

The Dynamics Of Populism In Pakistan: Media, Military, And Religion

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Abstract:

This research delves into the history of populism in Pakistan as its current political manifestations and underlying theories. Through the perspective of Post-structuralist discourse theory (PSDT) methodology the study explores how religion, civil-military relationships and media contribute to the growth of ideology in the nation. Populism in Pakistan thrives on intertwining the concepts of "logic of difference" and "logic of equivalence" allow populist leaders to construct a narrative centered on crisis and exclusion while also symbolizing people's aspirations, for change. To grasp the essence of populism in Pakistan, it is essential to delve into the historical context of the movement, as its theoretical foundations.

The research also investigates into the utilization of religion, by political leaders to forge a sense of national identity and garner backing from the masses. Additionally, it explores the impact of the military on the scene in the nation and its correlation with the emergence of movements. The study sheds light on how media portrayals influence sentiment and uphold ideologies. By examining these factors, the research offers an insight into the intricate dynamics of populism in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Populism, PSDT, Civil Military Relations, Religion, Media, National Identity.*

Introduction:

The Islamic ideology was central to Pakistan's existence according to the two-nation theory, which emphasized the importance of Quranic teachings and Sunnah for the legitimacy of the regime (Majid, et.al, 2014) Mohammad Ali Jinnah advocated for the two-nation theory, which led to the partition of India into two distinct nations. As a non-sectarian practicing Muslim, Jinnah advocated for the equality of all Islamic sects, which played a significant role in shaping his vision for an inclusive Pakistan. However, the rise of populist movements later posed challenges to this vision, as populism often fueled sectarian divides and undermined the unity necessary for an independent Pakistan (Awan, 2020).

Populism, historically significant, has taken the form of the social compact. It used religion, social inequality, and a desire for territorial sovereignty. This launched a mission based on

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spiritual nationalism and cultural distinctiveness. Nevertheless, the project's foundation lacked well-planned initiatives and a vital component, leaving a nation striving to forge a common ideal in the face of social divisions. Haqqani says, "Pakistan's need... could not remain once the demand was fulfilled with the emergence of an independent country." (Haqqani, 2018)

The country was portrayed as needing to figure out where it fit in the world even though it had its own flag, army, and independent governmental and economic structure. (Wint and Hussain, 1966). The US and UK helped Pakistan become recognized and accepted as a sovereign nation prepared to join the growing bipolar world order, and this was made possible by the Cold War bloc system.

Populism aimed to create a common idea to advance Pakistan's geopolitical objectives. The influence of Islamist political parties over the state's ideology and political system grew because of the significance of religion. Jamiat-e-Islami and Jamiat-e Ulema-e-Islam, among other socially and religiously conservative Islamist parties, strongly supported the leaders' narrative of a power vacuum. The engagement of both military and civilian sectors was enhanced, leading to the sustainability of Pakistan.

Populism also has a major impact on the military's ability to maintain the "deep state" and rule Pakistan. The military's power stems from a number of things, such as hostility against other countries, affiliation with the ISI, well-behaved personnel, and unstable internal politics. Although the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) has a history of backing coups against civilian regimes, these narratives have allowed the COAS to participate in socio-economic and governance decision-making. With limited opportunities to directly challenge the military, civilian governments often capitalize on public dissatisfaction to consolidate their own authority." Furthermore, by disseminating false information and endorsing populist ideologies, certain media sources have actively assisted the state in creating a sense of national identity (Yusuf & Schoemaker, 2013). The fallout from these activities has severely damaged society's connection with the state.

Pakistan has charismatic leaders such as former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the late Z.A. Bhutto, it is imperative to comprehend the causes of populism in the country in the twenty-first century. The Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) and the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) both opposed populism, with PNA doing so in the 1970s and PDM in 2020. This essay aims to comprehend the impact of populism on Pakistan through an analysis of religion, the military, and the media. Religion, the military, and the media are the pillars that both populism and counter-populist movements have used to foster hostility between the challenged and the challenger and to propagate the idea of an existential crisis. The paper aims to investigate the characteristics of Pakistani populism and create a theoretical framework for comprehending it by utilizing an interpretive epistemology and constructionist ontology. As stated by Kubalkova (Kubalkova, 2011), the article's second section will examine the comparison and contrast between the PDM movement and the Khan government using post-structural discourse theory (PSTD). The last part of the paper will highlight the significance of an empty signifier in the development of a paradigm rooted in hegemonic populist tendencies.

