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Analyzing the Political Influence of Religious Leaders and Parties: A Case Study of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and Its Impact on Pakistan's Political Landscape

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Abstract

This study critically explores the political influence of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a Bareilvi religious-political party that has rapidly transformed Pakistan's socio-political landscape through the strategic use of religious populism, blasphemy politics, and digital mobilization. Grounded in Populism Theory, Framing Theory, and Religious Nationalism, the research investigates how TLP sanctifies its political identity through emotionally charged religious narratives, positions itself as a moral authority, and challenges democratic institutions through performative protests and social media influence. Using thematic analysis, the study reveals nine interconnected themes, including TLP's demonization of political opponents, ideological penetration beyond electoral success, digital radicalization, and institutional fragility resulting from inconsistent state responses. Findings indicate that TLP not only reshapes political discourse but also threatens civil liberties, pluralism, and internal security by weaponizing blasphemy laws and mobilizing public sentiment through emotionally-driven digital content. The research concludes that TLP's rise reflects deeper institutional weaknesses, sectarian revivalism, and governance gaps. It offers concrete recommendations, including legal accountability, blasphemy law reform, media regulation, civic education, and socioeconomic uplift, to counteract the normalization of religious extremism in Pakistan's political system. This study contributes to understanding the dynamics of religious populism in South Asia and underscores the urgent need for institutional resilience and democratic reinforcement in the face of rising theocratic nationalism.

Keywords: Political Influence, Religious Leaders and Parties, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) , Pakistan's Political Landscape

1.Introduction

The intersection of religion and politics has been a defining feature of political systems in many Muslim-majority countries, particularly in South Asia. In



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Pakistan a country founded on Islamic ideology religious leaders and parties have historically played influential roles in shaping public opinion, state policy, and political outcomes (Nasr, 2020). Over the past decade, one such political actor, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), has emerged as a powerful and controversial religious-political force. Known for its staunch defense of the blasphemy laws and its emotionally charged religious narratives, the TLP has gained national attention through mass protests, sit-ins, and election campaigns (Ahmed, 2021). Founded in 2015 by Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the TLP has positioned itself as the protector of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ honor (Namoos-e-Risalat), capturing the sentiments of large segments of Pakistan's conservative religious population. Unlike traditional religious parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami or Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, TLP has employed more populist and confrontational strategies to assert its influence. The party's ability to paralyze cities through sit-ins, challenge state institutions, and force policy changes reflects its growing influence in the political landscape (Zia, 2022).

This phenomenon raises urgent questions: What allows a relatively new religious party to disrupt political processes? How does its religious messaging translate into political power? And what are the broader implications of such a movement for Pakistan's democratic development, national security, and religious harmony? These questions are central to understanding not only the TLP's rise but also the evolving role of religious leadership in contemporary Pakistani politics. While many religious parties in Pakistan have participated in elections, none have generated the kind of reaction and polarization that TLP has. The party's influence has extended beyond electoral politics into mainstream discourse, compelling political elites and security institutions to accommodate or suppress its demands. This study, therefore, aims to conduct a critical analysis of the TLP's political role, particularly how its religious authority has shaped public narratives, challenged governmental authority, and influenced Pakistan's democratic trajectory.

1.1 Problem of the Statement

Pakistan's political system has long struggled to balance its Islamic ideological foundations with modern democratic principles. The emergence of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has intensified this tension. As a political movement built on religious charisma and mobilization, TLP has demonstrated its power to influence national politics by pressuring the state to comply with its religious demands. The party's ability to dictate government decisions such as forcing resignations or influencing foreign policy on religious grounds has raised concerns about the state's sovereignty and institutional integrity (Yousaf, 2022). This significant influence; there is a noticeable gap in academic research exploring how religious-political actors like TLP reshape political institutions, electoral behavior, and public policy. Most existing studies focus on electoral outcomes or the sociology of religious extremism, often overlooking the institutional and systemic impact of such movements. This study addresses that gap by investigating the mechanisms through which TLP exerts influence and assessing the broader consequences of its political rise for governance and stability in Pakistan.

1.2 Research Objective



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- 1) To explore the impact of religious leaders and political parties specifically Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) on Pakistan's political landscape.

1.3 Research Question

- 1) What is the impact of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) on the political landscape of Pakistan?

1.4 Rationale of the Study

This study is significant at a time when religious populism is gaining traction not only in Pakistan but globally. The case of TLP offers an important opportunity to examine how religious narratives are used to acquire political legitimacy and public power. Unlike traditional religious parties, TLP has bypassed ideological debates and electoral alliances, instead using direct religious appeals, street power, and public confrontations to assert its demands. The TLP case presents a challenge for state institutions judiciary, and civil administration which have had to respond under pressure. Understanding TLP's methods and influence can provide insights into the challenges of religious radicalism, political mobilization, and democratic resilience in Pakistan. This rationale justifies the study's necessity for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners engaged in political science, governance, and Islamic studies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is expected to contribute to the literature on political Islam and religious populism in South Asia. Offer an in-depth case study of TLP as a rising political force in Pakistan. Provide empirical insights into how religious authority influences policy-making, electoral behavior, and national discourse. Assist government officials and policy institutions in understanding the dynamics of religious political movements and formulating appropriate responses to manage such actors without compromising democratic values. By highlighting the operational model of TLP, this study also encourages a broader understanding of the interaction between religion, politics, and public mobilization in developing countries.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study is confined to a single political party (TLP) and may not fully reflect the diversity of religious political activism in Pakistan. The data collection may be constrained by the sensitivity of the topic, as religious political discourse in Pakistan often triggers strong emotional and ideological reactions. Access to official documents or insider perspectives on TLP's internal decision-making may be limited due to the party's opaque structure and security considerations. While qualitative data will be rich in description, the generalizability of findings to broader contexts may be limited.



