competition. Extremism can become threat for importer state itself if it is weak and poor state whereas it will be effective weapon if state has democracy and prosperity. Therefore, this paper scrutinizes that these rival states observes different level of extremism, because there is correlation if both equally use extremism as tool to counter

other one can affect more than other. The more political environment of one state bestowed with democracy and prosperity, the less level of extremism observed in this state and vice-versa.

Jalal, (1995) gives critical analysis of the complex relationship between religion and politics in Pakistan. Jalal argues that Pakistan was not originally envisioned as a purely theocratic state; rather, Islam was used as a flexible political tool during the independence movement and afterward by state elites to construct national identity and legitimacy. She emphasizes that the country has struggled to reconcile its Islamic identity with the demands of a modern nation-state, leading to tensions between democracy, military dominance, and religious forces. Her work also shows how historical events, regional conflicts, and global pressures have shaped the increasing role of religion in politics, often strengthening authoritarian tendencies and weakening democratic institutions. Overall, Jalal's scholarship challenges simplistic views of political Islam by presenting it as historically contested, politically constructed, and deeply intertwined with power dynamics in Pakistan.

Nasr) highlights his argument that Islam plays a central role in constructing state authority, especially in societies where institutional legitimacy is weak or contested. Nasr contends that in countries like Pakistan, religion is not merely a belief system but a powerful political resource used by the state to mobilize support, unify diverse populations, and compensate for fragile democratic or bureaucratic structures. His work shows how Islamic identity has been strategically employed by both civilian and military regimes to reinforce their legitimacy, particularly during periods of political instability. At the same time, Nasr emphasizes that this reliance on Islam can strengthen religious political movements and reshape the political landscape, sometimes challenging state authority itself. Overall, his scholarship situates political Islam within broader processes of state-building, demonstrating that religion becomes especially influential where formal institutions fail to fully command public trust and allegiance.

Recent literature on Islamization in Pakistan argues that such policies functioned as strategic tools of state power, particularly during periods of weak political legitimacy. Scholars note that Islamization under regimes like that of Zia-ul-Haq was used to strengthen regime legitimacy by presenting the state as a guardian of Islamic values, thereby appealing to public religious sentiment and justifying authoritarian rule (Khan, 2020). Shah, (2016) highlights, these policies helped incorporate religious elites (ulema) into the governance structure through institutions such as the Council of Islamic Ideology and Shariat courts, effectively aligning religious authority with state power. Furthermore, literature highlights that Islamization contributed to the marginalization of political opposition, as dissenting voices could be framed as un-Islamic or against the ideological foundations of the state, limiting democratic space (Mushtaq, Umber, Sarda, & Bibi, 2025). Overall, these studies demonstrate that Islamization in Pakistan was not merely ideological but a calculated political strategy to consolidate authority, co-opt religious actors, and suppress opposition within a fragile institutional context. Despite extensive literature, limited attention has been given to Islamization as a systematic legitimacy-building strategy within authoritarian frameworks. This article addresses this gap.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How has the Pakistani state used Islamization policies to consolidate political legitimacy during periods of weak democratic governance?

To what extent did Islamization under Zia-ul-Haq reshape the relationship between religion and state power in Pakistan?

Is Islamization in Pakistan primarily ideological, or has it functioned as a strategic political instrument for regime survival?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how Islamization policies have been used as a tool for political legitimacy in Pakistan. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on interpretation of political narratives, legal frameworks, and historical developments rather than numerical measurement. The data collection was made through Government documents, observational discussions etc. Secondary sources include data collection from books, journals, articles, newspapers, internet search, magazines, research papers and dissertations. The study primarily uses a historical-institutional approach, analyzing how state institutions and political actors have interacted with Islamic ideology over time. The regime of Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988) is taken as the central case of systematic Islamization.

3. Theoretical Framework

Political legitimacy refers to the belief that a government or political authority has the rightful power to rule and that citizens should obey its decisions. Different theorists explain legitimacy in various ways. Max Weber identified three types: traditional legitimacy based on customs, charismatic legitimacy based on a leader's personal appeal, and legal-rational legitimacy based on laws and institutions (Weber, 1978). Social contract thinkers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes argued that legitimacy comes from the consent of the governed, though they differed on the extent of authority and rights. In modern contexts, legitimacy is often linked to democratic practices such as free elections, effective governance, and the protection of rights. Overall, political legitimacy depends on a combination of public consent, legal authority, government performance, and moral justification. In authoritarian regimes, the absence of electoral legitimacy often necessitates alternative sources such as ideology or religion. In Pakistan, Islam serves as a central source of political legitimacy, shaping both the identity of the state and the authority of its governments. Since independence under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the country has defined itself as an Islamic republic, where rulers often justify their authority by aligning policies with Islamic principles. The Objectives Resolution of 1949 established that sovereignty ultimately belongs to Allah, providing a religious foundation for governance. Political leaders and institutions frequently invoke Islamic values to gain public support, strengthen national unity, and validate laws and policies. At the same time, the role of Islam in political legitimacy remains contested, as different groups interpret Islamic principles in diverse ways, leading to debates over democracy, lawmaking, and the proper relationship between religion and the state in Pakistan.

