



The role of religious seminaries in electoral politics: a case study of District Mardan, Pakistan

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This paper is an attempt to understand the role of religion and religious seminaries in electoral politics in Shergarh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This paper concentrates on two of the most famous seminaries in the area, which are aligned with Jamiat Ulema Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami. The research seeks to do so by investigating the networks between how these institutions conducted their education and the region's political environment. To achieve the results, this study uses a mixed methods approach with questionnaires as well as in-depth interviews with different stakeholders (students, educators, and local political figures). It provides a full understanding of how religious teachings are related to the political scenario and electoral outcomes. The indoctrination at the seminaries matters to voter behaviour and party preference. These seminaries are important venues for disseminating political messages and framing issues in a religious context that resonates with the local population. This indoctrination within these institutions can directly affect how politics is done and how the elections are conducted. The study makes a further contribution to the understanding of how the process of political socialization takes place in these seminaries.

Keywords: Religious politics, Electoral politics, Religious political parties, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), Jamat-i-Islami (JI), Role of religion in Politics, Religious seminaries.

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1. Introduction

This paper is an attempt to investigate the role of religion and religious seminaries in electoral politics in PK 61 Tehsil Takht Bhai, district Mardan. The study attempts to understand how religious seminaries have influenced the voting behaviour of its students in election 2024. The study is planned to be done in the provincial assembly constituency of PK-61. The constituency for the study is selected because of its religious diversity. The constituency is primarily dominated by two major religious political parties including Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI) and Jamat Islami (JI). The primary data was collected from the students of these religious seminaries dominated by these two political parties. There are several other political parties in Pakistan which dominates politics both in Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular (Khan et al., 2020). There are other political parties that could be justly categorized as “religious” such as Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan, but the study is limited to the mentioned two parties because they, on the one hand have “their” Madaris in the constituency and on the other hand teachers of these Madaris contest elections. The uniqueness of the constituency makes the study more valuable because we can explore and investigate the religious politics more effectively here than any other place. These two parties are selected because they have more electoral power and political space than any other religious parties in the province. They formed governments or remained coalition partners in the province in the last two decades.

Madrasa, a religious institution used for religious instructions in Pakistan. Different political parties have their own Madaris under their direct control or most of the times, under the supervision of their students. These parties indoctrinate members of the Madaris and politically motivate them to participate in their political gathering. They are perceived as a crucial medium for promoting political views. It is believed that their primary objective has shifted from cultivating future religious scholars to exerting complete control over society and the political system. Since madrasa teachers play a significant role in forming the opinions of their pupils, it is critical to examine the political beliefs of these educators and determine how they align or diverge from Pakistan's overall political landscape. An effort in that approach is the research. For generations, Madaris, or religious seminaries, have been an important part of Pakistan's sociopolitical environment (Rahman, 2009).

The politics and society among Muslims in South Asia have always been significantly shaped or influenced by religion. When the Muslims first came to the area, they brought with them a robust educational system that helped ingrain Islam into practically every facet of both public and private life (Iqbal & Farmanullah, 2023; Rehman et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020). There are quite a few Madaris or Islamic religious seminaries with long history in Pakistan. Primarily established to spread religious knowledge and teachings, Madaris have served as a diverse source of shaping the country's social, political and religious dynamics. The ancient Islamic tradition of religious education gave rise to Madaris in Pakistan. These seminaries can be documented to be traceable to the medieval period when they founded to educate people in Quranic studies and Islamic jurisprudence. Eventually, Madaris expanded and diversified, covering Arabic literature, Islamic history, theology, and Sufi mysticism (Wilkinson, 2020). Madaris have filled the needs of religious educational of millions of Pakistanis who wish to enhance their knowledge of Islam in the past. To these vulnerable groups especially those from poor background who cannot afford to go to school or university, Madaris has provided them with an easy alternative where education is provided for free. They have also supported the students who came from very poor families offering them food, shelter among other things (Bano, 2007).

