

Polarization and Rise of Religious Extremism in Pakistan

Dr. Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Khan

*Director Administration,
Punjab Higher Education Commission
Lahore*

Dr. Saqib Warriach

*Assistant Professor
Government College University, Lahore*

Imran Alam

*Assistant Professor
Punjab University Law College, Lahore*

Dr. Tauseef Iqbal

*Sr. Assistant Professor,
Behria University, Islamabad*

Abstract

Recent researches in political science, socio-legal and other social disciplines indicate that the polarization in the society is one of the major threats for national harmony. This article explores the relationship of polarization with religious extremism and gives an insight on a variety of issues like intolerance and exceeding religious violence in Pakistan society. The ideological or religious polarization between contending groups can be a major source of conflict and one of the impediments in the way of political progress and nation building. This is qualitative research based on primary cum secondary sources. After data collection thematic analysis has been made to make view on polarization and religious extremism in Pakistan. Polarization has a direct relationship with the negative development of religious intolerance and religious extremism. This article argues that without tackling the issues of polarization it is very difficult to win the war against the militant religious extremism and terrorism in the country. It ends with some suggestions to address the increasing polarization in the society.

Keywords: Polarization; Intolerance; Religious extremism; Terrorism.

Introduction

Polarization explains the phenomenon in which human population is divided into different groups within a society (Gradin, 2000). Polarization is generally rising in many parts of the world. Even the governments of developed countries like UK and USA show special concern to address this issue. It detects the presence or the disappearance of groups in a distribution and captures the phenomenon of the diminishing middle class or 'a divided society' (Zhang & Kanbur, 2001). High polarization may lead to high disintegration of the society. In the study of civil war, Ellingsen describes and analyses the key factors of domestic and civil unrest. She has the perception that the countries in which the dominant group is less than 80 per cent of the total population share, the political power is more prone to indulge in civil wars as compared to the homogeneously constituted countries. In her research she presents the relationship between heterogeneous groups and their conflicts with strong political groups. These conflicts may lead to separation and a strong division of the society on ethnic basis (Dixon, 2009). According to DiMaggio et al. (1996) polarization is both a state and a process. Polarization as a state refers to the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum. Polarization as a process refers to the increase in such opposition over time. Former President General Pervez Musharraf, *The Times* (2007) wrote: "Polarization has already made Pakistan all but ungovernable". The phenomenon of polarization is alarming since the rise of militant religious extremism in the society. Some political scientists argue that crisis in government policies and divergence on a broad range of issues is putting society into the circuit of polarization. However, others think that polarization occurs when there is an ideological division or clash on the few issues related to religion, ideological or politics. Political polarization is the process in which a gap developed between conservatives and liberals on political

issues and political developments. The political polarization may have a chance to mix with ethnic hatred and pushes the society towards the extreme poles of divisions.

An Improbable State

In 1940, Mr. Jinnah had demanded a special status for the Muslims in an independent India on the bases of religion. The bloodshed based on communal division seemed a strategy of the congress to suppress the Muslims and create hindrance in the way of the freedom movement. Some historians argued that Jinnah did not favor a separate state but preferred a confederation in which the Muslim-majority provinces of the British Raj would get due power at the center as partners with a similarly constituted Hindu entity. In 1947, a new state came into being with the dream of a homogeneous Muslim community. Quaid-e-Azam in his 11th August speech clearly presented a conflict resolution for all the communities of Pakistan. But this idea did not take root in the society and diminished with the death of Jinnah. Pakistan underwent the experience of a community that has spent many decades in the culture of communal violence. The Objectives Resolution was the first success of the religious elite to divide the citizens on the religious basis. Objective resolution legalized and paved the way for political use and misuse of religion. Personal clashes and conflicts could now be justified on the basis of religious differences. One can say that Objectives Resolution provided a strong background for the polarization and rise of religious extremism in Pakistan.

