

Islamism and Liberal Democracy: An Analysis of Electoral Politics of Jama'at-i-Islam Pakistan (1970-1997)



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Abstract: *The intersection of Islamism and liberal democracy presents a complex phenomenon in contemporary politics. The foundational principles of both ideologies often appear incompatible within the political framework of Muslim states and societies. Islamism comprises four interconnected components: religious ideology, a comprehensive interpretation of Islam, the pursuit of global influence, and the utilization of 'all means' to achieve its ultimate objectives. Conversely, the core tenets of liberalism include individualism, freedom or liberty, human reason, equality, toleration or forbearance, consent, and constitutionalism. The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan (JIP), founded by Maulana Abul Ala Mawdoodi, is grounded in his concept of Political Islam or Islamism. The JIP has consistently striven to gain electoral traction and implement its ideological agenda through parliamentary means. However, the existing electoral system in Pakistan is deeply rooted in liberal democracy, presenting a paradox in relation to the ideological principles and organizational structure of the JI. This research paper seeks to unravel the dichotomy inherent in the JI's ideological principles, which are rooted in Islamism, when juxtaposed with the liberal democratic electoral politics of the JIP.*

Keywords: Islamism, Liberal Democracy, Jama'at-i-Islami, Electoral Politics, Elections

Introduction

The Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan (JIP) was founded by Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903-1979), a prominent Islamic scholar and ideologue of the twentieth century. Since the country's independence, the JIP has been struggling to get electoral victories to transform Pakistan into an Islamic polity. Mawdudi introduced innovative interpretations of key Islamic concepts and terminologies, challenging traditional understandings. His vision of a political program is centered around the state, forming the

foundation of his ideological concept of Islam known as Islamism or political Islam (Amin, 2010). The JIP's pursuit of its goals through electoral politics operates within the framework of liberal democracy, creating a paradoxical ideological and political scenario in relation to Islamism.

Islamism as Religious Ideology

'Islamism' can be defined as a 'religious ideology' encompassing a 'holistic interpretation' of Islam, with its ultimate goal

being the 'conquest of the world' through 'all means' available (Mozaffari, 2007). This definition comprises four essential components: a religious ideology, a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of Islam, the aspiration to achieve global dominance, and the willingness to employ any means necessary to reach the ultimate objective. According to Jean J. Rousseau, the spiritual and moral foundations play a crucial role in the 'civil religion' of any modern society. Some political scientists argue that contemporary political ideologies such as fascism, Nazism, and communism can be considered forms of 'political religion.' However, Islamism is distinct from 'secular' or 'civil' religions and is conceptually closer to the idea of 'clerical fascism.' The term 'Islamism' consists of two parts: 'Islam,' referring to the religion with its unique civilization and history, and 'ism,' a non-Islamic suffix denoting an ideology.

Islamism represents an ideology that signifies a specific, coherent, and recognizable framework. The concept of ideology can be defined as follows:

“Sets of ideas by which individuals explain and justify the ends and means of organized social action, with the aim of preserving or reconstructing a given reality” (Sternhell, 1994). Ideologies wield greater influence as tools for public mobilization within totalitarian societies. In this regard, Islamism extends beyond being solely a 'religion' from a theological standpoint, confined to ritual worship and private prayers. Instead, it encompasses a comprehensive way of life, offering guidance for economic, social, and political behaviors (Shepard, 1987). Islamists selectively adopt certain elements of Islam and transform them into ideological concepts. Conceptually, Islamism goes beyond being a mere ideology and sanctifies the very essence of an ideology.

Consequently, the nature of Islamism differs significantly from other ideologies as it draws inferences from both 'religion' and 'ideology.' Given this dual character, Islamists perceive their policies and actions as religious responsibilities (Mozaffari, 2007).

Islamism and the holistic interpretation of Islam.

Islamists employ selectivity when interpreting religious principles derived from the original sources of Islam, namely the Quran and Sunnah. They assert that their chosen interpretations represent the true essence of Islam, firmly believing that their selected version encompasses the entirety of Muslim society in a holistic manner. This holistic interpretation is rooted in the inseparable nature of three fundamental aspects of Islam: Dîn (Religion), Dunya (Way of life), and Dawla (Government). According to Islamists, the indivisibility of religion persists indefinitely, and their objective is to fulfill this goal on a global scale. The literature produced by Islamist ideologues and thinkers, such as Sayyid Qutb of Egypt, Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, and Mawdoodi of Pakistan, endorses this three-dimensional and totalitarian nature of Islamism (Roy, 2002).

