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The Role of Political Parties in Promoting Religious Extremism in Pakistan and India

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ABSTRACT

Political parties and religious extremism are one of the key challenges that has impacted governance of South Asian nations, human rights and regional security. Religion has always been an important means of cultural identity in both Pakistan and India and it has also been a strong tool of political mobilisation. Although the two states' constitutional and ideological underpinnings are different (Islamic republic versus secular democratic republic), political Islam has come to influence electoral dynamics, policy debates and public debates in both Pakistan and India. Religious symbols, narratives and identities have often been used by political parties as a means to unify voters, demonise opposition and give credence to the policies of state. This politicization of religion has in some instances led to religious polarization, sectarian conflict, hate speech and communal violence and erosion of democratic norms. This paper will make a comparative study on role of political parties in promoting religious extremism in Pakistan and India with reference to historical development, ideological base, electoral behaviour, constitutional provisions and relation between political parties and religious groups. The research examines the role of mainstream political parties along with religiously oriented parties, and its impact on the emergence of religious nationalism, identity politics and majoritarianism in the context of political competition. The paper points out that while forms of religious extremism vary from Pakistan and India, political parties in both countries have, to varying degrees, used religion as a means to an end both for electoral and ideological reasons. These have helped to foster social polarization, reduce institutional neutrality and has given rise to an erosion of pluralistic democratic values.

Keywords: Religious Extremism, Political Parties, Pakistan, India, Religious Nationalism, Electoral Politics, Democracy, Hindutva, Islamization, Sectarianism.

1. Introduction

Throughout South Asia history, religion has been a key factor in the formation of political identity, in the process of state formation and in the process of nation building. Even though both countries have the same trajectory of colonial past, the political courses taken by the two nations have been different, both constitutionally and ideologically. However, there have been growing examples of the mingling of religion and politics in both countries, with repercussions for democracy, human rights and regional peace and stability. In last few years, in particular, religious symbolism, communal identities, and nationalist narratives have been used by political parties to rally electoral support, establish power bases, and shape public opinion. Although religion may be a positive influence on moral values and social cohesion, its politicization can lead to the development of exclusionary ideologies, communal

polarization and extremist movements. The partition of British India in 1947 made an impact on political scene of South Asia. Pakistan was born as a safe haven for Muslims of Indian subcontinent, while India took its pledge towards secularism and religious diversity in the constitution. Two states still have an ideational base that affects the political developments today. The historian Ayesha Jalal has pointed out that within context of creation of Pakistan, there were complexities in discussions around definition of Muslim political identity, and not just a simple religious project. In same way, Bipan Chandra claims that the secular structure of India was designed to safeguard religious diversity in wake of partition trauma as well. (Chandra, 2008) However, dramatic politicization of religion has taken place in both countries, Pakistan and India, over last 40 years. In Pakistan, successive governments have introduced Islamic principles into constitutional and legal system and religious political parties have played a more than their fair share in exerting pressure on street, through coalition politics and influence of ideology. During 1980's, government's Islamization policies greatly increased the importance of religion in law, schools and public administration. Talbot says these policies changed the nature of religious speech into a pivotal aspect of state authority and political rivalry. In India, there has been a parallel process but with a twist; rise of Hindu nationalism. (Talbot, 2009). Institutions and groups affiliated with *Sangh Parivar* have propagated ideology of Hindutva which defines national identity in terms of 'Indian civilizational values' primarily Hindu. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has marked its success in electoral arena since 1990s, which has significantly affected discussions around secularism, minority rights, citizenship and national identity. Etienne Balibar, a political scientist, believes that Indian politics today is becoming more "majoritarian" in tendency than "civic" because religion is now tightly tied to political legitimacy. (Jaffrelot, 2021)

Political parties are a peculiar institution in democratic systems, being mediators between society and the state. Their political platforms and rhetoric, their legislative agenda and the way they form coalitions have a significant impact on public perceptions of religion and minority communities. Religious identities can be mobilized for electoral gain, especially in polarized societies, and political competition can provide an incentive for parties to do so. Brass argues that communal violence is not just the product of spontaneous religious hostility, but the product of political manipulation by organized elites with an eye to electoral success. In this respect, religious extremism is a given word that should be separated from religious belief or practice (Brass, 2003). Extremism is defined as ideologies and political movements that are opposed to pluralism, intolerant towards other religious communities, and advocate violence and discrimination against others or imposition of exclusive interpretations of religion on society or state. As *Mark Juergensmeyer* puts it, "Religious violence often comes out of political conflict defined as a holy war between good and evil on the extreme edges of being. Religious violence often appears when political wars are presented as sacred wars between good and evil at extreme level of being," Juergensmeyer says. (Juergensmeyer, 2017) (p. 12). This framing allows politicians to label opponents not just as rivals but as threats to life, which accentuates polarization and validates exclusionary policies.

In Pakistan, religious political parties like *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (F) have always called for more adherence to Islamic codes of conduct, thereby giving influence to

mainstream political parties through alliances and protests. As for mainstream parties, they have often used religious language during elections, to prevent that they would be perceived as not being sufficiently Islamic. This phenomenon has been one of the factors that have led to normalization of religious narratives in competition of political parties. Political agenda of BJP has been ideologically influenced by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its affiliated organizations in India. Issues of citizenship, educational reform, temple issues and notion of national identity have brought question of implications of religious nationalism for constitutional secularism and minority rights up for significant academic discussion. When basis of political legitimacy is religious identity rather than constitutional citizenship, democratic institutions are susceptible to Nussbaum's argument. The consequences of political promotion of religious extremism are not confined to domestic politics. (Nussbaum, 2007). Religious polarization has a negative effect on communal violence, sectarian conflict, discrimination against minorities, civil liberty and interfaith relations. This also impacts foreign policy, specifically Pakistan-India relations and the impact of historical resentments and religious narratives on strategic perceptions. The securitization of religious identity also makes counterterrorism efforts even more complex as it obscures the distinction between religious expression and extremist mobilization. The comparative analysis in this study is thus an attempt to find a balance between promoting an understanding of role of political parties in Pakistan and India in terms of normalisation or institutionalisation of religious extremism. The paper does not exclusively blame one political actor or one country, but looks at the various structural, ideological and institutional processes that allow political exploitation of religion.

2. Research Methodology:

This study is based on qualitative comparative case study, which allows in-depth analysis of relationship between political parties and religious extremism in Pakistan and India. Comparative method helps to find out commonalities and country specific dynamics. Historical-institutional and comparative analytical approach are used for study. It explores the history of political parties, constitutional developments and religious mobilisation since independence and looks at latter half of 1980s, when religious nationalism has grown stronger in both states. The study is mainly concerned with national-level political party and their relation with religious mobilization in Pakistan and India. These are considered in light of their significance in wider comparative argument, but are not discussed in terms of the importance of local political dynamics or regional variation. The study is based on scholarly and institutional sources and has no field interviews or survey data.

3. Theoretical Framework:

This study's theoretical approach relies on a combination of complementary approaches to understand dynamics between political parties and religion and the way that religion and identity can be used to influence electoral competition and potentially contribute to religious extremism. Religious nationalism is about the relationship between religion and national identity and nation-state legitimacy. Juergensmeyer says religious nationalism offshoots political debate into moral or sacred sphere, which enhances polarization and diminishes

room for compromise. (Juergensmeyer, 2017) The use of this framework is useful for analyzing topics of religious identity politics and state responses to religious identity politics, Islamist political narratives in Pakistan, and Hindutva ideology in India. Social Identity Theory was developed by *Tajfel* and *Turner* and posits that people have a portion of their identity from their role of being a member of a social group. (Tajfel, 1979) Political parties can strengthen in-group cohesion in name of an out-group threat from other religious groups, thereby strengthening divide.