Polarization and Ideology of Pakistan

The ideology of Pakistan was interpreted by the religious elite with the aim to establish a religious oriented society. The minorities feel threatened from the majority and their chance of marginalization is more as compared to the constituently protected secular state. Quaid –e Azam did not want that in any case Pakistan would become a theocratic state. The Objectives Resolution was also against the 11th August speech of Quaid-e-Azam and the fourteen points of Jinnah before the partition. It

seems ideology of Pakistan had pushed the country towards polarization of the society and rise of religious extremism in the country. After the Objectives Resolution, Islam played a significant role in establishing an Islamic narrative for the establishment of an Islamic society in the newly born state of Pakistan (Mukhtar, 2018)

The ideology of Pakistan plays an important role in creating a society that is vibrant and emotional for ethnic Islam. Most of the Pakistanis have a strong belief that Pakistan was created in order to establish Islamic rule and so that Muslims can lead their lives according to the teachings of the Islamic Principles (these principles were elaborated in Objectives Resolution passed in 1949 by the Constituent Assembly as a guideline for making new constitution for the country). There was no challenge to this fallacy. Pakistan was established for the protection of economic, political and religious rights of the Muslims. The religion itself was not threatened in Hindu majority India.

There is no doubt in the personality and the politics of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, that he was a modern liberal leader. He also believed in the coexistence and equality of all the citizens of the state. He was the staunch supporter of the modern values and he himself got education from the secular and western institutions. He was not like those leaders who wanted to use religion in politics for their self-interest and wanted to enact policies according to the interpretation of the religious elites. Quaid-e-Azam was clear about the perception of Islam and a theocratic state. He showed his keen interest in protecting the minorities and in protecting the nation from communal clashes. Once he said that minorities' rights would be protected from the highest supreme authority namely Quran. In his famous speech Quaid –e-Azam said “you may belong to any religion or caste or creed- that has nothing to do with the business of the state. On another occasion he said “Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslim would cease to be Muslims, not in the religions sense, because that is the personal faith of each

individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state” (Khan, 2016).

The need of the time is to change the curriculum according to the Quaid-e-Azam’s principles which he gave for the establishment of Pakistan. The modern, historians must be encouraged and unbiased modern syllabus must be taught in the schools. The current policy must be revolving around the national interest of the country and not the Islamic sectarian perceptions. In this regard role of the parents, teachers and the society is very important. We are learning biases in homes, schools and from the society. In Pakistan, some illiterate people have given cultural bad names to other communities. For instance, in our society people frequently use the word Hindu *Banya* to describe the evilness of the Hindus. By using these slangs, the minds of the people lose the ability to see the diversities among a nation. Polarization is increasing with the increase of diversities in the nation and religious extremism is the result of the increasing trends of polarization and negative growth of the society. First the state has to control polarization and then the religious extremism in the society.

The religious elite claim that Pakistan was established in order to protect Islam from the fanatic Hindus. For religious elite the aim of Pakistan is only to serve Islam and the true followers of Islam are mainly the Sunni Hanfi class of the society. The society is divided again and again on the basis of religious affiliations. This division is widespread and is the basic key factor for the creation of a polarized society. Pakistan has fought two major wars with India on the Kashmir issue. Pakistan needs freedom fighters for the protection of the national interest and for the liberation of Kashmir. “This ideology of Pakistan and belligerent relationship with India resulted in military’s dominance in the affairs of state. Army took the responsibility of forging a new nation and providing justification of creation of Pakistan” (Wilke, 2001)

Middle class of the society immediately embraces all the absurd and irrational concepts of the ideology that were

interpreted by the religious elite of the society. With the passage of time these interpretations take ethnic and political colors to please the politicians for the fulfillment of their self-interests.

Pakistan's Polarized Politics

In an article of Riaz Hussain titled as '*Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan*' argues that how some progressive and liberal politicians end in taking refuge in the Islamic slogans. For example, he explained that the Islamization first emerged as a nascent state policy under the Pakistan People's Party government led by the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-77). Bhutto used emotive religious phrases like *Musawat-i-Muhammadi* (the equality of Muhammad) and *Islami Musawat* (Islamic equality) as part of his political rhetoric to justify and win mass support for the socialist policies of his government (Hassan, 1985).

Pakistani politics has been further polarized since 1970's, when PNA propagated religious card to topple the government of Z.A Bhutto. Zia ul Haq came with the policy of islamization and as a third military dictator decided to fight a proxy war in favor of the USA against the USSR.

The military dictator Gen. Zia ul Haq also follow the same tactics to use religion in politics for the purpose of their own self interests. The curriculum taught in schools is also based on polarized knowledge. The presidential tenure of General Zia ul Haq and his foreign policy propagated Jihad and bred the seeds of polarization and terror. In 1977, Zia started Islamization of Army, and elevated its social status by granting them large properties in the grooming urban areas. He brought a lot of amendments in order to bolster the madrasas, regarding their numbers, and their respective authority. Moreover, under the influence of USA Pakistani ISI, helped in the recruitment and training of mujahedeen's against the Soviet Union, and also planned to wage Jihad against India on the Kashmir front, using mujahedeen's as independent warriors.

