

Religious Extremism and Power Politics in Pakistan: A Conceptual Study

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ABSTRACT

This Paper has explained the nature of religious extremism and its connection with power politics in the political culture of Pakistan. Extremism in general and religious extremism in particular has become prevalent challenge of contemporary age, and Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries in this regard. This study has framed in order to grasp the conceptual clarity of this looming large phenomenon. The trends of religious extremism and its connection with power politics in Pakistan has also discussed through the lens of realism paradigm. It result has drawn how extremists use religion for politics, the cause of Islam is mere slogan, and behind the curtain real motives are power and authority. This study has analyzed the above phenomenon through the lens of Realism, Rational Choice Theory and Cost-Benefit analysis. In real politik, the basic struggle is to pursue self-interest, and self-interest translated into the language of politics as quest for power. However, it has concluded in this literature, whenever extremist agenda upraised for religious cause, the real motives linked with power politics and self-interest instead of serving religion. The paradoxical political history of Pakistan is filled with contradictions, episodic alliance and non-alliance with religious extremists to pursue power politics in the realm of domestic and international politics which give rise to intolerance extremism, terrorism and radicalization in the society. The cost-benefit analysis has concluded the state has to pay heavy cost in term of sustain power within and outside the country.

Keywords: Extremism, Terrorism, Radicalization, Realism, Power Politics, Religious Extremism

INTRODUCTION

It is pertinent to elaborate term extremism and religious extremism to understand it as a strategy for power politics at academic level. Extremism in general and religious extremism particular has become widespread global issue. It is being used as a tool to cut the world communities into various sub groups which are radical in nature, their activities and practices create chaos and anarchy in the society. Therefore, extremism has become hot topic to discuss, and complicated to grasp its gravity. As extremism is a complex phenomenon, it has defined by many researchers and analysts, and various interpretations and dimensions revealed by them. Mostly the term extremism intermingled with radicalization and terrorism whereas these

three terms have distinctive meanings. Even though these three terms are related with one another, having different meanings. Extremism is mindset which urges radical insight, and terrorism is practice of this mindset.

Origin and Etymology of Extremism

The modern world poses serious threats of extremism¹ and terrorism², which in fact, have potentially endangered the international and regional peace and security. The phenomenon of extremism is as old as recorded human history, but it rejuvenated as a corrosive political and religious extremism after the event of September 11, 2001 in the United States.

Khalid (2014) illustrates the extremists are those who are diverted from accepted social-political norms and standards, use illegitimate means and cohesive strategies to meet their extreme social-political views. The extremists either individual or group overwhelm with divergent dogmas, moral values and convictions, and try to impel on others regardless respecting others concerns.

The term extremism is further translated into two aspects, violent and non-violent extremism. Non-violent extremism is state of without political will of extremists who do not active to materialize their thoughts into actions whereas violent extremism is defined as the beliefs and actions of people who advocate or use violence to achieve certain ideological, religious, or political goals. This includes terrorism, sectarian violence, genocide, and communal riots. Almost all forms of violent extremism, regardless of their motivation, seek change through fear and threats rather than a constructive democratic process.

Definitional Dilemma between Extremism and Radicalization

Table 1

This table Indicates Difference between Extremism and Radicalization

Radicalization	Extremism
Radicalization is fanatic and fundamental socio-political approach	Extremism can be defined as views, beliefs, feelings, and strategies of an individual or groups deviated from existing norms
Radicalism as a political doctrine is far away from religiosity rather radical political movements are striving for liberal reforms such as humanism, individualism, freedom, collective emancipation, universal suffrage and the welfare state.	Extremists use religion, fear and terror in order to justify and achieve their self-centered political or social change
Radicalization is a process and can be first step which may leads to an individual and group towards extremism	Extremism is an radical insight and use of illegitimate means of power to pursue deviated vicious goals

¹ The fact of someone having beliefs that most people think are unreasonable and unacceptable:
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org>

² (Threats of) Violent action for political purposes: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>

Radical views cannot always be translated into extremism and violent extremism	The extremist agenda by no means and ways can be translated into action without violence
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It is quite evident from above discourse on the concept of radicalization and extremism that both are different concepts. All radicals are not extremists, but it is first step to go forward extremism or violent extremism.