Instruments of power: instrumentalist scholars like Paul Brass contend that ethnic and religious identities are strategically mobilized by political elites to pursue power, influence electoral results and manipulate public opinion. Religious identities are thus not just cultural identities, but also political resources that are used in times of competition. (Brass, 2003) There is a recent scholarship that focuses on nature of democratic backsliding and how elected governments may weaken pluralism by creating an advantage for cultural or religious majority. This view is useful to understand how political parties may transform constitutional norms and public institutions without necessarily going above rules of democracy. Comparative politics provides an analytical framework for systematically analyzing similarities and differences between Pakistan and India in the area of Constitutional design, Party systems, Electoral incentives, State–religion relations, Institutional capacity and Human rights implications. These theoretical frameworks offer a holistic approach to understanding the relationship between political parties and religious extremism, as well as its implications for democratic governance, social cohesion and regional stability in South Asia.

4. Literature Review:

There has been an increasing interest in study of political parties and religious extremism in political science, comparative politics, security studies and sociology. The role of political elites in shaping religious identities for political purposes in order to gain electoral support, forge political legitimacy and redefine national identity has been studied extensively. The convergence of religion and politics has led to a large and extensive literature in South Asian context, especially Pakistan and India, on themes of nationalism, democratization, communal violence, sectarianism and human rights. Both Pakistan and India have seen growing political appropriation of religion despite having different visions of constitution for themselves, Pakistan believing that it should be based on Islam and India that it should be secular and democratic. Existing literature is generally shared in recognizing that religious extremism cannot be attributed to theological factors alone, but has an insidious connection with political institutions, electoral incentives, historical legacies, socio-economic inequalities, media narratives and policies. This review critically looks at theoretical and empirical literature on political parties and religious extremism in Pakistan and India. It clarifies what majority of scholars agree on and what they do not and underscores the need for a comparative exploration of political processes in which parties promote and/or exacerbate religious polarization.

4.1. Conceptualizing Religious Extremism:

Religious extremism is regarded as the adherence to a particular ideology which is rigid and inculcates ideas that are incompatible with pluralism, promote exclusionary identities, and sometimes justify violence against people who are perceived as religious or political 'traitors'. But there is a warning from scholars to be careful not to equate religious commitment with extremism. Religious violence is essentially political, when religious symbols become tools for legitimizing political conflicts, according to Mark Juergensmeyer. (Juergensmeyer, 2017). However, there is no intrinsic violence in religion itself, but rather when political comes into play with religious identity. Likewise, Appleby states that religion has potential to be a peacebuilding force and also a conflict-generating force. (Appleby, 2000) It is rule in politics to use religion to endorse politics, particularly in times of social turmoil. As Bruce notes, religious extremism often emerges in places where political institutions are underminant and identity politics are dominant factor in electoral contestation and governance is contested. (Bruce, 2003)

Political parties play a crucial role in representative democracy. They represent the interests, create policies and bid for political power. Political scientists, however, are more and more aware that parties also construct collective identities. *Lipset* and *Rokkan's* theory of political cleavages shows that a political party tends to form on an issue that corresponds to long-lasting social divisions, such as those of religious, ethnic, language or class. (Lipset, 1967) Donald Horowitz also states that in pluralistic societies, political parties often appeal to ethnic and religious groups, as ethnic and religious appeals create greater electoral allegiance than economic ones. (Horowitz, 1985) Paul Brass, one of leading scholars on communal politics in South Asia, asserts that communal violence never occurs spontaneously. Instead, "Political entrepreneurs deliberately initiate and exploit communal identities for political gain." Brass presents the idea of an "institutionalized riot system" (Brass, 2003) that sees political actors, along with local organizations, and media narratives all contributing to creation of localized tensions that turn into widespread communal violence. His study offers a worthwhile theoretical base for understanding of indirect role of political parties in religious extremism that does not explicitly call for use of violence. Religious nationalism has been at the heart of political extremism in South Asia and literature on subject is of a central importance. Anthony D. Smith believes that nationalism sometimes gets its legitimacy from myths, memories and religions. (Smith, 1991) As in Smith (1991), Juergensmeyer broadens this argument by elaborating on how relation between religious identity and state sovereignty is intertwined. (Juergensmeyer, 2017) In today's world, as Roger Brubaker writes, "religious nationalism of present is also distinct from traditional nationalism insofar as it has become more likely to equate majority religious identity with national identity. This theoretical approach is especially important to comprehend the Islamic constitutional identity of Pakistan and the current Hindutva politics of India. (Brubaker, 2017)

4.2. Literature on Pakistan:

The scholarly debate regarding Pakistan's ideological foundations remains extensive. Historian Ayesha Jalal argues that Pakistan's creation should not be interpreted as inevitable outcome of Islamic ideology alone. Instead, she emphasizes constitutional negotiations,

Muslim political representation and colonial institutional arrangements. (Jalal, 2014) Similarly, Ian Talbot demonstrates that Pakistan's political identity evolved gradually rather than being fully defined in 1947. (Talbot, 2009) *Farzana Shaikh*, however, argues that Pakistan's constitutional ambiguity regarding Islam created persistent tensions between democratic governance and religious legitimacy. According to Shaikh, "The unresolved question of Pakistan's Islamic identity has continuously shaped constitutional politics." (Shaikh, 2009)

4.2. Literature on Pakistan:

There are still many ongoing debates on intellectual history of Pakistan's ideology. Historian Ayesha Jalal says, this should not be read as a direct result of Islamic ideology alone for creating Pakistan. Rather she stresses constitutional negotiations, presence of Muslims in political discourse and colonial institutional arrangements. (Jalal, 2014) Similarly, Ian Talbot shows that Pakistan's political identity was not established in 1947, but was a process. (Talbot, 2009) However, Farzana Shaikh maintains that Pakistan's constitutional uncertainty and duality about Islam led to perpetual clashes between democracy and religion (2009). The issue of Pakistan's Islamic identity has been "a constant theme in the constitutional politics of the country", says Shaikh. (Shaikh, 2009)

One of the most impactful studies is offered by Hassan Abbas, who investigates dynamics of interaction between the military governments, religious parties and extremist groups. Abbas claims that Gen. Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation policies were the core of whole societal transformation of Pakistan with the institutionalisation of religious discourse in state institutions. Similarly, Abbas carries out political analysis of *Jamaat-e-Islami* and shows how religious parties, based on ideology, established their influence beyond their electoral strength through alliances, student groups, educational institutions, and civil society. (Abbas, 2005) International Crisis Group asserts that religious parties are able to exert undue influence, as they can duplicate religious narratives of the mainstream parties, during electoral contest. (Group, 2011) Post-Afghan jihad, sectarian groups have come to play a greater role in shaping political agendas, as Muhammad Qasim Zaman shows in this article. (Zaman, July 1998) Mariam Abou Zahab connects sectarian mobilization to regional geopolitics, specifically Saudi-Iranian rivalry. (Abou Zahab, 2004) Fair highlights that political acceptance of extreme discourses undermined state power and facilitated growth of militant groups. (Fair, 2014) There are several scholars who claim that even secular-minded political parties are increasingly using religious language. Ahmed said that religious symbolism has now become a normal strategy for politics of the country and it is adopted by all the political parties. From literature reviewed, Ahmed indicates that it is political competition, not religion that accounts for much of current religious mobilization. (Ahmed, 2020)

