

Role of Pakistani Political Parties in Advancement of Terrorism

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاونٹر ٹیرورزم

Keeping in view that business of politics is largely based on popular voting, it requires the political parties to indulge into mass public reach out campaigns; therefore, the political ambience is that of competition and rivalry in multi-party and two-party systems. The compulsion and desire to come out victorious against the other political parties or in order to appease their concentrated vote banks political parties are likely to endorse, promote and coincide with the extremist ideologies leading to violence and terrorism. This research aims at studying the role of political parties since the world stepped into the millennium, the year 2000, to evaluate the likelihood of world's leading political parties deliberating as an instrument of their policy to fuel extremist ideologies that have led to the rise in violent extremism & terrorism.

The UN Democratic Governance Group's Handbook of Working with Political Parties (published 7th January' 2006) cited many contributions of political parties: aggregating interests, mobilizing the electorate, shaping public policies, holding politicians accountable, and fostering future leaders. Therefore, it places the role of political parties that of building consensus and harmony similar to which theoretical and academic discourse in political science coincides. Citizens across the world, however, do not share the UN's positive view of political parties. When the World Values Survey asked people in 55 countries "how much confidence" they had in their parties, almost 75 percent on average said either "not much" or "very little."

Only in China, Vietnam, and Malaysia did a majority say they had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in their parties. National Democratic Institute (NDI) in its report "Political Parties and democracy in theoretical and Practical Perspectives" (2013) reaffirms the views regarding political party's centrality in success and advancement of democratic environment in a state. In Pakistan alone, a democratic election has increasingly been making space for independent candidacy in place of political parties. Notwithstanding the public's negative views, most scholars agree with the UN Democratic Governance Group and regard parties as necessary to democratic government and value their contributions to governance. Assuming that political parties contribute to the quality of country's governance, international organizations and non-governmental organizations have poured millions of dollars into party development under the framework of democratic assistance. The research will be able to assess the fault lines within working of political parties and their role in fueling extremist ideologies in one way or another. The research seeks to provide changes in policy process in countries where religious or social extremism is rife.

1. Introduction

Political Parties frequently engage in violent behavior, directly or indirectly. This phenomenon is more frequently observed in developing regions i.e. South Asian countries like Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh etc. However, post 9/11 shift in world political dynamics which lead to terrorism take center stage as an immediate political question needed to be addressed, it has increasingly paved way for political narratives with terrorism at the pivot to be formed, western countries have become susceptible to politically motivated violence under endorsement of political parties as much as developing nations.

“Titanic syndrome”¹ theory would be most appropriate to describe the scenario, which propels the significance of terrorism in western politics post the incident of September 11. In “Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero” (Gunaratna & Iqbal, 2012) have pointed out contributions of Pakistan’s army and its role in UN as an active participant in global efforts for counter terrorism. However, the author also recognizes that such efforts have proved timely and temporary, which have eradicated the terrorist hideouts only to witness them resurface as quickly as possible after the military offensive have halted in terror inflicted areas, reiterating the proposal that the problem lies within the system, system that stands upon its institutions, its organs such as education sector, law and governance.

Therefore, it is mandatory to have them evaluated in order to understand the problem areas. It will help chalk out a comprehensive strategy to eliminate extremist mindset and build a national narrative to endorse counter terrorism as a national cause. Keeping in view that business of politics is largely based on popular voting, it requires the political parties to indulge into mass public reach out campaigns; therefore, the political ambience is that of competition and rivalry in multi-party and two-party systems. The compulsion and desire to come out victorious against the other political parties or in order to appease their concentrated vote banks political parties are likely to endorse, promote and coincide with the extremist ideologies leading to violence and terrorism. This research aims at studying the role of political parties since the world stepped into the millennium, the year 2000, to evaluate the likelihood of world’s leading political parties deliberating as an instrument of their policy to fuel extremist ideologies that have led to the rise in violent extremism & terrorism.

The UN Democratic Governance Group’s Handbook of Working with Political Parties (published 7th January’ 2006)² set forth the rationale, saying that “political parties are an essential part of the apparatus of governance.” It cited many contributions of political parties: aggregating interests, mobilizing the electorate, shaping public policies, holding politicians accountable, and fostering future leaders. Therefore, it places the role of political parties that of building consensus and harmony similar to which theoretical and academic discourse in political science coincides. Citizens across the world, however, do not share the UN’s positive view of political parties. When the World Values Survey asked people in 55 countries “how much confidence” they had in their parties, almost 75 percent on average said either “not much” or “very little.” Only in China, Vietnam, and Malaysia did a majority say they had “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in their parties. National Democratic Institute (NDI)³ in its report “Political Parties and democracy in theoretical and Practical Perspectives” (2013) reaffirms the views regarding political party’s centrality in success and advancement of democratic environment in a state.

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1 "The Titanic Syndrome: Thirty Reasons Intentional Transitional Interims Can Hurt a Church!"