In Pakistan's political system, legitimacy is often constructed through the use of Islamic discourse, constitutional provisions, and religious symbolism, enabling governments to justify their authority in religious terms. However, political Islam in Pakistan is not uniform; it is interpreted differently by state institutions, religious parties, and civil society, leading to ongoing debates about the balance between democracy, Islamic law, and modern governance. Religion as a state instrument provides a significant theoretical framework for understanding political legitimacy in Pakistan, where Islam is often used by ruling elites to strengthen authority and maintain control. In this perspective, religion is not only a source of moral guidance but also a strategic tool employed by the state to unify the population, justify policies, and counter political opposition. Historical regimes, particularly under leaders like Zia-ul-Haq, actively institutionalized Islamization policies to legitimize their rule and consolidate power. Through constitutional provisions, legal reforms, and public rhetoric, the state invokes Islamic identity to foster national cohesion and reinforce its legitimacy. However, this instrumental use of religion remains contested, as critics argue that it can politicize faith, marginalize minority groups, and create tensions between democratic principles and religious authority in Pakistan politics.

Islam and Politics in Pakistan's Earlier Years

The legacy to use religion in politics initiated soon after the independence. The maiden problem of Pakistan was to decide the political structure whether secular or Islamic. The Muslims were already divided into two groups while independence movement, the one who advocated need of separate homeland for practicing Islamic values freely, and the others argued that the idea of Pakistan for Islam is mere political stunt. Conversely, at the very outset of Pakistan the former, followers of Jinnah, wanted to establish a type of regime where all ethno-cultural societies enjoyed equal rights beyond any biasness of religion whereas the latter, follower of Islamist fundamentalist groups, raised their voice for making Pakistan an Islamic state. This was very ironical situation, both the parties were playing Islamic card for politics in one or another way. In 2003, Jones argues on the most crucial issue of newly born state, what should be the role of Islam in state, that Mohammed Ali Jinnah's concept of two-nation theory based on Islam was to establish a separate Muslim state for the safeguard of Muslim who were manipulated by Hindu majority, and Islam was driving force to mobilize subjugated Muslim community in sub-continent. According to Anita M. Weiss Jinnah envisioned a moderate, progressive and western-oriented country where religious minorities would enjoy the same rights and privileges as Muslims. In his inaugural address as Pakistan's first leader in August 1947, Jinnah said that the questions of religion and religiosity would diminish, and that, "in course of time Hindus would ease to be Hindus and Muslims would ease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state" (Naim, 1979).

The Pakistanis, who assumed this version of two nation theory and Jinnah's meaning of Pakistan for Islam, they wanted to make Pakistan a moderate state and tolerate society based on Islamic values without making a theocratic state. Some Pakistani, who believed the strict version of two nation theory, demanded a full-fledged Islamic state. Regardless, various efforts done by historian, it is still conundrum to define Jinnah's real design for Pakistan (Jeffrelot, 2004).

This ideological confusion engulfed Pakistan in its earlier years. The Ulema's demand for Islamic constitution to make Pakistan Islamic state, and Muslim League leadership agitation due to absence of unanimity on one sided shariah law imposition in diverse society, was initial tussle between political leaders and religious clerics. Ulema's demand for Islamic state in other words was endeavor to share political power (Weiss, 1986). Meanwhile, the use of religion in politics started in Pakistan, and fundamental Islamic forces which were active against Pakistan movement came at political forefront in Pakistan.