4.3. Literature on India:

The voluminous literature on religion and politics in India is also too vast to be covered. Perhaps the most influential scholar is Christophe Jaffrelot. Jaffrelot maps the journey of ideology of Hindutva from early 20th century to present-day electoral scenario. According to

him, it has been the progressive education and engagement in civil society and electoral politics of organizations linked to Sangh Parivar which have helped to normalize Hindu nationalism over time. In democratic government, majority religious identity is equal to national identity, which renders democratic institutions vulnerable, as Martha Nussbaum testified. (Jaffrelot, 2021) She says: “Fear politics turns citizens into enemies” (Nussbaum, 2007). Paul Brass (Brass, 2003), Ashutosh Varshney (Varshney, 2002) and Steven Wilkinson (Wilkinson, 2004) are these three scholars, who dominate the literature on communal violence. According to Varshney, there is a significant reduction in communal violence when there are Strong intercommunal civic networks. Electoral theory is Wilkinson theory about how governments would behave if there were different electoral incentives. The more important the votes of minorities, the more the government will protect them. If minority votes are not decisive, states' reactions are less strong. According to Thomas Blom Hansen, Bharatiya Janata Party succeeded in making cultural nationalism a political issue. He is concerned with mobilisation of masses, not with elite conspiracy. (Hansen, 1999) In addition, Jaffrelot has also contended that the political victories secured a few years ago have allowed Hindu nationalism to shape the discussions on the constitution, education and public institutions. Comparative analysis of Pakistan and India is still rather limited (Jaffrelot, 2021). The majority of scholarships apply to a single country. For example: Talbot (Talbot, 2009) concentrates on Pakistan. Jaffrelot stresses India. Varshney explores communal violence in India. (Varshney, 2002) The research of Islamic political parties is undertaken by Nasr. (Nasr, 1994) Therefore, direct comparison is not well developed. When comparisons are drawn, they tend to focus on the role of nationalism, democratization, military institutions, constitutional development as opposed to political parties in fostering religious extremism. Human rights groups repeatedly have asserted that polarization in society makes religious minorities more vulnerable. United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have all reported on importance of hate speech, mob violence, discrimination, attacks on places of worship, impunity and misuse of legal institutions. Minority protection is one of the most important measures of quality of democracy, according to scholars such as Jack Donnelly. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in digital politics in literature. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart have found that populist movements have increasingly turned towards digital communication to bolster identity politics. (Norris, 2019) However, according to Vaidhyanathan, social media algorithms seem to be rewarding more extreme political material, which fuels ideological polarization. In South Asia, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and now X (Twitter) are used as effective tools to mobilize people for elections and disseminate religious narratives. There are several studies that show a connection between online hate speech and communal violence.

4.4. Research Gap

Though there is significant work on role of religion in South Asian politics, a few key lacunae can be identified. First, a large number of studies are limited to Pakistan or India alone while few make a systematic comparison between the mobilization of religious identities in the two countries by political parties. Second, current studies tend to focus on the role of religious organisations or religious extremist groups, and less on the contribution of major political

parties in the normalisation of exclusionary discourses during electoral competition. Third, while much research has examined communal violence, sectarian conflict and religious nationalism, very little work has examined these elements together within a single analytical framework that also examines democratic governance, electoral incentives, constitutional developments, and human rights. Fourth, recent shifts in digital political communication, social media mobilisation and algorithmic propagation of religious narratives have not been adequately integrated into comparative studies between Pakistan and India. Last but not least, many of the writings available are outdated with regard to relevant political events in last ten years, such as changing electoral strategies, citizenship debates, judicial decisions and increase of online political campaigns. Therefore, it is essential to undertake a new comparative analysis that combines historical and contemporary sources to present an analysis and draw conclusions about impact on democratic institutions, minority rights and regional security. The present study tries to fill these gaps by comparing role of political parties in promotion of religious extremism in Pakistan and India with a focus on interplay between competition for power, constitutional provisions, identity politics and protection of democratic pluralism.

5. Evolution of Religion & Politics in Pakistan & India: A Comparative Perspective:

The relationship between religion and politics in South Asia has an even more historical origin than Pakistan and India's independence in 1947. In the colonial period, religious identity started to merge with political representation as various constitutional changes were implemented like Indian Councils Act (1909) and Government of India Act (1935) which introduced communal electorates and strengthened religious identity. The division of British India just made religion a more salient political fact, leading to the establishment of two separate nation-states with different visions of their constitutions. Pakistan was born as a Muslim homeland and India was established as a secular democratic state. The differences aside, both countries have witnessed moments when religious parties have used religion as a political tool of mobilization that have led to different aspects of religious extremism, communal polarization and identity politics. The importance of this historical shift cannot be overstated as present-day religious extremism cannot be fully understood in absence of reference to evolution of constitution, electoral contest, political leadership and state-building dynamics. The politics of identity in South Asia is not just determined by religious ideology but also by institutional selection of politics, political competition and historical contingencies as Ayesha Jalal (2014) asserts.

5.1. Historical Evolution of Religion and Politics in Pakistan:

On 14 August 1947, Pakistan was founded after partition of British India. While demand for Pakistan was expressed mainly in terms of Two-Nation Theory, there were no clear-cut links between Islam and state even after independence of Pakistan. On 11 August 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah gave his key note speech before the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, in which he spoke of equality of citizenship regardless of religion: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with business of the State." But with the enactment of Objectives Resolution (1949), however, a significant development in

constitution had taken place where sovereignty was declared to be with Allah and democratic government by elected representatives was affirmed. There is a debate whether the Objectives Resolution were compromise between Islamic principles and constitutional democracy, or first step towards state sponsored Islamization (Shaikh, 2009). In 1956, Constitution was proclaimed an Islamic Republic of Pakistan, thus religion was integrated into constitutional identity of state. However, constitutional provisions were not effectively realised due to political instability, lack of civilian institutions and frequent change of governments.