Additionally, Madaris have also served as entities dispensing social welfare services to people in the society. Almost all Madaris bear the shape of inclusive welfare centres providing free medical clinics, water depots and relief services during calamities. Madaris in Pakistan has been an important and a rather controversial factor in the evolution of socio-religious institutions in Pakistan. These seminaries have a long-standing tradition in the educational system of Pakistan with their roots in centuries ago. They perform lots of functions in the society which include religious teachings, social needs and the maintenance of culture or rather maintaining the status quo. However, there have been criticism and challenge regarding the radicalization and extremism in these Madaris. The primary purpose of Madaris in Pakistan is to educate students in Islam. They specialize in introducing its students to Islamic religious beliefs and practices, Islamic sacred text, prophetic traditions, Islamic law and other related courses. It caters for students from all categories such as those interested in theology and scholarship, *imam* and for others seeking enhanced knowledge on Islam (Paper, 2002).

The impact of Madaris is that in many regions of Pakistan including rural and other under-privileged areas, Madaris act as substitute system of education. Often, due to the lack of government schools, the children that attend Madaris are at least able to learn basic reading and counting which most government schools do not offer. They tend to feed students, sometimes their families and even treat their sicknesses for free and occasionally take it a step further offering same services to outsiders. Madaris have been in forefront in discharging help in disaster-stricken areas and in cases of emergencies (Siddiqui, 2022).

It is noteworthy that Madaris have always met a significant challenge of maintaining the Islamic line of cultures and languages in particular Arabic and Persian often used in the religious literature. As institutions engaged in the teaching of classical Islamic literature, Madaris are necessarily a means toward the transmission of oral or traditional knowledge. Lately, certain of the Madaris have endeavoured to introduce vocational training as part of their program. This approach is also designed to impart practical knowledge and provide skills. This integration assists the graduates to retrieve better economic opportunities other than these religious positions (Tudor, 2022). In one way or another, the Madaris are also affiliated with some religious-political groups and their parties. A survey conducted in 2008 by a private independent think tank under the banner of Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies suggests that a bulk of these Madaris has political linkages. They are aligned with some religious political parties. The research revealed that some Madaris, such as Deobandi and Jamat-e-Islami (JI), had a more political bent than others. While the majority of Madaris boards forbid Madaris from being involved in politics, some Madaris openly align themselves with religious political parties (Rana, 2015). Various religious political parties provide free transportation and food to Madaris students to participate in anti-government and anti-Western rallies (Qadri, 2018). This study is intended to be focused on the Shegarh Tehsil PK-61, where Madaris, affiliated to political parties, are operating since very long.

The existing literature on the role of religious seminaries in politics has been explored in different ways which shows its impact even in the American continent (Hirschman, 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021). Hidayet Siddikoglu (2018) explores the nexus of Madrassa and politics in Pakistan (and Afghanistan) from a historical perspective. He examines its role in and relationship to state and non-state actors (Siddikoglu, 2018). Bano primarily discusses the role of Madrasas in the political scenario of Pakistan. She focuses how the seminaries engage with the Pakistani state in different times (Bano, 2007). Butt (2012) discusses the social and political role of Madrassa in Pakistan. He takes input from different religious leaders from Pakistan

(Butt, 2020). Other studies on the role of Madrassa are irrelevant to the current study because it has been studies in relation to militancy, terrorism, reforms and so on. This study primarily focuses the role of Madrassa in electoral politics in Mardan.

2. Methodology

The research is intended to be mixed in nature. The research explores how Madrasa have been used for the political mobilization and how that influence voting behaviour in the favour of religious political parties in PK-61 constituency, District Mardan. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to achieve the research objectives. The researcher collected primary data through interviews to explore how these Madaris influence voting behaviour of the students and questionnaire to explore how members or students of the Madrasa cast their vote. This research was mixed both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The study attempted to describe how Madaris have been used by different political parties for their own political benefits in Mardan. Furthermore, the study highlights the how the Madrasa education ultimately influence voting behaviours and preferences of its students. Semi structured interviews and close-ended questionnaire was developed for data collection. The primary data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured techniques implied to probe the respondents and collect maximum data. The study is also planned to collect data through questionnaire. This is to understand and explore how the members of the religious seminaries casted their votes and in who's favour.