Various Faces of Extremism

Mainly two types of extremism are; violent and non-violent extremism, but on the base of the nature of ideology which a group or an individual possesses, and labeled as an extremism further categorized it in multi facet dimensions. In 2011, Ahmar defines that extremism is manifested in five different forms:

- Religious extremism
- Sectarian extremism
- Ethnic extremism
- Racial extremism
- Gender extremism

The modern world is experiencing the manifestation of all versions of extremism, but this research only focus on issue of religious extremism.

Religious Extremism Phenomenon of 21st Century

Among all types of extremism, religious extremism is considered one of the most influential and useful to seek political will. While religion is the sharp tool, to be used to polarize society and exploit for desired goals, therefore, religious extremism is rampant phenomenon in the 21st century. Extremism is based on the concept of exclusivism which makes extremists think that they are different from others on cultural, linguistic, ethnic or sub-religious grounds and use violence in expressing their identity and pursuing their ideological, social, economic and political objectives. Religious extremism is not a new phenomenon as it has existed in its diversified forms throughout the world history. Various Christian denominations, orthodox Buddhist groups and Hindu extremists have existed since long. Moreover, fundamentalism has been defined as strict adherence to the basic and traditional views of any particular religion or it is a direct opposition of modernization.

The recent alarming situation in the context of religious extremism occurred in the influence of three events that happened within months of one another in 1979 still exert a commanding influence in regions on the fault lines of today's most consequential ideological and sectarian conflicts. The Iranian Revolution, the siege of Mecca's Grand Mosque, and the Soviet Union's invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. Each event among all became cause of exclusive and inclusive conflict, inclusive conflict between Shia and Sunni, and exclusive conflict among other religions like hostility in Hindus, Muslims and Christianity. As 21st century is being marked the watersheds in the evolution of Islamist extremism. The inescapable conclusion is that violence and chaos in name of religious doctrine is common not only in south Asia but also in the west. After United States war on terror, the progress in religious extremist is widespread and evident such as Trump's America first slogan, the Muslims plight in India under devote Modi government,

and Islam phobia in the west. Hence religious extremism is prevalent throughout the world. Similarly Pakistan is one of the vulnerable states who drive Islamist extremism and violence.

Religious Extremism in Pakistan

Pakistan in terms of extremism is facing all versions of extremism like ethnic, gender, political and religious extremism. All types of extremism in Pakistan lead towards religious extremism. The history of religious extremism is as old as the history of Pakistan itself. The country engulfed with the wrath of extremism in the name of Islam from the very beginning of the state emergence on the comity of the world. The fruit of religious extremism is reaping in recent decades in the form of violence and terrorism.

Pakistan is one of the countries in the world that is experiencing severe forms of extremist violence such as target killings and suicidal attacks. Extremist militant organizations of all shapes and sizes have put a threat on the democratic environment of the country through their flawed militant ideology of Islam. The country has failed to achieve stability in its multi-dimensional meaning and violent extremism has not only affected the law and order situation of the state but it has also disturbed the business and other economic activities taking place in the country (Hussain, 2012).

Javaid (2011) has primarily focused on the impact of such religious extremism, fundamentalism and militancy on the society as a whole and people belonging to different religions in Pakistan.

Ever since its independence, Pakistan is a developing country and striving hard to compete with the rest of the world. There is not only one factor that is not letting the economy experience rapid growth rates but frequently changing governments, mismanagement and underutilization of resources, failure of governance, security break down and worldwide recession has catastrophically influenced the economy of Pakistan. In addition to these factors, extremist and religious violence is one factor that is playing a negative role in the economic growth and development of the country. Pakistan is a country with a much fragmented society in terms of religious, regional and national identities. The total population is divided on economic, religious, regional, ethnic and linguistic basis. According to world fact book (2010), almost 184 million people reside in the country belonging to different religions and identities (both regional and national). As far as economic division is concerned, 54% of the population is living in state of multiple deprivations with 69% of rural and 21% of urban poverty rate. Out of this total figure of 184 million, 95% of the population is comprised of Muslims with 75% Sunni, 20% Shia and 5% include Christians and Hindus. Furthermore, a percentage of Bareilvis and Deobandis exist within Sunni community also (Talbot, 2009). Apart from such fragmentation of the society, there is another characteristic of the country which is violence and terrorism placing it third in worldwide rank (Delavande & Zafar, 2011).

In general, extremism in Pakistan is due to weak political culture and unbridle lust of power among institutions. Religious extremism has severe implications for Pakistan as it has now made the society more 'vulnerable' leading to lack of cohesion and unity among people.

