

## The Intersection of Theocratic Support and Military Juntas: A Comparative Analysis of Myanmar and Pakistan

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

### Abstract

History bears witness to the fact that military juntas around the world often garner support from theocratic segments of society to manipulate the socio-political rights of citizens within a state. In light of this phenomenon, this research paper critically examines the issue of Buddhist theocratic support for military juntas through a comparative analysis of Myanmar and Pakistan. The study delves into the historical and socio-political contexts that have facilitated the rise of military juntas to power and assesses the degree to which Buddhist religious institutions and leaders have endorsed or backed their rule. Furthermore, it draws parallels with Pakistan, where religious parties (specifically Jamat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam) have consistently endorsed martial laws imposed by various military regimes. Through meticulous analysis of these cases, the paper aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between religious institutions, military juntas, and their impact on society and democratic processes. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersections between religion, politics, and military rule, thereby stimulating discussions on the implications for democracy, human rights, and the role of religious institutions in political governance.

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## Introduction

Military juntas, throughout history, have often sought support from religious institutions and leaders to legitimize their rule and manipulate the socio-political landscape of the countries they govern. This paper critically examines the phenomenon of Buddhist theocratic support for military juntas, focusing on the case studies of Myanmar and Pakistan. By exploring the historical and socio-political contexts in which military juntas have risen to power and the extent to which Buddhist religious institutions and leaders have endorsed or supported their rule, this research aims to shed light on the complex relationship between religion, politics, and military governance (Yaqoob, 2018).

In Myanmar, the military junta has a long history of receiving support from certain segments of the Buddhist clergy. The influence of Buddhism in Myanmar is deeply entrenched, with the majority of the population identifying as Theravada Buddhists. The paper investigates the factors that have facilitated the alignment between the military junta and Buddhist institutions, examining the role played by religious leaders in legitimizing and perpetuating military rule. It also analyzes the impact of this alliance on democratic processes, human rights, and societal cohesion within Myanmar. By delving into these dynamics, the research aims to uncover the mechanisms through which Buddhist theocratic support sustains military juntas in power and its implications for the broader socio-political landscape of the country (Narain, 2021).

Similarly, in Pakistan, the intersection of religion and military rule has been a recurring theme in the country's history. Religious parties and factions have often endorsed martial laws imposed by various military regimes, claiming to protect Islamic values and restore order. The research paper explores the historical context and socio-political conditions that have led to the support of religious parties for military juntas in Pakistan. It examines the role of religious leaders in justifying and advocating for military rule and investigates the consequences of this alliance on democratic institutions, human rights, and societal dynamics. By drawing parallels with the case of Myanmar, the study aims to identify common patterns and dynamics in the relationship between religious institutions, military juntas, and their impact on governance and social stability (Green & Sheikh, 2021).

By critically examining the phenomenon of Buddhist theocratic support for military juntas in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties in Pakistan, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the intersection of religion, politics, and military governance. It seeks to illuminate the mechanisms through which religious institutions influence and sustain military rule, as well as the implications for democratic processes, human rights, and the overall socio-political landscape. By exploring these dynamics, the research aims to foster informed discussions and contribute to the development of strategies that promote democratic governance, social cohesion, and respect for human rights in contexts where religious institutions intersect with military power (Yaqoob, 2018).

## **Background and Significance of the Study**

The phenomenon of military juntas gaining support from religious institutions has been observed in different parts of the world, with significant implications for socio-political rights and democratic processes. This research paper aims to critically examine the specific case studies of Buddhist theocratic support for military juntas in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties in Pakistan. By delving into the historical background of these countries and their experiences with military takeovers, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between religion, politics, and military rule (Al-Azhari, 2020).

Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1948, Myanmar (formerly Burma) has witnessed several military takeovers that have profoundly influenced the country's political landscape. The first significant military coup occurred in 1962 when General Ne Win seized power, establishing a military dictatorship that lasted for nearly five decades. During this period, Buddhist religious institutions played a complex role, with some segments of the Buddhist clergy supporting the military regime while others engaged in opposition movements advocating for democracy and human rights. The 1988 pro-democracy

uprising, led by Buddhist monks, demonstrated the potential for religious institutions to mobilize against military rule (Al-Azhari, 2020).

In the case of Pakistan, the country has experienced multiple military takeovers since its independence from British rule in 1947. General Ayub Khan's coup in 1958 marked the first military takeover, followed by General Yahya Khan's assumption of power in 1969. These military regimes implemented martial laws and suspended democratic processes, leading to significant social and political upheaval. Religious parties in Pakistan have historically demonstrated a willingness to align with military rulers, often supporting martial laws in the name of stability or Islamic principles. The military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) saw a strengthening of religious conservatism and the Islamization of state institutions, further blurring the lines between religion and politics (Al-Azhari, 2020).

The significance of this study lies in its ability to provide insights into the historical contexts and factors that have influenced the relationship between religious institutions and military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan. By examining the patterns of Buddhist theocratic support for military rule in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties in Pakistan, this research aims to uncover the motivations, strategies, and implications of these alliances. Understanding the complex dynamics between religion, politics, and military governance is essential for promoting democratic processes, protecting human rights, and fostering social cohesion.