Islamism and Conquest of the World

Islamists perceive the current world as being under the control of evil forces and oppressed by non-Muslims. They view Muslim-majority regions such as Kashmir, Palestine, and Chechnya as being under the dominance of non-Muslim powers, which they aim to reclaim. Islamists harbor a nostalgic yearning to revive the societal model of Medina, which was shaped under the guidance of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), as well as the classical period of the Caliphate. They firmly believe that reinstating the Caliphate is the initial step towards the global Islamization of the world (Shahibzadeh, 2016).

Islamism and getting goals by All Means

The Islamists employ a comprehensive and wide-ranging framework to pursue their aforementioned goals. This framework encompasses various approaches, ranging from peaceful preaching, ideological indoctrination through literature, and expanding propagation to political struggles. However, it also extends to violent strategies, including acts of terrorism, suicide actions, hostage-taking, assassinations, and massacres of civilians, as a means to achieve their objectives through any available means. It is important to note that not all Islamists endorse

or engage in violent activities, as some work within peaceful political and constitutional realms, employing religio-political and social movement strategies to pursue their goals through legal means. Examples of violent Islamist activities can be seen in the actions of al-Qaeda across different regions of the world, while peaceful patterns of struggle are exemplified by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and, for a specific period, in Egypt (Arendt, 1966). Additionally, the Jama'at-i-Islami of Pakistan has also been engaged in a struggle within the constitutional and political framework of the country (Bahadur, 1978).

Liberal Democracy

The roots of democracy can be traced back to ancient Greece. The term 'democracy' is derived from the Greek words 'kratos,' meaning rule or power, and 'demos,' referring to 'the people.' Thus, democracy can be understood as the 'rule of the people.' Abraham Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address in 1863, provided a modern interpretation of democracy, stating it as 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people.' However, the term 'democracy' remains contested, lacking a consensus on its definition. In the twentieth century, 'liberal democracy' emerged as the most popular and successful model, superseding other versions of democracy (Heywood, 2017).

Liberal democracy represents a hybrid political system, combining two distinct features: liberalism and democracy. The 'liberal' component emphasizes the idea of 'limited government,' while the 'democratic' element highlights a commitment to 'popular rule.' Liberal democracy is characterized by three key features:

- i. It operates as a representative form of procedural democracy, with regular elections held to gain political office. Elections are conducted based on the principle of political equality, following the concept of 'one man/woman, one vote; one vote, one value.'
- ii. It is grounded in contestation and electoral choice, promoting tolerance for a wide range of ideological beliefs, political pluralism, diverse

social philosophies, and competing political parties and movements.

iii. It maintains a clear separation between the state and civil society. This is ensured through checks and balances on government authorities, both internally and externally, and the presence of autonomous bodies such as interest groups, capitalist organizations, and a free-market economy (Heywood, 2017).

Key ideas of Liberalism

• **Individualism:** Liberal ideology places great emphasis on the individual human being rather than collective bodies or social groups.

• **Freedom:** The fundamental principle of liberalism is individual liberty or freedom, prioritizing personal choice and action. However, liberals advocate for "freedom under the law," ensuring that everyone can enjoy maximum liberty without infringing upon the freedom of others.

• **Reason:** Liberals believe in a rational world order that can be understood through critical inquiry and human reasoning. They encourage a culture of debate to resolve differences peacefully rather than resorting to violence.

• **Equality:** Foundational equality is a central element of liberalism and individualism. Liberals assert that individuals are born equal in terms of moral worth and advocate for equal rights, equality before the law, and political equality, such as the principle of one person, one vote.

• **Toleration:** Liberals promote toleration, which involves allowing others to hold differing opinions and beliefs without interference or hostility.

• **Consent:** According to liberals, social relationships and authority should be based on mutual agreement and consent. They believe that the government should derive its power from the consent of the governed.

• **Constitutionalism:** Liberals view government as a necessary institution to ensure stability and order in society. However, they are wary of the potential for government to infringe upon individual rights. Therefore, liberals advocate

for limited government through mechanisms such as the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the establishment of a codified constitution that outlines rights and defines the relationship between the state and the individual (Heywood, 2013).