The in-person interviews were conducted and data collected from the members of the Madaris, primarily from their leaders/teachers, Ulemas. The researcher also asked about the political affiliation or party preference of the adult students of the Madrasa. The primary data was collected through questionnaire as well. The interviewees were primarily teachers and senior students of these Madaris. Random sampling technique was used for data collection. The sample size is planned 20 respondents for interviews: 10 from each main Madrasa in Shergarh. These Madaris include, Darul Uloom Islamia Arabia Shergarh affiliated with JUI-F and Jamia Miftah ul Uloom, affiliated with Jamat e Islami. The sample size for survey questionnaire consists of 40 respondents, 20 from each mentioned Madaris. The 40 respondents (20 from each Madrasa) for the questionnaire are selected because the study is focused on only two Madrasas and the eligible students for vote might be even in minority. The researcher stopped collecting data after the point of saturation. The data collected through questionnaire provided the rationale or background for the main study which was based on in-depth interviews. The mentioned two Madaris were selected for this study because of their role in politics, the Senior member and teacher of the Darul Uloom Islamia Arabia Shergarh was the candidate for the National Assembly and so are the teachers and members of the Madrasa Jamia Miftah ul Uloom active members of the JI.

3. Role of Dar Ul Uloom Islamia Arabia and Jamia Miftah ul Uloom in politics

The Madrasa Dar Ul Uloom Islamia Arabia, established in 1952, has been a significant institution in the education of Islamic scholars. It is known for producing many graduates every year, including 40 Hafiz students, 700 Ulema, and 50 Muftees. These figures reflect the madrasa's vital role in shaping the religious and scholarly landscape in the region. Most of the students come from Malakand Division, indicating the local influence of this madrasa, which serves as a key educational centre for aspiring religious scholars in the area. The same case is with Jamia Miftah ul Uloom established in 1979 and is another institution that has improved

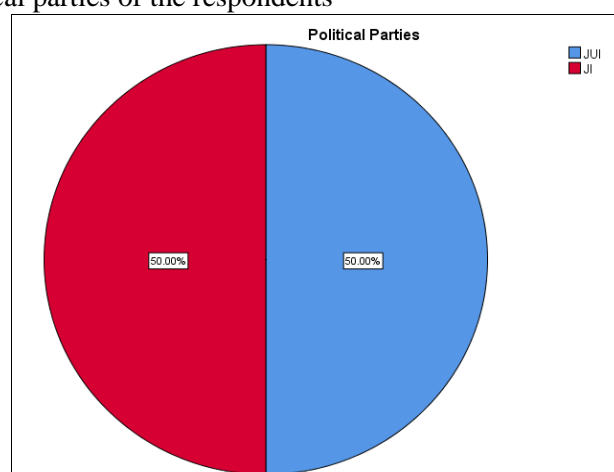
the educational system through the high passing rates among its graduates. The institution annually graduates 44 Hafiz students, 74 Ulema and 13 Muftees. Like Dar Ul Uloom Islamia Arabia a good number of students enrolled in the seminary are from Malakand Division. Yet, the madrasa also has students from adjacent districts; Mardan and Charsadda and other areas.

Both madrasas play an important role in educating the people of the region. They embrace courses such as, Quran and Sunna, Islamic law, and that of training scholars who would be useful to the society in teaching Islam. This chance of producing so many graduates every academic year points to the ever-increasing need for Islamic education in the region. The local patronage, most students being from the Malakand Division and its adjoining areas is quite evident and is an indication of the extent to which these institutions are grounded in terms of local support.

3.1. Political parties of the respondents

For exploring the political affiliation of the respondents, we asked “Which political party do you belong to?” The data collected from around 40 respondents at two Shergarh seminaries reveals a clear political division. When asked about party affiliation, the responses were evenly split: 50% supported JUI, while the remaining 50% backed JI. This balanced representation suggests a significant presence of both political ideologies within the seminary environment. The equal support may indicate that students are actively engaged with both parties, reflecting diverse perspectives on political and social issues. Such findings highlight the role of these institutions in shaping political affiliations among their students. Although, it is necessary to understand the political affiliation of the students of each Madrassa to political parties.