1. The impacts of Religious Activism in the 1956 Constitution

Pakistan adopted its first constitution after nine years debate and struggle between ML leadership and religious fundamentalists to decide its nature. The delay in constitution making occurred due to alliance between traditional religious leaders and fundamentalists to influence the institutional role of Islam within state. Although, the decade of 1950 overwhelmed with religious groups pressure for Islamization, the 1956 constitution was neither based on theocracy nor secularism. Henceforth, Religious forces had suppressed by state after the crackdown of Anti-Ahmadi movement, the reflection of religion was given to constitution in order to satisfy the demands of radical Islamic clerics. The constitution ensured some Islamic provisions that is President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan would be Muslim, "no Law would be passed against the teachings of Quran and Sunnah and the existing laws would be made Islamic in character" (Callard, 1957). Jaffrelot argues, neither the Objectives Resolution nor the Talimat-i-Islamia Council recommendations regarding Islamic teaching were taken into account, and furthermore, article 18 of the Constitution guaranteed "freedom to profess, practice and propagate any religion and the right to establish, maintain and manage religious institutions". In this way the first constitution had mixed nature, the name of state, formation of law according to Islam and compulsion for head of state to be Muslim assure that the constitution was not secular, under these provisions minorities could not enjoy same right as the Muslims. Whereas, Non-Muslims allowed to follow their religion freely, it clearly exposed that the nature of document was not theocratic. Thus, it was a balanced and moderate document to satisfy all sections of the country, the traditionalists, conservative religious and liberal democratic. Apparently this constitution showed less role of religion in politics, but it confirms to framers of the constitution that Islam has irrefutable role in politics and state affairs as objective resolution added as preamble later on the demand of religious forces.

2. The Glimpse of Religion and Politics in Ayub Khan Era

General Ayub Khan the first military dictator considered as modernist politician. After The 1958 military coup Ayub Khan rose up against ulema publically, he addressed Ulama of Deobandi madrasa in May 1959 at Tandi Allahyar in Sindh, Islam was a "progressive religion" but a great distance had come to separate religion and life. He stressed on ulama to avoid presenting Islam as set of dogmatic beliefs and practice and to stop presenting a picture of ardent Muslim as primitive man who stay away from modern way of life and progress. Rather it is duty of ulema to mire on their sectarian squabble and help people to unite on the base of shared beliefs of religion. In this way he called the ulema for playing their role in national development to provide spiritual insight

among masses through religious teaching, but kept them away from politics (zaman, 1985). Jaffrelot said Ayub Khan chose the hard line to mitigate the role of ulema in politics; he banned JI along with other parties in 1958, confiscated its assets, twice arrested Maududi, and offered him presidency of Bahawalpur University in order to quit from politics. He introduced reformed practices of Islam through his Muslim Family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) on 15 July 1961. He gave second constitution in 1962 which was contrary to 1956 constitution in various aspects, firstly it based on controlled democracy, a presidential form of government, some Islamic provision which were in line with previous constitution added in this document, but the name of country Islamic Republic of Pakistan was replaced with Republic of Pakistan, later on the name of country restored as Islamic Republic of Pakistan under the pressure of religious forces. Conversely, this constitution less involved in Islamic characters in actual sense of the term (Ziring, 1971). It is quite clear that Ayub Khan's vision close to secular notions, he did not want to give chance to those who could use religion for politics. Though it was herculean task to curtail religious forces to influence the state policies, he struggled to marginalize the role of ulama in politics. While discussing the role of Islam in Pakistan's politics in his book *Friends not Masters*, he wrote: "Any attempt at interpreting the tenets of Islam and adapting the laws to conform to the requirements of the time is a signal for the ulama to raise the slogan of heresy" (Khan, 1967). He established Council of Islamic Ideology, a type of Islamic Research Institute, for taking advice and opinion of ulema on legal and constitutional issues. This might be to neutralize the religious forces and ulama who wanted their share in the country's legal and political system. On the other hand, Ayub Khan was influenced by Iqbal in his approach towards Ijtihad and the need of Ijma (consensus) therefore he expected from ulema to perform in this domain. He established Islamic Research Institute for this purpose and urged ulema to serve in this institute instead of state institutes. The religious forces of Pakistan including ulema and Pirs were not satisfied with Ayub Khan's secular policies. They turned against him, because his policies were not serving their cause to enjoy power and monopoly in political realm. For Ayub Khan, religion and politics have distinctive status; the essences of both can be enjoyed and preserved, if not mixed together. As a western educated and liberal statesman, he was neither religious nor irreligious (Abbas, 2005). He just wanted to combat the dogmatism of the religious leaders who had increased power due to their influence over the common people and used this power for political gains.