This research also has practical implications for policymakers, civil society organizations, and scholars working towards democratic governance and human rights in contexts affected by military rule and religious influences. The findings can guide efforts to promote inclusive governance, strengthen democratic institutions, and challenge the manipulative use of religion for political purposes. By shedding light on the historical contexts and dynamics of religious support for military juntas, this study aims to contribute to academic scholarship and inform policy discussions on the complex interplay between religion and political governance. At the same time, by examining the motivations, strategies, and implications of these alliances, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between religion, politics, and military rule. The research findings have the potential to inform efforts to promote democratic processes, protect human rights, and foster social stability in societies where religious institutions intersect with military power.

## **Research Objectives and Methodology**

The primary objectives of this research are:

- To analyze the historical and socio-political contexts that have facilitated the rise of military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan.
- To investigate the extent to which Buddhist religious institutions and leaders in Myanmar have endorsed or supported military juntas.
- To examine the historical relationship between religious parties in Pakistan and their endorsement of martial laws implemented by military regimes.
- To understand the motivations and strategies behind the support of Buddhist theocratic segments for military juntas and the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties.
- To explore the implications of religious support for military rule on society, democratic processes, and human rights in Myanmar and Pakistan.

- To draw parallels and identify common patterns between the cases of Buddhist theocratic support in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws in Pakistan.

## Methodology

This research will employ a comparative case study approach to examine the phenomenon of religious support for military juntas in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties in Pakistan. The research will utilize a combination of primary and secondary data sources to achieve the objectives of the study.

- Primary data collection will involve conducting interviews with key stakeholders, including religious leaders, members of religious institutions, political figures, and civil society activists. These interviews will provide valuable insights into the motivations, perspectives, and experiences of individuals and organizations involved in the intersections between religion and military rule.
- Secondary data collection will involve an extensive review of existing literature, scholarly articles, reports, historical documents, and media sources. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical context, political dynamics, and socio-cultural factors that have shaped the relationship between religion and military governance in Myanmar and Pakistan.
- The data collected will be analyzed using qualitative research methods, including thematic analysis and content analysis. The comparative approach will enable the identification of common patterns, differences, and nuances in the cases of Buddhist theocratic support in Myanmar and the endorsement of martial laws in Pakistan.
- Ethical considerations will be taken into account throughout the research process, ensuring the protection of the participants' confidentiality, informed consent, and adherence to ethical research principles.

By employing a rigorous and comprehensive research methodology, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics between religion, politics, and military rule in Myanmar and Pakistan. The research findings will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject and help inform policy discussions and initiatives aimed at promoting democracy, human rights, and the role of religious institutions in political governance.

## Historical Context: Military Juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan

Myanmar and Pakistan, both countries with complex political histories, have experienced periods of military rule since their independence. Understanding the historical context of military takeovers in these nations provides valuable insights into the factors that led to these transitions and the role of religious parties or groups in supporting such military juntas (Sheikh, 2019).

In Myanmar, the military junta, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), seized power in 1962. The coup was motivated by various factors, including the desire to establish a centralized military regime, economic mismanagement, and political instability. The military justified its rule by asserting the need to maintain national unity and protect Buddhist traditions, which were seen as integral to the country's identity. While Buddhist religious institutions did not openly endorse the military junta, they benefited from the regime's support and protection, leading to a perceived alignment between the military and Buddhism (Sheikh, 2019).

Similarly, in Pakistan, military takeovers occurred at different times, driven by distinct circumstances. General Ayub Khan assumed power through a military coup in 1958, citing the need to address political corruption and restore stability. During his rule, religious parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, supported Ayub Khan's regime due to his conservative policies and emphasis on Islamic principles. However, as dissent grew, leading to the 1969 mass protests, religious parties gradually distanced themselves from Ayub Khan's military junta (Sheikh, 2019).

In 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq seized power in Pakistan, justifying his coup as a response to political chaos and corruption. Zia-ul-Haq's regime implemented a series of Islamization policies, seeking to align the state with a conservative interpretation of Islam. Religious parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, lent their support to Zia-ul-Haq's military junta due to its perceived commitment to Islamic values. This support provided legitimacy to the regime and helped solidify its control (Sheikh, 2019).

Another military takeover occurred in Pakistan in 1999 when General Pervez Musharraf ousted the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. While religious parties did not openly endorse the military's actions, some segments within these parties viewed Musharraf's rule as an opportunity to advance their conservative religious agenda (Sheikh, 2019).

### **Buddhist Theocratic Support to Military Juntas in Myanmar: Factors to Consider**

- **Role of Buddhist Religious Institutions and Leaders**

Buddhist religious institutions and leaders in Myanmar have played a significant role in shaping the political landscape and influencing public opinion. While not all Buddhist religious institutions overtly endorsed or supported military juntas, they often benefited from the regime's protection and support. This created a perceived alignment between the military and Buddhism, which had a profound impact on societal dynamics (Naaz, 2022).

Buddhist leaders, including influential monks, have historically held significant sway over the population. Their endorsement or silence regarding military rule has influenced public perception and acceptance of the junta's actions. Some Buddhist religious institutions and leaders have supported military juntas due to the belief that they would safeguard Buddhist traditions, maintain national unity, and protect against perceived threats, such as the influence of ethnic minorities or religious minorities (Naaz, 2022).