Figure 1: Political parties of the respondents



Source: Author's creation

3.2. Supporting religious politics

As mentioned in the previously, religious politics has always remained relevant in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We asked, “Do you support religious politics?” As highlighted in previous chapters, religious politics has consistently played a significant role in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The results, illustrated in Table 01, reveal a striking consensus: 97% of respondents from both seminaries expressed their support for religious politics. This overwhelming majority indicates a strong alignment with religiously motivated political ideologies among the students. Such support underscores the influence of religious beliefs on political engagement in the region,

reflecting the deeply rooted connection between faith and politics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's social landscape.

Table 1: Religious politics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	97.6		
Missing	System	00	2.4	100.0	100.0
Total		40	100.0		

Source: Author's creation

3.3. Madrassa and political affiliation

The data gathered from approximately 40 respondents across two Shergarh seminaries—Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia, affiliated with Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI), and Jamia Miftah ul Uloom, associated with Jamat Islami (JI)—provides insights into the political affiliations of these students. According to the findings highlighted in Table 02, there is a strong correlation between the students' political support and the seminaries in which they belong to. It was seen that most of the students from Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia supported and voted for JUI which is due to the impression of their institutions on them. This might be due to the teachings of this seminary as well as an emphasis on political activism that JUI supports. On the other hand, majority of the respondents from Jamia Miftah ul Uloom preferred JI, in support- educational environment that they undergo influences Jamat Islami's principles and objectives. This division leads to the general thesis of how religious seminaries prescribe people's political affiliations and political beliefs. This describes how these seminaries are not only institutions for the education of the people in religion, but political actors as they shape the politics of students concerned through different means.

Table 2: Madrassa and political affiliation

		Political Parties		Total
		JI	JUI	
Madrassa	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	0	19	19
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	20	1	21
Total		20	20	40

Source: author's creation

3.4. Nature of political parties

Regarding the complexity of religious seminaries and political parties they respondents asked which party is most holy and close to their values and beliefs. This question is crucial, which 'goes far beyond the question of political party identification of these students but draws attention to the effect of religion as an important determinant of political orientations within the region'. The results of the questionnaire are as shown in the *Table 3* presenting a clear division of political affiliations of two groups of students. Those studying in Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia saw the JUI as the holiest political party. This preference confirms social and religious orientations prevalent at this seminary and the close affinity between the JUI and ideology that circulates here in the seminary. The JUI has traditionally been linked with

traditional Islamic sect of Deoband and has contributed to key political process in Pakistan, especially regarding the rights of religious groups. This endorsement most probably positively affects the JUI policies and the efforts to sustain the essence of Islamic rules within the governmental structures, which strengthens perception of the party as the holy one among students from this institution. On the other hand, students of Jamia Miftah-ul Uloom pointed Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) as the holiest political party. Jamaat-e-Islami has a different paradigm; it is more political in structure and has regular political bearings than DAW. Many students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom might be drawn to the party due to its allusion to an Islamic society based on democracy and social justice, and reform. This divergence in preference shows how different seminaries socialize students politically to identify with certain parties that in turn have Islamic interpretations that are acceptable to the seminaries and the students alike.

Table 3: Madrassas in relation to political parties

		Political Parties		Total
		JUI	JI	
Madrassas	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	20	0	20
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	0	20	20
Total		20	20	40

3.5. Relations between learning and political party

In a question aimed at uncovering the relationship between the religious education and politics in the area, we asked the respondents, “What is the representative or closest representative political party of the knowledge you learned in your seminary?” As Table 4 shows the responses of the students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia and the findings are quite shocking as all of them are almost on very similar line with each other. An astonishing ninety nine percent of the students had identified JUI as the political party that best embodies the knowledge imparted as well as the beliefs fostered at the seminary they attend. This huge support shows a clear ideological sympathy between what the seminary teaches and what the JUI stands for. Such alignment indicates that the curriculum is more than an apparatus for inculcating religious knowledge but is also an instrument for shaping political opinion through encouragement the students vote the party of their preferences. On the other hand, the students from Jamia Miftah ul Uloom was having different orientation of thinking they claimed that JI is the real representative party of their thoughts, ideology and knowledge. Analysing all the Jamaat-e-Islami’s characteristics of socio-political organization, it seems to be more alike to the teachings this seminary is based on- social justice, democracy, structured approach to Islamic governance. This divergence perfectly illustrates that different seminaries can develop various political attitudes in their student depending on the education point of view and theological approaches.