- **State Control of Islam and Opposition from Religious Groups**

Ayub Khan waged the war with clerics to curb their role in politics as well as to abate the power of his potential rivals. Since the beginning of Pakistan there were only religious groups stand against ruling elite as powerful influential entities. The ulema and Pirs were only threat to despotic government of Ayub Khan, as a western educated progressive leader, he adopted strict policies against religious forces. Shaikh (2018) argues that Ayub's campaign to ease the burden of Islam and encourage a more secular discourse had extracted a heavy price from his critics among the ulama and their Islamist allies. Ayub Khan's secular notion was direct threat to JI whose exponent was struggling for Islamization of the state. JI allied with other religious group to counter Ayub Khan on political fronts. They raised their voice against Ayub military regime on the issue of family planning, family laws ordinance and westernization of state. They called his government anti-Islamic, secular and anti-Allah, eventually conservative chunk turned against him. As a result Ayub Khan did not confront them on this point, because they succeeded to manipulate the masses.

On the other hand Ayub khan tried to reconcile with Pirs for retaining his power. Indeed, it was difficult to halt the religious hard-liners. Ayub khan initiated a bold step to curtail the politicization of ulema and Pirs. Despite uprising of religious forces against library policies of Ayub khan, the role of religion was at length the most part of his military rule.

3. The Era of Tactical alliance with Religion

After the decay of Ayub khan military rule, from Yayha Khan to Zia-ul-Haq military regime the dimensions changed in the case of religio-political nexus. Yayha Khan, Z.A. Bhutto and Zia played the card of Islamization for legitimize their political career. In this era, the restoration of Islamic forces altered the entire dynamics of future political culture of Pakistan. But the dynamics of the new political landscape had also become more complex and the outcome of any struggle for supremacy less certain. At one level Islamic parties stood to benefit from a climate in which answers to the national predicament were being sought in Islam. Indeed, they gave Islamist movements more room to manoeuvre than any government or state leader had ever allowed them.

- **Yayha Khan and the JI: The First Association between Islamists and the Military**

In the decade of late 1960s, the country engulfed with many crises, especially East Pakistan grievances and insecurities were at peak, Ayub khan remained fail to sustain his power and vanish the dark clouds of identity crisis. This was merely a short distance from the claim that secularism itself was to blame for the crisis. The rise of Bangali nationalism and ethnic division was strident blow on Two Nation theory. The founding ideology of Pakistan was disappearing; the people of East Pakistan had nurtured the dissatisfaction from their decision to follow Jinnah, even they were thinking about their breakup (zaman, 2018). Yayha Khan, the second ruler from military background adopted totally divergent policy from his successor Ayub Khan, in order to resolve issue of identity crisis and tussle between East and West Pakistan, he asked for the support of fundamentalists. Thus efforts were done to reconciliation between Islam and nationalism by Yayha khan to strengthen the close ties and co-operation between two wings (Shaikh, 2018). The spokesperson of Yayha khan met with JI leadership for assistance to assemble Yahya's regime. Maududi accepted alliance with Yayha and his lieutenants, Mian Tufayl, concluded the crux of meeting on these words, that Yayha Khan was a "champion of Islam", that the Legal Framework Order in preparation would make Pakistan an Islamic state and that power would eventually fall to the JI (Nasr, 1994). JI used political activism of Islami Jami'at-i Tulabah (IJT), a student wing created by JI, to halt the newly emerging political powers in both wings, and helped Yayha to command his regime.

Unfortunately, the first alliance between military and Islamist organizations did not prove fruitful rather the results occurred unlikely. Military and religious forces were fighting together on two fronts, first, to counter the growing power of Z.A.Bhutto from West Pakistan, and second, to stop insurgency from East Pakistan. But on both fronts they had to face retreat, such as, Bengalis succeed to get separation from Pakistan, and Pakistan People's party achieved distinguish position in first general elections and came in power in the west Pakistan. On the contrary, the religious parties, JI, the JUI and the JUP could not gain 14 percent of vote. Yet, the results of election closed the chapter of Islamists movement and exposed the trend in masses to avoid fundamentalism, PPP faced tough competition from JUI and National Awami party (NAP) in two provinces Baluchistan

and NWFP (now Khyber Pakhunkhwa). Both parties succeeded to make coalition Government in NWFP. It was first time in the history of politics when Islamic party thrived to seek government, thought in alliance (Choudhury, 1988). Hence, this coalition government of JUI and NAP had very short span and weak spine, and ended in few months. Although the results of first general election showed that religious party (JUI) had influence in Pakhtun region, the entire results concluded that the longstanding demand of Islamization was mere political stunt of so-called ulema, theocracy did not priority of masses at all. But the use of Islam for political cause took new turn in next decades which was more alarming for state and society. As the history of Pakistan filled with paradoxes, the secular party (PPP) and his liberal leader (Z.A. Bhutto) during his years of power also exploited Islam for political ends.