The military governments of Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan and General Yahya Khan tended to be pragmatic in their attitude towards religion, though Islamic symbols continued to play a role as a factor of legitimacy. General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq era (1977-1988) was the most crucial period of change. Zia initiated a far-reaching Islamization drive that incorporated Islamic values into public administration, expanded religious education, formed a Federal Shariat Court and strengthened implementation of Hudood Ordinances and Islamic law. Hassan Abbas states that Zia's Islamization shaped political culture in Pakistan and introduced religious discourse within structure of state. (Abbas, 2005) Meanwhile, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in Pakistan becoming a frontline state and high-level international backing for Afghan resistance groups. In this period, religious seminaries (*madarasas*) grew in number significantly and militant organizations received ideological and financial, organizational resources. The convergence of military rule, Cold War geopolitics, and religious mobilization has been cited by many scholars as being a catalyst to further reinforce extremist narratives that have continued to shape Pakistan's politics even after withdrawal of Soviet Union. (Fair, 2014) Pakistan reverted back to parliamentary democracy after Zia's death. But change of governments between Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N) sometimes used Islamic arguments to gain political legitimacy. Parties making a positive contribution were few, if they did, but they rarely won big electoral victories, while religious groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) had influence through coalition politics, protest politics and religious networks. During 1990s, sectarian organizations that emerged only further exacerbated Sunni-Shia violence. Some scholars like Muhammad Qasim Zaman, hold that sectarian conflict was more prominently connected to electoral politics and regional geopolitical rivalries. (Zaman, July 1998) The post-9/11 security environment further complicated relationship between political parties and religious groups. The campaign against militant groups also aimed at eliminating these groups, though, at the same time, mainstream political actors often shied away from a direct confrontation with the extremist narratives because of electoral considerations. Since 2008, Pakistan has undergone several democratic changes, while also facing issues with religious polarization. Political parties have decried and taken precautions on sensitive religious issues like blasphemy bills and sectarian conflicts. Political sensitivity around religious legislation reforms was apparent in the assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in 2011. The rise of *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP) is a notable occurrence in current Pakistani political scenario. In TLP, issue of blasphemy laws and doctrine of Khatm-e-Nabuwwat (Finality of Prophethood) has come to show that religious movements can quickly become a force for political influence, when politics has little or no parliamentary presence. Religious identity is

still important in elections and mainstream parties have at times been able to negotiate with or accommodate such movements.

5.2. Historical Evolution of Religion and Politics in India:

In contrast, India's constitution was more secular, ensuring the freedom to practice any religion, equality for all citizens before law and protection of rights of minorities. Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership shifted focus of state to civic nationalism and religious pluralism. However, communal conflicts continued to be a constant part of Indian politics. Organisations like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) founded in 1925 further promoted ideology of Hindutva, which is an ideology that sees India as predominantly a Hindu nation. The RSS, though not formally a political party, gained influence in sphere of ideas via its affiliated organisations in education, in labour unions, in student unions, and in cultural institutions. BJP was founded in 1980 and it has been a turning point in Indian politics. BJP primarily became a proponent of "Gandhian socialism" but later focused on Hindutva as its main ideology. The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign grew into a watershed political campaign of late twentieth century. The demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 set off a nationwide wave of communal violence and changed nature of election politics in India. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, BJP's ability to bring together religious symbolism and developmental and nationalist narratives enabled it to make Hindu nationalism the dominant political ideology. This was exacerbated by the Gujarat riots in 2002, which reignited international discussions on communal violence, governance and minority protection (Jaffrelot, Modi's India: Hindu nationalism and the rise of ethnic democracy) Ashutosh Varshney stresses that communal violence is not necessarily an expression of spontaneous religious tension but the organization of the political. (Varshney, 2002) The electoral triumphs of BJP since 2014, 2019 and 2024 gave a boost to political footing of Hindutva. The policies on citizenship, educational reform, constitutional revisions and temple building stirred extensive debate among academics and the political sphere. The withdrawal of Article 370 from the Indian Constitution in 2019 and the enactment of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) along with judicial rulings on anyodhya dispute have emerged as key topics in conversation on secularism, constitutionalism and minority rights. When concept of national identity is increasingly shaped by religious majoritarianism, democratic institutions become vulnerable, as Martha Nussbaum has argued. Meanwhile, BJP's supporters argue that policies are aimed at redressing historical imbalances, promoting national integration and reaffirming India's culture. This difference highlights the need to differentiate between political advocacy, constitutional interpretation and extremist mobilization.

5.3. Comparative Historical Analysis:

Pakistan and India have different foundations in their respective constitutions. They have some commonalities in history of relationship between religion and politics. First, political parties in both countries have become more sensitive to religious identity value in elections. History has shown religion to be a powerful force to mobilize voters, give political authority and delegitimize those who oppose political system. Secondly, constitutional developments have had a significant impact on political discourse. The incorporation of Islamic provisions

in constitution of Pakistan into state institutions has gradually become part of constitutional development while constitutional commitment to secularism in India has existed side by side with increased political power of Hindu nationalism. Hence, in both countries constitutional principles and political practice have never been in perfect harmony. Third, religious groups have played a game of influence that is more powerful than their numbers of voters. In Pakistan, religious parties and movements have been able to influence public debate by being mobilized on the streets and forming coalitions for religious legislation. Religious parties and movements have had a significant impact on public debate in Pakistan by mobilizing on streets and creating coalitions for religious legislation. In India, *Sangh Parivar* affiliated organizations have created an ideological influence, which goes beyond formal party structure, through various educational, cultural and social institutions. There are still noticeable disparities between these two. The debates on subject of religious politics in both countries have been defined by themes of Islamic identity and sectarian relations in case of Pakistan and themes of majoritarian nationalism, secularism, citizenship and cultural identity in case of India. Furthermore, Pakistan has been a country of long periods of military intervention and its state-religion relations have been altered and India's political process has taken place within a continuous electoral democratic system. A second distinction is over institutionalization of political competition. Although religious parties have seldom had large parliamentary majority, in Pakistan, main-stream parties have generally played alongside powerful religious parties. In India, in contrast, Hindu nationalist ideology has been more and more popularly expressed through a vital national political party that has gained a wide range of electoral victory and brought religious identity into mainstream of government. However, comparative evidence suggests that there is no direct link between constitutional design and religious extremism, nor between religious demography and religious extremism. Instead, process of politicisation of religion is moulded by a variety of factors: political incentives, electoral competition, historical narratives, institutional decisions, media environments and leadership strategies. The way communal conflict is generated is often a form of organized political process, not a natural or inevitable religious antagonism, as Paul Brass argues. (Brass, 2003)

6. Political Parties and the Promotion of Religious Extremism in Pakistan:

Religion and political parties have been two crucial aspects of Pakistan's political history since country's independence. Pakistan, like other states, was established as a Muslim state but its constitutional development did not initially outline a total theocratic state. Rather, successive civil and military governments slowly began to increase influence of Islam in domains of politics, legislation, and public administration. Both religious and mainstream political parties have been involved in this process, using religious narratives to mobilize electorates, enter into political formation and secure political legitimacy. Importantly, role of political parties must be regarded not as uniform. Religious parties have made explicit demands for Islamic governance, and so have mainstream political parties, at times using religious language to gain acceptance, or, to defend themselves from charges of being weak on Muslim side of fence.

6.1. Evolution of Religious Political Parties:

Since Pakistan's independence, religious political parties have been a part of the electoral politics of Pakistan, but have seldom won a substantial portion of the national vote. Their effect is sometimes greater than their votes due to their organizational structure, their religious voice, and ability to mobilize on streets. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) (JUI-F) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP) are among the influential parties. Combining religious knowledge with organized structures, Jamaat-e-Islami turned Islamic ideology into a modern political movement, as argued by Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr (1994). It did not usually win a parliamentary majority but it was able to make an impact in universities, professional associations, in the labor unions and in student politics. Deobandis have established JUI-F, which has gained considerable political sway in religious seminaries (madararas) mainly in KPK and Balochistan. They have offered educational and social services and served as significant political mobilization networks.