Table 4: Relations between learning and political party

		Political Parties		Total
		JUI	JI	
Madrassa	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	19	1	20
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	2	16	18
Total		21	17	38

3.6. Reasons of support

In a further attempt to understand why participants would support a specific political party, they were asked, “Which political party did you last vote for, and why?” The responses from the students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom predicting the support for Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) are overwhelmingly ideological based on Islamic religion, political and social pursuits, and governance. Supporting JI, Sajid said that he thinks this is a movement for the Islamic defence. This perspective underscores a critical reason many students support JI: principles of promoting and preserving the interest of Islamic values in the political system and in the country in general. To Sajid and others the voting for the JI is seen as much more than just a political process and decision, it is seen as religious duty and practice of Islam. This concept of a movement that is intended on advocating for their religion is very central to the social self-organization and *raison d’être*.

Altaf Hussain used the same feeling when he spoke saying that the real Jihad is the rule of Islam. He beholds voting for JI as making contribution to this other fight. His usage of JI resonating the features of Khilafat, convey his yearning for an authoritative system of Islamic polity that many students think can define a more socially conscious society. This belief in the ability of the party to bring back an almost ‘Islamic’ system of governance is probably a source of hope for people like Altaf. Hamid took the above message to another level by expressing support for JI for its goal of precipitating an Islamic revolution and the desire to make Pakistan a prosperous, free and a green nation. This way, his reference to the environmental sustainability together with Islamic foundation shows a modern-day Islamic governance befitting the world’s needs.

To this pragmatic reason, Sohail had a stronger reason for supporting JI and for noting that the party too has fought for corruption, inflation, and oppression. He drew our attention to the fact that there exist many educated people within the JI which he felt that having knowledgeable and principled leadership is the key to proper functioning of the system. Pursuing this line of thinking, there is an increasing appreciation of many voters for more openness and responsibility from the politicians which they seem to find in the JI. Nauman Haider remained confined to the JI’s pledge for changes in education system and constitutional governance, stressing on the latter where the party has called upon the people to work within their constitutional jurisdictions.

There is one party that Abdul Samad supports – JI – because its goal is the creation of a single Muslim nation. Thus, the vision of the global Islamic unity finds its echo with many students who perceive their political activity as the part of the Islamic movement. Thus, the desire for unity today raises the position of JI as a party of a national scale and as part of a more extensive Islamic context. Jan was keen to assert JI’s support for implementing Shariah as well as for both group and individual rights. His emphasis on humanity and Islam suggests that many of them regard JI as a party that reconciles religious principles with social justice – which will be compelling to many young people who aspire to both to engage with religion and politics in the present. Mushtaq came to the point straight saying that JI for implementing an Islamic system in Pakistan.

Misbah’s comment that JI is an Islamic party with unambiguous Islamic agenda, free from corrupt influences, strengthens the party even further. He stated that JI assist the general population more often than not and does not look for anything in return indicating that JI is a

emulate party in an area that is usually filled with a lot of self-interest. Thus, Kabeer strengthened previous reviews that argue that JI envision Islam as a blueprint for a complete life. This view indicates how many students view JI, not as a political party but a movement fighting for the change of norms and standards to conform to those of Islamic religion. Ihsan accused other parties of being irresponsible and unsuitable for their education policies, and other problems. Such disillusionment with the AFL and CIO translates many to vote for JI, which they think is more honest and sincere as a political party.

The information obtained from the answers of the students in support with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) sheds a good amount of light into the students' ideological and emotional commitments to this party. In fulfilling this objective, each respondent articulated different but related reasons which are anchored on a strong spiritual and emotional identification with religion; aspiration to the nation's development; and appreciation of democratic ideals and the common good. To refute JUI's arguments regarding his government's prejudice against the party, Shafi brought up the point about its struggle for Pakistan and its Islamic character. He was able to stress that the party challenges considerably in the fight for the Islamic values stating that they paid a lot for their ideals. Shafi is willing to accept that 'JUI has made several sacrifices for religion in Pakistan' shows a lot of regard for the position of the party in defending religion. From this view, we see that there is strong patron support for JUI because people see the organization as a representative of their faith interests.