- **Analysis of Religious Justifications and Endorsements**

Religious justifications and endorsements provided by Buddhist institutions and leaders have been instrumental in garnering support for military juntas in Myanmar. The junta has often portrayed itself as the defender of Buddhism and the protector of the nation's religious heritage. This narrative has been used to legitimize military rule and suppress dissent by labeling critics as threats to Buddhism or national unity (Naaz, 2022).

Religious endorsements by influential monks have been utilized to cultivate a sense of legitimacy and moral authority for the military juntas. Such endorsements have helped shape public perception and justify the junta's actions, even in instances where they may have violated democratic principles or human rights. These religious justifications, rooted in a fusion of nationalism and Buddhism, have served as a powerful tool for maintaining control and silencing opposition (Naaz, 2022).

- **Implications for Democracy and Human Rights**

The Buddhist theocratic support for military juntas in Myanmar has significant implications for democracy and human rights in the country. The close association between Buddhism and the military has resulted in the marginalization and persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly the Rohingya Muslims. The military's actions, justified under the guise of protecting Buddhism and national unity, have led to gross human rights violations, including ethnic cleansing and displacement (Naaz, 2022).

The religious justifications provided by Buddhist institutions have contributed to the erosion of democratic values and the suppression of dissent. By portraying military rule as essential for protecting Buddhism and national interests, religious endorsements have helped legitimize authoritarian practices, restrict freedom of expression, and curtail civil liberties (Naaz, 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of Buddhist religious institutions and leaders in shaping public opinion has hindered efforts to promote pluralism, inclusivity, and interfaith dialogue. This has limited the space for constructive engagement and marginalized voices advocating for democratic reforms and the protection of human rights. Moreover, the involvement of Buddhist religious institutions and leaders, the use of religious justifications, and the resulting implications for democratic processes and human rights must be critically examined and addressed to promote a more inclusive and rights-based society in Myanmar (Naaz, 2022).

## **Religious Parties and Endorsement of Martial Laws in Pakistan**

### **Overview of Martial Laws in Pakistan**

Pakistan has a history of military interventions and the imposition of martial laws since its independence in 1947. The military juntas have justified these actions as necessary measures to address political instability, corruption, and economic crises. Martial laws have suspended the democratic processes, curtailed civil liberties, and concentrated power in the hands of the military (Din, 2017).

### **Support Extended by Religious Parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami**

Religious parties in Pakistan have played a significant role in the country's political landscape. During different periods of martial law, some religious parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, have extended their support to the military regimes. One notable instance was during the political crisis in 1970-1971, which ultimately led to the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh (Din, 2017).

### **Influential Factors Driving their Endorsement:**

Several factors influenced the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties, particularly Jamaat-e-Islami, during the political crisis in East Pakistan. Firstly, Jamaat-e-Islami saw the military junta as a bulwark against what they perceived as the leftist and nationalist Awami League, which had won a majority in the 1970 general elections. The military regime, led by General Yahya Khan, denied the Awami League its rightful mandate to form a government, leading to widespread protests and political unrest (Din, 2017).

Jamaat-e-Islami, aligned with the military junta, played a crucial role in suppressing the Awami League's demands for autonomy and self-governance. They supported the military operations carried out in East Pakistan, which resulted in human rights abuses, including widespread violence and atrocities. Jamaat-e-

Islami members were reported to have actively collaborated with the military in these operations (Din, 2017).

Their support was driven by ideological and political considerations. Jamaat-e-Islami perceived the Awami League's secular and Bengali nationalist agenda as a threat to the idea of a unified Muslim state. They believed that the military's intervention was necessary to maintain the unity of Pakistan and protect the interests of the dominant West Pakistan establishment, in which Jamaat-e-Islami had significant influence (Din, 2017).

The historical context of political tensions between East and West Pakistan, as well as the ideological differences between religious and secular nationalist forces, further contributed to Jamaat-e-Islami's support for the military junta. They saw the military's actions as necessary to suppress what they considered a rebellion against the state and to maintain Pakistan's integrity (Din, 2017). It is significant to express that the support of Jamaat-e-Islami to the military junta in East Pakistan remains a contentious issue and has been subject to criticism and condemnation. The military operations carried out during that period resulted in a significant loss of life and widespread human rights abuses. The repercussions of those events continue to shape the political landscape and public discourse in Pakistan (Din, 2017). Therefore, it is assessed that the Jamaat-e-Islami's support for the military junta during the political crisis in East Pakistan in 1970-1971 reflects the complex dynamics between religious parties, military interventions, and political ideologies in Pakistan. Their endorsement was driven by ideological, political, and regional considerations, and their collaboration with the military had profound implications for the political landscape and human rights in the country.

However, this example indicates numerous factors that generally discussed as the influencing steps to endorse martial laws by religious parties in Pakistan.