6.2. Mainstream Political Parties and Religious Narratives:

The relationships between religion and main political parties are more complex than relationship between religion and explicitly religious parties. Generally, all major parties have supported constitutional democracy and Pakistan's Islamic identity including Pakistan Muslim League (N) (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI). It has been observed that mainstream parties have used language of religion at times in election campaigns or controversies. These tactics have more often than not been pragmatic political decisions and not principled political choices. The role of religion in political has made it so that even non-religious parties now attempt to debate Pakistan's policies in Islamic terms to maintain political acceptability, argues Shaikh. (Shaikh, 2009) This is an example of the kind of signaling that political scientists refer to as “competitive religious signaling,” in which parties, as well as fighting over economic or governance matters, also compete over their perceived religious values. This is not always extremism but it can limit political space for pluralistic debate and foster ever more exclusionary rhetoric.

6.3. Institutional Change Through Islamization:

This was the most important institutional change during period of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). Zia carried out a comprehensive program of Islamization which involved Hudood Ordinances, establishment of Federal Shariat Court, expansion of *Zakat* and *Ushr* system, revision of education curricula and rise of Islamic law in governance. These reforms introduced religious discourse into institution of state and changed their laws and political motivations, as argued by Hassan Abbas (Abbas, 2005) This period is also linked by many analysts to larger geopolitical developments. Pakistan got a lot of foreign help for supporting Afghan resistance to Soviet Union and religious narratives entered into security policy. These developments were said to have bolstered networks that later came to be known as militancy, with varying connections to networks and times, as argued by scholars like Christine Fair (2014).

6.4. Religious Mobilization in Electoral Competition:

Competition in Pakistan has often led to the use of religious symbolism by political parties. They refer to slogans focusing on Islamic identity, pledges to safeguard religious values in public spheres, alliances with religious scholars in electoral campaigns and mobilization on religious issues. Politicians are interested in electoral incentives because religion can be a strong source of legitimacy for them in a variety of constituencies. Paul Brass makes a more general statement that political elites in divided societies often rely on "communal" appeals when they can mobilize more emotional attachment than appeals based on policy. (Brass, 2003) While patronage, local leadership, ethnicity and economic concerns influence Pakistan's elections, a religious dimension remains a powerful symbol of resource.

6.5. Blasphemy Politics:

Among the most politically sensitive issues in Pakistan is debate surrounding blasphemy legislation. Blasphemy laws have become deeply embedded within public discourse. Political parties across the ideological spectrum have generally approached proposals for legal reform cautiously because of the issue's religious sensitivity and potential for public mobilization. The assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in 2011 after his criticism of aspects of the blasphemy law highlighted the risks associated with political debate on this issue. The widespread public demonstrations following his assassination revealed extent to which religious symbolism could shape political discourse. Many scholars argue that blasphemy debates illustrate how political competition may discourage nuanced policy discussion. Parties often prioritize political survival over substantive legal reform, reinforcing the status quo.

6.6. Emergence of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan:

One of the most significant developments in contemporary Pakistani politics has been the rise of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Established in 2015, TLP rapidly transformed from a religious movement into a nationally recognized political party. Its political platform emphasizes Protection of blasphemy laws, Finality of Prophethood (*Khatm-e-Nabuwwat*), Defense of religious honor and Mobilization through public demonstrations. Unlike earlier religious parties that focused broadly on Islamic governance, TLP concentrated on a limited number of emotionally resonant religious issues. International Crisis Group (2022) argues that TLP demonstrated how modern communication technologies, charismatic leadership, and protest politics could rapidly expand a party's influence despite limited parliamentary representation. (Group, Pakistan's hard policy choices in the wake of the Taliban's return., 2022) The party's success illustrates how religious mobilization increasingly extends beyond traditional electoral competition into street politics and digital communication.

6.7. Sectarian Politics:

Sectarian differences have also been impacting political scene in Pakistan. In 1980s and 1990s, Sunni-Shia relations worsened as a result of regional geopolitical competition, domestic political competition and ideological polarization. According to Qasim Zaman, sectarian identities started to be politicized more and more, when sectarian organizations wanted to influence state policies and religious institutions. (Zaman, July 1998) While political parties

in general condemn sectarian violence, critics state that the inconsistent implementation of laws against hate speech and sectarian organizations has on occasion allowed extremist messages to continue.

6.8. Media, Social Media, and Political Messaging:

With the growth of television channels and digital media, nature of religious politics in Pakistan has been changed. The use of television debates, Facebook, YouTube, X (previously 'Twitter') and WhatsApp is growing by political parties. Online media allows campaign messages, religious speeches and political narratives to be spread quickly. But the researchers also point to dangers of misinformation, conspiracy and hate speech online. Religious issues especially when they are emotionally charged—can spread faster and more easily than policy-based discussions, which can further polarize. The connection between social media and extremism is thus indirect but important, especially where online discourses converge with electoral contestation and public protest.

6.9. Democratic Governance and Institutional Consequences

Politicisation of religion has had a few implications in realm of democratic institutions in Pakistan. The first is that religious polarization may narrow policy agenda, drawing attention away from governance questions and toward symbolic ones of identity. Secondly, parties can try not to discuss controversial legal changes due to concerns about public reaction. Third, political conflict over religious legitimacy can undermine constitutional pluralism by making it less likely to have inclusive debates about minority rights and equal citizenship. However, it should be noted that there are also countervailing forces in Pakistan's political system. Civic society organizations, independent media, academic institutions and judiciary have at times challenged right to constitutional freedoms, nature of rule of law and religious coexistence. Public opinion is not uniform and political parties themselves may have conflicting opinions on role of religion in government.

7. Political Parties and the Promotion of Religious Extremism in India:

Since the independence of India, religion has played an important role in Indian society but the constitutional vision that was embraced in 1950 had envisioned a secular democratic republic which ensured equality before law, religious freedom and protection of minority rights. The Constitution of India is not religious in nature unlike Constitution in Pakistan, which includes Islam as part of its constitution. However, religion has increasingly become a factor in electoral politics, especially since 1980s. Religious symbols, historical narratives and cultural identities have been used by political parties to rally voters, redraft concept of nationalism and impact public policy. Political instrumentalization of religion is differentiated from democratic expression of religious values and former is generally considered abuse of religion while latter is legitimate. There is a general distinction between legitimate democratic religious expression in politics and political instrumentalization of religion that raises exclusionary narratives and/or polarization. This is an important distinction to grasp modern Indian situation. For a long time, religion has played a role in public life, but recently it has been increasingly used as an electoral tool, reshaping party competition and public discourse.

7.1. Evolution of Political Parties and Religious Mobilization:

Indian National Congress held the forefront in Indian politics for the first three decades after independence. Indian National Congress was in forefront of Indian politics during first 30 years after independence. Congress under leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru stressed constitutional secularism, democratic institutions and religious pluralism. Nehru said that state should treat all religions equally and neither discriminate against them nor favour them, thus providing equal citizenship to all communities. In India, however, notion of secularism was not as tight as one in West between church and state. Rather, Indian model was one of principled engagement, which allowed state to come in contact with religious institutions while being constitutionally neutral. Rajeev Bhargava, a political scientist, believes Indian secularism was meant to control religious diversity and not to remove religion from public life. However, communal tensions periodically flared up such as in Jabalpur (1961), Ahmedabad (1969), Moradabad (1980) and Nellie (1983) showing that constitutional protection alone failed to prevent religious violence. In 1980, political scene began to shift with establishment of *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP). Early elections got a mixed reaction from it, but it started to adopt ideology of Hindutva and call on people to recognize India's civilizational heritage as Hindus as a basis for the Indian nation.

