

Research Article

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Zahid Shahab Ahmed*

National Identity Formation in Pakistan: Analysis of the Anti-Secular Narrative

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Abstract: Soon after its declaration as an Islamic Republic in 1956, Islamists have experienced numerous ups and downs in Pakistan. Islamists not only try to maintain the status quo of the Islamic state but also endeavour to expand the scope of *sharia*. Despite insignificant achievements in elections, Islamists have mostly been able to dictate civilian and military governments in matters of national identity. One of the greatest challenges for the promotion of pluralism is the Islamists' anti-secular narrative, which holds significant backing from both the civil and the military elites. The goal of this paper is to analyse such narrative with reference to Pakistan's continuous struggle for a national identity. The analyses propose that anti-secular voices are occupying centre stage in Pakistan, leaving little room for diverse opinions. Anti-secular groups use violence as a tool to silence any opposition against their ideology for Pakistan, which is evident by regular attacks on not only the religious minorities but also the moderate or liberal Muslim thinkers. The conflict over national identity between extremists and moderates is also one of the main causes of rising violent extremism in Pakistan.

Keywords: national identity, anti-secularism, Islamists, pluralism, counter-narrative

1 Introduction

During a 2-month fieldwork in Kathmandu, I met a number of Ahmadiyya refugees from Pakistan. Although the Government of Nepal does not recognise them as refugees, they get some living allowance (4,000 Nepalese Rupees per month in 2009) from the International Organisation of Migration (IOM). Despite this allowance, they were observed to live under difficult circumstances. I enquired a 20-year-old Ahmadiyya his reasons for living in such miserable conditions. In reply, he stated that unlike in Pakistan, there was no threat to his life in Nepal. In 2009, he was seen eagerly waiting for an IOM-hired bus to take him to Kathmandu airport for residency in either Europe or Canada—where many Ahmadiyyas have already settled.¹ Religious extremists in Pakistan repeatedly attack the Ahmadiyya community. A recent example is that of the December 2016 attack on their 'place of worship' in Chakwal, Punjab (Dhaku 2016). This raises questions on pluralism and respect for diversity in Pakistan. The conflict between the majority Muslims and the Ahmadiyyas should have been settled a long time ago when they were declared non-Muslims in 1974; but that is not the case, as fundamentalists and extremists endeavour for an Islamic state for Muslims alone. This is evident through attacks on other religious minorities too, mainly Christians and Hindus, and even on sectarian minorities such as Shias and Ismailis.

¹ For more information on this, read <http://tribune.com.pk/story/684227/visa-fines-pakistani-refugees-others-condemned-to-hilly-prison-in-nepal/>

*Corresponding author: Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Alfred Deakin Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Australia, E-mail: zahid.ahmed@deakin.edu.au

In Pakistan, religion (Islam) is considered to be supranational; therefore, the country struggles to form a singular nation based on cultural or ethnic aspects. However, religion's (Islam) supranationalism leaves out a significant number of religious minorities in the established national identity of an Islamic Republic. Although Pakistan is a majority Muslim country with 96% Muslims, it has 3.54% of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadiyyas, Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs and others (Rais 2004, 457). It is difficult to provide exact official data because the last national census was done in 1998. As per the present day's estimated population of 200 million (Karim 2016), the population of religious minorities is >7 million, which is greater than the population of many countries and almost equal to the population of Israel, Tajikistan, Bulgaria, Serbia and Papua New Guinea. The demographics demand pluralism, which was practised by the founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, for instance, through establishment of his first cabinet in which the law minister (Jogendra Nath Mandal) was a Hindu and the foreign minister (Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan) was an Ahmadiyya (Hoodbhoy 2016, 36). However, Ahmadiyyas were then not officially declared as non-Muslims. Another pluralistic example is that of Pakistan's flag, in which the white strip was added to the erstwhile Muslim League's green flag with a star and a crescent to represent minorities in the country (Burki 1986, 43). The formation of such a pluralistic cabinet and the pluralistic flag should have ended any confusion on Jinnah's vision for Pakistan, but that was not the case, as Jinnah passed away in 1948 and, with that, also his long-fought vision for the new homeland.