Zia is considered the grandfather of global Islamic jihad, because, during his tenure, the extremism was growing rapidly. Weapons were distributed in fragments of the society and Kalashnikov culture emerged in the horizon of the state. In short, Zia gave Pakistan, “the incendiary mix of despotism and islamization”. Jihad was propagated as an integral duty of every Muslim and many scholars like ‘Abdullah Azzam’ who, being named the “father of modern global Islamic jihad” by a former head of Mossad, influenced Jihad in Pakistan, through his lectures and also became a role model for Osama Bin Laden, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad and Abu Musab Al Zarqawi(Riedel, 2011). The most important event was Iranian Revolution of 1979. It was believed that Moscow was behind the Iranian Revolution. Another very significant event was the entry of Marxist army officers of Afghanistan in the neutralist Government of Afghanistan. This pressed the way for the Soviet troops to infiltrate. Afghanistan turned to Saudi Arabia since Saudis were quite worried about Marxist threat in Afghanistan and Iranian Revolution. Thus a joint venture was created among Islamabad, Saudi Arabia, CIA and Afghanistan to boost the financial and militancy aid to Afghan Mujahedeen in order to crush communism. Due to the huge financial support from CIA, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan began to train Afghan Mujahedeen at Durand Line. The author of *Deadly Embrace Pakistan, America and future of the Global jihad* Bruce Riedel claims that 80,000 to 90,000 Mujahedeen were trained by Islamabad in the time span of ten days. All this happens through polarization of the society. Pakistan’s support to Afghan Mujahedeen brought much instability to Pakistan also. A large number of refugees entered Pakistan without the adaptation of any migrant’s policy. Violence spread in every nook and corner of the country.

Gen Zia had planned to shift a wave of Jihad in Kashmir as well. After the war of 1971 with India, Bhutto had inclined towards China. Since Islamabad had the feelings that USA left Pakistan alone in the war. However, American president Jimmy Carter with the help of CIA began to rehabilitate Pakistan-US relations in 1977. CIA funded million dollars to Islamabad for

Afghanistan War. Zia's regime enjoyed good relations with Washington (Tumminello & Harper, 2015).

Zia's regime has everlasting impact on the political system of Pakistan. It destroyed the national harmony of the state and established the jihadi and sectarian outfits in the society and played as a catalyst in the process of political polarization. Political polarization is only for the promotion and protection of the self-interest of the politicians and provides a space for political extremism. Democracy is considered as a tool for mediation between extreme and moderate voices within the segments of the society.

To address the polarization some fundamental changes in the society like free education, madrasas reforms, media liberalization, information technology and globalization are required. In Pakistan intense radicalization, weak economic condition and high population growth have created polarized political opinions. The leadership of political parties is unable to handle this extreme change in political opinion which has created divisions within the society. Controversial issues like legislative progress, democracy, external policy, internal security, inter provincial harmony; justice and foreign policy mixed with corruption, nepotism and bad governance have created extreme opinions at both the sides of the political divide, leading the nation to anarchic deadlocks and conflicts of interest within political parties and overall.

Causes of Polarization and Liberalism

To analyze the degree of polarization in Pakistan, one should know the economic and social problems of the people. Power outages, unemployment, poverty, injustice, nepotism, sectarianism and corruption all factors make people frustrated and push them to a hatred lifestyle.

There is a deadlock in the formulation and enforcement of policies throughout the country. British legacy divide and rule is still operational in Pakistan and many political and religious

elite divided the people on communal or sectarian basis for their own political ends. Generally, majority of the elite class is based on a secular and westernized culture whereas middle and the poor class of the society are deeply attached with social traditions and religious norms. In order to gain support of the masses during election the elite class is used and misused religion very frequently. Many of them are succeed in gaining the popular support of the people after using religion. The society is horizontally and vertically dived in the name of religion. The horizontal division is on the basis of sects carved in the name of the religion of Islam and the vertical division is against the minorities i.e. Amides, Christians, and Hindus etc. The ruling elites are also ambitious to please the US and the western countries for the purpose of gaining economic interests and foreign aid. There is a deep faulty line between the real and the apparent attitude of the politicians. They are liberal and westernized in their private lives but present themselves religious in their political and public life. The polarization takes momentum in such type of hypocrisy and divides the society on different issues. Pakistani politics is an impulsive politics and religion plays a very significant role in polarizing the society. The researcher reviewed 200 articles and among them selected 20 pieces of literature and interviewed 20 social researchers, political analysts and religious elite for thematic analysis. After data collection analyses have been made to make a view on polarization and religious extremism in Pakistan. The research yielded the following themes of polarization and the rise of religious extremism in the Pakistani society.