Electoral Politics of Jama'at-i-Islami Pakistan

Jama'at-i-Islami (JI) was founded on August 26, 1941, in Pathankot, under the religious and political ideology of Sayyid Abul'Ala Mawdudi. Mawdudi's ideology, known as Political Islam or Islamism, aimed to establish God's sovereignty both in this world (Hukumat-i-Ilahia) and in the Hereafter, according to his interpretation of Islam. He believed that existing civilizations and ideologies such as socialism, fascism, and capitalism would eventually fade away, and the future of humanity would depend on Islam.

Mawdudi emphasized the necessity of a righteous political party to promote this virtuous ideology, stressing that establishing an Islamic system and way of life was the responsibility of Muslims, rather than merely creating a Muslim Nation State. Over time, JI evolved from a religious group into a political party, playing a significant role in Islamization and advocating for an Islamic constitution since Pakistan's independence.

The party mobilized religious scholars (Ulama) to promote the concept of an Islamic State, and their efforts contributed to the adoption of the Objectives Resolution. JI and the Ulama strongly believe that Islam is the core foundation of Pakistan. After the passage of the Objectives Resolution, JI considered Pakistan to have become an Islamic State in principle, leading the party to participate in the Punjab Provincial elections held in March 1951 (Bahadur, 1978).

JI'S Manifestos, Elections Campaigns and Slogans

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has consistently presented a comprehensive election manifesto, making minor adjustments for each campaign. The manifesto incorporates the ideology of Political Islam, as advocated by Mawdoodi, in its preamble. This version of Islam, endorsed by the

JI, goes beyond being a mere political party and instead represents an ideological movement that encompasses all aspects of life. The JI firmly believes that Islam is a universal code that should govern and shape every facet of existence. They express their commitment to utilizing all available resources to implement Shariah, striving to establish an Islamic State modeled after the Khilafat-e-Rashida (Rightly Guided Caliphs). In doing so, they aim to combat all forms of social ills, unlawful exploitation, oppression, and moral corruption (JI Manifesto, 1970).

Programme and General Principles of the JI

The JI program was based on self-rule, social justice, democratic procedures, avoiding linguistic, racial, and sectional activities, and no policy would be made against the ideology and integrity of Pakistan. The manifesto of JI covered the following areas.

Constitutional Reforms

The proposal entails the creation of new provinces, namely Bahawalpur, Lasbella, Qallat Division, and Karachi. The central government would retain control over foreign affairs, federal finance, external trade, defense, and communication. The primary sources of law would be the Quran and Sunnah.

Legal Reforms

Any laws that infringe upon fundamental rights and personal liberties will be abolished. Amendments will be made to the criminal and civil procedures to ensure the prompt delivery of social justice. Legislation will be enacted to prohibit vulgarity and obscenity. Laws will be formulated based on Islamic jurisprudence to foster character development within society and uphold women's rights.

Moral and Religious Reforms

The party aims to facilitate congregational prayers, observe Fridays as a day off, uphold the sanctity of Ramadan, appoint imams in mosques, establish systems for managing religious endowments (Awqaf), provide support for Hajj pilgrims, and raise societal awareness regarding Shariah principles to promote a better

understanding of the fundamental commandments of Islam (JI Manifesto, 1970).

Educational Reforms

The education system will be structured in accordance with Islamic principles, aiming to foster individuals who believe in the oneness of Allah. Additionally, technical and vocational institutions will be established nationwide to provide practical skills and training.

Administrative Reforms

The JI plans to establish an administrative system consisting of competent, honest, and professional executives. Stringent measures will be implemented to combat corruption, bribery, malpractices, favoritism, and nepotism. Institutions will be put in place to prevent the misuse of power, and all officials will be held accountable for their actions.

Economic Reforms

The JI opposed the existing economic system and aimed to achieve equitable distribution of wealth. They sought to eliminate the unjust exploitation of the poor within the country.

Agricultural Reforms

Landlordism will be abolished, and a land ceiling will be imposed, limiting ownership to 100 acres of irrigated land and 200 acres of unirrigated land. Public property and confiscated land will be distributed to tenants and non-owner farmers. Modernization in agriculture will be implemented (Ali, 2017). A system will be established to safeguard fertile soils, preserve forests, manage floods, provide housing for the homeless, and promote the establishment of industries in rural areas to generate employment opportunities.