Ever since the foundation of Pakistan had been laid, Islam has been at its core. It became an Islamic Republic in 1956, with its constitution subscribing 'to a diluted form of pluralism' (Hoodbhoy 2016, 36). The blueprint 'Objective Resolution' for the Islamic Republic was prepared during the era of Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan's first Prime Minister. While the Objective Resolution provided hints to religious (Islamic) alignment of the government, there was no mention made to *sharia*² in the document (Zaidi 2003, 102). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, however, initiated Islamisation in the 1970s, which was institutionalised during the Zia-ul-Haq's era.³ It was in the 1980s, during the era of General Zia-ul-Haq when Islamisation led to promulgation of Islamic laws in the country. These laws included the ambiguous blasphemy law and the Hudood Ordinance.⁴ It was also during this time that the media became highly state controlled, and 'with the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism ...[television drama] was to suffer a serious setback' and the state-run television channel (Pakistan Television Corporation [PTV]) was used for spreading both political and religious messages (Burki 1986, 33). It was also the time when the Ministry of Information directed PTV's women newscasters to appear on TV with *dupatta* (scarf) covering their heads and without make-up. At the peak of Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation, he said, 'Pakistan is like Israel, which is an ideological state. Take out the Judaism from Israel and it will fall like a house of cards. Take Islam out of Pakistan and make it a secular state; it would collapse' (Burki 1986, 78; Tharoor 2014). While he was inspired by the religious values of Saudi Arabia, the country was undergoing structural changes due to its strategic partnership with the US and Saudi Arabia for the so-called *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Then, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) were at the forefronts of *jihad* and Islamisation at home and abroad (Afghanistan) for their political ambitions (Ahmed 2012).

For long, there have been sectarian differences causing fissures in Pakistan. Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, a combination of internal and external factors has escalated sectarian violence in the country. In 1980, Islamabad was the site of the first-ever demonstration by Shias against the implementation of the Zakat and Ushr Ordinance (Islamic taxes) by the then President General Zia-ul-Haq (Warde 2010, 116). Shias demanded exemption from paying *Zakat*⁵ to the state and the government had to agree (Iqbal 2014). According to Ali (2000, 33), the successful protests in Islamabad became a factor in deteriorating

² *Sharia*, derived from the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (*Sunnah*), is the religious law forming Islamic tradition.

³ During Bhutto's era, Islamisation happened both domestically and in Pakistan's foreign relations. It was during this period that Ahmadiyyas were declared non-Muslims in 1974, and strong relationships with Muslim majority countries, e.g. via the Organisation of Islamic Conference, became a key feature of Pakistan's foreign policy.

⁴ The Pakistan Penal Code prohibits blasphemy against any recognised religion and considers this a punishable crime. Similarly, Hudood Ordinances were brought in by Zia-ul-Haq as part of Sharia for punishing criminal offences, such as adultery.

⁵ *Zakat* is an Islamic practice of alms giving, which is among the five pillars of Islam.

Shia–Sunni relations in Jhang – presently a hotspot of sectarian violence – where both communities had lived side by side for generations. Outside powers, mainly Saudi Arabia, have been somewhat successful in ensuring that Pakistan carries a Sunni label, which is dangerous because the country is home to the second largest Shia population after Iran. According to a study, there are 17–26 million Shias in Pakistan, which comprises about 10–15% of the Shia population in the world – second after 37–40% in Iran (PRC 2009). Nonetheless, there are contradictory views on the proportion of Shia population in Pakistan. Some state that it is around 7%, but Shias claim their population to be between 15% and 20%. If we estimate the Pakistani Shia population based on the estimated population of 200 million in 2016, then their number can be between 13 and 38 million out of the 192 million Muslims. Whatever the case might be, there is no denying the fact that there is a sizeable Shia population in Pakistan. In discussions on nation-building, it is imperative to focus on the non-homogeneity of Islam in Pakistan. While analysing the factors responsible for national identity formation in Pakistan, it is also important to pay attention to the extremist narrative that, e.g. declares Shias as non-Muslims or *kafirs*. Since the 1980s, extremist groups such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan have been trying to reach a legislative amendment for declaring Shias to be *kafirs* (Malik 2011, 37).⁶