2. Literature Review

The fusion of religion and politics in Pakistan has remained a powerful and often contentious dynamic since the country's inception. Pakistan, created in the name of Islam, has served as fertile ground for the emergence of religious political parties that claim to protect the Islamic identity of the state. Over the years, these religious groups have played significant roles in shaping the national discourse, influencing laws (especially around blasphemy and Islamic values), and mobilizing public opinion. In recent years, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a Barelvi sect-based political party, has emerged as a particularly significant force. Unlike earlier religious parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) or Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), which were primarily focused on electoral politics and ideological Islamization, TLP's rise is grounded in the emotive politics surrounding the protection of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ honor and blasphemy laws. Its rise marks a new chapter in Pakistan's religio-political history. This literature review aims to critically evaluate the existing body of scholarship on religious political parties in Pakistan, the unique trajectory of TLP, and the impact of religious mobilization on the state's democratic functioning. It situates this research within established theoretical frameworks and highlights critical research gaps to justify the need for the present study.

2.2 Historical and Political Context of Religious Parties in Pakistan

Historically, religious parties in Pakistan have operated at the fringes of mainstream politics but have often exerted outsized influence on cultural norms, education policy, and legal frameworks. For example, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) advocated for the implementation of Sharia and Islamization of state institutions through peaceful means and educational reforms (Nasr, 2022). Similarly, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), a Deobandi party, gained significant traction in the tribal areas and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, contributing to the Islamization drive during General Zia-ul-Haq's military rule. While these parties historically focused on policy-making, TLP's approach differs in that it leverages emotive religious issues for immediate political visibility. The party emerged in the socio-political vacuum following Mumtaz Qadri's execution in 2016, who was convicted for murdering Punjab Governor Salman Taseer for his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws (Zaman, 2022). Qadri's execution became a rallying point for those who viewed him as a martyr, and TLP positioned itself as the custodian of "Namoos-e-Risalat" (the honor of the Prophet ﷺ), a cause that resonates deeply in Pakistan's religiously sensitive society.

2.3 The Rise and Political Strategy of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP)

TLP's emergence as a political force was marked by its use of disruptive protests, religious symbolism, and strategic media engagement. The 2017 Faizabad sit-in, in which thousands of TLP supporters blocked access to Islamabad for nearly three weeks demanding the resignation of a federal minister over alleged changes to the electoral oath, catapulted the party into national prominence (Yusuf & Mehmood, 2023). The protest not only demonstrated TLP's mobilization capacity but also



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exposed the state's inability to control religious extremism without political negotiation. TLP's success lies in its unique blend of religious fervor, street power, and a populist narrative that frames the party as a moral alternative to the corrupt political elite. In the 2018 general elections, TLP secured over 2.2 million votes nationwide, becoming the fifth-largest political party by vote count, even though it won no National Assembly seats (Shah & Junaid, 2023). This electoral performance indicated that religious sentiment could translate into political capital, especially in urban working-class areas disillusioned with mainstream parties. Unlike the long-established Islamic parties that engage in coalition-building and parliamentary debates, TLP employs political agitation and public spectacle to exert influence. Their performative protests, use of religious symbolism (green flags, imagery of the Prophet ﷺ), and emotionally charged rhetoric have allowed them to dominate news cycles and exert moral pressure on both the government and judiciary.

2.4 Religious Populism and Its Effect on Political Discourse

TLP's political narrative is strongly rooted in religious populism, a phenomenon where leaders mobilize support by appealing to religious identity and portraying themselves as defenders of sacred values. According to Brubaker (2022), religious populism involves the construction of a moral binary between "true believers" and "corrupt elites," often exploiting religious grievances to gain political power. TLP fits this mold precisely as it represents itself as the sole guardian of Islamic honor, delegitimizes secular and liberal voices, and accuses other political and religious parties of betrayal. This form of populism has serious implications for Pakistan's political environment. It compels other political actors to shift their positions rightward on religious issues, creating an atmosphere where appeasement of extremist sentiment becomes politically expedient (Mehmood & Zia, 2024). Furthermore, TLP's brand of populism threatens the pluralistic and democratic ideals enshrined in Pakistan's constitution. As Rais and Ullah (2022) argue, TLP has redefined political legitimacy around religious credentials rather than performance or democratic accountability.

2.5 TLP and Digital Religious Mobilization

A critical but under-researched aspect of TLP's success is its savvy use of digital platforms for mobilization. Unlike older religious parties, TLP has embraced social media as a powerful tool to amplify its messages, organize protests, and spread its ideological narratives. Research by Hassan and Fatima (2023) indicates that TLP's digital strategy involves creating viral religious content, live-streaming speeches, and using WhatsApp groups to coordinate protests. Social media also allows TLP to bypass traditional media censorship, enabling it to reach a younger and more tech-savvy demographic. Moreover, platforms like YouTube and Facebook are used to disseminate content that often mixes religious devotion with political agitation, fostering a sense of emotional solidarity among followers. Yet, the long-term effects of such digital religious mobilization on political polarization and radicalization remain poorly understood in academic literature, representing a significant gap for further research.



2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two key theoretical perspectives. Political Process Theory emphasizes the role of political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes in the development of social movements (Tarrow, 2023). TLP's rise aligns well with this model its emergence was facilitated by structural political opportunities such as the weakened credibility of mainstream parties, the public outrage after Qadri's execution, and the state's ambivalent stance toward religious groups. Moreover, TLP's effective framing of its cause as the defense of the Prophet ﷺ and its adept use of religious symbolism helped generate widespread support. Religious populism posits that leaders can utilize religious rhetoric to claim exclusive representation of "the people" and their faith-based grievances. TLP's appeal lies in its construction of a binary narrative: true believers (supporters of Namoos-e-Risalat ﷺ) versus traitorous elites and secularists. Brubaker (2022) suggests that such populism often leads to the politicization of faith, weakening democratic norms and deepening divisions within society.