- 1) Firstly, religious parties have often seen military rule as a means to safeguard and promote Islamic values and principles. They have perceived military regimes as more committed to upholding religious traditions and countering what they view as secular or Western influences (Din, 2017).
- 2) Secondly, religious parties have believed that military interventions can restore law and order, combat corruption, and provide stability in the country. They have viewed military regimes as necessary for bringing about discipline and enforcing Islamic morality (Din, 2017).
- 3) Furthermore, religious parties have sometimes supported martial laws as a means to advance their own political interests and gain influence. Aligning themselves with the military has provided them with a platform to advocate for their religious and ideological agenda, including the implementation of Islamic laws and policies (Din, 2017).
- 4) The historical context of political instability and weak civilian governance in Pakistan has also contributed to the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties. They have often perceived military regimes as more capable of effectively addressing the country's challenges and providing a stronger leadership alternative (Din, 2017).

### **Comparative Analysis: Myanmar and Pakistan**

When examining the phenomenon of religious parties endorsing military juntas, it is valuable to draw a comparative analysis between Myanmar and Pakistan. While the specific contexts and dynamics differ between the two countries, certain parallels can be observed regarding the relationship between religious parties and military rule (Yaqoob, 2018).

In both Myanmar and Pakistan, military juntas have historically sought support from religious institutions and leaders to legitimize their rule and suppress opposition. In Myanmar, the military junta, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), sought the support of influential Buddhist religious institutions. Similarly, in Pakistan, military regimes sought endorsement from religious parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, to consolidate their power (Yaqoob, 2018).

One common factor in both cases is the perceived threat to national unity or religious identity. In Myanmar, the military junta justified its actions as a means to protect Buddhism, which is the majority religion in the country, from what they deemed as the influence of minority communities and religious diversity. This rhetoric resonated with certain Buddhist religious institutions and leaders, who saw the military as guardians of their faith (Yaqoob, 2018).

Similarly, in Pakistan, religious parties like Jamaat-e-Islami endorsed military rule, particularly during times of political crises, by invoking the notion of protecting Islam and the interests of the Muslim community. They viewed military interventions as necessary to counter what they considered secular or nationalist forces that could undermine the Islamic identity of the state (Yaqoob, 2018).

Another aspect of comparison is the implications for democracy and human rights. In both Myanmar and Pakistan, the military juntas' suppression of democratic processes and curtailment of civil liberties resulted in violations of human rights and restrictions on political freedoms. Religious parties, by endorsing these military regimes, indirectly contributed to the erosion of democratic values and the stifling of dissent (Yaqoob, 2018).

## **Examination of Similarities and Differences in the Intersection of Religion and Military Rule**

In Myanmar, Buddhist theocratic support to military juntas has been a notable phenomenon. Buddhist religious institutions and leaders have played a significant role in endorsing and justifying military rule. They often emphasize the protection of Buddhism and the preservation of national identity as key reasons for supporting military juntas. Buddhist leaders have used religious justifications to legitimize the actions of the military, portraying them as guardians of Buddhism and defenders against perceived threats to the religion (Sheikh, 2019).

Similarly, in Pakistan, the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties has been observed throughout the country's history. Religious parties, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, have often supported military regimes, particularly during periods of political instability. They argue that martial laws are necessary to establish and maintain Islamic governance, protect Islamic values, and combat perceived threats to the religious identity of the country. Religious parties have found common ground with military juntas in their shared emphasis on the preservation of religious and cultural norms (Sheikh, 2019).

Despite these similarities, there are also notable differences in the intersection of religion and military rule in Myanmar and Pakistan. In Myanmar, the influence of Buddhist religious institutions and leaders is particularly pronounced, with Buddhism being the dominant religion in the country. Buddhist monastic orders, such as the Sangha, hold significant sway and have historically supported military juntas. This close association between Buddhism and military power has raised concerns about the impact on democracy and human rights, especially for minority religious groups such as the Rohingya (Sheikh, 2019).

In Pakistan, religious parties' support for martial laws can be attributed to a combination of factors. While some religious parties genuinely believe in the establishment of an Islamic state and see military intervention as a means to achieve that goal, others have supported military regimes due to political expediency or personal interests. The endorsements by religious parties in Pakistan have often come with expectations of increased influence, power, or the implementation of specific religious policies (Sheikh, 2019).

### **Impact on Democratic Institutions and Governance**

The impact of military rule and takeovers on democratic institutions and governance in Myanmar and Pakistan has been extensively analyzed by scholars and researchers. Several authors have provided insights into the intersection of military rule and its implications for democratic processes in these countries.

In the context of Myanmar, David I. Steinberg, in his book "Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know" discusses the historical background and political dynamics that have shaped military rule in Myanmar. He explores the military's influence on governance and the challenges it poses to the development of democracy (Din, 2017).

Regarding Pakistan, Ayesha Jalal, in her book "The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics" delves into the history of military intervention in Pakistan and its impact on democratic institutions. She examines the underlying factors that have contributed to the endorsement of martial laws by religious parties and the consequences for governance. Another notable scholar, Hasan-Askari Rizvi, in his work "Military, State and Society in Pakistan" examines the complex relationship between the military, politics and democratic institutions in Pakistan. He analyzes the patterns of military intervention, its effects on governance, and the challenges it poses to democratic consolidation. Additionally, Hamza Alavi, in his article "The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh" explores the role of the military in political power and its impact on democratic governance in Pakistan. He critically assesses the military's influence on political decision-making and its implications for democratic institutions (Green & Sheikh, 2021).

