

The Interplay of Media and Political Islam in Pakistan: A Critical Evaluation of Farooq A. Kperogi's Book

Ali Hussain

Member at Islamabad Press Policing (Islamabad) and News Editor at ARY News (Islamabad Office)

Abid Hussain

Content Writer at the Asia Inclusive Think Tank (Peshawar Office)

Email: abid.freelancejournalist@gmail.com

Publication History:

Received: May 01, 2023

Revised: May 10, 2023

Accepted: May 20, 2023

Published Online: June 01, 2023

Keywords:

Georgia State University,
Islamization in Pakistan,
Hindus,
Social Harmony,
Democratic Values,
Jamāt-e-Islāmī,

Research related to Academic Areas:

Media Studies, Pakistan Studies,
Social Studies, Book Review,

Acknowledgment:

This paper is a joint academic contribution of the authors.

Ethical Consideration:

This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

Abstract

This paper critically evaluates Farooq A. Kperogi's book, "Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan", within the context of the interplay of media and political Islam in Pakistan. Using a comprehensive analysis of Kperogi's arguments and evidence, the paper offers a nuanced critique of the book's approach to the complex relationship between media and political Islam in Pakistan. Drawing on a range of historical and contemporary sources, the paper examines the role of media in the rise and consolidation of political Islam in Pakistan, including the role of religious political parties and militant groups in shaping public opinion and political discourse. It also explores the ways in which media outlets and journalists have been co-opted by political Islamists for their own agendas, as well as the challenges faced by independent media and secular voices in this context.

Overall, the paper argues that while Kperogi's book offers important insights into the interplay of media and political Islam in Pakistan, it is ultimately limited by its narrow focus on certain aspects of this complex relationship. By offering a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by the interplay of media and political Islam in Pakistan.

Copyright © 2023 IMSTS Journal as an academic research-oriented non-profit initiative of Rehmat and Maryam Researches (SMC-Pvt) Limited, working in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lodhran under the Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). This is an open-access article. However, its distribution and/or reproduction in any medium is subject to the proper citation of the original work.

Introduction

Pakistan is a nation with a convoluted past of political, social, and religious intricacies that have shaped its identity and governance (Rizvi, 2016). One particularly significant aspect of this intricacy is the interplay of media and political Islam, which has garnered the attention of scholars in recent years. Farooq A. Kperogi's work, "Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan", offers an insightful and critical evaluation of this phenomenon, exploring how the media has become a tool for manipulating religion in the country. The book provides an extensive analysis of the role of media in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan, with a focus on the ascent of religious political parties and their ideology's impact on society.

Kperogi posits that media has played a crucial role in promoting the Islamization of Pakistan, enabling political actors to use religion as a means of achieving their objectives.

This paper critically evaluates Kperogi's book, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between media and political Islam in Pakistan. We begin by exploring the historical and social context in which this phenomenon emerged, highlighting the key factors that have shaped Pakistan's political and religious landscape. We then provide an overview of Kperogi's arguments and the evidence he presents to support them. Thus, our analysis examines the strengths and weaknesses of Kperogi's arguments, analyzing his methodology and the sources he draws upon. We also engage with other scholarly works on the subject, assessing their contributions to our understanding of media and political Islam in Pakistan.

The primary aim of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the complex interplay of media and political Islam in Pakistan. Through a critical evaluation of Kperogi's book, we hope to deepen our understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for Pakistan's political and religious future.

History of the Author

Farooq A. Kperogi is a Nigerian-American scholar and journalist who obtained his PhD in Communication from Georgia State University. He currently serves as an Associate Professor of Journalism and Emerging Media at Kennesaw State University in Georgia. Kperogi's scholarly research centers on the relationship between media, language, and politics, with a particular emphasis on the role of media in shaping political discourse and identity. Specifically, he has dedicated his research to the study of media and Islam, examining the connections between media depictions of Islam and the construction of Muslim identity (Kperogi, 2023).

Kperogi's book, "Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan", was motivated by his interest in the ways in which media has been utilized to promote political Islam in Pakistan. He contends that media has played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan, empowering religious political parties to mobilize support and advance their agenda. Kperogi's research draws upon a diverse range of sources, such as media coverage, political speeches, and interviews with key figures in the Pakistani political arena. His comprehensive analysis provides insight into the complex and often-misunderstood phenomenon of how media has been utilized to promote Islamization in Pakistan (Kperogi, 2023).