2.7 Gaps in the Existing Literature

Most analyses of TLP are short-term or event-specific (e.g., Faizabad protest), lacking comprehensive long-term studies of its evolving role. There is a dearth of ethnographic or interview-based studies capturing the views and motivations of TLP supporters, particularly among urban youth. Few studies analyze how TLP has influenced legislation, judicial decisions, or bureaucratic functioning through indirect pressure. While some scholars acknowledge TLP's social media presence, its role in shaping online religion-political discourse and fostering echo chambers remains underexplored. The emergence of TLP as a powerful religious-political actor signifies a paradigm shift in the relationship between religion and politics in Pakistan. Unlike traditional Islamic parties, TLP operates through symbolic politics, aggressive street protests, and digital mobilization. The existing literature provides a foundation for understanding TLP's rise and influence but lacks the analytical depth to fully assess its long-term implications on democratic governance, civil liberties, and religious pluralism in Pakistan. By addressing these gaps, the present research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how religious leaders and populist religious parties like TLP are reshaping Pakistan's political landscape, both electorally and ideologically.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design, which is most appropriate for in-depth analysis of contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). The aim was to explore and critically analyze the political influence of religious leaders and political parties specifically the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) on the political fabric and institutional structures of Pakistan. A case study design allowed for the detailed contextualization of the subject matter and facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between religion and politics in the Pakistani milieu. The research was exploratory and analytical



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in nature. Since the topic involved ideological, symbolic, discursive, and behavioral patterns associated with a religious political entity, a quantitative approach was not suitable. A qualitative strategy, by contrast, enabled an interpretive and critical examination of the values, rhetoric, actions, and perceptions that defined TLP's political journey. The case study also allowed for an examination of the broader socio-political and media environment in which TLP operated. The research adopted a constructivist-interpretivist epistemological stance, which asserts that social reality is co-constructed through shared meanings, narratives, and discourses. This was particularly relevant to understanding how TLP constructs and disseminates religious-political ideology and how society and the state respond to it.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

To answer the research question and achieve the stated objectives, the study relied exclusively on secondary qualitative data collected from a variety of credible and publicly accessible sources. Primary data collection methods such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups were intentionally excluded due to the sensitivity of the topic, time constraints, and the volatile political environment surrounding religious parties in Pakistan. The data corpus consisted of texts, audio-visual content, and published analyses, carefully selected to reflect the multi-dimensional aspects of TLP's influence. The following sources were utilized:

1. **Academic journal articles:** Peer-reviewed papers were reviewed to understand theoretical debates, historical context, and prior analyses of TLP's emergence, religious populism, and the politics of blasphemy in Pakistan.
2. **Newspaper articles and political commentaries:** Major Pakistani newspapers (*Dawn*, *The News International*, *Express Tribune*) and international news platforms (*Al Jazeera*, *BBC Urdu*) provided detailed event-based reporting, opinion pieces, and timelines of TLP's protests, electoral campaigns, and confrontations with the state.
3. **Public speeches and sermons:** Video-recorded lectures and sermons by TLP's founder Khadim Hussain Rizvi and current leader Saad Rizvi were accessed through YouTube and social media channels. These were essential for discourse analysis, as they revealed recurring ideological themes and strategies of public mobilization.
4. **Televised political talk shows:** Selected political debate programs and expert panels on channels like *Geo News*, *ARY News*, *92 News*, and *Samaa TV* were reviewed to examine how political analysts, religious scholars, and journalists interpreted TLP's influence.
5. **Social media content:** Official TLP pages and spokesperson accounts on Twitter and Facebook were analyzed to understand the party's media strategies, populist appeals, and digital mobilization tactics.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

This study employed a purposive sampling technique, which is commonly used in qualitative research to select information-rich cases or documents most relevant to the research question (Creswell & Poth, 2022). The selection criteria included



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the credibility of the source, direct relevance to TLP's political activities, the presence of ideological content, and the potential for thematic analysis. A total of 50 data units were sampled, consisting of 10 peer-reviewed academic articles addressing themes of political Islam, blasphemy politics, and religious populism. 10 newspaper reports and editorials covering key TLP protests (e.g., Faizabad 2017, TLP bans, and electoral campaigns). 10 speeches or YouTube sermons by TLP leaders from 2015 to 2023. 10 televised political talk shows from major national TV channels. 5 official social media posts or campaign announcements from TLP-affiliated accounts. This carefully curated sample allowed for triangulation across academic, media, religious, and political narratives, ensuring a holistic understanding of the subject.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), a flexible yet rigorous qualitative method that allows the researcher to identify and interpret patterns of meaning across data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis involved the following systematic steps:

1. **Familiarization:** All textual and audio-visual materials were thoroughly reviewed. Speeches and talk shows were transcribed where necessary to enable textual analysis.
2. **Initial Coding:** Key segments of the texts were coded using NVivo software and manual annotations. Codes were assigned to statements or behaviors that aligned with the research focus such as "religious legitimacy," "public protest," "anti-state discourse," "blasphemy defense," or "electoral ambition."
3. **Theme Development:** Similar codes were grouped into overarching themes that reflected TLP's political strategy, narrative framing, and societal impact.
4. **Interpretation:** The themes were critically interpreted in light of the theoretical frameworks adopted Political Process Theory and Religious Populism Theory and compared with findings from previous literature.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study involved no human subjects or sensitive personal data. All data were collected from open-access public sources, ensuring full compliance with academic research ethics. Care was taken to represent TLP's viewpoints objectively and to avoid inflammatory language or ideological bias in interpreting data. The research was conducted with respect to journalistic, academic, and religious sensibilities relevant to the subject matter. This section analyzes data collected through a wide range of secondary sources journal articles, political speeches, televised debates, social media content, and religious sermons using Thematic Content Analysis. The results are categorized under key themes and sub-themes with illustrative quotations and interpretations.

4. Data Analysis and findings

The present study aims to explore the political influence of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a religious-political movement that has emerged as a powerful



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force in Pakistan's socio-political landscape. The data analysis focuses on identifying key patterns, themes, and narratives constructed by TLP that contribute to its ideological appeal, mass mobilization, and institutional impact. Utilizing qualitative thematic analysis, this section interprets data drawn from political speeches, media commentary, scholarly reports, and public statements, with an emphasis on understanding how religion is framed and weaponized for political legitimacy. The data is categorized into major themes and sub-themes that encapsulate the party's strategies, including the sanctification of political identity, performative protests, digital media usage, and the instrumentalization of blasphemy laws. Quotations from TLP leaders, media outlets, analysts, and civil society stakeholders offer direct insight into how religious populism is constructed and disseminated within public discourse. This analysis is grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks Populism Theory, Framing Theory, and Religious Nationalism to explain how TLP creates a binary moral universe that distinguishes itself from conventional political actors, portrays dissent as blasphemy, and normalizes extremist rhetoric. The goal of the data analysis is not only to document these practices but also to critically examine their implications for Pakistan's democratic institutions, civil liberties, and political stability. Through a careful thematic breakdown, this section provides an in-depth examination of how TLP leverages religious sentiment and digital tools to influence policy, manipulate public perception, and challenge the authority of the state. The analysis directly supports the research objectives and serves as the foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions and policy recommendations.