4. Z.A. Bhutto Populist Slogans and Islamic Symbolism of Pakistan People's Party

Z.A. Bhutto the first democratically elected prime minister of Pakistan, got popularity in West Pakistan through proclaiming doctrine of Islamic socialism. Z.A. Bhutto took three point slogans to mobilize the masses for PPP, "Islam is our faith. Democracy is our polity. Socialism is our economy" (Bhutto, 1969). He advocated that socialism is similar to Islam in socioeconomic sector and has little differences with Islam in other fields of life. Bhutto became popular leader among masses in his short span of political struggle because his slogan of Islamic socialism was safe compromise and judicious solution to determine position of religion in politics. The people of Pakistan were satisfied to have a moderate intellectual leader and had no question for Islam. But it was difficult to ignore religious forces which already had mobilized against Bhutto in Yahya's era. Conservative religious groups did not consider Islamic socialism apt system for Pakistan. Many prominent religious personalities went against Bhutto and publicized fatwa (zaman, 2018). On the other hand it was high time to revive state identity when one part already had departed on the grounds of identity crisis, ethnic differences, and economic exploitation. As a result, Z.A. Bhutto compressed the disposition of this new Pakistan as Islamic republic of Pakistan and directed the country towards more clear affinity with Islam and, with Islamic world. He tried to retrieve Islam more efficiently than any leader before him to do so in internal and external context. He did so consciously because break up from eastern wing made the situation more vital to restore Islam (Shaikh, 2018). Nevertheless the role of religion was nothing to do in fall of Dhaka, but Pakistan had no other identity choice than Islam. Ironically this time Islam was more significant tool to unite the nation than ever the foundation of Islamic Republic of Pakistan's national identity. Islam had now become an essential defense mechanism at a time when an existential anxiety drifted. After taking office, Bhutto played the Islamic card to pacify the Islamists, starting with the JI. Bhutto tried hard to strengthen his Islamic credential. He gave 1973 constitution with full-stocked Islamic provisions, though some were in line with last two constitutions. Bhutto signaled his supposed affinities with the religion that confirmed the new-found importance of Islam in the conduct of public affairs. His ruling PPP openly proclaimed the power of 'Islamic socialism' to drive its populist programme and, perhaps taking a page out of Ayub's book, moved quickly to forge alliances with various local Pirs—although unlike Ayub he showed little inclination to challenge the Islamists by seeking to exercise a monopoly over public expressions of Islam.

- **Uprising of Religio-Political Parties against Bhutto's Rule**

The religious parties made proposals to the masses within the label of religion and doomed other parties for deceiving the religious cause. But as already mentioned all parties independent of their philosophies claimed that they were committed to the cause of Islam. No party was able to manage a complete separation between religion and politics and this was primarily because of the influence applied by the ulama that Islam proceeded to stay within the frontline of the politics in Pakistan.

Although Bhutto chased the route began by Ayub Khan, to take Islam under state control through his policy of nationalization, deviating from his predecessor, he implemented an Islamisation policy that reached its height after the 1977 election. Friday declared as public holiday. Even Bhutto announced the arrangement of sharia, which would be ensured prohibition of Alcoholic drinking, dancing and gambling, in order to pacify the JI demonstrators who protested against the substantial fraud he had scored in 1977 general elections. Despite of all efforts to use religion in public policy to win the support of the religious segment of the country, Bhutto failed to sustain his power and position. Nine opposition parties including the religious parties, Jamat-i-Islami was on the forefront of these religious opposition parties, formed an alliance, Pakistan National Alliance (PNA). This alliance adopted an Islamic inspired platform called Nizam-i-Mustafa (Order of the Holy Prophet SAW). The PNA immediately denounced the election and termed the results fake and unacceptable. It boycotted the provincial elections, demanded for Bhutto's resignation and holding of new election. Protests over the results of election started in Karachi quickly spread across the country. Bhutto denied the allegations of rigging and arrested the opposition parties', including the Jamat-i-Islami, members which further aggravated the tense situation. JI along with other parties conducted street protest and started civil disobedience. The cleavage between government and opposition was deepening. The demands for democratic and constitutional measures transformed into an Islamic social movement under the title of Nizam-I Mustafa (Nasr, 1994).