Looking at the recent history of Pakistan with reference to the promotion of pluralism, the era of General Pervez Musharraf – 1999–2002 Chief Executive of Pakistan and 2001–2008 President of Pakistan – should be analysed. The focus of this paper is to analyse relevant aspects of Musharraf’s regime before and after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (henceforth 9/11). It was a time when the global landscape suddenly shifted following the 9/11 terrorists attacks, with a focus on Islam versus the West. Pakistan became a frontline US ally in the ‘War on Terror’ and had to take a U-turn on its erstwhile policy of supporting the Taliban. Musharraf initiated social reforms for the promotion of pluralism and therefore gained the backing of religious minorities in the 2002 elections. Due to his vision of ‘Enlightened Moderation’,⁷ he received applause from all over the world, including a standing ovation from leaders of the American Jewish Congress (Jan 2005, 163). Nonetheless, at home, Musharraf received criticism of the vision attempting to Westernise Pakistan as per the wishes of the US. Even Musharraf’s close political allies in Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) opposed Enlightened Moderation; for instance, MMA’s President Qazi Husain Ahmad labelled Musharraf’s vision as a national threat (*Dawn*, 23 March 2005). In his book *In the Line of Fire*, Musharraf (2006) replies to criticism of his vision by accepting that he is not an Islamic scholar and that the idea has nothing to do with Islam but Muslims and their freedom.⁸ His vision for a new Muslim society failed short of meeting its objectives because ‘the Pakistani establishment has been pandering and surrendering to the demands of Islamists’ (Sareen 2011, 32). Thus, the goal of this paper is to analyse the nature and effects of Islamists’ anti-secular narrative during Musharraf’s period in power.

Findings of this paper are crucial for understanding the position of pluralism in Pakistan. By deepening an understanding of the situation, I hope to open up pathways for interventions promoting pluralism, as well as inter- and intra-faith harmony. In this context, it is important to understand the dynamics of the anti-secular rhetoric in Pakistan because extremist elements continue to attack individuals and organisations advocating secular values in the country. Understanding of Islamists’ anti-secular narrative will also help in producing a counter-narrative. The timing of this analysis is also appropriate because the Government of Pakistan has implemented its strategy on countering violent extremism under ‘National Action Plan-2015’ and the task of producing the counter-narrative is assigned to the National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA). Particularly, the analysis will be useful to scholars and policymakers focussing on a counter-narrative for addressing extremist ideologies.

⁶ *Kafir* is perhaps the most misused present-day term in the Muslim world. While its original meaning is ‘nonbeliever’, in connection to someone who does not believe in God and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad, *kafir* is a term commonly used by Muslim extremists for setting scores against members of other Muslim sects, such as Sunnis against Shias.

⁷ General Musharraf’s coined this term after the start of the ‘War on Terror’ to emphasise on countering extremism through moderate teachings of Islam.

⁸ The book was translated in Urdu and published with the title of “*Sab se Pahle Pakistan*” (Pakistan First) by Ferozsons, Lahore. ‘Pakistan First’ was Musharraf’s slogan in line with his ‘Enlightened Moderation’. Interestingly, the Urdu title of the book is completely different from the English title ‘*In the Line of Fire*’.

2 Methodology

The focus of this research is on General Pervez Musharraf's era, a year prior to 9/11 and a year after, i.e. 2000 and 2002. This also covers the period of the 2002 elections in Pakistan. This paper analyses the anti-secular narrative through newspaper reports from two prominent newspapers – *The News* (English) and *Nawa-e-Waqt* (Urdu). Both newspapers are from the biggest media groups in Pakistan – the Jang Group and the Nawa-i-waqt. The former owns Geo TV and the following newspapers: *Daily Jang*, *Daily Awam*, *Daily Awaz*, *Daily Waqt*, *The News* and *Pakistan Times*. Nawa-i-waqt owns Waqt News TV and publishes newspapers by the names of *The Nation* (English) and *Nawa-e-Waqt* (Urdu). *The News* is the largest English daily, with a circulation of 138,000–144,000 per day, and *Nawa-e-Waqt* is the second largest Urdu newspaper after *Daily Jang*, with a daily circulation of >0.5 million copies (Shah 2010, 1). A total of 30 relevant statements were collected from both newspapers for the years 2000 and 2002.

3 Results and discussion

The aim of this section is to present a synthesis of the results with discussion. Ever since the establishment of Pakistan, Islamists have been in action politically. Their role becomes more visible on the matters of the constitution and its implementation. There are numerous examples of military and civilian governments backtracking from certain reforms after facing resistance from the Islamists. All these aspects receive a special focus in this analysis.

3.1 Anti-secularism

Although limited in scope, there are numerous small-scale Islamic parties in Pakistan. These parties are devoted to reviving Islam in each and every sphere of life and by virtue of their ideologies are called Islamists. It is due to their agenda that Islamists are protective of the declared identity of Pakistan, in which they want all citizens to follow the Islamic code of conduct or *sharia*. Change does not happen overnight, and today's political gains for Islamists are a product of continuous efforts since the creation of Pakistan. The mainstream media continues to provide space to leaders of Islamic parties for spreading their ideology. Similar was the case during the period investigated in this research (see the following examples).