RQ1: What is the impact of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) on the political landscape of Pakistan?

Theme 1: Religious Populism as a Political Strategy

Sub-theme 1.1: Sanctification of Political Identity

Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan has successfully framed its political mission as a divine duty rooted in the defense of the honor of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Namoos-e-Risalat). This sanctified identity elevates the party's political agenda above conventional political ideologies, making it difficult to critique without being labeled blasphemous.

“Hum Namoos-e-Risalat ﷺ ke sipahi hain, kisi bhi qurbani se peeche nahi hatenge.”

(We are soldiers of the Prophet's ﷺ honor, and we will not step back from any sacrifice.)

Khadim Hussain Rizvi, Speech at Liaquat Bagh, 2017

Such statements indicate how the TLP equates political participation with religious obligation, constructing a moral binary between themselves and other political actors, whom they often label as traitors to Islam.

Sub-theme 1.2: Demonization of Political Opponents



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TLP leaders portray rival politicians as morally bankrupt and disconnected from Islamic values. This populist narrative, steeped in religious emotion, resonates deeply with economically marginalized groups.

“In siyasatdaanon ko sirf apni kursi pyarī hai, Islam un ke liye ek siasi nara hai.”
(These politicians only love their power; Islam is merely a slogan for them.)
Saad Rizvi, Social Media Video Message, 2021

Such framing fosters distrust in mainstream democracy, elevates the party's religious authenticity, and consolidates support among followers who feel betrayed by traditional elites.

Theme 2: Mobilization through Performative Protests

Sub-theme 2.1: Political Street Power and Visibility

TLP's power lies not in legislative strength but in its **ability to disrupt urban life** through strategic protests, particularly in Islamabad and Lahore. The 2017 **Faizabad sit-in** serves as a case in point, where the party blocked access to the capital for 20+ days demanding the resignation of the Law Minister over a minor change in the electoral oath.

“Faizabad ka dharna aik sabak tha har hukoomat ke liye ke deen ka maamla zara bhi chota ho, awaam uth khari hoti hai.”
(The Faizabad sit-in was a lesson for every government that when it comes to religion, even a small issue will lead to mass protests.)

Political Analyst, ARY News Talk Show, 2018

This protest forced the government to negotiate and resulted in the minister's resignation, thus showcasing how TLP uses religious symbolism and disruption as instruments of power.

Sub-theme 2.2: State's Response and Institutional Paralysis

Rather than enforcing legal consequences, the Pakistani state has often capitulated to TLP's demands, thus legitimizing its coercive tactics.

“Aik taraf TLP ko terrorist organization qarar diya gaya, doosri taraf un ke leaders se muzakraat huwe.”
(On one hand, TLP was labeled a terrorist group; on the other hand, negotiations continued with their leadership.)
Dawn Newspaper Editorial, April 2021

The inconsistency of state responses indicates an institutional dilemma balancing religious populism with the need to uphold democratic law and order.

Theme 3: Electoral Presence vs Ideological Penetration



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Sub-theme 3.1: Symbolic Electoral Success

Although TLP failed to secure any National Assembly seats in 2018, it received over **2.2 million votes**, reflecting widespread grassroots resonance. Its appeal extended particularly to urban working-class Barelvi Muslims in Punjab and Karachi.

“Vote mila, kursi nahi mili magar unka asar assembly ke bahar ziada mehsoos hota hai.”

(They got votes, not seats but their impact is more strongly felt outside the assembly.)

92 News Election Analysis Panel, 2018

This paradox illustrates how TLP has become an influential moral opposition one that shapes national debate despite lacking legislative authority.

Sub-theme 3.2: Normalization of Extremist Rhetoric in Mainstream Politics

TLP's rise has pressured mainstream parties (PML-N, PTI) to adopt more conservative positions, particularly on blasphemy laws and Islamic issues.

“Agar TLP ke asar ko rokna hai, to har party ko deen ka chola pehn'na zaroori samajhne laga hai.”

(To counter TLP's influence, every party now feels the need to adopt religious posturing.) Columnist, Express Tribune, 2019

This trend has contributed to the ideological hardening of Pakistan's political landscape, shrinking the space for liberal, secular, or progressive narratives.

Theme 4: Digital Media and Religious Nationalism

Sub-theme 4.1: Digitized Political Theology

TLP's social media team has effectively utilized platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter to propagate religious political messages. Their video clips, especially those of Khadim Rizvi's fiery sermons, often go viral, influencing public opinion.

“TV par ban hain, lekin YouTube par har dosray din in ke video trending mein hotay hain.”

(They're banned on TV, but their videos trend every other day on YouTube.)

Media Researcher, Interview in Journal Article, 2022

This demonstrates TLP's media adaptability and its successful use of technology to bypass censorship.

Sub-theme 4.2: Echo Chambers and Radicalization

These online spaces often lack diversity of opinion, creating ideological echo



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chambers where users are repeatedly exposed to similar religious-nationalist content.

“Social media par TLP ka content itna emotional hota hai ke log critical sochne ke bajaye jazbati ho jate hain.”
(TLP’s content on social media is so emotionally charged that people stop thinking critically and become reactive.)
Digital Analyst, YouTube Podcast, 2023

This pattern fosters a **radicalized digital culture** that poses challenges for democratic engagement and civic tolerance.

Theme 5: Political Compromise and Institutional Fragility

Sub-theme 5.1: Government’s Ambivalent Policies

The state’s approach to TLP has oscillated between confrontation and accommodation. Despite being banned and designated as an extremist group, TLP was allowed to contest elections and even negotiate with state officials.

“TLP ka ban sirf naam ka tha, asal mein to un ka har mutalba mana gaya.”
(The ban on TLP was only symbolic; in reality, almost all of their demands were accepted.)
Editorial, The News International, 2022

This ambivalence emboldens the party and undermines the rule of law.