These authors and their works provide valuable insights into the impact of military rule on democratic institutions and governance in Myanmar and Pakistan. Their analyses shed light on the historical, political, and societal factors that have influenced the dynamics of military intervention and its consequences for democratic processes.

### **Societal Ramifications and Challenges**

The societal ramifications and challenges resulting from military rule in Myanmar and Pakistan have been studied by various scholars, who have examined the social dynamics and consequences of military interventions in these countries.

One prominent author in this field is Maung Aung Myoe, who, in his book "Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces since 1948" explores the social and institutional dimensions of the military in Myanmar. He delves into the influence of the military on society, its role in shaping the country's identity, and the challenges it poses for social cohesion and inclusivity (Akon, 2022).

In the context of Pakistan, Christophe Jaffrelot, in his work “The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience” provides an in-depth analysis of the societal ramifications of military interventions. He examines the impact on civil-military relations, political dynamics, and the challenges of building inclusive and cohesive societies in the face of military rule (Akon, 2022). Another important contribution is by Farhat Haq, in her book “Sharia and the State in Pakistan: Blasphemy Politics” where she explores the societal implications of the rise of religious extremism and the challenges it poses to democratic governance in Pakistan. She discusses the role of militant religious groups, their influence on society, and the complexities of reconciling religious ideologies with democratic values (Akon, 2022).

Additionally, Ayesha Siddiqa, in her work “Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy” investigates the economic and social impact of the military’s involvement in business enterprises in Pakistan. She examines how the military’s economic interests shape power dynamics, influence societal structures, and affect the country’s democratic institutions (Akon, 2022).

These authors’ works shed light on the societal ramifications and challenges posed by military rule in Myanmar and Pakistan. They explore issues such as social cohesion, inclusivity, civil-military relations, religious extremism, and the military’s economic influence. By analyzing these dynamics, they provide valuable insights into the complexities of societal transformation under military rule.

## **Exploration of Criticisms Surrounding Religious Institutions’ Support for Military Juntas**

The phenomenon of religious institutions’ support for military juntas has not been without its criticisms. Scholars, journalists, and researchers have examined and highlighted these criticisms, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved. Some of the key criticisms surrounding religious institutions’ support for military juntas in the context of Myanmar and Pakistan are as follows;

### **1) Abuse of Religious Influence**

Scholars such as Azeem Ibrahim in his work “The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar’s Hidden Genocide” have pointed out that in Myanmar, the military junta has exploited the influence of Buddhist institutions to propagate a nationalist and anti-minority agenda. This has resulted in the marginalization and persecution of the Rohingya Muslim community. Similarly, in Pakistan, religious parties have been criticized for supporting military regimes that have implemented repressive policies, curtailed civil liberties, and undermined democratic values (Shah, 2019).

### **2) Instrumentalization of Religion**

Researchers like Farahnaz Ispahani in her book “Purifying the Land of the Pure: Pakistan’s Religious Minorities” argue that religious institutions’ support for military juntas often stems from a strategic manipulation of religious sentiments for political gain. They contend that religious parties in Pakistan have used their influence to legitimize military rule and advance their own agenda, rather than working towards the welfare of the general population (Shah, 2019).

### **3) Erosion of Secularism**

The support of religious institutions for military juntas has raised concerns about the erosion of secularism and the blurring of lines between religion and state. As noted by Ayesha Siddiqa in her book “Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy” the alliance between religious parties and the military in Pakistan has perpetuated a narrative that prioritizes religious identity over democratic principles, leading to the marginalization of secular voices and institutions (Shah, 2019).

#### 4) Impact on Interfaith Harmony

The endorsement of military rule by religious institutions has the potential to exacerbate religious tensions and hinder interfaith harmony. As highlighted by scholars like Ei Ei Htwe in the article “Ethno-Religious Conflict in Myanmar: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” the support of Buddhist institutions for the military junta in Myanmar has strained relations between Buddhists and minority religious communities, contributing to communal violence and social divisions (Shah, 2019).

While these criticisms exist, there are also differing perspectives on the role of religious institutions in supporting military juntas. Further research and analysis are needed to fully understand the nuances and complexities of this relationship and its implications for society and democratic processes in both Myanmar and Pakistan.

### Counter-arguments and Divergent Perspectives

Counter-arguments and divergent perspectives exist regarding the relationship between religious institutions’ support for military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan. Some of these perspectives include;

#### 1) Stability and Order

Supporters of religious institutions’ involvement argue that military rule provides stability and order in times of political turmoil and social unrest. They contend that religious institutions, with their moral authority and influence, can play a vital role in maintaining societal harmony and preventing the country from descending into chaos (Shah, 2019).

#### 2) Protection of Religious Values

Some proponents argue that religious institutions align with military juntas to safeguard religious values and protect the interests of the majority religious community. They argue that these alliances are necessary to counter perceived threats from minority religious groups or external influences that may challenge the dominant religious identity (Shah, 2019).

#### 3) Historical Context

Critics of the counter-arguments point out that the historical context and specific circumstances in Myanmar and Pakistan must be taken into account. They argue that the legacies of colonialism, ethnic tensions, and political instability have shaped the dynamics between religious institutions and military rule in unique ways. Therefore, a contextual understanding is crucial to comprehending the complexities of this relationship (Shah, 2019).