Populist Traits that are Evident in the Theoretical Framework

Populism in politics seeks to highlight the flaws in the current political structure or ruling class. Through this approach, it aims to question the established order and foster a more radical, individual-oriented outlook on bringing about change.

According to Jaeger and Walgrave (2007), populism is based on anti-elite sentiments and constantly appeals to the masses. A compelling leader or a shared belief are frequently sought by populist groups to justify their goals. Taking the background into account is necessary to comprehend the populists' strategy. It could be based on a vertical power structure, the idea of "losers of globalization or modernization thesis," and socioeconomic inequalities.

A subset of critical security studies argues that populists employ the politics of fear and insecurity to frame an existential crisis, which is essential to their portrayal of people as powerless and disadvantaged (Wojczewski, 2020). This approach involves giving identities shape and treating them as physical entities that represent resistance and collective will.

After that, the populist uses words and deeds to create a discourse based on indications that are dependent on context (Hansen, 2011). Muller argue that the tendency to split society into two camps is anti-pluralist. However, they have overlooked the fact that populism, as understood by post-structural discourse theory, aims to create a pluralistic social ideal by establishing an inclusive framework that permits different identities to coexist (Muller, 2017). This framework understands identities as multifaceted, dynamic, and subject to change rather than as something that is fixed or unchangeable. There needs to be a social order that is susceptible to political interventions and disturbances that populists can take advantage for the pluralist normative vision to flourish (Panizza & Miorelli, 2013).

Even though populist movements are commonplace around the world, it might be challenging to understand Pakistan's situation because both the opposition and the current regime have populist tendencies. Since Pakistan's independence, words made by powerful individuals have shaped the discourse that shapes the identity of the elite. Numerous media outlets, including print, electronic, and social media, have enabled the consolidation process (Ekstrom et al., 2018). To encourage resistance to the previous government, Imran Khan's administration in Pakistan refocused attention in 2017 on anti-corruption and religion (Hassan, 2018). Despite having some independence from the military, his administration's legitimacy relies on the same dubious political system. Imran Khan stands out from past leaders in Pakistan by adeptly and gracefully expressing groundbreaking ideals (Milam 2018).

In spite of their wish to profit from the people's unfulfilled frustrations, the Pakistan Democratic Movement's opposition has overlooked the fundamental elements that have historically created Pakistan's identity. Pakistani populism has to be defined broadly, taking into account the historical background and external factors that have influenced the nation's landscape. Populism has many different roots and is characterized by its lack of distinctive characteristics. Populism and post-structural discourse theory leaders have become more compatible because of constructivist ontology and de-essentializing (Howarth, 2010).

Laclau and Chantal in 2001 argue that society's structural principles lack a fundamental or natural foundation. Cannolly (1991) points out that the idea of a preset essence is problematic because it upholds foundationalism and essentialism. This method of studying populism using a post-structuralist discourse theory (PSDT) framework has been rejected by Torfing in 1999 and other academics.

The essay builds the theoretical framework using post-structural discourse theory, which incorporates ideas like the "logic of difference" and the "logic of equivalency." The opposing force, referred to as the "logic of difference," helps to distinguish between the challenger and the challenged, while the "logic of equivalency" emphasizes the ways in which populism ties

in with both the opposition and the ruling class (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). It is incorrect to suggest that one logic can totally eclipse the impact of the other, even though it is true that both logics aim to dominate the discursive networks. The populist purposefully creates an empty signifier in a discursive network by utilizing derogatory laws and concepts like nationalism and corruption. Another way to conceptualize the empty signifier is as a dominant unifying principle that consolidates disparate grievances into a coherent whole, hence enhancing the populist's capacity for representation (Laclau, 2005).