Dera Ismail Khan: The Central Amir Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and General Secretary of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties, Maulana Fazal ur Rehman, addressing a meeting at Daraban Kilan said the establishment of an Islamic government and system was must in Pakistan which could get rid of people of their miseries. (*The News*, 5 September 2002, 15)

No 'ism' or system except Sharia will be allowed to invoke in Pakistan: JI Ameer Qazi Hussain Ahmed. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 13 June 2000, 1)

We will fight against those who want to make Pakistan a secular state: Chief Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 13 June 2000, 1)

Since the starting year of the data, viz. 2000, the position of Islamists vis-à-vis secularists has not changed. In March 2014, a statement from JI's General Secretary, Liaqat Baloch, criticised Pakistan's security reforms as 'a conspiracy to turn Pakistan into a secular country' (*Dawn*, 21 March 2014). In March 2016, while opposing Punjab Government's Protection of Women against Violence Bill, JUI's chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman said that he would oppose secularism (*The Express Tribune*, 1 March 2016). Religious parties also use this anti-secular debate as a political tool against governments. For example, JI's chief Sirajul Haq (2016a) criticised the *Pakistan Muslim League* – Nawaz (PML-N) government by saying that 'the Prime Minister's slogan of a liberal and secular Pakistan and [Pakistan Peoples Party] PPP leader Bilawal

Bhutto's move for a political alliance against the religious parties was an indication that whereas the Qibla [direction in which Muslims offer their prayers—Mecca] of the rulers was the US and Washington'. Even on the corruption scandal of Panama Leaks, Sirajul Haq (2016b) added a religious perspective by saying, 'only liberal and secular people were named by the Panama Leaks for tax evasion and there was not a single religious scholar or [madrassa] head facing corruption charges'.

3.2 Pressurising Governments

Islamists have the ability to dictate governments on a range of social policies. During Musharraf's era in 2000, its Interior Minister had to issue a statement mentioning that Pakistan is not a secular state (refer following examples).

No Ambiguity on Pakistan being Islamic State: Interior Minister Gen (Retired) Moinuddin Haider. In a statement in Karachi, he said that Pakistan could not be a secular state. (*The News*, 13 June 2000, 8)

The government should refrain from making Pakistan a secular state: JI Pakistan. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 11 January 2002, 3)

Weak governments or the governments seeking legitimacy at home have often benefitted from the Islamists in the country, who in turn have easily manipulated those governments. This was particularly the case with General Musharraf, who had an ambitious agenda for reforms in the country. In uniform, as the Chief Executive of Pakistan, Musharraf's agenda also led to criticism of the Pakistan Army (as seen in the following examples).

People want Islamic system not secularism in Pakistan, President Jamiat Ulema-e-Pakistan Abdul Sattar Khan Niazi. He said this during an interview at the *Nawa-e-Waqt* office in Islamabad that the religious parties would sever their alliance with Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf if he did not implement *sharia* in the country. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 9 August 2000, 1)

Akora Khattak: Secular forces want to use military government to eliminate Pakistan's Islamic perspective: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam head Maulana Samee ul Haq. All religious forces should join hands to foil this conspiracy, said Maulana Samee ul Haq. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 16 June 2000, 4)

There is a connection between the anti-secular rhetoric of Islamists and minority rights in Pakistan. While demanding implementation of *sharia*, Islamists have opposed calls for secularism, in which they often link minority rights with violation of the teachings of Islam. Prominent religious parties, namely JI and JUI, lead this resistance. The inflexibility of both parties comes from success in firstly blocking reforms and then in reversing reforms. In November 2016, a bill was passed in the Sindh Assembly prohibiting the forced religious conversion of any person aged below 18 years. This continues to receive strong opposition from all religious parties, especially JI and JUI. The Sindh government of PPP is under pressure from JI, and the party's co-Chair Asif Ali Zardari has succumbed to political opposition on withdrawing the bill (Ghori 2016). After applauding the Sindh Assembly's Act with reference to criticism from religious parties, Pakistan's former minister Javed Jabbar (2016) wrote, 'Religiosity has also bred murderous extremism, gravely damaging the nation internally, and totally distorting its image'.