#### 4) Influence and Popular Support

Some argue that religious institutions’ support for military juntas reflects the sentiments and preferences of a significant portion of the population. They contend that these institutions act as representatives of the religious beliefs and aspirations of their followers, and their support for military rule reflects a genuine desire for societal order and the preservation of religious values (Shah, 2019).

Understanding these diverse viewpoints can contribute to a more comprehensive analysis of the implications for society, democracy, and the role of religious institutions in political governance.

## Ethical and Moral Considerations

Ethical and moral considerations play a significant role in analyzing the relationship between religious institutions' support for military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan. The involvement of religious institutions in political affairs raises important questions regarding the ethical responsibilities of these institutions and the moral implications of their actions.

### 1) **Separation of Religion and State**

One key ethical consideration is the principle of the separation of religion and state. Critics argue that religious institutions should maintain their autonomy and refrain from direct involvement in political matters. They contend that blurring the lines between religious authority and political power can undermine democratic principles and infringe upon the rights and freedoms of individuals (Norani, 2016).

### 2) **Human Rights and Freedom of Religion**

The moral dimension revolves around the protection of human rights and freedom of religion. It is essential to examine whether the support of religious institutions for military juntas contributes to the violation of human rights, particularly the rights of minority religious groups or dissenting voices. The suppression of religious freedom and the persecution of religious minorities can raise ethical concerns about the actions of religious institutions (Norani, 2016).

### 3) **Accountability and Transparency**

Another ethical consideration is the accountability and transparency of religious institutions. Critics argue that religious leaders and institutions should be held accountable for their actions and should demonstrate transparency in their engagements with political actors. Lack of transparency and accountability can erode public trust and undermine the credibility of religious institutions (Norani, 2016).

### 4) **Moral Guidance and Social Responsibility**

Supporters of religious institutions' involvement assert that these institutions have a moral duty to provide guidance and foster social responsibility. They argue that religious leaders should use their influence to promote ethical behavior, justice, and compassion within society. However, critics raise concerns about whether the support for military juntas aligns with these moral imperatives (Norani, 2016).

Exploring these ethical and moral considerations is crucial to understanding the broader implications of the relationship between religious institutions and military juntas. It prompts critical reflection on the responsibilities of religious institutions, the protection of human rights, and the pursuit of social justice within the context of political governance.

## Implications for Democracy and Human Rights

The intersection of religion, military rule, and the endorsement of martial laws by religious institutions and parties in Myanmar and Pakistan has significant implications for democracy and human rights.

### 1) **Erosion of Democratic Institutions**

The support of military juntas by religious institutions and parties can undermine democratic institutions and processes. Military rule often leads to the suppression of civil liberties, curtailment of political freedoms, and the weakening of democratic institutions such as the judiciary and the media. This can result in a lack of checks and balances, consolidation of power

in the hands of the military, and limited avenues for citizen participation and representation (Norani, 2016).

2) **Threat to Human Rights**

Military juntas are often associated with human rights abuses and violations. The imposition of martial law and the concentration of power in the military's hands can lead to increased surveillance, censorship, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings. Religious institutions' support for such regimes may contribute to the normalization or justification of these violations, further endangering the rights and freedoms of individuals, particularly marginalized groups (Norani, 2016).

3) **Suppression of Pluralism and Dissent**

The endorsement of military rule by religious institutions can exacerbate divisions within society and limit space for dissenting voices. It may promote a dominant religious narrative and suppress religious and cultural diversity, hindering the development of a pluralistic society that respects and upholds the rights of all individuals. This can lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization of minority communities (Norani, 2016).

4) **Impediment to Peaceful Transitions**

Religious support for military juntas can impede peaceful transitions to democratic governance. By endorsing military rule, religious institutions may contribute to the prolongation of authoritarian regimes, hindering efforts to establish inclusive and participatory political systems. This can create an environment of instability, political polarization, and social unrest, further undermining the prospects for peace and stability (Norani, 2016).

5) **International Perception and Engagement**

The religious endorsement of military rule can also impact the international perception of a country and its engagement with the global community. It may result in international criticism, sanctions, or restrictions on diplomatic and economic relations. This can have implications for foreign aid, trade, and investment, affecting the country's development and prosperity (Norani, 2016).

It is essential to recognize these implications and address the challenges posed by the intersection of religion, military rule, and human rights in both Myanmar and Pakistan. Safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights, and ensuring the separation of religion and state are crucial steps toward fostering inclusive and just societies that respect the rights and dignity of all individuals.

## **Lessons Learned from the Cases of Myanmar and Pakistan**

The cases of Myanmar and Pakistan provide valuable lessons that can inform efforts to address the challenges posed by the intersection of religion, military rule, and democratic governance. These lessons highlight the need for proactive measures to safeguard democracy, protect human rights, and promote inclusive and peaceful societies. Some key lessons include:

1) **Strengthening Democratic Institutions**

The cases of Myanmar and Pakistan underscore the importance of robust democratic institutions that can act as checks and balances on military power. Building and strengthening independent judiciary systems, ensuring a free and vibrant media, and promoting transparency and accountability are crucial in preventing the erosion of democratic principles (Yaqoob, 2018).