Religious Extremism and Power Politics through the Lens of Realism

Religious extremism in Pakistan can be better understood and explained through the lens of realism because the agents of religious extremism vows for the religion mere for power seeking pursuits. Similarly, realism, the paradigm of positivists in the field of international politics, mainly revolves around power politics. The core assumptions of realists are egoistic human nation and self interest lies in the power politics (Donnelly, 2000). In simple words, the politics evolve around the quest for self-interest which synonym in realism as power politics.

Proximity between Religious Extremism and Realism

The idea and tactic of extremism is related to realist paradigm. The core principles of Realism persuasion of power and effort to chase self-interest are applicable in this context. Likewise, the extremist state and non-state actors manipulate the whole fabric of society and feast terror and chaos in quest of their self-interest and drive for power. To some extent, the mindset of radical and fundamental group's link with classical realism as Machiavelli asserts in "The Prince", whatever the means are used for acquiring absolute sovereignty can be justified at the end. Religion is used by the extremists in order to pursue power and fulfill their illegitimate will of power because religion is the best tactic or means to influence the masses and exploit for self-interest. Hereafter, the theory of classical realism in the terms of self-interest and power politics can be utilized to better understand the issue of extremism in Pakistan. These assumptions of realists are aptly applicable in the politics of religious extremism at both levels, in domestic and international politics.

Domestic Politics of Pakistan and Extremism for Power Politics

The history of Pakistan is engulfed with the tussle of religion and politics. All the stakeholders, from military dictators to democratic leaders, bowed the seed of religious extremism for political purposes. The fault line in Pakistan politics commenced from Two Nation Theory when first time Islam selected for politics to ensure the identity of the Muslims in heterogamous society of the sub-continent. Pakistan movement under the slogan of state for Islamic laboratory proved fruitful. Though Islam in this case utilize for political cause without escalating theological sentiment, yet it became hint for future religio-political stakeholders to use it for pursuing and maintain power. Furthermore, at the very beginning of newly emerged state, Maududi's, the founder of Jamat- e- Islami, expeditions for Islamisation were mere some episode to hold high ranks in government institutions. Likewise, other religious groups and so called ulema raised their voice for achieving their vested political interest in the name of Islam because no one can say no to his or her faith if something presented in the clothes of faith. Eventually religio- political groups in Pakistan shaped as pressure groups which time to time come and go to shake the pillars of democratic process for personal interest, and their personal interest revolves around power politics. The game of power politics through religion was at zenith at the time of Zia-ul-Haq regime. His Islamization policy in domestic politics proved a devise for him to legitimate his illegitimate power, and jihadist movement to counter Soviet Union in Afghanistan was driving force to maintain position in external politics. But both initiatives of Zia ascertained fatal for state and society in next years, yet the weapon of Islam remained ultimate resort to sustain his power in the region. Such as the seed of religious extremism bowed at the very outset of state, ripe in the era of Zia, and still it is being harvested in the form of war on terror, street riots, suicide attacks, target killing and violent political embroils. The democratic successors of Zia did not avoid the tradition he set in politics. Nawaz Sharif the elected prime minister proposed fifteen amendments in the constitution to impose Shariah law as supreme law of land, not passed. Like previous episodes this was also not to serve Islam, but self- political interest and lust for power. In an Islamic republic only religion can influence the masses fast, and their will can be attained.

Subsequently, the conflict and cooperation in religio-political groups also depend on Hobbes thesis about human nature that motivated by competition, differences and glory. 'The first maketh man invades for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation' (para, 7) (Burchill et al.2013, p.34). Undoubtedly, the extremist's agenda in Pakistan politics only motivated for gaining power and political reputation. They create conflicts with legitimate patrons of government to get power and reputation, and sometimes bound to cooperate with them for their survival and safety. In short, Pakistan's political development has been turbulent and chaotic because religious extremists have been given free reign.

International Politics of Pakistan and Extremism for Power Politics

Religious extremism in Pakistan is not only penetrated in domestic politics but it also envisioned in foreign policy apparatus. Pakistan is at vulnerable position on the base of its geographic location and historical origin. The division of sub-continent into two states, Pakistan and India, happened at odd circumstances. The hostility between Pakistan and India is as old as the history of both states. In the same way, another neighboring country, Afghanistan has turbulent relations with Pakistan since its creation. Unfortunately, Pakistan share the longest border with India and Afghanistan, both them at dragger drown with Pakistan. So far as, the prime objective of Pakistan's foreign policy is to counter the hostile diplomacy and designs of both states.