Detecting the gravity of the situation Bhutto agreed to negotiation and reconciliation with religious parties. After two days of his meeting with Maududi, Bhutto proclaimed that, in the light of the demands of Nizam-i-Mustafa, the sharia was now "the law of the country" (Gaborieau, 2004). However, strongly leftist and secular stance of PPP was soon changed significantly towards promoting Islam as a social system and a political ideology. Gradually all the significant issues related to public policy were eventually dressed in religious color. In Short, soon after, Islam became the legitimizing tool for all political activities. The PPP government resorted to Islamic rhetoric and appeal to Islamic justifications as key guiding factors for law and decision-making (Nasr, 2001). Rather the sharp change in Bhutto's stance that religion becoming a key factor in country's political discourse was the conditions under which Bhutto assumed power, yet , his politicization of Islam in 1977 arranged the groundwork for Zia, whose rule in this domain as in others, differed from the previous regimes more in nature than in degree. In other words, Bhutto's agreement with religion on political front, either for reviving and rejuvenating national identity or for countering his political opponents, reinforced the supremacy of religion for the following military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. It can be concluded that seeds of a lethal alliance between religious forces and military is found in Bhutto's policy shifts.

Zia's Version of Islamisation and Politics of Legitimacy

Bhutto-PNA Negotiations did not work at all therefore; escalating social unrest once again prompted the military to intervene, army chief General Zia Ul-Haq seized martial law. Zia's promise of holding "free and fair" elections within ninety days proved to be another prolonged interlude of dictatorship in the history of Pakistan. Bhutto was charged with conspiracy to commit murder, and following a highly questionable legal process, he was hanged in April 1979. After six years of Bhutto's rule the army, once again, had become the only symbol of honesty and integrity (Abidi, 1988). His regime possessed all the characteristics of military regimes i.e., the perpetuation of hegemony of the military as a major share-holder in the power-structure. But in order to retain the power Zia's regime greatly applied quite a different strategy and initiated the moves towards application of Shariah in the country. In fact Zia had realized that the slogan of Roti, Kapra aur Makan [Bread, Clothing and Shelter] had not been fulfilled by the Bhutto's regime as a result of which the PNA had been able to attract the masses towards its platform. The PNA had no political agenda to convince the masses for opposing Bhutto except the slogan of Nizam-i-Mustafa (System of the Holy Prophet). Zia was a keen observer of the scene and after having usurped the power from a democratic government, he adopted a strategy through which he could seek the support of the PNA, the Ulama and masses of the country. Zia knew that it was the slogan of Nizam-i-Mustafa which could please the Ulama and religious parties as well as provide him with an umbrella to rule. This was high time to introduce such policies which really appealed to the religious sentiments of the masses (Shah, & Panhwar, 2014).

Thus, the grounds of Zia's Islamisation policy were obvious even before he took Power in 1977. The year before, immediately after he became COAS, he changed the motto of the army, replacing Jinnah's formula, "Faith, Unity, Discipline" with "Iman, Taqwa, Jihad-f-sibilillah (Faith, Piety, holy war) in the name of god" (Fair, 2014).

Zia adopted the shrewd strategy of Islamization to mitigate PPP popularity as well as to control the intensity of PNA's movement. Abbas stated that the promise of free and fair election soon transformed to the promise of accountability, but lurking behind the slogan of accountability was that of the Islamization of Pakistan, and Zia effort to legitimize his coup. Zia avowed in his first address to nation, after seizing power from PPP, on July 5, 1977. "Pakistan, which was created in the name of Allah, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of [the] Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country" (Richter, 1979).

1. Islamisation Policy of Zia and the Role of religious parties

After assuming the power, Zia-ul-Haq criticized the politicians for not taking any concrete steps to Islamize the political, social and legal systems of the state (Kaushik, 1993). He, therefore, in order to pretend his sincerity with the cause of Islam, took several notable measures with regard to introduce an Islamic system in Pakistan. These measures included contacts and consultation with religious scholars – ulama, promulgating the 'Hudood Ordinance', establishing the Shariah Court, setting up shariah benches in the supreme court, setting up the Qazi courts, steps towards developing an Islamic economic system through reforms in banking sector, founding International Islamic University Islamabad, lawmaking regarding Ahmadis, enforcing 'Shariah Ordinance' in 1988, reforms in information and entertainment media and so called making a 'favorable atmosphere' in which people could live their life in accordance with the injunctions of Qur'an and Sunnah.