2) **Protecting Freedom of Expression and Civil Liberties**

The cases highlight the significance of protecting freedom of expression, assembly, and association. It is essential to safeguard the rights of individuals, including religious and minority groups, to express their opinions, engage in peaceful protests, and participate in the political process without fear of reprisal or discrimination (Yaqoob, 2018).

3) **Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding**

Addressing the role of religion in political governance requires promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and tolerance. Encouraging constructive engagement among different religious communities can foster respect, cooperation, and the recognition of shared values, leading to a more inclusive and harmonious society (Yaqoob, 2018).

4) **Ensuring Religious Freedom and Pluralism**

Protecting religious freedom and upholding the principles of pluralism are vital in preventing the dominance of any particular religious group or institution in the political sphere. Governments must ensure that all citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, are treated equally under the law and have the freedom to practice their faith without persecution or discrimination (Yaqoob, 2018).

5) **Enhancing Civic Education and Political Awareness**

Building a strong civic education system and promoting political awareness among citizens are crucial in cultivating an informed and engaged electorate. Educating individuals about their rights, democratic processes, and the importance of active participation in shaping the political landscape can empower them to hold their leaders accountable and make informed decisions (Yaqoob, 2018).

6) **Engaging with Religious Institutions and Leaders**

Constructive engagement with religious institutions and leaders is essential in fostering dialogue, promoting shared values, and encouraging their support for democratic governance and human rights. Building relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding can facilitate cooperation in addressing societal challenges and promoting inclusive and peaceful societies (Yaqoob, 2018).

By learning from the experiences of Myanmar and Pakistan, policymakers, civil society organizations, and international actors can work towards addressing the complex dynamics between religion, military rule, and democratic governance. It requires a multi-faceted approach that encompasses legal reforms, institutional strengthening, fostering dialogue, and promoting a culture of respect for human rights and democratic principles.

## **The Role of Religion in Democratic Processes**

The role of religion in democratic processes is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that varies across different contexts and societies. Religion has the potential to both positively contribute to democratic governance and present challenges to its functioning. Understanding the dynamics of religion in democratic processes is crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable democracies. Here, we explore some key aspects related to the role of religion in democratic processes:

1) **Values and Moral Foundations**

Religion often plays a significant role in shaping the values and moral foundations of individuals and societies. Religious beliefs and teachings can provide a moral compass that guides individuals'

behavior and informs their political views. In democratic processes, religion can influence the values and ethical considerations that underpin political decision-making (Ahmadov, 2019).

2) **Political Mobilization**

Religion has historically been a powerful force for mobilizing people and organizing social movements. Religious communities and institutions can mobilize their followers to participate in political processes, advocate for their interests, and contribute to public debates. Religious leaders can play influential roles in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for specific political agendas (Ahmadov, 2019).

3) **Ethical Frameworks**

Religion often provides ethical frameworks that guide individuals' attitudes towards social justice, human rights, and equality. These ethical frameworks can influence political ideologies and shape policy preferences. In democratic processes, religious perspectives on issues such as poverty, social inequality, and environmental stewardship can contribute to policy debates and shape the agenda of political parties and movements (Ahmadov, 2019).

4) **Pluralism and Inclusivity**

Religion can be both a source of unity and division in democratic societies. Inclusive democracies strive to accommodate the diverse religious beliefs and practices of their citizens, fostering an environment of religious pluralism and tolerance. Recognizing and respecting religious diversity is essential for building inclusive democratic institutions and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their religious affiliations (Ahmadov, 2019).

5) **Secularism and Separation of Church and State**

The concept of secularism plays a significant role in the relationship between religion and democratic processes. Secularism promotes the separation of religious institutions and the state, ensuring that the government remains neutral in matters of religion and treats all citizens equally, regardless of their religious beliefs. The principles of secularism help safeguard individual freedoms, prevent religious discrimination, and create a level playing field for all citizens in democratic societies (Ahmadov, 2019).

6) **Checks and Balances**

Religion can serve as a check on state power by advocating for social justice, human rights, and accountability. Religious organizations and leaders can play a vital role in holding governments accountable for their actions and advocating for policies that promote the common good. Their engagement in democratic processes can help ensure that political power is exercised responsibly and in line with moral and ethical considerations (Ahmadov, 2019).

7) **Challenges and Tensions**

Despite its potential positive contributions, the involvement of religion in democratic processes can also present challenges and tensions. These may include the potential for religious intolerance, the privileging of certain religious groups over others, the imposition of religious beliefs on the wider society, or the use of religion to justify discrimination or exclusion. Navigating these challenges requires careful balancing of religious freedoms, individual rights, and the principles of democratic governance (Ahmadov, 2019).

In fact, the role of religion in democratic processes is counted as complex and multifaceted. Religion can both enrich and complicate democratic governance, shaping values, mobilizing individuals, and influencing policy debates. Embracing religious pluralism, promoting secularism, and ensuring inclusivity are essential for harnessing the positive potential of religion in democratic societies while mitigating the

challenges and tensions that may arise. Striking a balance between religious freedoms and the principles of democratic governance is vital for building inclusive and resilient democracies that uphold human rights, equality, and social justice for all.