3.3 The State's Identity

There has always been confusion over Pakistan being an Islamic state. There have been concerns regarding space for secular values under the dominance of the majority's religion. Such concerns have been in debate ever since the creation of Pakistan. In fact, divergent views with respect to the vision of the country's father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, exist; for example, whether he had wanted a secular state on an Islamic Republic as per the Two-Nation Theory. The debate on this issue is ignited from time to time and was highly prevalent in the years covered by this research.

Tanzeem-e-Islami Pakistan Chief Dr Israr Ahmed while speaking to members of Nowshera Bar Association said Pakistan was created in the name of Islam under the two-nation theory and those who want to convert it into a secular state are living in fool's paradise. (*The News*, 13 September 2000, 5)

Some people try to portray Quaid-e-Azam's 11 August 1947 speech emphasising minority rights as secularism... He was not a secular but repeatedly called for a model Islamic state. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 28 July 2000, 6)

Based on their own unclear understanding of secularism, Islamists continue to oppose secularism. As clear from the analysis in this paper, Islamists associate secularism with deviance from key Islamic teachings, e.g. the Islamic code of conduct. The position is so rigid that they are not willing to make any compromise on allowing promotion of pluralism in the country (as seen in the following example).

Pakistan is an Islamic state and there is no place for secularism: MMA Leader in Attock Hassan Raza Naqvi. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 24 September 2002, 6)

Islamists have a limited presence in mainstream politics and decision-making. Nevertheless, they are influential when it comes to the matter of religion and religious and national identity, for instance, Islamists have a complete control over the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII).⁹ The Council's current chair, Maulana Muhammad Khan Sherani, in office since 2010, has been a prominent JUI leader. Despite heavy criticism of the Council for its controversial proposals, e.g. husbands' 'light beating' of their wives and gender segregation in schools, hospitals and offices (Khan 2016), Sherani continues to hold the position. Since 2008, JUI's leader Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman is the chair of the Special Committee of the Parliament on Kashmir. It is important to highlight that the Kashmir dispute with India is central to Pakistan's national policy and identity vis-à-vis the Two-Nation Theory.

There is growing confusion about national identity since the creation of Pakistan. While the Two-Nation Theory had promoted the idea of a separate state for Muslims of the Indian sub-continent, the proponents of the idea of Islamic state claim that the basic idea was to create a homeland for Muslims where they could practice their religion as per *sharia*. The supporters of Muslim State claim that the goal of creating Pakistan was to have a homeland for Muslims with its government not necessarily following *sharia*. Partly this confusion or fissure is the result of Jinnah interchangeably using the terms 'Islamic state' and 'Muslim state' in his speeches. According to Hoodbhoy (2016, 48), this was because Jinnah lacked 'a clear understanding of either history or theology This left a legacy of confusion'. On the other hand, scholars like Burki (1986, 77) believe that Jinnah wanted an Islamic state, a nation-state, as clear from ways in which Jinnah defined Muslims as a separate nation from the Hindus. The Two-Nation Theory is attributed to Sir Muhammad Iqbal. It is believed that the proposal for a separate state for Muslims was presented by Iqbal to Jinnah, but his idea was not to create an Islamic state but a country where Muslims could freely practice their religion, meaning a Muslim state (Cesari 2014, 200). This conflict continues until now and has exerted serious implications for the peace and security of the country.

There is an ongoing conflict between secular elements and religious parties over the national identity of Pakistan. Javed Jabbar (2016) said 'founded on the basis of religious identity, there is now rampant religiosity' in Pakistan. In opposition to secular or liberal values in Pakistan, religious parties go back to the very foundation of the country. This is clear from a statement of JI's chief Sirajul Haq (2016a), who warned the rulers by saying that 'Pakistan is an Islamic ... the aim of establishing this state was not secularism or liberalism but the Khilafat [Caliphate] and the Islamic system based on the Quran and the Sunnah'. This is similar to JUI's position. The so-called religiosity is a reason behind the increasing public support for *sharia* in Pakistan. A study including >1,500 respondents found overwhelming support for the implementation of *sharia* as *jihad* in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Islamabad, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Rathore and Basit 2010, 26). Another research found most of the participants (55%) acknowledging the services of religious scholars and clerics for Islam

⁹ The Council of Islamic Ideology is a constitutional body that advises the legislature on *sharia*.

in Pakistan (Sial and Anjum 2010, 53). The lack of trust on the secular political parties due to corruption also reflects the inability of the political leadership to gain people's trust.