Theme 1: Ideological interpretations and practices that have led to the polarization and the rise of religious extremism in the society.

Theme 2: A state of Self-righteousness in which every individual of the society considers himself a separate entity to the mainstream majority of the state.

Theme 3: State patronization: A regular effort of the government to preach a particular religious ideology.

Theme 4: A power politics between ruling and religious elites.

Theme 5: Poverty and polarization.

Theme 6: Illiteracy and polarization

the results of the surveyed literatures are a little bit different to the results of the literature review.

Table 1

Different Perceptions on Polarization and the Rise of Religious Extremism in Pakistan

No.	Division	Polarization and Rise of Religious Extremism	Origins	Recommended solutions
1	Litterateurs	Irrational ideological interpretations	Intermixing of religion with politics for political interest	No use of ideological Islam in politics
2	Social researchers and political analysts	Political phenomenon in which economic, religious and political reasons are more important	No distribution of the resources	Applicable policy making
3	Religious leaders/theologians	Use religion to divide the society	Power politics of the political and religious elite	Total separation of religion with politics

The aim of the research is to highlight the most important causes of polarization in the society. The result of the research shows that the polarization is due to the irrational ideological interpretations by the political and religious elite of the society. The social researches and social scientist put more importance on the reconstruction of the society without the ideological biases.

In Pakistan liberalism is mixed with the culture of the western society. In west people do not give importance to the social institution of marriage and their societies are considered sex free societies. Even Minorities like Christians in Pakistan perceive liberalism as 'anti-religion'. Many religious scholars claim that Pakistan has only one danger i.e. liberalism and that the government should adopt strict policies against the liberal people and overcome the challenge of liberalism. The behavior and hatred of the liberal people against the religious people and vice versa is also increasing the phenomenon of polarization in the society.

Polarization, Intolerance and Religious Extremism

Polarization in the society increases with the increase in intolerance and extremism. It is the antithesis of pluralism. In a pluralistic society differences are recognized and not to use to humiliate others. In a pluralistic society, the phenomenon of polarization is not very sharp. Everyone enjoys equal freedom. If this equal freedom is not recognized and honored, things begin to fall apart, and system will not accommodate people of all colors, beliefs and races. Suppression and oppression become the order of the day.

Pakistani society is moving towards extremism and polarization thus violence is also increasing. The murder of the Punjab governor Salman Taseer reflects this phenomenon who was murdered by his own security guard because he could not tolerate his opinion on changing the law of blasphemy. The lawyers who are the upholders of the rule of law showered petals on the murderer (Khan, 2011).

The society is habitual of seeing everything in black and white. There is no middle way or moderation in the attitude of people. There is a deeply rooted polarization. Society is divided between “us” and “they”, between Kaffirs and Muslims, between Punjabis and non-Punjabis. Differences are being highlighted and the symbols of pluralism are being done away with. Extremism and terrorism are getting approval from the polarized society.

The question is what reasons stand behind polarization in the society where more than ninety percent of the population is Muslim? The central values of Islam are tolerance and compassion then why these values are being shunned and replaced with extremism and violence? Holy Prophet (PBUH) preached Islam with advice, argument and reasoning then why the extremists so called the soldiers of Islam forget this lesson? Why have they sworn on a mission to kill and murder? They know the basic lessons of Islam but they don't follow. The society at large believes that Islam is the religion of peace but then it sanctions the shuffling of voices and applauds arbitrary murders.

The educated people of the country always took relief in the fact that the silent majority of Pakistan is tolerant and the religious wing never gets victory in the election. The silent majority perhaps is no longer consisted of peaceful and tolerant people. Different groups are sanctioning oppression and suppression of dissenting voices.

The question arises what are the reasons behind this pernicious attitude? Several reasons can be identified in this regard. Firstly, the reason of the growth of polarization in the society is the failure of our education system to check the anarchical impulses in man. It is depressing to hear the educated people like lawyers and journalists praising the arbitrary killing. Khalil Gibran says, “Pity the nation that acclaims the bully as hero”(Gibran, 1963).