Noman said the same what Shafi said; JUI is a party for the development of Pakistan. This stands in consonant with other expectations from backers where their country prospers while at the same time embracing Islamic values. It is noticeable that like Noman, many voters believe that JUI has been genuinely advocating for usable Islamic values and national development. Thus, the fact that JUI is based on the principles of Islamic governance and the improvement of the country's situation is especially attractive to those who want to address all major issues. The perspectives shared by these students illustrate a complex interplay between religion and politics in Pakistan. For many, supporting JUI is not merely about policy or governance; it is about affirming their religious identity in a political landscape that they feel often marginalizes Islamic principles. This deep-seated connection to religion shapes their political engagements, making their support for JUI a manifestation of both faith and a commitment to the broader Muslim community.

3.7. Leadership in Pakistan

Leadership, persona, and the character ensure that the followers' beliefs and motivation distinguish themselves to those of the leaders. In order to measure this, the researcher asked the question, 'who is the greatest and ideal leader in Pakistan today?' There were differences between the students of two well-known religious schools, and although their preferences differed, they aligned with their political orientation.

To the students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman was like an icon who was to be followed. He has been politically active in Pakistan for a number of years, and it was assumed he was the leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) party. Students appreciate his capacity to bring out the Islam values in political arena more so his devotion to religious course. This prompts him to be a leader who is both traditional in his approach and politically inclined; students find it hard not to respect him and in most cases are proud to be in his institution. These differences in choices between the two groups depict how the leaders'

characteristics and the adopted political systems maximize the students' appreciation and preference by indicating a considerable influence of leadership in shaping the politics of religious seminaries.

Table 5: Leadership in Pakistan

		Leadership		Total
		Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman	Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman	
Madarass	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	20	0	20
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	0	20	20
	Total	20	20	40

During the interviews conducted at Jamia Miftah ul Uloom students were asked questions such as "What this leader or leaders have that other do not have?" The findings with regards to Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman informed a profound respect as well as a list of attributes that echoed the students, their ambitions for political as well as religious authority.

Ahmed Jan reiterated that Hafiz Naeem gets people on the side of the rights and stated, "He does what he tells the people." This assertion highlights a crucial aspect of effective leadership: the ability to mobilize, to move people into action, and to make them feel they are empowered to act for change. Shaukat Aziz tried to put Hafiz Naeem's defence of Islam within the parameters of legislative assembly mandate. He mentioned the party's opposition to Transgender Bill in the Senate in which JI has been very keen in defending Islamic values in parliaments. This is a unique feature: unlike other political leaders and representatives who shy away from making religious statement and standing up for them in political forum, Hafiz Naeem can do all of that. Sadiq enlarged on the fact of the capabilities of Hafiz Naeem, where he says, 'He has all the abilities of a great leader.' This general approval implies understanding that different abilities are necessary in leadership, such as eloquence, wit and dedication. Louding for such qualities, Sadiq awakened the students desire collectively for an able, versatile and value-imbued political leader.

Misbah also said that Hafiz Naeem is constitutional head of the party which meant he had a lot to do in keeping the party's organizational structure and charters intact. This institutional leadership is helpful to students especially in the search for order and consistency in their political party. Shaukat further stressed that Hafiz Naeem is very intelligent, very upright and non-corruptible, adding that "he never be lured by the Pakistani establishment." This assertion raises one of the most important issues that contemporary students can address, namely the issue of political leaders' potential for ethical betrayal. Some of the positive attributes that people have about Hafiz Naeem include his perceived integrity: as a person of principle, other people place their trust in him. The students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom provided a range of ideas that makes Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman different from other leaders. Starting from the fact that he can rally the people and protect their interests as well as the values of Islam, ending with the intelligence and honesty, all these qualities reflect the students' desire to become wise, dedicated and fair leaders. Their answers point to the need for leadership to adopt political ideas with the religious principles, hint at an overall wish for election candidates to be persons of integrity.

Students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia opined their deep level of respect for Maulana Fazal

Ur Rehman and following are their reasons some points elaborating why they are supporting and loyal to him. Their answers also demonstrate religious and social justice orientations, and all of their quotes from Fazal Rehman to show that he defends religious values and for social justice throughout his political career.