The confusion emanating from the very foundation of the country complements the cause of fundamentalist and extremist elements in Pakistan. Those forces are adamant on creating an Islamic state in letter and spirit. The present head of JI, Sirajul Haq, wished for implementation of *sharia* across the country while he was a senior minister in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (*The Express Tribune*, 28 July 2013). In April 2016, Haq demanded the Islamic system in the country (*The Nation*, 2 April 2016). While addressing a gathering in Karachi, JUI's chief, Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman, said, 'We want the enforcement of *sharia* at gun point' (Imtiaz 2012). If we connect JUI's position (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 13 June 2000, 1), then it is clear from the use of words like 'fight' and 'gun point' that the opposition to secularism is constant, but the expression is more aggressive. It is ironic that the narrative often produced by Islamists in parties such as the JI and JUI, which helps extremists, is neglected in policy discussions on countering terrorism and violent extremism in the country.

Violent extremism is manifested through an increasing number of attacks on religious minorities across Pakistan. In recent years, the frequency and severity of such attacks have escalated, for instance, there have been attacks on religious places and minority organisations. In May 2013, a violent mob destroyed Hindu temples in Larkana, Sindh. Later in September 2013, there was a terrorist attack on All Saints Church in Peshawar, which killed 83 people. In 2015, there was an attack on the Ismaili community – a sectarian (Shia) minority – which killed 43 in Karachi. In March 2016, a suicide bomber attacked Christians celebrating Easter Sunday in Lahore and killed 72 (*The Express Tribune*, 28 March 2016). According to a report (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project [ACLED] 2016), 83 people belonging to religious minorities died in terrorist attacks – mostly conducted by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar¹⁰ – in Pakistan during the period from January to July in 2016.

Extremist elements have been successful in crushing any opposition against their ideology. To achieve and maintain their targets, they have lodged violent attacks. Extremists have indiscriminately attacked advocates of religious freedom, including common people to high-profile celebrities and policymakers. In this regard, prominent examples are the following people, who were killed for promoting pluralism in Pakistan: Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer and Federal Minorities' Minister Shahbaz Bhatti. Prominent Islamist groups hailed Mumtaz Qadri, Taseer's murderer, as a hero. JI wholeheartedly supported its hero and campaigned for a presidential pardon for Qadri (Gishkori 2011). In fact, JI used Qadri's image, e.g. on banners, for collecting votes in UC 34 in Karachi (*The Express Tribune*, 27 November 2015). This went in vain because JI's candidate lost the elections against Muttahida Qaumi Movement's Muhammad Sohail Anwar. This generally is the case with Islamists, who despite their ability to mobilise masses fail to achieve a significant political success.¹¹

However, this scenario is changing with the rise of extremism in certain parts of the country, as recently witnessed in Jhang (Punjab). Moulana Masroor Nawaz won in PP-78 with a margin of nearly 13,000 votes against a contender backed by the Prime Minister's party, namely, PML-N (Sindhu 2016). It is important to mention that the winner is the son of Haq Nawaz Jhangvi¹², the founder of a militant sectarian outfit called Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (Nasir 2016).¹³ The case of Jhang demonstrates that militants are gaining political position in the country, although not at an alarming pace. Moulana Masroor Nawaz continues to use peace rhetoric for bringing Shias and Sunnis close in his constituency. This is a major factor behind his huge win in a context wherein masses are facing 'conflict fatigue'. To add to his popularity as a peacemaker, Federal Minister for Religious Affairs, Sardar Muhammad Yusuf, presented him with a 'peace award' at

¹⁰ Jamaat-ul-Ahrar is a militant Sunni Islamic Deobandi group that split away from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in 2014. The group continues to maintain close links with the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda.

¹¹ The Jamaat-e-Islami, a leading and the oldest religious party in Pakistan, had won only four seats in West Pakistan in the National Assembly elections of December 1970 (Burki 1986, 65).

¹² Haq Nawaz Jhangvi founded an anti-Shia militant organisation with the name of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan. In 1990, suspected Shia militants killed him.

¹³ For more about sectarian politics in Jhang, read the following study: Mukhtar Ahmad Ali. 2000. *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang*. Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies.

a gathering of the National Peace Council in Islamabad (*The Express Tribune*, 29 December 2016). While Nawaz claims to be a peacemaker, it is going to be very difficult for him to deviate from the agenda of his supporters, e.g. Ahle-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat – banned by the Government of Pakistan since 2012 for its suspected involvement in terrorist activities of Sipah-e-Sahaba. Thus, there continues to be a criticism in the media of Nawaz's win of elections and a peace award.