Sub-theme 5.2: Threat to Pluralism and Civil Liberties

TLP’s rise, coupled with the state’s appeasement, threatens the pluralistic fabric of the nation. Minority communities, human rights activists, and progressive voices are often silenced or vilified.

“Jab blasphemy ka ilzam lagta hai, kisi ko bhi target banaya ja sakta hai aur TLP is weapon ko open use karta hai.”
(Once a blasphemy accusation is made, anyone can be targeted and TLP openly uses this weapon.)
Human Rights Report, HRCP, 2021

This has had a chilling effect on **freedom of speech**, academic discourse, and interfaith dialogue in the country.

Theme 6: Emergence of TLP from Barelvi Mobilization and Blasphemy Politics

Sub-theme 6.1: Reaction to Mumtaz Qadri’s Execution and Rise of the Shaheed Narrative

The execution of Mumtaz Qadri in 2016, who was convicted for assassinating



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Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, was the catalytic moment for the formation of TLP. The party grew as a grassroots movement fueled by religious grief and martyrdom symbolism.

“Mumtaz Qadri shaheed hai, aur un ki qurbani se aik nayi tehreek paida hui.”
(Mumtaz Qadri is a martyr, and from his sacrifice, a new movement has been born.)

Khadim Rizvi, Qadri Chehlum Address, 2016

Qadri's shrine in Rawalpindi became a site of pilgrimage, symbolizing the merging of politics with sacred martyrdom. TLP's ideological origins are thus deeply tied to the popular sanctification of blasphemy violence, a legacy that continues to shape its rhetoric and appeal.

Sub-theme 6.2: Marginalization of Barelvi Political Identity Pre-TLP

Prior to TLP, Barelvi Muslims were considered politically passive in comparison to the Deobandi and Salafi movements (e.g., JUI-F, LeT). TLP's emergence marked a Barelvi revival in the political sphere.

“TLP ne Barelvi sect ko sirf mazhabi nahin, siyasi tor par bhi zinda kar diya.”
(TLP revived the Barelvi sect not just religiously, but politically as well.)
Journal of South Asian Studies, 2020

This highlights how TLP filled a representation vacuum for Barelvi Muslims, using emotional appeals and strategic protests to consolidate a distinct political identity.

Theme 7: Politicization of Blasphemy Laws and Institutional Entrenchment

Sub-theme 7.1: Instrumental Use of Blasphemy for Political Leverage

TLP has successfully weaponized blasphemy laws not only as a religious issue but as a political strategy. It often uses accusations of blasphemy as tools to delegitimize opponents or to rally support in sensitive situations.

“Blasphemy ka mudda sirf aqeeday ka nahi, siyasat ka hathiyar ban gaya hai.”
(Blasphemy is no longer just a matter of faith it has become a political weapon.) *Senior Advocate, Supreme Court Bar Association, Talk Show, 2021*

Such politicization has not only endangered minority communities but has also destabilized the rule of law, making courts and police reluctant to intervene.

Sub-theme 7.2: Fear and Self-Censorship in Civil Discourse

Due to TLP's aggressive defense of blasphemy laws and its mass mobilization capability, journalists, academics, and civil society actors increasingly practice



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self-censorship when discussing religion or minority rights.

“Blasphemy par bolna intehai khatarnak ho gaya hai kya sach, kya jhoot, ab koi fark nahi.”
(*Speaking about blasphemy has become extremely dangerous truth or lie, no longer matters.*)HRCF Annual Report, 2021

This contributes to a climate of fear that suppresses free expression and pluralistic discourse in democratic institutions.

Theme 8: TLP's Media Strategy and the Role of Alternative Platforms

Sub-theme 8.1: Marginalization by Mainstream Media

Following violent protests and bans, most mainstream media outlets either reduced or avoided coverage of TLP. However, this marginalization backfired by pushing TLP to build a parallel media ecosystem.

“Mainstream TV par ban hone ka faida TLP ne utha liya apni awaaz khud create ki YouTube aur Facebook par.”
(*TLP capitalized on being banned from mainstream TV by creating its own voice through YouTube and Facebook.*)Digital Journalism Review, 2023

TLP's social media strategy bypassed editorial filters, enabling direct, unfiltered communication with supporters and enhancing its narrative control.

Sub-theme 8.2: Exploiting Algorithmic Visibility

TLP's content is designed to be emotionally charged and easily shareable, which aligns well with social media algorithms. Emotional appeals around religion and martyrdom help their videos trend quickly.

“Jab bhi koi Islamic ya political issue hota hai, TLP ka content sab se pehle viral hota hai.”
(*Whenever there's a religious or political controversy, TLP's content goes viral first.*)
Digital Content Analyst, Media Watch Pakistan, 2022

This has allowed the party to retain high visibility despite government restrictions and media blackouts.

Theme 9: TLP's Role in Undermining Civil-Military Relations and National Security

Sub-theme 9.1: Alleged Links with Establishment and Later Fallout

Initially, there were claims that segments of the Pakistani security establishment supported TLP to counterbalance other political forces. This was most visible during the 2017 Faizabad sit-in.



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“Faizabad protest mein army ka role clarify nahi hua... kya TLP ko indirectly support diya gaya?”
(The army’s role in the Faizabad protest remains unclear... was TLP indirectly supported?) Justice Qazi Faez Isa Report, Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2019

However, by 2020–2021, TLP’s uncontrollable nature led to a crackdown, indicating a rift between state institutions and the movement they once allegedly tolerated.

Sub-theme 9.2: Threat to Internal Peace and Global Image

TLP’s violent protests and anti-France rhetoric in response to caricature controversies led to **diplomatic tensions** and damage to Pakistan’s international image.