Industry and Trade

Policies will be formulated to prevent the concentration of wealth, and all illicit sources of income, such as gambling, usury, and hoarding, will be prohibited. Monopolies held by capitalists will be dismantled, and corrupt industrialists will be held legally accountable. The manifesto also includes various reforms such as ensuring labor rights, providing housing facilities, supporting the disabled, elderly, and those in need through government assistance, and providing free access to affordable medicine. The rights of sectarian groups will be respected, and the government will protect the rights of minority communities across the entire country.

JI Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of the JI will be centered around its ideological principles, emphasizing the promotion of international peace and justice. The party will provide support to oppressed nations and actively oppose imperialism on a global scale. Policies will be crafted based on national interests, with a particular focus on encouraging the involvement of Muslim countries in international affairs. The JI will stand in solidarity with the Kashmir freedom movement and adopt a non-aligned approach in international politics (Ali, 2017).

Electoral Performance of JI in 1970 Elections

The JI contested the 1970 elections, and the following results illustrate their limited voter support:

Votes received by JI in the constituencies of the National Assembly in the four provinces of West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

	E P	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Baluchistan	Total
Jama'at-i-Islami	1,044,137	515,564	321,471	103,958	4,331	1,989,461
Percentage	(6.07%)	(4.74%)	(10.31%)	(7.22%)	(1.16%)	(6.03%)

National assembly seats contested and won by the JI in the 1970 elections:

Provinces	E P	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Baluchistan	Total
JI Seats contested	71	44	19	15	2	151
Seats won	0	1	2	1	0	4

Votes received by JI in the 1970 provincial assemblies elections:

Provinces	East Pak	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Baluchistan	Total
JI	678159	16162	89245	37387	8609	975027
Percentage	(4.5%)	(1.61%)	(2.93%)	(2.58%)	(2.07%)	(3.24%)

Votes received by Religious Parties in the 1970 provincial assemblies elections:

Provinces	East Pak	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Baluchistan	Total
JI	678159	16162	89245	37387	8609	975027
Percentage	(4.5%)	(1.61%)	(2.93%)	(2.58%)	(2.07%)	(3.24%)

Provincial assembly seats contested and won by JI in the 1970 Elections:

Provinces	East Pak	Punjab	Sind	NWFP	Baluchistan	Total
JI Seats contested	174	80	37	28	12	331
Seats Won	1	1	1	1	0	4

(Report on General Elections, 1970)

JI joined PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) before 1977 elections to gain some electoral representation in the parliament. The PNA was established against Bhutto which was defeated badly in the said polls. JI was given 18% share (31 seats out of the PNA's total 168) in the NA; it won 9 seats (25% of the PNA's total of 36 seats).

	Punjab	NWFP/KPK	Sind	Total
Votes receive by the JI	789,743	133,362	290,411	1,213,516
Seats contested by the JI	20	5	6	31
Seats won by the JI	2	3	4	9
Seats won by the PNA	8	17	11	36

To the surprise of many, the Jama'at achieved notable success in the elections, securing two seats in

Punjab, four seats in Sindh, and three seats in NWFP/KP (Nasr, 1994). In 1985, General Zia organized non-party elections, introducing modifications to the candidate nomination process and expanding the number of seats in the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies. The president provided assurance that the elections would be conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner (Muhammad, 2012).

Seats and votes got by JI in 1985 elections.

	Punjab	KPK	Sind	Baluchistan	Total
NA					
Seats contested	37	13	15	3	68
Seats won	3	4	2	1	10
Total Votes received	625848	196585	238228	30527	1091188
Average votes per candidates	16914	15121	15881	10175	16046
PA Seats contested	53	22	24	3	102
Seats Won	2	5	5	1	13
Total Votes received	377790	114131	160056	13916	665893
Average Votes per candidate	7128	5187	6669	4638	6528

The results gloomed General Zia and he changed his political cards and diverted towards Muslim League and regional parties from JI.

JI Electoral Position in Democratic Decade (1988-98)

JI became an ally of IJI (Islami Jamhoor Ittehad), an alliance of right-wing- parties.

The IJI along JI was defeated badly by the PPP in the 1988 general elections.