7.2. Hindutva and Political Ideology:

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, in early part of 20th century, expressed the idea of Hindutva. Savarkar was able to separate Hindutva from Hinduism and proposed it as a cultural and civilizational identity rather than merely a religious dogma. Later, various organizations, especially *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), have proliferated this ideology with large networks of education, culture and social outreach. RSS was established in 1925 and it continues to be a non-political, non-professional and volunteer association, but its concepts have had a wider impact on larger public discussion of nationalism and identity. Christophe Jaffrelot suggests that Hindutva transformed from a cultural movement to a governing ideology over years due to its consistent ideological orientation, organization and electoral success. "Hindu nationalism has increasingly taken root in democratic political institutions," Jaffrelot writes (2021, p. 34). Proponents of Hindutva argue that it fosters national unity, cultural rejuvenation and historical continuity. Critics, however, claim that its political use may lead to marginalization of religious minorities as it equates national identity with dominant religious tradition. This interpretation gap is still one of the main issues in the ongoing debate in India's modern political discourse.

7.3. Ram Janmabhoomi Movement and Electoral Transformation:

The *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement was a watershed moment in the history of religion and electoral politics in India. The movement was demanding construction of a temple on the site where Babri Masjid had been in existence for sixteenth century and is traditionally believed to be birthplace of Lord Ram by many Hindus. Late in 1980s/early 1990s, question became a political campaign. BJP's national visibility increased significantly with public mobilization, religious processions and political rallies. On 6 December 1992, *Babri Masjid* was demolished,

sparkling communal violence in several Indian cities. Communal violence often comes not from religious animosity but from orchestrated political mobilization, says Paul Brass. (Brass, 2003) In a similar fashion, *Ashutosh Varshney* shows that a lack of civic institutions among communities and use of religious divisions by political actors increase likelihood of violence. (Varshney, 2002) The *Ram Janmabhoomi* movement is thus an example of power of religious symbolism to impact on the electoral landscape and political conversation.

7.4. Electoral Politics and Religious Identity:

Identity politics has emerged as a significant aspect of Indian elections, a proposition that has been increasingly being made by political scientists. Electoral issues of economic development, welfare policies, caste alliances and leadership have not lost their importance, but in recent times, religion has become a more salient political concern. The electoral success of the BJP in 2014, 2019 and 2024 was the result of several factors such as economic policies, welfare programmes, leadership appeal, national security and cultural nationalism. But there is some debate about relative significance of religious identity in this larger electoral bloc. Thomas Blom Hansen claims that Hindu nationalism managed to capture essence of cultural identity and to make it a mass political movement through use of religious symbols and a democratic process. (Hansen, 1999) For Steven Wilkinson, political incentives are a crucial determinant of government's reaction to communal violence. When minorities make up an electorally significant group, governments are more likely to take a strong and timely action to stop violence. (Wilkinson, 2004)

7.5. Citizenship, Constitutional Debates and Religious Politics:

There has been a lot of academic and political discussion on religion and citizenship in India since enactment of new laws. Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 provides fast-track citizenship to people of certain religions (except Muslims) from neighbouring countries. Backers said bill offered humanitarian aid to minorities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who were being persecuted. However, critics pointed out that use of religious criteria by Act was inconsistent with constitutional equality for secular India. Likewise, NRC-driven public discussion occurred on its documentation criteria, citizenship verification and implications for vulnerable. The developments suggest rising politicisation of constitutional and legal questions in terms of national identity, migration and religious affiliation.

7.6. Communal Violence and Political Competition:

India's political history has been marred by communal violence on an intermittent basis. Anti-Sikh violence (1984), *Babri Masjid* demolition and riots (1992-93), Gujarat riots (2002), Muzaffarnagar violence (2013) and Delhi communal violence (2020) are major incidents. There are differing opinions among scholars as to cause of these events. Some highlight historical grievances and local socio-economic tensions others focus on political mobilisation, administrative failures and inflammatory rhetoric. Varshney's basic proposition is that presence of strong, interfaith civic organizations significantly diminishes communal violence. (Varshney, 2002) Meanwhile, Brass highlights importance of political elites and local networks of organizations in escalating localized conflicts into more widespread communal

conflicts. (Brass, 2003). Importantly, these scholars warn against oversimplification of explanation that rests on religious differences alone and instead emphasize importance of political organization, institutional capacity and state reactions on the outcomes of communal violence.

7.7. The Role of Social Media and Digital Political Campaigning:

Indian electoral politics has undergone a transformation with swift growth of digital communication. Social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are becoming more common tools in political campaigns for distributing campaign messages and engaging campaign supporters. Vaidhyathan found that algorithm-based digital platforms tend to spread polarizing political messages with an emotional tone. (Vaidhyathan, 2018) In lead-up to elections, there is often a lot of narrative on religious issues, historical grievances, and identity messaging in online networks. Digital communication has made it more accessible for people to participate in politics and increased political participation of the public, but it has also been effective in spreading misinformation, hate speech and rumours about communities. Digital communication has made it easier for people to engage in politics and has widened the political participation of the public, but it has also been effective in spread of misinformation, hate speech and communal rumours. Multiple incidents of communal violence have been associated with dissemination of fake and inflammatory information on encrypted messaging apps. Political parties are thus being placed under greater pressure to share accurate information and to counter online incitement, without trampling on freedom of expression.

7.8. Impact on Democratic Institutions and Minority Rights:

The growing political role of religion has raised significant issues for Indian democracy. The rise of politics has spurred important implications for Indian democracy in context of religion. One, the religious component is increasingly involved in issues about citizenship, constitutional amendment, education, and national history. Second, critics say that if constitutional protections are not being respected on a regular basis, then majoritarian political narratives can lead to a weakening of equal citizenship sentiments in minority populations. Thirdly, polarization can create barriers to interfaith dialogue and bipartisan agreement on national issues. Meanwhile, democratic institutions in India, such as judiciary, Election Commission, independent media, civil society groups and a federal system, remain crucial in helping to resolve political conflicts. The three traditional modes of contestation and interpretation of constitutional principles judicial review, electoral accountability and public debate still exist and have proven to be effective. So, as concerns rise about religious polarization, India's democratic structure remains open for political contestations and legal responsibilities.

8. Comparative analysis of Role of political parties in promoting religious extremism in Pakistan and India:

The historical legacies and constitutional developments in Pakistan and India give rise to different dynamics of political parties and religious extremism. After gaining independence in

1947, both nations have seen a progressive politicization of religion, albeit in distinct ways and through different institutional arrangements and ideological perspectives. Pakistan's constitutional framework is a secular one, whereas India's is an Islamic one, leading to differences in the political landscape, but electoral competition, identity politics and quest for political legitimacy have prompted political actors in both countries to use religion in public affairs.