The government's National Action Plan against terrorism and extremism is a mixed bag of successes and failures. *The Quetta Commission Report* slammed the government's counter-terrorism measure by specifically focussing on the lack of a counter-narrative for tackling extremism (SCP 2016, 85).¹⁴ This would require a greater effort to study the extremist narrative for developing a counter-narrative that is organic in nature. Nonetheless, to achieve all these, there is a need to go back to the very foundation of the country and resolve disagreements over national identity. This is because extremist elements continue to use the Islamic label of the country for propagating hatred against 'others', as witnessed through the strong anti-secular narrative in the country.

3.4 Anti-Westernism

Often Islamists blame local liberals, the US and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for promoting secularism or non-Islamic values in Pakistan. In this context, it is important to understand the Islamists' views on secularism. As clear from their rhetoric (as shown in the following examples), the understanding is limited to fears of non-Islamic values and the scrubbing of 'Islamic Republic' from the title of Pakistan. Islamists have not been clear about their stance against pluralism or the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. Nonetheless, they are guided by their political agendas for gaining more advantage at decision-making levels.

Maulana [Fazl-ur-Rahman of JUI] said that the religious parties have been facing America while the secular forces were supporting them against the religious parties. (*The News*, 5 September 2002, 15)

NGOs are trying to turn Pakistan into a secular state: President Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Maulana Shah Ahmed Naurani. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 6 July 2000, 1)

Over the past decade, there has been a rise in an organised campaign against NGOs in Pakistan. This has not only constrained the work of many NGOs but has also led to an increasing number of attacks on NGO workers and offices. According to Aid Workers Security Database, Pakistan remains one of the deadliest countries in the world for aid workers; however, this trend has slightly declined. There were 12 attacks on aid workers in 2015 as compared to 18 in 2014 (Ismail 2015). As the results of this study show, anti-NGO rhetoric is an old phenomenon and so are attacks on NGOs. In 2002, there was an attack on a Christian NGO, Institute for Peace and Justice, in Karachi (Nadeem 2002). Recently, the government's heavy hand on local and foreign NGOs may also support the cause of extremist elements that wish to expand their welfare-related activities at community levels. On an occasion, Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan said that NGOs working against Pakistan's national interests would not be allowed in the country (Haider 2015). It is important to understand the context of this stringent government policy on NGOs. The reforms are linked to the killing of Osama bin Laden, for which apparently intelligence information was provided to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) by the fake vaccination campaign of the NGO 'Save the Children' in Abbottabad; however, Save the Children continues to deny any involvement with the CIA (Shah 2011).

It is mainly since 9/11 that there has been much discussion about curricula or educational reforms in Pakistan. This generated new opportunities and challenges, e.g. opportunities for NGOs, to work in the area of Peace Education, and challenge extremist forces opposing reforms in Pakistan's education system. Many NGOs, such as the Agha Khan Foundation and the Peace and Education Foundation (PEF), have been accused by Islamists of working to defame Islam and change Pakistan's education as part of a

¹⁴ The report is a somewhat comprehensive and thorough analysis of the failure of the National Action Plan.

global conspiracy against Islam and Pakistan's identity. During General Musharraf's era, in 2002, the Agha Khan University Examination Board was formed for improving the standard of education at the school level. This, however, provoked street demonstrations, with JI accusing the Board for following a secret Western agenda of secularising Pakistan. Consequently, the government had to refrain from instituting the Board and due to this, what was deemed as 'a step in the right direction' by Hoodbhoy (2006, 12), could not achieve its desired objectives. Similarly, PEF, which has been working on peace education projects in *madaris*, has come under attack for its report on the status of religious freedom in Pakistan. In a newspaper article, Ansar Abbasi (2016), who is a known Islamist and investigative journalist, wrote against PEF for working on the American agenda to liberalise Pakistan's school curriculum and defame Pakistan.

3.5 So-called Seculars

While successive governments have yielded to the demands of Islamists, it is important to mention that the so-called secular parties have also been resisting secularism in the country. Apart from the above-mentioned statement of the then Interior Minister, Moinuddin Haider, there have been statements from members of the PML-N against secularism in the country. An example is the following newspaper statement from the wife of Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which also points to the hypocrisy on this matter among mainstream political parties. While Sharif was in exile, his wife (Kalsum Nawaz) was running the PML-N.