Zia's era was obvious glimpse of Islam in politics. His introduction of Hudood Ordinance and its provision of the blasphemy as a capital crime were hallmark of his religious temperament and affinity with JI. His conservative ideology and narrow minded approach towards Islam continued until his death in August 1988 (Nasr, 2001).

It was the high time for Jamat-i-Islami to fulfill its long standing wish to acquire place in administrative institutions of the state, therefore, Mian Tufail, successor of Maududi as party's Amir, despite the internal disagreement, decided to support Zia's rule and his Islamization process instead insistence on the civilian rule. Eventually, cabinet including other national institutions, civil bureaucracy, courts and army, filled with Right Islamists. AS JUI and JI, were two limelight religious parties in the politics of Pakistan. The former, to some extent had lost popularity among masses at the end of Bhutto regime because the party had changed its Islamist rhetoric and allied with socialist policies of PPP. Resultantly, earned criticism from fanatic followers and termed as sarcastically pragmatic, opportunist and hypocritical by many (Pirzada, 2000). However, the decade of 1980s was considered as the zenith and prime time of Jamat-i-Islami. During Soviet-Afghan War JI was playing major role on the call of Zia's Afghan Jihad policy. In this period religious parties were at mainstream in politics, especially JI was at apex to influence in the official circles of the state. Unlike JI, JUI kept away from military rule and endeavored to restore the civilian rule. Henceforth, the Afghan Jihad changed the entire dynamics of Pakistan politics and society. As a result, Zia manipulated the Muslim for Jihad and promoted Deobandi Madras system. JUI stood parallel to JI in participation of so called "Holy War", because the promotion of madras system and jihad was its ideological interest. The Jihadi campaign against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan which was funded by Saudi Arabia and USA led to the establishment of hundreds of Deobandi madras (religious seminaries) throughout the Pakhtun region in Pakistan. Furthermore, the traditional role of ulema in Pakistan, particular in Pakhtun society, changed drastically that was confined to mosque, had turned to politics. The religious clerics, for political motives, started to control religion rather than be controlled by it (Ahmed, 2004). Madrassah became as a franchise and the alim as an entrepreneur in the field of indorsing extremism. Thus, it is asserted that the groundwork between the military and the religious right founded by Yayha Khan, and later on institutionalized by Zia.

2. The critical Appraisal of Zia Regime

O! Religion what crimes have been committed in thy name! (Emma Goldman)

The process of Islamization was the most cynical attempt committed by the military dictator Zia who manipulated the religion for his self-interest. The religion used as tool in order to consolidate and prolong his illegal rule over the country. The alienation and hostility between religious parties and military turned into close proximity. It was strategic alliance between the two, the religious parties under the flag of PNA were supporting military Dictator to grab a share of power as they had longstanding hunger for power, and wanted to prevent Bhutto's return. As in 1994, Nasr explains, Zia was offering "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." However, Ayub Khan's modernist discourse of Islam and his efforts to ease the York stick of the orthodox traditions lasted in the influence of Zia Islamization. Resultantly, his regime paved the way for extremist and conservative Islamist groups to prompt an upsurge of Islamist activism, particularly

through the jihad in Afghanistan. The rise of political Islam during Zia regime also resulted in the sectarian conflicts and controversies (Nasr, 2000). Shia and Sunni ulama were at daggers drawn with one another on the question as to which interpretation of shariah would be the basis of public policy.

Zia's Islamisation policy, unparalleled since the birth of Pakistan, had manifold and sometimes unintended consequences on Pakistani society. Although his religious fervor, dogmatic religious approach and use of Islam as instrument for gaining the legitimacy succeeded at initial stage of his rule, and hailed by the ulama, religio-political parties and public at large, but later on his stringent Hudood ordinance, the tightening of the Blasphemy Law, vehement transformation in The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) evoked a significant extremist agenda in the state which eventually distorted into violence and chaos in the society. The sentiment of intolerance and act of discrimination aroused against minorities and women in the influence of Zia's myopic interpretation of Islam. As his revival of separate electorates was direct target of discrimination towards minorities.

So far as, the track of religion in politics has dated back in the history of Pakistan, indeed, the religion was motivation, identity maker and driving force to achieve self-determination for the Muslims of the subcontinent. However, Jinnah, the leader of Pakistan movement and founding father of Pakistan was more inclined towards secular notions, Islam for him a safe and strong tool for formulation national identity in the sub-continent. Accordingly, the precedents of Jinnah also had their reasons to trap secularism with Islamic characteristics. The trauma of the 1971 Partition nurtured the aggravating link to Islam as Jinnah intended it for national identity. But in the late 1970s Zia changed the route of religion from national cause to his personal inclinations of legitimization his illegal rule. In this way, the complex phenomenon of religious extremism and use of Islam for vested interest initiated.]