The populist gets support in their opposition to the ruling class and establishes themselves as the main voice of the people's grievances by capitalizing on unmet social needs (Laclau, 2005). In order to comprehend populist tendencies in Pakistan's political leadership and opposing forces, this study seeks to broaden the ideas already held by academics such as Laclau (Laclau, 2005). This study goes one step further and applies the ideas of difference and equivalency to different levels of populist tendencies rather than rigidly following one set of standards. This broadens the meaning of an empty signifier to include the media, religion, and the connection between the civilian and military forces. By strengthening the links within post-structural discourse theory to comprehend Pakistani politics, the aim of this research is to further the current understanding of populism.

The Populist System's Structural Logic of Equivalency and Logic of Difference

Imran Khan has led numerous protests since 2013, with the objective of overthrowing the corrupt former Sharif government (Ullah et al., 2020). In 2018, Imran Khan assumed the role of prime minister in Pakistan due to various factors, including the nation's weak economy and the backing of the Tehrik-e-Insaf party. Khan's election ambitions were strengthened by a discourse focused on transparent administration and eradicating existing problems, supported by a flimsy ideology and the grandiosity of "Naya Pakistan" (Hassan, 2018).

On the other hand, to see the current events as a permanent shift for Pakistan would be historically inaccurate. In order to obtain power and influence over the political system and institutions, former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto used the idea of "social justice" in the government during the 1970s (Hassan, 2018).

Since obtaining independence, Pakistan has based its social structure on Islamic values, promoting Muslim solidarity both at home and abroad (Karim, 2020). In addition to helping Khan win over the bitter parties, his use of religion as a unifying theme provided Islamist parties greater influence over the present administration. Prof. Ayesha Jalal in 2019 notes that the September 7, 1974, national assembly's unanimous approval of a constitutional amendment designating the Ahmadis as a minority was a turning point for Pakistan and demonstrated the historical relevance of the pressure imposed by Islamists. The Pakistani nation-state established a limited definition of citizenship by designating Ahmadis as non-Muslims, weakening its commitment to equal citizenship rights (Jalal, 2019, p. 175). Imran Khan faced challenges in his attempt to diminish the importance of blasphemy laws due to opposition from Islamists, as seen in the Asia Bibi case. The appointment of Atif Mian to PM Khan's Economic Advisory Council in 2018 garnered attention from Islamists due to a separate incident of anti-Ahmadiyya sentiment. Like his predecessors, PM Khan was forced to accede to the demands of the anti-Ahmadiyya parties after widespread demonstrations by Islamists in Pakistani streets. Haqqani in 2020 investigated the use of religion in politics. The 2018 general elections produced no clear majority because of a shortage of seats (Shah, 2019). PM Khan attempted to curry favor with extreme anti-Shia organizations like Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat ASWJ and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan TLP, which appeared to condone acts of violence against the Shia community

(Baloch & Petersen, 2020). By uniting around a religious issue in 2020, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a coalition of opposition parties, defeated the Khan government and emerged as a serious contender.

The appointment of Maulana Fazlur Rehman as the leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) in 1988 reveals the conflict between counter-populism theory and practice in Pakistan, despite the supposed inclusivity of the PDM movement. Rehman's effort to appeal to Islamists was motivated by the JUI (F)'s disapproval of Asia Bibi's acquittal in the blasphemy case (Jaffrelet, 2020). The PDM movement, with its diverse liberal, conservative, and democratic forces, challenges PM Khan's authority by embodying the "logic of difference" instead of the "logic of equivalency" that drives sectarianism.

The military has a significant impact on Pakistani politics due to a further aspect of the underlying "logic of equivalence." Political system impartiality in Pakistan has come under scrutiny due to the military's meddling in politics, which is motivated by corporate power and unethical behavior (Shah, 2019; Mehmam, 2020; Behera, 2018). In order to address previous PM Shairf's unsolved concerns, PM Khan, who was close to COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, planned a covert coup against him during the election campaign.

In light of the current economic crisis, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) movement is casting doubt on the legitimacy of the "Naya Pakistan" discourse and casting doubt on the Khan regime's efficacy given its strong reliance on the COAS. Seizing upon a common set of concerns, the PDM movement has become a powerful counter-populist force, openly criticizing the top brass of the military without going up against it directly (Ahmed, 2020). A concise declaration regarding the PDM movement's objectives is challenging because of its dynamic character. While the PDM movement's hostility toward senior military figures gives rise to the "logic of difference," while the "logic of equivalency" results from both sides' shared commitment to military institutions.