Prisoner's Dilemma /Pakistan versus Afghanistan

The realists believe that cooperation among states impede due to anarchy and egoism. Prisoner's Dilemma presents this logic in world politics. Pakistan and Afghanistan are caught in a classic "prisoner's dilemma" in the situation over terrorist activities of Taliban and other militant groups in the territory of both states. The prisoner's dilemma is a game, contains two players with two choices. It deals the situations in which there is a fundamental conflict between what establishes a rational choice for an individual or a group. Herbert Butterfield calls this 'Hobbesian fear.' "If you imagine yourself locked in a room with another person with whom you have often been on the most bitterly hostile terms in the past, and suppose that each of you has a pistol, you may find yourself in a predicament in which both of you would like to throw the pistols out of the window, yet it defeats the intelligence to find a way of doing it" (Butterfield, 1950, P.90).

It is evident in the context of this game theory, both actors wants to cooperate beyond keeping away from conflict, but owing to desires of gain and glory restraint from cooperation. Thus the anarchic international environment defeats the good intentions of cooperation as the both actors remain doubtful about the status of gain. This is how the actor's quest for cooperation locked in a vicious cycle of mutually caustic collaboration (Burchill et al.2013).

The relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan can be determined through this game theory. The history of conflict and cooperation between the two states have long narrative story. Pakistan involve in militant activities in Afghanistan since the decades of 1970s, it is due to maintaining the policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan to counter Indian influence from the region. Pakistan allied with USA in the era of Soviet - Union war in Afghanistan and United states war on terror after 9-/11 attack. In the first phase of alliance with America, Pakistan was in cooperation with Taliban, the extremist religio-political group in Afghanistan which was mainstream militant power against Soviet Union. Zia government manipulated the masses for jihad, the holy war, in Afghanistan. A large chunk of Pakistani population joint Taliban against soviet union, even Taliban are developed as Pakistani Taliban or Afghani Taliban. In the contrary, in the next phase of alliance Taliban war fighting against United States, therefore, Musharraf the military doctor of that time had to choose conflict with self-made Islamist militants.

Both states have endured massive death and destruction in the influence of promoting religious extremism for power politics. They want to cooperate in order to deal with terrorist

Threats, and stop their militant activities in each other's territory but they could not pursue cooperation on the base of uncertainty of the division of gain and quest for competition.

Security Dilemma/ Pakistan versus India

The 'Security dilemma' (Glaser, 1997) is another game theory defined by structural realists has same logic. The absolute uncertainty about the intention of others, competition prevails over cooperation. The security measure taken by others actors perceived as threat for the formers. R Jervis (1978) in his study "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma" develops two vital arguments. First, he explains that the security dilemma is the key to understanding how in an anarchic international system states with fundamentally compatible goals still end up in competition and at war. The security dilemma exists when "many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others." It provides the rational foundation for what Jervis termed the "spiral model," which describes how the interaction between states that are seeking only security can fuel competition and strain political relations. Second, Jervis explains that the magnitude and nature of the security dilemma depend on two variables: the offense-defense balance and offense-defense differentiation. As a result, the security dilemma can vary across space and time. Although states exist in a condition of international anarchy that does not vary, there can be significant variation in the attractiveness of cooperative or competitive means, the prospects for achieving a high level of security, and the probability of war.

In the case of Pakistan's diplomatic ties with India, since independence in 1947, the policy "relative gains" has pushed the two into a "security dilemma" based on which they have nuclearize the entire region with developing nuclear weapons in the name of self-defense. They see each other in a zero-sum relationship where the loss to one side is considered a gain by the other. Yet, they have fought two full-fledged wars, and escalation on line of control is unstoppable. The Kashmir³ is the main boon of contention between the two. In the fear of war and aggression both states compete with each other for security. One's action must nurture others reaction. For instance, in 1972 India got status of nuclear state after successful experiment of its nuclear weapons, in the response of Indian increasing security capabilities, Pakistan also tested its nuclear weapons in 1992, and achieve the same position as nuclear state. Pakistan always indulges in security dilemma in terms of the offense-defense balance and offense-defense differentiation. Pakistan's security measure and diplomatic tactic are advanced in the response of Indian offensive initiatives.

Pakistan applied the strategic tool of religious extremism to defeat Indian in Kashmir valley. The Islamist militant groups, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jamaat-ud-Dawa and Haqqani Network are operating guerrilla war in occupied Kashmir valley to insure zero-sum game in the region. Hence, religious extremism is used in Pakistan's domestic and international politics as a tool of power politics.