8.1. Constitutional Frameworks and State Identity:

A one of the most basic contrasts between Pakistan and India is the relationship between the two countries and their religion in their respective constitutions. According to the constitution of Pakistan, it is an Islamic state. Islam is the state religion and at the same time, Constitution provides for certain fundamental rights such as freedom to profane and practice religion. The concept of Islam is reflected in interpretation of constitution, in law making, in makeup of some state institutions such as Federal Shariat Court and Council of Islamic Ideology. In contrast, India is a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic. While the term 'secular' was officially added to Preamble by 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976), it is noteworthy that there were constitutional safeguards for equality, religious freedom and minority rights which had already anticipated the word 'secular'. Political developments show that constitutional provisions do not prevent politicisation of religion, albeit tifferences in constitution. Both political parties in both countries have used constitutional concept of 'identity' to tell an electoral story, thereby altering meaning of public discourses on nationalism, citizenship and religion. Institutional commitment, not just a constitutional declaration, is essential to constitutional secularism, as Rajeev Bhargava contends. In a similar way, Farzana Shaikh points out that constitutional debates on Islam in Pakistan have not been free from politics since independence (2010). (Shaikh, 2009)

8.2. Political Party Systems and Religious Mobilization:

The party systems are very different in two countries. The religious political parties in Pakistan mostly have limited national electoral support and influence through coalition politics, religious networks, street mobilization and ideological pressure on mainstream political parties. *Jamaat-e-Islami* and *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam* (F) have been instrumental in influencing national debates without being represented in parliament. The various mainstream parties, such as *Pakistan Muslim League (N)*, *Pakistan Peoples Party* and *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf*, have generally supported constitutional democracy, using at times the language and symbols of Islam in election campaigns or during more significant political debates. Indian religious nationalism is closely linked to electoral success of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with Sangh Parivar (National Volunteer Organisation) ideology influencing its stance, which includes Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). While explicitly religious ones are not as large as in Pakistan, India has seen the infusion of religious nationalism into one of its main governing parties.

8.3. Electoral Competition and Religious Identity:

In both countries, electoral motivation is a key factor in promoting religious mobilisation. Religious identity can be used by political parties as a way to mobilize loyal voter bases, enhance emotional ties among supporters, delegitimize political parties and opponents, define national identity and shape public discourse. How identity claims tend to be more effective than policy claims in elections is a central claim of Donald Horowitz. In Pakistan, elections often feature religious rhetoric around Islamic identity, blasphemy law and constitutional principles. Election campaigns in India are increasingly featuring themes of cultural nationalism and religious heritage, temple politics and citizenship and historical identity. There are, however, numerous non-religious factors that also influence electoral success in both countries such as economic performance, leadership, governance, social welfare, regional politics and local patronage networks, as scholars remind us.

8.4. Religious Nationalism and Political Legitimacy:

The common ground is the most noticeable religious nationalism in political development of Pakistan and India. The Islamic identity has been an important source of constitutional legitimacy in Pakistan since implementation of Objectives Resolution in 1949. The understanding of Islamic principles, among successive governments, and ongoing discussion about democracy, legislation, minority rights and constitutional power illustrate the current debates on democracy, legislation, minority rights and constitutional power. Hindutva has gradually been shaping political discourses on cultural heritage, historical memory and visions of the nation in India. According to Mark Juergensmeyer, religious nationalism is only politically powerful when political conflicts are presented as moral conflicts about sacred values, not normal policy debates. (Juergensmeyer) This tends to limit the political possibilities of compromise because the opposition is seen as a danger to religion or to "the nation."

8.5. Extremist Narratives and Political Competition:

But academics disagree that electoral competition can inadvertently lead to more exclusionary rhetoric. Paul Brass believes that communal polarization tends to happen over a course of time rather than in a flash of violence, through repeated political messaging. This process incorporates symbolic political discourse and statements; identity-based campaign slogans; historical complaints; selective historical memory and emotionally charged political rhetoric. These stories can, over time, help foster social polarization, distrust of religious communities and communities. There have been instances in both Pakistan and India where political opposition led to a rise in religious polarization, but nature of polarization and ideological themes and institutional settings are different.

8.6. Minority Rights and Democratic Citizenship:

Politically mobilized religious identity has one of its principal consequences with regard to minority rights. Minority communities such as Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and others, in Pakistan have experienced issues with legal protection, representation, discrimination and security. Over years, successive governments have put measures in place to promote representation of minorities, but very few of these measures have been

implemented in an even way. Muslim, Christian, Sikh and other minorities have raised concerns about communal violence, hate speech, and equal citizenship in India from time to time. The ongoing controversies over Citizenship Amendment Act, inter-faith relations and religious conversion laws are examples of the ongoing issues on constitutional secularism and minority rights. Jack Donnelly asserts that protection of minorities is one of most significant measures of the quality of a democracy because constitutional rights are only meaningful if they can be effectively implemented. (Donnelly, 2013)

8.7. Media, Social Media, and Political Polarization:

Digital communication has played a significant role in revolutionizing Pakistan and India's political mobilization. Political parties use Facebook more and more, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and now X (Twitter). These are the platforms that allow for the fast spread of campaign messages, ideological narratives and political mobilization. Digital media can, however, also spread misinformation, conspiracy theories, communal rumors, hate speech and emotional polarization. As per Vaidhyanathan, social media platforms often reward content that gets people emotionally invested in a matter, which can perpetuate ideological polarization. There is growing responsibility from the political parties to discourage inflammatory communication and foster fact-based democratic communication.

8.8. Democratic Institutions and Constitutional Governance:

Political party-religious relations have an important impact on democratic institutions. These are issues faced in various institutions that are common, such as the weakening of pluralistic political debate, rising identity-based polarization, loss of public trust, pressure upon judicial independence, politicization of educational narratives, and challenges to inclusion of minorities. However, Pakistan and India still have some significant democratic safeguards. These include constitutional courts, election commissions, independent media, civil society organisations, universities and legal advocacy groups. These institutions can often serve as channels of constitutional accountability and protection of democratic norms.

9. Impact of Political Parties' Promotion of Religious Extremism on Democracy, Human Rights, Internal Security, Foreign Policy, and Regional Stability

As political parties become more politically active in religious identity in Pakistan and India, it has implications which go beyond electoral politics. Although in the past, religion has been both a source of moral values, social cohesion and cultural identity it can also offer a source of political instrumentalisation which can create serious problems for democratic governance, protection of minorities, national security and relations with other states. This is because political parties are at the heart of public discourse, legislative agendas, electoral narratives and state policy.

9.1. Impact on Democratic Governance:

A major impact of the politically polarized religious competition is its impact on democratic process. Political pluralism, equal citizenship, peaceful political competition, constitutional supremacy, and independent institutions and minority rights are all essential to democracy.

As more and more, political legitimacy becomes identified with religious identity, then the nature of political competition may change, from debating policies to contesting identities. Throughout Pakistan, debates about blasphemy legislation, sectarian matters, Islamic constitutional identity, and other issues have often limited policy discussion. (Diamond, 2019) Governments have tended to take a conservative stance on sensitive religious issues due to possible political ramifications of public debate. Likewise, in India, issues of citizenship, temple politics, religious conversion laws, and cultural nationalism have now become more prominent issues in electoral discourse. Critics say identity politics could limit room for consensus on economic development, education, health care, environmental policy and institutional changes. However, democratic institutions in both countries such as legislatures, courts, electoral bodies and civil society organizations remain as vehicles for contesting and upholding constitutional values.

9.2. Constitutionalism and Rule of Law:

Religious political mobilization also affects constitutional governance. Constitutions have legitimacy as a result of equal application of law, independence of judiciary and accountability of institutions. As political discourses become more religiously oriented, the legal system could be under more pressure when deciding on politically sensitive issues. The constitutional issues that come up in Pakistan often raise issues concerning Islamic provisions, blasphemy law, rights of minorities, religious education and constitutional interpretation. In India, the topics of constitutional litigation have been secularism, citizenship, freedom of religion, educational autonomy, religious sites and more. *Ran Hirschl* argues that constitutional courts are more and more becoming a site where more general “ideological battles” about religion and national identity are being fought. As a result, judicial independence becomes increasingly relevant in maintaining constitutional balance (Hirschl, 2010).