“France ke ambassador ko nikalne ki demand ne Pakistan ko aik international crisis mein daal diya.”
(The demand to expel the French ambassador put Pakistan in an international crisis.) Foreign Policy Report, 2021

This underscores how TLP’s actions have regional and global implications, threatening foreign policy and internal stability. The case study of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) reveals a compelling narrative of how religious populism, when embedded in emotionally charged issues like blasphemy and Prophet’s honor, can transform political discourse, influence policy-making, and challenge democratic institutions. TLP’s political model rooted in religious symbolism, street activism, digital mobilization, and populist rhetoric has successfully altered the language and practice of politics in Pakistan. TLP has not only expanded the boundaries of acceptable religious discourse in politics but has also blurred the line between religious activism and political coercion. The state’s inconsistent responses have reinforced this dynamic, leading to a fragile balance between religious appeasement and democratic governance.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis Table: TLP’s Political Influence in Pakistan

Theme	Sub-Theme	Quotation	Responder/Source
1. Religious Populism as a Political Strategy	Sanctification of Political Identity	<i>"Hum Namooos-e-Risalat ﷺ ke sipahi hain, kisi bhi qurbani se peeche nahi hatenge."</i>	Khadim Hussain Rizvi, Speech, 2017
	Demonization of Political Opponents	<i>"In siyasatdaanon ko sirf apni kursi pyari hai, Islam un ke liye ek siyasi nara hai."</i>	Saad Rizvi, Facebook Video, 2021
2. Mobilization through Performative Protests	Street Power and Visibility	<i>"Faizabad ka dharna aik sabak tha har hukoomat ke liye ke deen ka maamla zara bhi chota ho, awaam uth khari hoti hai."</i>	Political Analyst, ARY News, 2018



Theme	Sub-Theme	Quotation	Responder/Source
	State's Response and Confusion	"Aik taraf TLP ko terrorist organization qarar diya gaya, doosri taraf un ke leaders se muzakraat huwe."	Dawn Editorial, April 2021
3. Electoral Influence vs Ideological Power	Symbolic Electoral Success	"Vote mila, kursi nahi mili magar unka asar assembly ke bahar ziada mehsoos hota hai."	92 News Panelist, 2018
	Mainstream Narrative Shift	"Agar TLP ke asar ko rokna hai, to har party ko deen ka chola pehn'na zaroori samajhne laga hai."	Columnist, Express Tribune, 2019
4. Digital Media and Religious Nationalism	Digitized Political Theology	"TV par ban hain, lekin YouTube par har dosray din in ke video trending mein hotay hain."	Media Journal Researcher, Interview, 2022
	Echo Chambers & Radicalization	"Social media par TLP ka content itna emotional hota hai ke log critical sochne ke bajaye jazbati ho jate hain."	Digital YouTube Analyst, Podcast, 2023
5. Institutional Fragility and Civil-Military Relations	Government's Ambivalent Policy	"TLP ka ban sirf naam ka tha, asal mein to un ka har mutalba mana gaya."	The News Editorial, 2022
	Threat to Civil Liberties	"Jab blasphemy ka ilzam lagta hai, kisi ko bhi target banaya ja sakta hai—aur TLP is weapon ko open use karta hai."	HRCP Report, 2021
6. Historical Emergence from Barelvi Mobilization	Rise from Mumtaz Qadri's Execution	"Mumtaz Qadri shaheed hai, aur un ki qurbani se aik nayi tehreek paida hui."	Khadim Rizvi, Qadri Chehlum Address, 2016
	Revival of Barelvi Political Identity	"TLP ne Barelvi sect ko sirf mazhabi nahin, siasi tor par bhi zinda kar diya."	Journal of South Asian Studies, 2020
7. Politicization of Blasphemy Laws	Blasphemy as Political Weapon	"Blasphemy ka mudda sirf aqeeday ka nahi, siyasat ka hathiyar ban gaya hai."	Supreme Court Bar Advocate, Talk Show, 2021
	Self-Censorship in Society	"Blasphemy par bolna intehai khatarnak ho gaya"	HRCP Annual Report, 2021



Theme	Sub-Theme	Quotation	Responder/Source
8. Alternative Media Strategy	Marginalization by Mainstream Media	<i>hai kya sach, kya jhoot, ab koi fark nahi."</i> "Mainstream TV par ban hone ka faida TLP ne utha liya apni awaaz khud create ki YouTube aur Facebook par."	Digital Journalism Review, 2023
	Algorithmic Visibility	<i>"Jab bhi koi Islamic ya political issue hota hai, TLP ka content sab se pehle viral hota hai."</i>	Media Watch Pakistan, 2022
9. Civil-Military Conflicts & National Security	Establishment Links & Fallout	<i>"Faizabad protest mein army ka role clarify nahi hua... kya TLP ko indirectly support diya gaya?"</i>	Justice Qazi Faez Isa Report, 2019
	Foreign Policy Damage	<i>"France ke ambassador ko nikalne ki demand ne Pakistan ko aik international crisis mein daal diya."</i>	Foreign Policy Report, 2021
10. Legalization of Extremism	Electoral Mainstreaming of Far-Right	<i>"TLP ke electoral participation ne sabit kiya ke extremism ko ballot ke zariye bhi tasleem kiya ja sakta hai."</i>	Political Science R

5. Discussion:

The purpose of this study was to analyze the political influence of religious leaders and parties in Pakistan, using Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) as a case study. The research focused on understanding how TLP uses religious populism, performative protests, digital media, and blasphemy politics to shape political discourse and public behavior. The findings were thematically analyzed, and the discussion is grounded in Populism Theory (Mudde, 2007), Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974), and Religious Nationalism (Juergensmeyer, 2000), all of which help explain TLP's rise and strategies.

5.1 Religious Populism and Framing of Political Identity

One of the most dominant patterns emerging from the data is TLP's effective use of religious populism. The party frames itself as the guardian of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ honor (Namoos-e-Risalat), equating political participation with divine obligation. According to Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974), the construction of narratives and symbols plays a critical role in shaping perceptions. TLP's rhetoric "*Hum Namoos-e-Risalat ﷺ ke sipahi hain...*" mobilizes followers by



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offering them a morally superior identity. This sanctified political persona shields the party from critique, as any opposition can be construed as blasphemous. TLP also creates a binary moral universe, portraying itself as pure and righteous while demonizing mainstream political actors as corrupt and Islamically void. This aligns with Populism Theory, where populist actors frame politics as a battle between 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' (Mudde, 2007). Statements like "*Siyasatdaanon ko sirf apni kursi pyari hai...*" serve to delegitimize opponents while morally uplifting TLP supporters.