Ahmed emphasized that Fazal Ur Rehman stands for the poor, highlighting a critical aspect of his leadership: For this reason, some of the subtopics within this topic include Servility; an understanding of compassion for the vulnerable groups. Allah listen this man always speaking the truth because the Maulana always speaks the truth, so the honesty & integrity are sure success of the leader. Ahmed also refers to Fazal Rehman as a farsighted leader; when students talk about the man, they think of a man who not only meets their needs today, but who also has vision for tomorrow. This blend of sympathy and vision enables him to make people understand that he is the leader who will help them improve.

Sajjad described Fazal Rehman as a man of high moral character and without any corruption. This point strikes a logical chord to the students who fully understand the political systems corrupted by such vices. The fact that their leader can put it into application of the teachings learnt in their madrassa enhances their support since they get encouraged by the notion that their religious knowledge will be of importance in the political leadership circle. Further, Sajjad said that Fazal Rehman is always aggressive in the defence of Islam and Pakistan further strengthening the portrait of an active leader with zeal for religion as well as country. In interview with students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia they identified several reasons for perceiving Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman as unusual. The value of compassion, equity, truthfulness, integrity, and his non-compromising stand impresses the students' ideals of leadership that is upright, honest, and non-exploitative of one's neighbour and is aligned to their religious and social principles. By so doing, the students are displaying a group need for a leader who besides comprehending their challenges, endeavours to solve them in consonance with Islam.

3.8. Ideological relevance with the leader

For the students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia, Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman is one with a view that reflects the student's beliefs. They like his dedication towards Islamic sharia and trying to bring religious and social changes within the premise of the country's political system. Such alignment points towards the view in Fazal Ur Rehman that a student doesn't just follow a political figure, but the figure follows a direction which is virtuous and beneficial to the students. By doing that, he is a contemporary oriented urging for the basic tenets of Islam which makes him an ideologically correct leader in its literal sense to them.

On the other hand, the students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom named Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman as a leader their thought process resembles most closely. Hafiz Naeem is a notable face of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and he has focused on the educational rights as well as qualitative change in the governance system according to the tenets of Islam with a strong and clear message of socialism minimizing social inequality. The students appreciate his authoritative scholarly enunciation and the practical solutions that he provides regarding social issues. To them HN was a progressive leader with message based on traditional Islamic values blended with social and political realities suitable for their imagined ideological campaign. This divergence typical for the Pakistan experience demonstrates that ideological correctness in religion and politics is influenced by historical and modern factors.

The identification of Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman and Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman as ideologically correct leaders underscores the students' desire for representation that aligns with their beliefs and values. These choices not only reflect their political inclinations but also signify a broader search for leadership that authentically represents their understanding of Islam in the context of modern society.

Table 6: Ideological relevance with the leader

		Leadership		Total
		Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman	Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman	
Madrassa	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	20	0	20
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	0	20	20
Total		20	20	40

3.9. The Party which can bring Islamic system

In exploring the students' views on which religious political party is most equipped to establish a proper Islamic system, we can find a clear distinction between students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia and those of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom. This part highlights the contrast in both political beliefs and emphasis as the primary drivers of political parties. Among the Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia learners, majority closely associated the capability of developing a correct Islamic system to this party, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). Many of the students maintained that they support JUI because of the party's unrelenting stand on Islam and the Sharia form of governance. For many students, JUI is seen as an organization that supports such principles as Islamic culture and morality and as advocating hearing the voice of the suffering people, improving education, and protecting rights of religion. About the party leadership: Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman for example is well loved by student because they believe he not only speaks for their beliefs but tries to change ideologies to reflect their beliefs. For these students, it makes JUI a party that put into the faith, politics and vice versa as it would be appropriate to give Pakistani people an Islam in its real and practical sense. As for the students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom, the favoured political institution to deliver a correct Islamic order was Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). People appreciate that JI pays attention to such aspects of governance as social justice, democracy and an all-encompassing reform since they consider them critical in effecting change to the Islamic governance model.

The responses from students at both seminaries illustrate their hopes and aspirations for an Islamic governance model. The support for JUI and JI underscores the importance of leadership and ideological clarity in shaping their political affiliations, revealing the ongoing quest for a system that genuinely reflects their understanding of Islam in today's world.