This shows that there is something rotten in the education system of Pakistan. Our education system has emphasized transference rather than transformation. Everything is described in black and white. Every hero is presented as a soldier of Islam. There is no room for criticism. Students absorb these apparent absolute truths through the rote system of learning. They don't look beyond the narrow conception of truth. This makes them intolerant of any other opinion. These self-righteous people are ready to crush the voices of pluralism and tolerance. These biases have become unshakable with the passage of time and no one can challenge these truths.

Rasool Raees Buksh says that Pakistani society is fractured and is driven by narrow religious and regional biases and it has accepted the violence as the legitimate means to get an end.(Bueno et al, 2015)The fractures in the society are due to the poor education system. There are the five departments in the education and Pakistan is very poor in all five departments. By and large our youth lacks discipline and capacity to do hard work. Education system can also be used to bring change. Education can be used as a tool to impart the values of tolerance and pluralism which could bring peace, unity and stability. Our history reflects this phenomenon Akbar the great, was tolerant towards the Hindu majority. Rajput's protected his kingdom with their blood. He achieved peace and stability through accommodation. His successors ruled because the kingdom they inherited was strong. Both Jahangir and Shah Jahan were not great administrator or ruler but the roots of stability that were planted by Akbar kept their kingdom intact. Aurangzeb reversed these achievements, and Hindus suppressed. He introduced the extreme versions of Islam so there were Marhathas, Hindu, Sikh and Jutt rebellions and the Mughal Empire disintegrated.(Hollinhead, 2018)

British India provides another example of the same phenomenon. Jinnah was a liberal politician who was ready to cooperate with congress for the self-government but it failed to provide safeguards to the minority. During its rule (1937-39) it could not bring the Hindus and the Muslims together. Muslims were suppressed and the result was partition. The moral code of

Islam that is based on tolerance and pluralism must be taught (Pandey, 1978). It must be taught that Holy Prophet (PBUH) gave protection to the Christians of Banu Najran in these words “you are protected, your property, your crosses and your churches under the protection of prophet of Islam”. Holy Prophet (PBUH) was injured by the rascals of Taif. He took protection in the mountains. There Angel Gabriel revealed to him and asked if he PBUH wishes, he would destroy the people of Taif. Holy Prophet said, I am sent as a blessing for both the world. It is the practice of holy prophet (PBUH) and He said, “whoever will follow my practice will never go astray”. He did not hate even his worst enemies (Ahmed & Ahmad, 1975).

Second, the writ of government must be strengthened. Government should not tolerate any breach in law and order. The reason for the growing intolerance in the country is the failure of the government to provide justice to people. When the laws of the land fail to provide relief, people take law into their own hands and settle the scores with the full severity of personal anger. Government should make the justice system more efficient and speedy.

Third, democracy regarded one of the best systems which create the spirit of pluralism. According to Hillary Clinton democracy will empower people with the sense of opportunity and empowerment? In Delhi after the murder of Indira Gandhi about five thousand Sikhs were butchered. Sikhs could be alienated forever but democracy brought them back to the social equation and one of them became the Prime Minister of India.

Fourth, good governance is the only remedy to decrease the pressure of religious right on the government. Though religious parties never succeed in elections, it is their agenda to get prominence in policy making. They hijack the policies of government and are intolerant towards others and so the government has to bend its knees before them because in the area of governance, it performs poorly. The agenda of each religious sect is that it alone represents the truth and all other

sects are out of the circle of Islam and therefore its followers are liable to be finished with death. They want that the state should use its authority and power to promote their version of Islam and suppress all other versions. Government has yielded to the ignorant society. This phenomenon can be checked if government makes some significant progress in the area of governance.

Conclusion

It is time to introduce reforms in the political system and institutions of Pakistan. Ideology of Pakistan should be liberated from the clutches of Islamist ideology. Because if we fail at this juncture, this may prove an unguarded hour for our nation and Karl Marx said, nations are not forgiven for their unguarded hour. Some money, some resources and some thoughts must be devoted to purge intolerance from the society. Reforms must be introduced immediately. Shakespeare says, there is tide in the affairs of man which, taken at the flood, leads as to fortune, omitted all the voyages of his life are bounds in shallows and in miseries. This is true for Pakistan. If we remain motionless and let the forces obscurantism seize us, our voyages will be trapped for ever. Government says that the some sections of the society are creating hurdles in introducing reforms. Then why does the government not try to change the mentality of the people through education? Reforms through education may take time to implement fully but the process to do so must be started now. Education has the ability to start the anti-polarization process and overcome the menace of extremism and terrorism in the country.

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