Media as a Tool for Political Islamization: A Critical Analysis of Religious Political Parties in Pakistan

Religious political parties have leveraged media as a tool to promote their political interests and foster the Islamization of Pakistan, thus playing a noteworthy role in the interplay of media and political Islam (Hassan, 1985). In his book, 'Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan,' Farooq A. Kperogi provides a critical assessment of this phenomenon, contending that political actors have used media to mobilize support and promote their agenda.

Kperogi posits that religious political parties have exerted significant influence on Pakistan's political landscape by utilizing media to disseminate their ideology and build momentum. With their own newspapers and television channels, these parties have garnered a strong media presence and used it to forward their political and religious objectives. They have also harnessed social media to amplify their views and reach a larger audience (A. Kperogi, 2023).

The book emphasizes the impact of religious political parties on public discourse surrounding Islam and its societal role, suggesting that they have employed media to advocate for a specific interpretation of Islam aligned with their political aims. This messaging has resonated with many Pakistanis, resulting in a strong association between Islam and a particular political ideology. Additionally, Kperogi asserts that religious political parties have manipulated media to promote bigotry and intolerance towards minority groups, including Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, contributing to sectarian divisions, violence, and discrimination. Therefore, it has been investigated that the Kperogi's book reveals the significance of religious political parties' use of media to push their political interests and engender Islamization in Pakistan. It underscores the need for a critical examination of media representations of Islam and the role of political actors in shaping public dialogue surrounding religion and politics in Pakistan (A. Kprogi, 2023).

The Negative Impact of Using Media as a Tool to Manipulate Islam in Pakistan

The utilization of media as a manipulative tool to promote a particular interpretation of Islam in Pakistan has yielded far-reaching consequences for the populace, particularly for the vast majority who are illiterate, unenlightened, or unacquainted with the intricacies of the matter at hand. The instrumentalization of religion for political ends has instigated the ascendancy of extremist creeds and sectarian violence, stoking tensions and sowing divisions in society (Khan, 2005).

Religious political factions have adroitly employed media as a means to propagate their own version of Islam, which dovetails with their political objectives and inculcates intolerance towards minority groups. This has engendered a detrimental impact on social harmony, as it has facilitated discrimination and violent aggression against minorities, including Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis. Moreover, the promulgation of a specific brand of Islam through media channels has provided a fertile breeding ground for extremist doctrines and terrorist activities, with some individuals being radicalized through exposure to extremist content disseminated through media outlets. This has resulted in dire implications for national security and stability. Furthermore, the use of media as a tool to manipulate religion for political ends has precipitated the erosion of democratic values and institutions in Pakistan. Religious political groups have leveraged media to influence public opinion and shape political discourse, thereby fostering the emergence of authoritarianism and undermining the fundamental principles of democracy (Khan, 2005).

In sum, the utilization of media as a tool to manipulate Islam in Pakistan has engendered a plethora of negative repercussions on society, such as the proliferation of extremist creeds, sectarian violence, discrimination against minorities, and the subversion of democratic norms. It is of utmost importance for media practitioners and political actors to act with circumspection and prudence, eschewing the exploitation of media for the propagation of their respective political and religious agendas (Khan, 2005).

A Dark Side of religious Political Parties for Fueling Extremism and Undermining Democracy through Media in Pakistan

The employment of media as a tool for manipulating the Islamic faith in Pakistan has yielded a profound impact on society, particularly in the realm of the country's campaign against terrorism. Religious political factions have harnessed media to advance their respective political and religious dogmas, thereby engendering the ascent of extremist ideologies and sectarian violence, which has further compounded the already onerous security situation (ICG-Report, 2022).

The usage of media as a means for manipulating religion has served to radicalize a subset of individuals, who have been subjected to extremist content via sundry media channels. This has engendered severe implications for Pakistan's national security and stability, and has further complicated the country's anti-terrorism crusade. Furthermore, the propagation of a certain variant of Islam through media has also fostered the undermining of democratic principles and institutions in the country. Religious political parties have exploited media to shape political discourse, manipulate public opinion, and impair the foundations of democracy (ICG-Report, 2022).

Therefore, analysts evaluate that the deployment of media to manipulate Islam in Pakistan has spawned significant negative repercussions on the country, especially in the context of the ongoing campaign against terrorism. It has served to escalate the proliferation of extremism, sectarian violence, and the deterioration of democratic values. A discerning assessment of the function of media in framing public debate on religion and politics is crucial to the promotion of social harmony and democratic values in Pakistan.