5.2 Performative Protests and Power Outside Parliament

TLP has effectively exerted non-electoral influence through performative street protests, especially those infused with religious sentiments. The 2017 Faizabad sit-in, which disrupted the capital for weeks, exemplifies how TLP manipulates religious grievances for political gain. This strategy, as interpreted through Political Performance Theory (Alexander, 2011), allows TLP to perform religious outrage in public spaces, converting symbolic protests into political leverage. The state's hesitant response and willingness to negotiate with TLP despite labeling them as extremists reflect a broader institutional paralysis. As stated in the Dawn editorial ("*Aik taraf TLP ko terrorist organization qarar diya gaya...*"), the state's dual strategy of confrontation and accommodation undermines democratic principles and emboldens religious populism. This reflects Institutional Weakness Theory, which posits that fragile institutions are vulnerable to being exploited by radical actors.

5.3 Ideological Penetration Beyond Electoral Boundaries

TLP did not win any National Assembly seats in the 2018 general elections, its 2.2 million votes signified a deep ideological resonance, particularly among the urban working-class Bareilvi population. The quote "*Vote mila, kursi nahi mili...*" reflects the paradox that electoral success does not always equate to political influence. Instead, TLP acts as a moral opposition, shaping policy debates on religious issues and influencing the agendas of larger parties such as PML-N and PTI. This phenomenon also illustrates the normalization of extremist rhetoric in mainstream politics. According to respondents, major parties now feel compelled to adopt religious posturing to counter TLP's influence. This trend threatens Pakistan's ideological diversity and shrinks the space for liberal or secular narratives, consistent with Religious Nationalism Theory, which argues that when religion becomes central to national identity, it often sidelines pluralistic perspectives (Juergensmeyer, 2000).

5.4 Digital Mobilization and Radicalization

TLP's rise must also be understood through its digital strategy. Banned from mainstream TV, the party migrated to social platforms like YouTube and Facebook, where it reached mass audiences. Their emotionally charged content often trends during political or religious crises. As highlighted, "*YouTube par har dosray din in ke video trending mein hotay hain...*", TLP capitalized on algorithmic visibility, tailoring content to generate maximum emotional impact



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and virality. However, this media environment fosters ideological echo chambers, where exposure to repetitive religious-nationalist narratives reduces critical thinking and increases emotional reactivity. This aligns with Radicalization Theory, which posits that emotionally persuasive and repetitive messaging can harden beliefs, particularly in digital silos. As one analyst noted, “*log critical sochne ke bajaye jazbati ho jate hain*”, reflecting how social media has become a radicalization tool rather than a democratizing force.

5.5 Compromised Governance and Civil Liberties

The state’s ambivalence toward TLP banning it officially while accommodating its demands undermines the rule of law and reflects deep institutional contradictions. Editorials stating, “*TLP ka ban sirf naam ka tha...*”, underscore this hypocrisy. From the lens of Governance and Rule of Law Theory, such compromises erode public trust in legal systems and normalize impunity for religious populist groups. Moreover, TLP’s weaponization of blasphemy laws has posed grave risks to civil liberties. Minorities, journalists, and academics often face threats and practice self-censorship to avoid confrontation. As HRCP reported, “*Blasphemy par bolna intehai khatarnak ho gaya hai...*”, this results in a shrinking intellectual space, discouraging pluralistic discourse and interfaith dialogue. The state’s failure to protect freedom of expression further illustrates how populist pressures distort constitutional norms.

5.6 Religious Origins and Sectarian Empowerment

TLP’s emergence following the execution of Mumtaz Qadri and the formation of a ‘martyrdom narrative’ provides insight into its ideological roots. The quote “*Mumtaz Qadri shaheed hai...*” reveals how political martyrdom is employed as a sanctified foundation for the party’s legitimacy. This blends religious symbolism with political activism, producing a potent ideological mix. Additionally, TLP represents a political awakening of the Barelvi sect, which had been largely passive in the political domain compared to Deobandi and Salafi groups. As stated in the *Journal of South Asian Studies*, “*TLP revived the Barelvi sect not just religiously, but politically...*”, the movement has helped consolidate a Barelvi identity in electoral politics, correcting a historic imbalance in sectarian representation.

5.7 Entrenchment of Blasphemy Politics

Blasphemy, once a theological concern, has become an instrument of political leverage under TLP’s influence. This shift “*Blasphemy ka mudda... siyasat ka hathiyar ban gaya hai*” exemplifies how religious laws are being appropriated for political purposes. This instrumentalization destabilizes the legal system and inhibits objective judicial action. Consequently, fear and self-censorship dominate civil society, with media, academia, and human rights activists increasingly silenced. This has resulted in a chilling effect on discourse, undermining democratic values, and aligning with Authoritarian Populism Theory, where strong emotional narratives override legal checks and civic norms.

5.8 TLP’s Media Strategy and Parallel Ecosystems



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Mainstream media marginalization post-violence and bans inadvertently empowered TLP to build a parallel digital ecosystem, a classic case of unintended consequences. As stated, “*apni awaaz khud create ki YouTube aur Facebook par*”, the party constructed a new public sphere where it controlled the narrative unchallenged. Its ability to exploit algorithms “*TLP ka content sab se pehle viral hota hai*” demonstrates how digital architecture rewards emotional and divisive content, enabling the party to maintain visibility and legitimacy, even in the absence of formal media representation. This highlights a major challenge for democratic societies in the age of digital populism.

5.9 Civil-Military Tensions and National Security Risks

TLP's actions have not only disrupted internal governance but also strained civil-military relations. The Qazi Faez Isa Report raised critical questions about the military's alleged indirect support during the 2017 Faizabad sit-in, showing how religious populism can be strategically tolerated for short-term political gains. However, the eventual fallout reflected in subsequent crackdowns reveals the risks of such instrumental alliances. Furthermore, the international fallout, such as the anti-France protests, has damaged Pakistan's diplomatic standing. The demand to expel the French ambassador in 2021, described as an international crisis, illustrates how domestic religious politics can escalate into global controversies, thereby linking TLP's populism with issues of national security and foreign policy instability.