Religio-Political group's Use of Religious Extremism in the Context of Rational Choice Theory

It is assumed that the tactic of extremism is based on rational choice theory, but in the case of Pakistan, whenever non state actors extremist propagation is supported by different segments of ruling class, the state suffer from indispensable damage. However, it is shortsighted and myopic rational choice which resulted as the highest cost for the lowest benefits.

Rational –choice theory emphasis on the long term and short term rational choices and the best means for the actors to achieve their most desired outcome or preference, given available information. Rational choice theory does not provide an explanation of preference formation, but rather offers a framework for explaining strategy choices under a given set of stable, ordered preferences. Rationality is evaluated in terms of whether the strategy is intended to obtain One's primary preference, not according to whether the preference itself

³ The disputed territory between indo-pak

seems reasonable to the outside observer. In other words, we cannot judge an action as irrational simply because we do not agree with the studied actor's preference ordering (Jon, 1986).

Religio-political group in Pakistan use religious extremism, the strategy and rational choice behind this, is to chase power and position and individuals preferences to participate religious extremists to seek salvation at the Day of Judgment. Yet, extreme tactics may be deployed as part of a logical, coherent, and rational strategy to maximize group goals. It is argued that radical Islamic groups offer spiritual selective incentives to individuals who are concerned with the hereafter. Although some radical Islamists are compelled by economic incentives or personal psychological needs that may have nothing to do with religious conviction (the need for revenge against perceived oppressors, a need for a sense of empowerment, or a desire for prestige), religion matters for many. In cases where individuals take spirituality seriously, movement ideologies offer strategies for fulfilling divine duties and maximizing the prospects of salvation on judgment day.

Even radical movements previously described as unflappable, ideological zealots trapped by rigid adherence to dogma are now analyzed as strategic thinkers. For instance, "al Qaeda's long-term goals are set by its fervent devotion to a radical religious ideology, but in its short-term behavior, it is a rational political actor operating according to the dictates of realpolitik" (Doran, 2002, p.182).

Likewise Islamist groups in Pakistan are rational or strategic thinkers, they do not come on the limelight for religious causes. They have long term goal to maintain, sustain and preserve this power and position in politics. Secondly, state sponsored extremist goals also perceived as long term goals to control internal external deplorable condition. Unfortunately, the history expose the real picture that , the state and the religio-political group which perform as pressures groups while using weapon of religious extremism remain fail to accomplish long run goals. Rather they just played zero-sum game instead of win-win game. The loss, state and society bear while playing the tool of religious extremism is indispensable and irreparable.

Cost- Benefit Analysis

Islamist radicals engage in high-cost/risk activism that exposes them to arrest, repression, and even death at a group level. It appears Islamists groups' perfectly rational king to re-anchor themselves through a religious idiom. Rather than viewing Islamists as grievance-stricken reactionaries, recent research has conceptualized Islamic activists as strategic thinkers engaged in cost-benefit calculations (Wiktorowicz, & Kaltenthaler, 2006).. Lisa Anderson, for example, observes that "the closer the movements were to the prospects of sharing power, the more pragmatic they appeared to be" (Anderson, 1997, p.26). In other words, radical Islamists choose to face great personal risks and costs because otherwise they are not pursuing their self-interest activism, individuals are influenced by a subjective assessment of costs and risks (Wiltfang, & McAdam, 1991). Risks are threats to an individual's well-being, such as threats to employment or physical safety. Costs are factors associated with the demands of participation that require the sacrifice of other commitments or interests. According to rational-actor models, we expect that individuals are unlikely to participate in high-risk, high-cost activism unless there is a setting payoff.

The cost-benefit analysis in the case of religious extremist actor is also benefit for group and risk for individual as the rational actor attain self-interest on the cost of others probabilities. Either the high cost is paid for vested interest but the affects the lives of individual who manipulated by extremists. At national level the alliance with religion always prove at risk, by paying heavy cost the state did not enjoy preferred benefits. It may be presumed that the focus of rational actors limited to short-term myopic goals.

CONCLUSION

It is quite clear from above discussion that religious extremism is the widespread and common phenomenon of 21st century. The dimensions to response conflicts have changed from full-fledged wars to proxy wars. The extremists are serving for proxy wars, and the most effective rational to manipulate the masses for their vested interest is religions. However, the religious extremism has become useful tool for politics. Although religious extremism is at full swing in South Asia, particular in Pakistan since decades, yet it has ameliorated in the rest of the world.

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