### **Strategies for Promoting Democratic Values and Inclusivity**

Strategies for promoting democratic values and inclusivity within the context of theocratic support to military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan require careful consideration of the unique challenges and dynamics present in these countries. Based on the findings of this research paper, the following strategies can be recommended;

- **Strengthening Civil Society**  
Supporting and strengthening civil society organizations that advocate for democratic values, human rights, and inclusivity is crucial. These organizations can play a vital role in promoting awareness, mobilizing citizens, and holding governments accountable for their actions. Providing resources, training, and capacity-building opportunities to civil society groups can enhance their effectiveness in advocating for democratic principles (Hook, Shaw, & Anwarulhaq, 2020).
- **Engaging Religious Leaders**  
Engaging religious leaders in dialogue and promoting their active involvement in promoting democratic values and inclusivity can be effective. Religious leaders hold significant influence and can play a vital role in shaping public opinion and mobilizing their followers. Encouraging religious leaders to promote tolerance, respect for human rights, and democratic principles can contribute to positive societal change (Hook, Shaw, & Anwarulhaq, 2020).
- **Promoting Interfaith Dialogue**  
Facilitating interfaith dialogue initiatives can foster understanding, bridge divides, and promote inclusivity. Creating platforms where religious leaders and members of different faith communities can engage in meaningful conversations can help dispel misconceptions, build trust, and foster a sense of shared values. These initiatives can contribute to social cohesion and promote a more inclusive democratic society (Hook, Shaw, & Anwarulhaq, 2020).
- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks**  
Enhancing legal frameworks that protect religious freedoms, ensure the separation of religion and state, and promote equality is crucial. Governments should strive to create an environment where individuals can freely practice their religion without fear of persecution or discrimination. Robust legal protections can safeguard the rights of religious minorities and create a level playing field for all citizens (Hook, Shaw, & Anwarulhaq, 2020).
- **Promoting Civic Education**  
Promoting civic education that emphasizes democratic values, human rights, and inclusivity is essential. Integrating these topics into school curricula and community programs can help instill a sense of civic responsibility, respect for diversity, and active participation in democratic processes. By fostering an informed and engaged citizenry, societies can strengthen democratic institutions and ensure the protection of fundamental rights (Hook, Shaw, & Anwarulhaq, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Promoting democratic values and inclusivity within the context of theocratic support to military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan requires a multifaceted approach. Strategies such as strengthening civil society,

engaging religious leaders, promoting interfaith dialogue, strengthening legal frameworks, and promoting civic education are crucial for fostering democratic values and creating inclusive societies. These strategies should be implemented in a context-specific manner, taking into account the unique dynamics and challenges present in each country. By adopting these strategies, governments, civil society organizations, and religious leaders can contribute to the establishment of democratic systems that respect religious freedoms, uphold human rights, and foster inclusivity.

### **Recapitulation of Key Findings**

The research conducted in this paper has shed light on the phenomenon of theocratic support to military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan. The historical analysis and examination of religious parties' endorsements of martial laws have revealed the complex dynamics between religion, politics and military rule. The study has highlighted the influential factors driving the support of religious institutions and parties for military regimes and explored the implications for democracy and human rights (Yaqoob, 2018).

### **Significance of the Research Undertaken**

This research is significant as it provides valuable insights into the intersection of religion and military rule in Myanmar and Pakistan. By examining the role of religious institutions, parties, and leaders in supporting military juntas, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the relationship between religion and politics. The findings underscore the need for strategies to promote democratic values and inclusivity within these contexts, highlighting the importance of civil society, interfaith dialogue, legal frameworks and civic education (Yaqoob, 2018).

### **Recommendations for Future Studies and Policy Considerations**

Further research is needed to delve deeper into the specific dynamics of theocratic support to military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan. Future studies could explore the motivations and ideologies driving religious leaders and institutions to endorse military regimes, as well as the impact of such endorsements on the broader society. Comparative analyses between different periods and regimes within each country could provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing religious support for military rule.

Policy considerations should focus on fostering an environment that encourages democratic values and inclusivity, while also respecting religious freedoms. Governments should work towards strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring the rule of law, and promoting transparent and accountable governance. Efforts should be made to engage religious leaders in promoting peace, tolerance, and respect for human rights, while also safeguarding the separation of religion and state.

It is also crucial to address socio-economic disparities and promote inclusive development that benefits all segments of society. Economic opportunities, access to education, and healthcare should be provided to marginalized communities, reducing their susceptibility to radicalization and extremist ideologies. International cooperation and support can play a significant role in promoting democratic values and inclusivity in Myanmar and Pakistan. The international community should engage with these countries, providing assistance, resources, and expertise to strengthen democratic institutions and promote human rights. Dialogue and exchange programs can facilitate cross-cultural understanding and promote shared values of democracy and inclusivity. Thus, it has to be concluded that addressing the challenges posed by theocratic support to military juntas in Myanmar and Pakistan requires a comprehensive approach that

encompasses policy interventions, socio-economic development, and international cooperation. By adopting strategies that promote democratic values, respect for human rights, and inclusivity, societies can work towards building resilient democratic systems that uphold the principles of freedom, justice, and equality for all.

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