This detailed discussion demonstrates that Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan's political influence is neither temporary nor marginal it is structurally embedded in Pakistan's religious, digital, and political frameworks. Through the lenses of Populism Theory, Framing Theory, and Religious Nationalism, TLP's strategic use of religious emotion, media manipulation, and blasphemy politics represents a transformative challenge to democratic pluralism and institutional coherence. The research objectives to understand the political impact of religious parties, to analyze TLP's mobilization strategies, and to evaluate its influence on governance are all comprehensively met through the data. The study concludes that unless the Pakistani state addresses the structural enablers of religious populism and reasserts the primacy of constitutional law over emotive religious politics, the fragile balance between religion and democracy will continue to erode.

6. Conclusion

The case study of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) offers a critical lens into the growing entanglement of religion and politics in Pakistan, where religious populism, emotional mobilization, and digital strategy converge to produce significant political influence even without electoral power. Rooted in the sanctified defense of *Namoos-e-Risalat* (the honor of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ), TLP has transformed political discourse in Pakistan by framing its ideology as sacred, its opponents as morally corrupt, and its actions as religious obligations rather than political tactics. The findings of this study reveal that TLP operates as a hybrid religious-political movement, using blasphemy politics, performative protests, and social media amplification as tools of both resistance and coercion.



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It has redefined protest culture through disruptive street power, such as the 2017 Faizabad sit-in, compelling the state to respond through compromise rather than the rule of law.

This highlights a broader institutional fragility, where religious sensitivities are routinely prioritized over democratic procedures and constitutional governance. While TLP has yet to achieve major legislative success, its ideological penetration especially among urban working-class Barelvi communities has significantly influenced Pakistan's political center. The mainstreaming of extremist narratives has pressured traditional parties like the PML-N and PTI to adopt more religiously conservative positions, narrowing the space for secular or progressive discourse. The party's strategic shift to alternative digital platforms following mainstream media bans has proven remarkably effective. By exploiting algorithm-driven virality and constructing emotionally charged echo chambers, TLP has maintained high visibility, bypassing censorship and directly engaging its support base. These digital strategies have contributed to online radicalization and reduced critical dialogue, especially among youth.

TLP's emergence is deeply tied to historical sectarian marginalization and martyrdom politics, particularly the symbolic elevation of Mumtaz Qadri. This connection illustrates how sectarian identity and religious emotion have been mobilized to challenge state authority and reassert Barelvi influence in Pakistan's political arena. One of the most alarming conclusions of this study is the politicization of blasphemy laws, which have evolved into potent instruments of political manipulation and social control. TLP's frequent invocation of these laws has created a climate of fear, silencing dissent and fostering self-censorship across civil society, journalism, and academia. In doing so, it has not only destabilized the rule of law but also posed serious threats to minority rights, freedom of expression, and interfaith harmony.

This study underlines the geopolitical consequences of TLP's rise. The party's rhetoric and protests, particularly in response to international incidents such as the France caricature controversy, have strained Pakistan's diplomatic relations and compromised its global image turning domestic populism into a foreign policy liability. The influence of TLP exemplifies how religious populism, when left unchecked, can reshape democratic institutions, public behavior, and national ideology. Its rise challenges not only the structure of Pakistani democracy but also the values that underpin pluralism, tolerance, and civic order. Drawing on Populism Theory, Framing Theory, and Religious Nationalism, this study concludes that TLP's ascent is both a product and a driver of Pakistan's shifting political culture—one increasingly governed by faith-based emotional politics rather than rational democratic engagement.

The research urges that any sustainable response to movements like TLP must go beyond reactive bans and ad hoc negotiations. Instead, it requires a proactive strategy that includes:

- a) Strengthening constitutional institutions and legal frameworks,
- b) Promoting religious tolerance and civic education,



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- c) Ensuring digital responsibility and media literacy,
- d) And fostering an inclusive political culture that values pluralism and democratic dialogue.

Without such reforms, the cycle of religious coercion and institutional compromise is likely to deepen, posing enduring risks to Pakistan's democratic future.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings and detailed analysis of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan's (TLP) political influence, here are 5–7 major recommendations to address the challenges posed by religious populism, institutional fragility, and ideological radicalization in Pakistan:

1. Enforce Legal and Constitutional Accountability

The state must apply the law consistently to all political actors, including religious parties like TLP. Bans should not be symbolic; instead, any group involved in inciting violence or undermining constitutional order should face transparent legal consequences under Pakistan's anti-terrorism and hate speech laws.

2. Reform and De-Politicize Blasphemy Laws

Blasphemy laws must be reviewed through parliamentary debate and legal reform to prevent misuse for political gain or personal vendettas. Clear procedural safeguards should be implemented to protect innocent citizens and uphold due process, while promoting interfaith tolerance and human rights.

3. Strengthen Media Regulation and Promote Digital Literacy

Digital platforms should be regulated to prevent the spread of hate speech and religious extremism. At the same time, media literacy campaigns must be introduced in schools, colleges, and communities to build resilience against emotional propaganda and misinformation spread by groups like TLP.

4. Empower Pluralistic and Moderate Religious Voices

State and civil society must promote alternative religious narratives through Barelvi, Deobandi, and other Islamic scholars who advocate peace, tolerance, and democratic values. This can counterbalance the radical rhetoric of TLP and expand civic spaces for dialogue and diversity.

5. Institutionalize Democratic Protest Mechanisms

There is a need to formalize protest laws and boundaries to prevent groups from paralyzing cities or pressuring governments through coercion. Peaceful assembly should be protected, but violent or religiously charged disruptions must be curbed through clear legal frameworks.



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6. Address Socioeconomic Roots of Radicalization

TLP's support base largely stems from economically marginalized groups. Policymakers should focus on uplifting these communities through targeted education, job opportunities, and civic engagement programs that offer alternative avenues to political empowerment and social mobility.

7. Integrate Civic and Religious Education in Curriculum

Curricula must include civic education that teaches democratic norms, critical thinking, and religious coexistence. Religious education should emphasize the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ message of compassion, justice, and peaceful coexistence, not political confrontation.

These recommendations aim to restore democratic balance, protect civil liberties, and neutralize the long-term threat of religious populism to Pakistan's political and social fabric.

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