We will not allow Pakistan to become a secular state: PML leader Begum Kalsum Nawaz. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 12 June 2000, 1)

An important finding of the research is that there are elements in the country that either overtly or covertly support the Islamists' position on secularism in Pakistan. This is clear from the cited statement of Nawaz Sharif's wife and the policies of many governments that have succumbed to pressure from Islamists vis-à-vis secularism and minority rights in Pakistan. It is difficult to understand the Islamists' pressure when they have been having minimal representation in the Parliament. This is the reason that Ayaz Amir (2016), former Member of Parliament and a well-known journalist, blamed Pakistan's problems on the English-speaking civil and military elites, who have been defending the status quo for their selfish agenda. Often, maintaining status quo is about avoiding troubles, e.g. demonstrations by Islamists, to stay in power. Thus, civil and military elites have made compromises for many decades and often worked side by side with Islamists, especially in the case of Musharraf's government. This was the reason that Musharraf's Enlightened Moderation failed.

3.6 The Newspapers

As clear from the above statements, both English and Urdu dailies provided coverage to anti-secular rhetoric of Islamists, mainly from JI and JUI. In summary, *Nawa-e-Waqt* published 80% (24 statements) supporting, while *The News* published 20% (6 statements). More statements have been made in 2000 (roughly 70%) than in 2002 (around 30%). This could be because 2002 was the year following 9/11, when there was a lot of influence on Musharraf for reforms vis-à-vis pluralism in Pakistan. It was also the year of elections in Pakistan, when politicians were approaching religious minorities for political support – typical in election campaigns. Ironically, at this time, Islamists also started talking about minority rights but not at the cost of their position on Islamic ideology. This particular factor helped Musharraf in not only winning the elections but also gaining local and global recognition for his pro-religious harmony stance (following are some examples from the data).

We will fully support Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf in referendum due to his pro-minority policies: Christian Party. Pervaiz Musharraf's election for the next five years is essential for Pakistan's security, development and minorities. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 10 April 2002, 1)

Muthidda Majlis-e-Amal to make Pakistan a true Islamic State. Minorities' rights to be ensured, said by the Jamat-e-Islami in Attock, Barkat Ali Khan. (*Nawa-e-Waqt*, 15 October 2002, 9)

The content analysis has been conducted for two newspapers of two different languages. *Nawa-e-Waqt* is considered to be a right-wing conservative Urdu daily. Conservative views on religion, ideology of Pakistan and Jihadist ideals are the central point of *Nawa-e-Waqt's* editorial policy. *The News* is an English-language newspaper that is mainly liberal in its editorial policy; yet, it occasionally provides space to the anti-secular narrative of Islamists. The Urdu and English press in Pakistan are different in nature due to their coverage patterns and editorial policies. Liberal values are embedded in the English-language press because of the following reasons first, there are only a few English-language journalists who are educated; second, as a foreign language, there is very little room for the editors and reporters to play with the content; and third, English-language journalism was introduced during colonial times; therefore, it links directly to the liberal values of the West and has continued to do so even after the partition. Therefore, it is also true that the constraints placed on media during the dictatorial regimes and the fragile democratic governments encouraged liberal values in the English-language press to some extent. By and large, whenever and wherever the English-language press found an opportunity, they returned to the liberal values and tried to retain their independence in their editorial policy. It is also a fact that the English-language press's readership is very small: mainly among the English-speaking political elite, powerful members of the military establishment, decision-makers, scholars and students.

4 Conclusion

Created as a nation-state, the Two-Nation Theory continues to be the mirror through which Pakistan's identity is viewed and formed. The analysis in the paper depicts that the anti-secular narrative is the product of not only the Islamists but also the so-called secular elements, the ones holding the majority in the parliament, who have also been doing mere lip service to pluralism in Pakistan. Since the creation of Pakistan, civil and military elites have made compromises for the sake of their selfish goals of staying in power by avoiding opposition from Islamists. Such compromises are evident from the examples of civil and military leaders working in cooperation with Islamists, for instance, in the case of Musharraf's alliance with MMA – a cause of the demise of Enlightened Moderation. Nonetheless, one cannot deny the impact of Islamists' anti-secular narrative, which continues to influence policies in the country. The growing influence of Islamists is also reflected by people's trust on them for promoting *sharia*.

A sustainable solution through countering violent extremism needs to address the fissures formed by the clash over national identity in Pakistan. It is unfortunate that the government's policies and action plans have not devoted any attention to nation-building processes emanating from concerns on Pakistan's identity and the place of secularism within that. This loophole continues to nourish religious extremism, as is evident through the violent attacks on religious minorities and moderate voices from within the Muslim community.

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