The Maulana will not stand idly by as the military backs Imran Khan, his bitter opponent. He and Imran are incompatible with one another. Even after several brushes with the law, Nawaz Sharif has always been seen as a member of the establishment. After severing their relations with the current military leadership, Maulana and Mian believe that attacking the military is their only option for getting rid of its mercenaries. By manipulating the perception of populism as the dominant tendency in Pakistan's social contract, media narratives serve to highlight the idea of the "logic of equivalency." Previous rulers have tried to undermine the authority of independent media in the country by forcing them to spread false information endorsed by the state and purposely fostering divisions between right and wrong, or between different groups. Similar to M.A. Jinnah, the main architect of Pakistan and a champion of democracy, they have utilized the media's power to promote themselves and have emphasized the strategy of controlling media autonomy (Wodak, 2015).

During and after the 2018 election campaign, Pakistani journalists viewed Prime Minister Khan as a champion of press freedom and the people's voice. However, the actions of the current administration under Imran Khan's government have demonstrated how false these claims are. According to DW in 2020, the Khan administration has implemented policies that hinder independent journalists and put financial pressure on media outlets. In contrast, the PDM movement unites political organizations that previously restricted press freedom under the "logic of equivalency," setting them apart from the "logic of difference" of the Khan administration.

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The Act of Forming a Meaningless Signifier.

The conflict between competing populist movements has given rise to a symbol that is commonly referred to as an "empty signifier." that captures the people's desire for both difference and similarity or as a product of the populist (Moffitt, 2015), with the process by which opposing parties preserve their monopoly over power depending on the interchange of ideologies, symbols, and ideas (Laclau, 1990). Rival factions in Pakistan have constructed a story that places democracy in opposition to authoritarianism in competition, removing the relevance of symbols in populist and counter-populist movements. The PDM movement and Prime Minister Khan are currently the frontrunners in driving the country forward.

Canovan (1999) argues that post-structural discourse theory (PTSD) is relevant to Pakistan's crisis of representation, as it explores the complex nature of discursive constructions. Moffitt (2016) employs the crisis framework to analyze failure, whereas Hay (1995) concentrates on uniqueness as a means of differentiation in Pakistani society. According to Stavrakis and their fellows a thorough examination of populism and anti-populism needs to consider how interdependent they are (Stavrakis et al. 2018).

Conclusion

Pakistan's political and historical development after achieving independence in 1947 has influenced the country's populism. The different structural conditions and undercurrents have made it easy to reconfigure and modify the setting. Populism has been used by politicians as a tool for popular mobilization, using the "logic of difference" to focus their aspirations on reform or revolution. However, by appealing to a "logic of equivalency," which allays the public's complaints with a vague but mutually acceptable answer, both populist and counter-populist movements have cemented the populist tactic. PM Khan and the PDM movement both used the situation as an opportunity by making vague promises about governance.

This highlights the lack of a dogmatic populist philosophy.

Despite the fact that PM Imran Khan's personality-driven politics prevailed until 2018, the PDM movement's resounding popularity has dramatically changed Pakistani domestic politics. Because political expediency has taken precedence over the greater good, the country finds itself in an offensive and disgusting situation both internally and internationally. This article tries to investigate the role of the media, civil-military relations, religion, and other variables that have contributed to the persistence of populism in Pakistan. To fully understand the negative relationship between center-province ties and populism in the nation, more study is necessary.

Both populists and counter-populists in Pakistan have reassured the public about fairness and integrity in the country through dialogue and adversarial interactions. This perspective of the origins of populism in Pakistan is supported by post-structural discourse theory (PTSD). Basically, there have been a few differences between Pakistani governments' objectives and policies. With the use of the PTSD theory, the study of populist political discourse contributes to a framework for analyzing the structures that affect subjects and objects in Pakistan. Studying Pakistan's populist inclinations is essential to comprehending the larger pattern of populism's rise in the twenty-first century.

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