Suggestions given by Farooq A. Kperogi

Farooq A. Kperogi's book, "Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan", delves into the use of media as a tool for Islamization and its impact on Pakistani society. Kperogi argues that the use of media as a tool for promoting a particular version of Islam has had a significant impact on the religious and political landscape of Pakistan. He suggests that the manipulation of religion through media has contributed to the rise of extremism and sectarian violence in the country, leading to further instability and conflict (A. Kperogi, 2023).

Kperogi also discusses the role of media in shaping public opinion and promoting a particular political agenda, particularly that of religious political parties. He argues that the use of media to promote political and religious ideologies has contributed to the erosion of democratic values and institutions in Pakistan, further exacerbating the already complex security situation (A. Kperogi, 2023).

Conclusion

The tome by Farooq A. Kperogi, entitled "Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan", examines the broader issue of media manipulation in Pakistan, but it does shed light on the influential role of religious

political parties such as JUIF¹, Jamat-e-Islami², Labaik ya Rasool Allah³, Mili Muslim League⁴, and others in this regard. The literary work posits that these political parties have utilized media as a tool to disseminate

¹ Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (Fazl-ur-Rehman group), also known as JUI-F, is a right-wing Islamist political party in Pakistan that has a long history of promoting sectarian violence in the country. The party has been accused of manipulating religion for political purposes, and using media to trigger anti-PTI and anti-Imran Khan sentiments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. JUI was founded in 1945 by Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, a prominent Islamic scholar and politician in Pakistan. The party was initially formed to promote Islamic values and principles in the country, and to protect the rights of Muslims in the region. JUI became increasingly influential in the 1980s, during the era of military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, who introduced a series of Islamization policies in the country (Waseem, 2022). However, in 1988, Fazl-ur-Rehman established its separate fraction called JUIF. Under the leadership of Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, JUI-F became a major player in Pakistani politics in the 1990s and early 2000s. Fazl-ur-Rehman, who served as the party's secretary-general and later as its chief, was known for his fiery speeches and his staunch opposition to the United States' war on terror in Afghanistan. He was also known for his support of the Taliban and other extremist groups in the region (Waseem, 2022).

JUI-F has been accused of promoting sectarian violence in Pakistan by using religion as a tool for political gain. The party has been particularly active in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where it has used local newspapers to spread its message of intolerance and hatred. JUI-F has also been accused of supporting terrorist groups in the region, including the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. In recent years, JUI-F has become increasingly critical of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which came to power in 2018. The party has accused PTI of being anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan, and has called for its removal from power. JUI-F has also been critical of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is seen as a symbol of change in Pakistani politics (Waseem, 2022).

JUI-F's use of media to promote sectarian violence and anti-PTI and anti-Imran Khan sentiments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been widely condemned by civil society organizations and human rights activists in Pakistan. These groups have called on the government to take action against the party and to ensure that freedom of speech is not used as a cover for hate speech and incitement to violence. Therefore, local and international scholars examine and endorse that the JUI-F's history of promoting sectarian violence in Pakistan and its use of media to trigger anti-PTI and anti-Imran Khan sentiments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a cause for concern. The party's leadership should be held accountable for their actions, and the government should take measures to ensure that such activities are not allowed to continue. It is important to promote a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity in Pakistan, and to reject any form of extremism and hatred that threatens the country's stability and security (Waseem, 2022).

² Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is a right-wing Islamic political party in Pakistan that has a long and controversial history in the country. During the Pakistan Movement, JI was one of the biggest opponents of the creation of Pakistan, arguing that Muslims should remain a part of a united India and rejecting the two-nation theory. Despite its opposition to the creation of Pakistan, JI became a significant political force in the country after its formation in 1941. The party's founder, Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, was a prominent Islamic scholar and philosopher who advocated for the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan (Iqtidar, 2011).

During the East Pakistan Civil War in 1971, JI played a controversial role in the conflict. The party opposed the creation of Bangladesh and supported the Pakistani military's efforts to suppress the Bengali independence movement. JI members were accused of carrying out atrocities against Bengali civilians, including rape, torture, and murder. The party was also alleged to have formed death squads to target Bengali nationalists and intellectuals (Iqtidar, 2011).

JI's manipulation of Islam through the media can be seen in its support for military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq, who came to power in 1977. Zia-ul-Haq implemented a series of Islamization policies in the country, including the introduction of Sharia law. JI supported Zia-ul-Haq's regime and used its newspaper, "The Daily Jang," to promote its conservative religious ideology and support for the military government (Iqtidar, 2011).