2United Nations Development Programme, A handbook on working with Political Parties

3 National Democratic Institute, Political Parties and democracy in theoretical and Practical Perspectives

dollars into party development under the framework of democratic assistance. The research will be able to assess the fault lines within working of political parties and their role in fueling extremist ideologies in one way or another. The research seeks to provide changes in policy process in countries where religious or social extremism is rife.

	Political Party	Country	Type	Extremist Endorsements
1	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)	Pakistan	Conservative-Religious	Gains vote bank by supporting extremist groups
2	Bhartiya Janata Party	India	Hindu-dominated	Calls out for anti-minorities, specifically anti-Muslim agenda, while patronizing Hindu-extremist, nationalist parties like RSS
3	Republic Party	USA	Anti-nonwhite right wing	Form policies on non-white and anti-Muslim lines to gain public support by proving them a threat to the state

1.1 Political Parties

Pankaj Mishra in *How Democracy Kills in Indonesia and Pakistan* published in *Bloomberg view*⁴ provides a perceptive argument on situation and causes of minority maltreatment in South Asia, South East Asia, including Pakistan, India and Indonesia. The article very appropriately explains that democracy is damaged not so much by Islam, or for that matter Hindu extremism, as by brutally self-centered elites who hijack the political process, using all available means to secure their supremacy. Pankaj Mishra has stated that in both Pakistan and Indonesia, suppression and violation of rights is usually blamed over the country's armed forces or their intelligence agency however, quite opposite is the truth. The political saboteurs, who portray themselves as saviors of humanity play a major role in instigating sectarian and minority related violence in order to keep their own place secure, they would not support a humanitarian and would rather chose to support the suppressers because latter is relatively a safer zone, and is likely to help them in their political adventures.

Political parties are an integral component of democratic systems. Yet, parties frequently engage in violent behavior. They employ violence directly, when their activists and cadres seek out political opponents and target the supporters of rival parties. They outsource violent tasks to urban gangs and ethnic militias who do their violent bidding in exchange for access to state Resources and protection from state punishment. And they form alliances with local patrons, who maintain local vote banks through the control of micro-level structures and often, through coercion and intimidation.⁵

⁴ Pankaj Mishra Bloomberg, "How Democracy Kills in Indonesia and Pakistan"

⁵ Niloufer Aamina Siddiqui , "Under the Gun: Political Parties and Violence in Pakistan"

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Table 1 (Political Parties)

Moosa Kaleem, Fareedullah Choudhry and Waseem Ashraf Butt in the article Sect in motion⁶,

have put forth concrete and analytical insight into increasingly threatening stronghold of sectarianism in Pakistan. As according to article, the Lahore-based political analyst Dr Hassan Askari typically points towards the prevalent discriminator and intolerant mindset of greater social fabric, which has become uncontrollably violent, and shows state failure at managing and safeguarding rights of its minorities. The article vehemently claims that the violence and protection of perpetrators from wrath of the law comes from the support of the local power hubs, mainly those related to politics having a strong position of authority in government machinery.

Keeping in view Republican Party in United States and its association with racial and religious narratives promoting white supremacy and Islamophobia are at the center of global debate on extremism. According to the Pew Research Centre, 83% of registered voters in USA that identify themselves as republicans are non-Hispanic whites. It has been largely observed that Republic party's policies instigate anti-Muslim, anti-nonwhite and gender-discriminatory sentiments which are likely to be counterproductive provoking violence from the communities that feel threatened by the policies. The trends related to such political endorsement are not restricted to one region, BJP Bhartiya Janta Party of India having association with extremist Hindu nationalist parties producing hate content and mainstream narrative against Muslim minorities have resulted in unprecedented violence against minority communities in India, also known as Saffron terrorism.

⁶ Waseem Ashraf Butt, Moosa Kaleem, and Fareedullah Choudhry, "Sect in Motion," Herald

Moreover, Pakistan Muslim League (N) is known as conservative mainstream Political Party having gained its popularity aligning with religious extremist narrative over the years or using religion as a foundation to score political agendas. It has been alleged to support religious extremist groups specifically in interior Punjab region who form crucial vote generating constituent pockets for PML (N) during election.

1.2 Research Questions/Objectives

There are two generic ways in which political parties become instrumental in radicalization of society or their followers specifically

- 1) When Political parties associate themselves with extremist organization, they become a source of their strength as extremist views readily gets legitimacy through a largely publicized political forum. A political party is not merely a group of people they are a future contestant for successive government, either they are sitting in opposition as shadow cabinet or they are already sitting on government benches in the parliament which gives them power to formulate policies and make a national outlook.
- 2) When Political parties endorse ideology, an extremist organization holds that directly influences their followers, thus it becomes impetus for radicalization of regular followers of political party. It may influence the followers to join hands with extremist organizations and become potential recruits for violent activities.
- 3) A third perspective is that Political parties alienate groups or simply overlook the grievances of group existing within the social fabric of country, which may further deepen the distance between the social group and the state.