9.3. Human Rights and Minority Protection:

One of the mostly discussed issues of religious political mobilization is related to minority rights. International human rights law, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, provides for the right to freedom of religion and equality before law and protection from discrimination. Minorities may be impacted by a polarized political climate in a variety of ways, such as greater social exclusion, hate speech, communal violence, discrimination, diminished political representation and insecurity. United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have reported concerns regarding the safety of religious minorities in both Pakistan and India, but the concern is more or less specific in the two nations. In Pakistan, scholarly literature highlights issues of sectarian violence, attacks on places of worship, discrimination against certain minorities, and issues of blasphemy law. In India, scholars have studied communal violence, hate speech, issues of religious conversions and minority citizenship and equal protection. Institutional implementation is a key way of establishing democratic legitimacy of treatment of minorities, as demonstrated by the fact that

constitutional guarantees do not just have to be symbolic, but also effective, argues Jack Donnelly. (Donnelly, 2013)

9.4. Internal Security:

Religion may also have an impact on internal security, as it can be politicized and used for that purpose. There are two types of religious involvement in politics, peaceful and ideological extremism and violent extremism. If these categories are not distinguished, there is the danger of a process of oversimplification of political reality. Political polarization of religious groups can fuel recruitment and mobilization by extremist groups by enabling them to tap into public grievances. Pakistan has been facing issues of sectarian militancy, religious extremist and religiously motivated acts of terrorism and violent extremist groups for a long time. A range of counterterrorism measures has been enacted by successive governments, such as the National Action Plan (2015) aimed at mitigating extremist violence through security, legal, educational, and financial measures. Religiously motivated violence, communal riots, insurgencies and extremist attacks have also been a major challenge for India, though the organizational setups and ideology differ significantly from Pakistan. Institutional changes with respect to political incentives, education, governance, and public trust, in addition to military responses, are needed to achieve sustainable counterfear. Christine Fair argues. (Fair, 2014)

9.7. Electoral Polarization:

Political parties are increasingly utilizing identity-based campaigning because of the fact that emotional stories can often prove more effective in mobilizing voters than policy discussions. Collective identity is an integral part of political interests and, therefore, long-term electoral loyalties, as Donald Horowitz (1985) argues. Religious symbolism, historical memory, appeals to cultural identity, emotionally charged campaign language and symbolic legislation are common electoral tactics. These approaches can produce short-term electoral gains and at the same time heighten long-term polarization in society. Political opposition, then, is increasingly about the different visions of the nation, not about the performance of the government.

9.8. Media, Social Media, and Information Politics:

The nature of religious mobilization has been changed by modern political communication. Traditional media still plays a part in public opinion, but digital media now plays a major role in political campaigns. Nowadays, political parties are using Facebook; YouTube; Instagram; WhatsApp; X (formerly Twitter) and short-video platforms. Digital communication offers valuable democratic opportunities such as direct communication with citizens, enhanced political participation and speedy transmission of policy information. There are however substantial problems to be discovered by researchers, including misinformation, hate speech, conspiracy theories, algorithm-driven polarization and emotional manipulation. According to Vaidhyanathan, emotionally charged content is often amplified on digital platforms, even if it is wrong. (Vaidhyanathan, 2018) This means that political parties have an increasing responsibility to promote ethical communication, and to deter online incitements.

9.9. Foreign Policy Implications:

Foreign policy is growing more and more influenced by domestic religious politics. Political issues relative to Islam, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Muslim World sometimes intrude into diplomatic discussions in Pakistan. However, in India, concerns over Hindu nationalism, regional security, migration and cross-border terrorism also play a role in foreign policy discussions. Constructivist scholars claim that national identity plays a strong role in foreign policy preferences. Alexander Wendt (1999) notes that "State interests are socially constructed through identities. (Wendt, 1999) Thus, political discourses on religion and nationalism can affect diplomatic agendas, bilateral interactions and international images. Perhaps nowhere are the consequences of religious political narratives more visible than in Pakistan–India relations. Since partition, bilateral relations have been influenced by Kashmir; cross-border terrorism; military competition; historical grievances; and identity politics. Political parties in both countries occasionally employ nationalist and religious rhetoric during periods of electoral competition or diplomatic tension. Such rhetoric may strengthen domestic political support but simultaneously complicate diplomatic dialogue. Scholars including Stephen Cohen argue that mutual threat perceptions frequently reinforce nationalist politics on both sides of the border. (Cohen, 2004) Consequently, domestic political competition sometimes affects regional security calculations.

9.10. Regional Stability in South Asia:

Religious extremism possesses implications extending beyond Pakistan and India. Regional consequences include refugee movements; terrorism; border insecurity; reduced economic cooperation; weakened regional organizations; and diminished investor confidence. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has frequently struggled to advance regional integration because bilateral political tensions overshadow economic cooperation. Political instability also affects transnational issues including climate change; water security; public health; migration; and trade. Thus, reducing political polarization contributes not only to domestic democratic governance but also to broader regional development.

10. Conclusion:

In this study, the role of political parties in the promotion of religious extremism in Pakistan and India is comparatively analysed on the basis of political understanding and constitution. It examines relationship between religion, political institutions, contests for power and constitutional change since partition of British India in 1947. The results indicate that despite different constitutional choices Pakistan and India made (Islamic Republic and secular democracy, respectively), they have witnessed a growth in political mobilization along religious lines, thus showing that constitutional design is no guarantee against politicization of religion. This research challenges the notion that religious extremism is a theological issue and is a result of historical legacies, political incentives, institutional setup, socio-economic factors, media influence and electoral competition. Religious symbolism and narratives of religious identity are often used by political parties, whether religious or secular, to garner

electoral support, enhance legitimacy and mobilize electorates. Such tactics can create a temporary political advantage but have a negative effect on social polarization and democratic governance. The comparison shows differing historical courses. The relationship between religion and State was formalised in Pakistan through constitutional changes such as Objectives Resolution (1949) and successive constitutions, and also by Islamization policies of General Zia-ul-Haq. Religious actors and militant networks were also bolstered by geopolitical developments: Afghan situation and post-9/11 world. In spite of secular nature of Indian constitution, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) instigated religious nationalism, which became an important electoral agenda in the country with Ram Janmabhoomi campaign and citizenship debates. The study has found that political parties have a dual democratic function. They are clearly on behalf of religious and ideological concerns, but can also use religion as a tool of an exclusionary politics. Polarization, historical grievances and fear can lead to polarizing electoral campaigns that result in a decline in democratic dialogue, rise in communal tensions and impact on minority rights. Identity politics also distracts from issues of governance like economic development, education, health and institutional reform and digital media helps to spread the misinformation, hate and polarization. Last, but not least, the study argues for the importance of constitutional governance, judicial autonomy, electoral accountability, civic education, minority protection, responsible political leadership, ethical media practices and regional cooperation for democratic resilience. Sustainable peace in South Asia must be based on political competition based on constitutionalism and pluralism, rule of law and equality in citizenship.

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