JI's support for militancy in Pakistan can be traced back to its role in the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s. The party supported the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation and provided financial and logistical support to the Mujahideen fighters. JI also formed its own militant group, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, which carried out attacks against Indian forces in Kashmir. Therefore, analysts and historians count this party as one of controversial and extremist element in the history of Pakistan since the Pakistan movement. The party's opposition to the creation of Pakistan,

their political and religious doctrines, leading to the proliferation of extremist thought, sectarian violence, and discrimination against minority groups. The book further highlights the impact of these parties in

its role in the East Pakistan Civil War, its manipulation of Islam through the media, and its support for militancy have all contributed to its reputation as a divisive and dangerous force in Pakistani politics (Iqtidar, 2011).

³ Labaik ya Rasool Allah (LRA) is a far-right Islamic extremist group in Pakistan that has gained notoriety in recent years for promoting militancy and violence through the use of social media platforms, often by manipulating Islamic teachings. LRA emerged in 2015 and has since become one of the most active and vocal extremist groups in the country. The group's central demand is the enforcement of blasphemy laws in Pakistan, and it has carried out numerous protests and demonstrations against the government's perceived failure to do so. LRA also advocates for the expulsion of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community from Pakistan, which it views as non-Muslims (News-Desk, 2017).

LRA has made extensive use of social media platforms to promote its extremist ideology and mobilize supporters. The group's leaders use platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to disseminate their message and recruit new members. They also use messaging apps like WhatsApp and Telegram to communicate with supporters and plan activities. LRA's manipulation of Islamic teachings is evident in its social media content. The group often posts videos and images of its leaders and members engaged in religious activities such as praying and reciting the Quran, which are intended to portray the group as true defenders of Islam. However, LRA's promotion of violence and militancy contradicts the peaceful teachings of Islam and goes against the vast majority of Muslims' beliefs (News-Desk, 2017).

The group has also used social media to incite violence against its perceived enemies. In 2017, LRA organized a massive protest in Islamabad against a change in election law, which resulted in a violent clash with police. LRA members were seen carrying weapons and attacking police officers, and several people were killed in the ensuing violence. LRA's use of social media has allowed the group to expand its reach and influence, but it has also made it easier for law enforcement agencies to track its activities. In 2018, Pakistan's government banned LRA and its parent organization, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, from participating in elections, citing their promotion of violence and extremism. Therefore, it has been evaluated by the scholars and researchers that LRA's use of social media to promote militancy and violence in Pakistan is a disturbing trend that must be addressed by the government and civil society. The group's manipulation of Islamic teachings and incitement of violence through social media is a threat not only to Pakistan but to the global community. It is essential to counter the group's extremist narrative through education and outreach, as well as through law enforcement and other measures to combat extremism and terrorism (News-Desk, 2017).

⁴ Mili Muslim League (MML) is a political party in Pakistan that has been accused of being a front organization for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a militant organization responsible for numerous terrorist attacks in India. The party was formed in 2017 and has since been active in Pakistani politics, often using media outlets to promote its extremist ideology and to mobilize supporters. MML's links to LeT have been a cause of concern for India and other countries in the region. LeT has been implicated in several high-profile terrorist attacks in India, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks that killed more than 160 people. The group is also active in Jammu and Kashmir, where it has been fighting Indian security forces for years (Iqtidar, 2011).

MML's promotion of militancy in Pakistan is evident in its use of media outlets to disseminate its extremist ideology. The party has a strong presence on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, where it often shares content that promotes its extremist views and glorifies violence. MML also has links to several newspapers and TV channels in Pakistan, which it uses to promote its message and to gain legitimacy (Iqtidar, 2011).

MML's promotion of militancy in Pakistan and its alleged links to LeT are a cause of concern not only for India but for the global community as well. The party's use of media outlets to promote its extremist views and to mobilize supporters is a threat to peace and stability in the region. The fact that the state of Pakistan, including its intelligence agency, is believed to be indirectly supporting the party is a cause for even greater concern. That's why, researchers conclude that the Mili Muslim League's promotion of militancy in Pakistan through media outlets is a troubling trend that must be addressed by the government and civil society. The party's links to LeT and its alleged support by the ISI are a cause of concern for India and other countries in the region. It is essential for Pakistan to take decisive action against organizations like MML and LeT to ensure peace and stability in the region (Iqtidar, 2011).

regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa⁵, Balochistan⁶, and South Punjab⁷, where they have been particularly active and influential.