The Legacy of Religion in Politics- the Post Zia era

The end of the regime of Zia-ul-Haq in 1988 did not mark the end of Islamization in Pakistan; rather, it signaled the beginning of a new phase in which religion remained deeply embedded within the political and institutional framework of the state. The policies introduced during Zia's rule had already transformed legal systems, educational institutions, and political discourse, making Islam an enduring source of political legitimacy. In the post-Zia period, civilian governments, including those led by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, faced structural constraints that limited their ability to reverse Islamization. Instead of dismantling these policies, they often engaged with religious narratives to maintain political support and avoid confrontation with religious groups. This reflected a broader political reality: Islam had become an integral part of state legitimacy, and opposing it carried significant political risks. During the 1990s, efforts such as the proposed enforcement of Sharia-based governance under Nawaz Sharif demonstrated that Islamization could still be mobilized as a political tool, even within democratic settings. At the same time, religious political parties and groups gained increased visibility and influence, shaping public discourse and policy debates. Under military rule once again, Pervez Musharraf attempted to reframe the role of Islam through the concept of "enlightened moderation." However, rather than removing religion from politics, this approach sought to reinterpret it in a way that aligned with global expectations while

maintaining domestic legitimacy. This illustrates how deeply the link between religion entrenched and state power had become. In more recent years, particularly during the leadership of Imran Khan, Islamic rhetoric has continued to play a central role in political narratives. The emphasis on the idea of an “Islamic welfare state” reflects the ongoing importance of religion as a source of moral authority and political legitimacy. Overall, the post-Zia era reveals that Islamization created a lasting political structure that subsequent governments—civilian and military alike—have adapted rather than dismantled. Religion has remained a powerful and flexible instrument in Pakistani politics, shaping governance, public expectations, and state identity. The legacy of Islamization, therefore, is not confined to a single regime but continues to define the contours of political power in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of political Islam and state power in Pakistan demonstrates that Islamization has functioned not merely as an ideological project, but as a strategic instrument for political legitimacy. Throughout Pakistan’s history, especially under the rule of Zia-ul-Haq, Islamization policies were systematically employed to justify authority, consolidate power, and suppress political opposition. By embedding Islamic provisions into legal and constitutional frameworks, the state was able to present itself as the guardian of religious identity, thereby strengthening its claim to legitimacy among the populace. Comparatively, even earlier leaders such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto utilized selective Islamic measures to appeal to public sentiment, highlighting that the use of religion in politics predates formal Islamization policies. This continuity suggests that Islam has remained a flexible and powerful political resource, adaptable to both civilian and military regimes. However, the long-term consequences of these policies have been complex. While Islamization may have provided short-term political legitimacy, it also contributed to institutional transformations, legal ambiguities, and social divisions, particularly affecting minority rights, gender equality, and sectarian harmony. The entrenchment of religion within state structures has made it increasingly difficult to disentangle political authority from religious justification. In contemporary Pakistan, traces of Islamization continue to shape political discourse and governance, as seen during the leadership of Imran Khan. This persistence indicates that political Islam remains a central component of legitimacy, even in evolving democratic contexts. In conclusion, Pakistan’s experience illustrates that Islamization, while effective as a short-term legitimizing strategy, carries enduring implications for state institutions and society. It highlights the broader challenge faced by states where religion and politics intersect: balancing ideological identity with inclusive governance and democratic stability.

Recommendations

1. The state should adopt a balanced approach that separates political legitimacy from the instrumental use of religion.
2. It is recommended that policymakers refrain from exploiting Islamic narratives for short-term political gains.
3. The government should ensure that Islamic principles are applied in a just and inclusive manner, protecting minority rights.
4. There is a need to reform Islamization laws, particularly those introduced during the era of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, to align them with modern human rights standards.

5. The state should promote democratic legitimacy through transparency, accountability, and rule of law rather than relying on religious symbolism.
6. It is essential to strengthen educational institutions to encourage critical thinking about religion and politics.
7. Religious institutions and political actors should be clearly separated to prevent the politicization of faith.
8. The government must take steps to reduce sectarian divisions by promoting interfaith harmony and tolerance.
9. There should be greater judicial oversight to ensure that religious laws are not misused for political or personal purposes.
10. Policymakers are encouraged to engage moderate religious scholars in shaping policies that reflect both Islamic values and democratic norms.

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