Party/Alliances	No. of candidate	Valid Votes	% Average	Elected MNAs
IJI	165	5,908,742	30.16%	54

The JI was allocated twenty-six National Assembly (NA) and forty-four Provincial Assembly (PA) seats. It won only eight NA seats along with one reserved seat and secured thirteen PA seats throughout the country. The party obtained only 26.9% of the NA seats and 25% of the contested PA seats, marking the worst result among all the IJI parties (Nasr, 1994).

1993 General Elections

The JI adopted a novel electoral approach by participating in the election under the new name of 'Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF),' led by the dynamic Qazi Hussain Ahmad. The election campaign was launched with great enthusiasm, focusing on prominent slogans, social concerns, and economic issues. Interestingly, the manifesto of the PIF highlighted issues that had already been raised by the PML-N and PPP (Dawn, 1993).

The elections results are given in the following table:

Political Party	Candidates	% Votes Polled	Seats Won	% Seats Won
PIF	105	2.36	3	1.45

(ECP Report, 1997)

JI secured only 2.4% of the popular votes, while the PML-N obtained 39.7%, and the PPP received 38%. The Jama'at boycotted the 1997 elections, citing the failure to address concerns related to accountability and the non-implementation of Articles 62 and 63 (Moten, 2002).

Findings and Conclusion

Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) has been striving to transform the country into an Islamic state through electoral and parliamentary means. Operating under the ideological framework of Political Islam or Islamism, the party has faced a dilemma due to the ideological clash between Islamism and liberal democracy.

The nature of Pakistani democracy is fragile and heavily influenced by personalized control, unlike the institutionalized structure of Western democracies. However, the current pattern reflects a practical manifestation of liberal democracy, fundamentally contradicting the ideology of Islamism. Here are some findings that highlight the contradictions between Islamism and liberal democracy:

Islamism is based on a "holistic interpretation" of Islam, aiming to conquer the world through any means necessary. It encompasses more than just a religious belief system, offering guidance for economic, social, and political aspects of life. On the other hand, liberal democracy is a form of procedural democracy, where elections are conducted based on political equality, with the principle of one person, one vote, and equal value. The liberal component emphasizes limited government, while the democratic element emphasizes popular rule.

Islamism's objective of "conquering the world" through any means directly opposes the political equality principle of liberal democracy. These ideologies are rooted in opposing arguments and

different political philosophies. Islamism limits individuality and grants limitless power to the state, while liberal democracy advocates for limited government and individual liberties within society.

Islamism sacralizes its ideology, drawing inferences from religion and providing selective explanations. Its holistic interpretation revolves around the indivisibility of three aspects of Islam: Din (religion), Dunya (way of life), and Dawla (government). Islamism cherishes a nostalgic desire to return to the classical period of the caliphate. Conversely, liberal democracy is based on contestation, electoral choice, political pluralism, and tolerance for diverse ideological beliefs and rival political parties. It emphasizes a clear separation between the state and civil society, promoting tolerance and allowing for disagreement.

Liberal democracy upholds the importance of constitutionalism, which establishes checks and balances among different branches of government. It also involves framing a written constitution and defining the legal jurisdiction and relationship between the state and individuals. In contrast, Islamism and liberal democracy are entirely at odds with each other. The JI has continuously struggled to achieve the goals encapsulated in Islamism within the framework of liberal democracy. Consequently, the party has faced setbacks in electoral politics, as voters have never fully embraced its ideological narrative, political program, or electoral campaigns throughout Pakistan's political history.

To illustrate this, in the 1970 elections, the Jamaat-e-Islami secured four National Assembly (NA) seats and received 6.03% of the votes. In the 1977 elections, it won nine seats, which accounted for 25% of the total PNA (Pakistan National Alliance) seats. In 1985, the party secured 10 out of 68 contested seats. In

1988, under the platform of the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), the JI won eight NA seats out of 26 awarded tickets. In the 1990 elections, the party obtained eight seats and received 3% of the popular votes for the National Assembly. In the 1993 elections, the JI contested under the name Pakistan Islamic Front (PIF) and won 1.45% of the NA seats.

The Jama'at, under its ideological umbrella, has never achieved a significant electoral victory that would allow it to implement its principles and targets through parliamentary laws, primarily due to the fundamental opposition between its ideology and the principles of existing liberal democracy.

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