Additionally, the publication contends that the manipulation of religion via media has contributed to the erosion of democratic values and institutions in Pakistan. Religious political parties have utilized media to shape political discourse, exert their influence over public opinion, and undermine the principles of democracy, thereby complicating the country's already problematic political and social milieu.

The aforesaid arguments in the book culminate in the conclusion that the role of religious political parties in Pakistan's media landscape has had a profound impact on society, notably amidst the country's ongoing struggles with extremism, sectarian violence, and democratic degradation. The book argues that it is essential to conduct a critical evaluation of the role of media in promoting social cohesion and democratic values, in order to construct a more inclusive and stable society in Pakistan.

References

- A. Kprogi, F. (2023). *Media and the Politics of Islamization in Pakistan*. Retrieved from Amazon and LinkedIn: <https://www.amazon.com/Media-Politics-Islamization-Pakistan-Kperogi/dp/0739195233>

⁵ Media outlets in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, such as the daily newspaper Ummat, have been known to promote extremist ideologies and glorify militant groups operating in the region. Similarly, TV channels such as Khyber News and Shamshad TV have also been accused of providing a platform to extremist and militant groups. These outlets use their platforms to disseminate a range of propaganda, including anti-Western and anti-Indian sentiments, and to mobilize support for their cause.

Social media has also been a significant tool in promoting religious militancy in KP, with Facebook and WhatsApp being particularly popular among extremist groups. These platforms are used to spread extremist ideologies and recruit new members, with groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) using social media to claim responsibility for attacks and to spread their propaganda. Unfortunately, the combination of biased media outlets and the prevalence of social media has contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies and the promotion of religious militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

⁶ Balochistan, a province of Pakistan, has also been affected by religious militancy, with certain media outlets playing a role in promoting extremist ideologies in the region. Newspapers such as Daily Balochistan Express and Jang Quetta have been accused of promoting extremist ideologies and providing a platform for militant groups operating in the province. They use their platforms to disseminate propaganda, recruit new members, and legitimize violent actions. On the other hand, social media has also played a role in promoting religious militancy in Balochistan, with Facebook and WhatsApp being particularly popular among extremist groups. These platforms are used to spread extremist ideologies, recruit new members, and claim responsibility for attacks. Unfortunately, the role of certain media outlets, combined with the prevalence of social media, has contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies and the promotion of religious militancy in Balochistan.

⁷ Religious militancy in South Punjab is promoted through various media outlets, including newspapers, TV channels, and social media. Newspapers such as Khabrain, Daily Islam, and Daily Ausaf have been accused of promoting extremist ideologies and providing a platform for militant groups. They use their platforms to disseminate propaganda, recruit new members, and legitimize violent actions.

Social media has also played a role in promoting religious militancy in South Punjab, with Facebook and WhatsApp being particularly popular among extremist groups. These platforms are used to spread extremist ideologies, recruit new members, and claim responsibility for attacks. Unfortunately, the role of certain media outlets, combined with the prevalence of social media, has contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies and the promotion of religious militancy in South Punjab.

- Hassan, R. (1985). Islamization: An Analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 263-284.
- ICG-Report. (2022, September 05). *A New Era of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan*. Retrieved from International Crisis Group: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/327/asia/south-asia/pakistan/new-era-sectarian-violence-pakistan>
- Iqtidar, H. (2011). *Secularizing Islamists? Jamamt-e-Islami and Jamat-ud-Dawa in Urban Pakistan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Khan, A. U. (2005). *The Terrorist Threat and the Policy Response in Pakistan*. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.
- Kperogi, F. (2023, April 15). *Farooq Kperogi*. Retrieved from LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/farooqkperogi>
- News-Desk. (2017, November 29). *The rise of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik-ya-Rasool Allah: dawn of a new era?* Retrieved from Global Village Space: <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/the-rise-of-the-tehreek-e-labbaik-ya-rasool-allah-dawn-of-a-new-era/>
- Rizvi, A. (2016, February 08). The Politicization of Islam in Pakistan: A Proposal. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2729129
- Waseem, Z. (2022). *Insecure Guardians; Enforcement, Encounters and Everyday Policing in Postcolonial Karachi*. London: Oxford University Press.