2. Theoretical Framework

It is an irony and at the same time unfortunate to witness events like Charlottes Ville In United States, Gujarat pogroms in India and Joseph Colony in Pakistan, connections of which have been found in political patronage of violence against minorities in order to appease lobbies for electoral support. In order to understand the psycho-social aspects of how extremist ideas influence members of a society the author has studied The staircase theory of terrorism (Moghaddam, 2011), which vehemently affirms that perceived injustice in the mind of a particular individual as member of the society or a community as a whole leads them towards developing association with violence and terrorism. The political parties in varying cultures and societies have fed the insecurities, mounting divisions and sense of discrimination rather than playing the role describes by the academicians, scholars placing the responsibility over the shoulders of political parties to become catalyst for harmony and peace.

As Fathali. M. Moghaddam in his staircase to terrorism has vehemently described the initial causes for an individual to become susceptible & accepting towards violence as a legitimate way to achieve his goals.⁷ A person starts off as a lay man, and finds himself in the center of social injustices, as he perceives them a reason for his or his communities disruption, he seeks ways to address those injustices but doesn't

⁷ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration"

have the means to do so, which leads him identify a specific entity to blame. That entity could be the state, an institution, individual or society as a whole, thus an individual who sees himself as a target of discrimination and injustice seeks to target someone in return, either to change the status quo or to satisfy his vengeance. The snowball nature of this phenomenon leads an individual to the point of adopting violence and terror as the only way to achieve his goals.

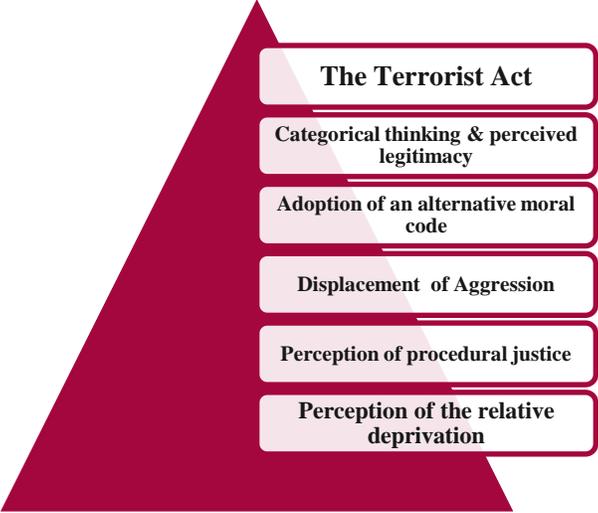


Figure 1 (Staircase Theory of Terrorism)

The role of Political Party is that of manipulation and exploitation of an individual or a group’s needs in today’s politics of power struggle.

3. Results

Keeping in view the factors discussed in theoretical framework, following are the most relevant factors that provide the results for this research. It will not be wrong to say that both the terrorists & Political Parties share a symbiotic relationship as both seem to benefit from each other, as it can be explained through push and pull factors.

	Push Factors	Pull Factors
a)	Social prejudice/injustice as perceived by a person or a group of people	Appealing policies or bargain option to elevate from the position of perceived injustice
b)	Financial inability to acquire expected goals	Possible provision of resources as promised by the political beneficiaries
c)	Lack of socio-political significance	An attractive position of respect as desired, a position within political party or within the government if the Political Party wins the election

Table 2 (Results)

The push factors allow us to understand the factors as also explained in the staircase theory by Moghaddam, it provide bases for an individual or group of individuals to find their place in terrorist organization endorsing an extremist agenda, whereas, same factors also lead him/her or them to find their solace in a political party, which has electoral power, and has the ability of mass mobilizing the people in favour of agenda as perceived by the terrorist organization. The pull factors explain the reasons which tempt terrorist organization or a terrorist to form alliance with a Political Party, while at the same time these factors prove that Political Parties need terrorist/extremist organizations as much as they need them in order to gain desired political edge to win election and gain power.

Terrorist organizations may represent sentiments of a regional community, ethnic group or religious association which will directly benefit a Political Party to gain Political leverage having endorsed the ideology of an extremist/terrorist organization.

4. Conclusion

The objectives of this research have given three different dimensions of understanding the point of view regarding Political Parties paving way elevating the influence of terrorist organizations by endorsing their extremist ideologies into their policy lines. Keeping in view the results, it can be concluded that Political Parties have significantly lost their way, as they are not playing the role of agent of political socialization, neither as an agent of national building, the sole purpose of Political Parties is power and influence, in order to achieve that they utilize unethical means like patronization and endorsement of extremist organizations. It can specifically be observed in the context of Pakistan's current socio-political dynamics where not just Political Parties but the entire governmental machinery appears as a hostage to an extremist group demanding review, and repeal of Supreme Court decision over acquittal of a Christian female who was wrongly accused of committing blasphemy.

Political Parties resort to using propaganda, character assassination and provocation as a tool to upstage success of rival Political Parties, which paves for extremist ideologies to be used as medium to conduct political business, while not adhering to the long-term consequences for achievement of short-term political goals. As the surveys, reports and analysis show the distrust among different individuals in the conduct of Political Parties, there is largely more chances that such trends in future either produce political inactivity, and inalienability among the citizens or may push them towards are, allying with non-state actors or terrorist organizations which portray a more goal-oriented and solution centric attitude.

ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.