Table 7: The Party which can bring Islamic system

		Political Parties		Total
		JUI	JI	
Madrassa	Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia	20	0	20
	Jamia Miftah ul Uloom	0	20	20
Total		20	20	40

3.10. Wrong in other parties

In answering the question, “If you belong to a religious party, what is missing in other religious political parties?” the students from Jamia Miftah ul Uloom highlighted various perceived shortcomings of other political parties, especially in their value system. This cast of discussion prompts an understanding of the extent of the ideological orientation of the students Madaris and the critical attitude of the students towards the other religious groups specifically the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

Sohail said that other parties do not have ideology. To Sohail, a lack of usable ideological structure in other parties is an organizational deficiency that makes these parties unable to solve the emerging socio-political problems of the country. This viewpoint reveals the significance of prejudice for political action in the opinion of students, using JI as the source of their beliefs. Altaf Hussain expressed the same opinion by pointing out that other parties have failed to deliver on their part. He emphasized on a perceived gap between the political crowd and actual practices, something that mars the credibility of those parties. This lack of accountability is frightening to students: students want to know which leaders and which parties are actually going to do something. Altaf’s himself commented about the performance of JI showed their effort of searching and expecting an honest and trustworthy political leader.

Shaukat Khan reacted by labelling other political parties as sectarian action as opposed to religious principles that JI adheres to. His criticism suggests that the majority of parties use religious emotion for their political benefit and do not work for the Muslims in general. This sectarianism creates division rather than unity something student at Jamia Miftah ul Uloom understand. They appreciate JI as using principles and integrating people focusing on a non-sectarian politics. Sajid mentioned that corruption, breakthrough, and prejudice are major weaknesses of another party. All these problems are well understood by students who recently became disillusioned with the political situation in Pakistan. Sajid says nationalism also hints at any party that consists only of nationalists who do not care about religion. JI students, first and foremost, try to stay loyal to Islamic values, and they consider other players as betraying the principles for self- or political motives.

Ahmed Jan blamed other political parties for their lack of adequate training and educating their employee in humanity standards as per the Qur’an and Sunnah. This view elaborates education and moral training in their view of leadership. Students of Jamia Miftah ul Uloom commented that actual political work should be based on Islamic principles and warned that the absence of such training reduces their credibility and efficiency. Regarding this case, Mushtaq expressed his concern on the hereditary system in other political organizations affirming that most of them give chance to relatives instead of competent people. This hereditary system created nonchalance and political apathy to belong to the party, thus resulting in stagnation from the party and from the community. However, JI is seen as an organization that supports leadership that has been gained through meritocracy as opposed leadership by birth right hence strengthening the students’ loyalty in the group.

When the students Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia were asked the same question, they had a deep sense of loyalty to the JUI. Siyab believed the other people have “wrong and fake beliefs”. This is an example of how people in the seminaries have been educated about other people and their beliefs. This also delineates the extent to which his beliefs conflict with other people’s beliefs. It also shows that the seminary educates their students this way. To indicate other as with

“wrong beliefs” is really alarming for the society which is religious diverse. This also indicates the sense of loyalty and support the respondent have with JUI.

Luqman also said that the JUI is the only party with true roots in Deobandi tradition of Islam. However, his response that other parties are “just fake in their nature and work.” This also highlights the way people are indoctrinated in these seminaries. He highlights that other parties do not represent the true and authentic Islam. This makes other parties not credible to be trusted and followed. Only his party of support represents and stands for the real and true Islam and wants to establish a system according to that.

Nasir Afridi had something different which make other parties less credible and must not be followed. He said that other parties have “betrayed this nation” for years. It resonates with the idea that other parties have ruined because they are getting votes and betray the people and their demands. He believed that other parties have been consistently failed to ensure accountability and fulfil the demands of the people. He creates a moral superiority of the JUI on all other political parties in Pakistan. He reinforces his loyalty and support for the JUI. This assertion highlights the ways through which and the way the students in these seminaries are educated about politics and other political parties in Pakistan.

These responses of the students of Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia reflects their loyalty and allegiance to the JUI and the way they have been indoctrinated through educational process. Their assertions of authenticity, integrity, and alignment with the Deobandi tradition highlight the ideological divides within Pakistan’s religious political landscape. It also highlights the role of religious seminaries in politics. They have literally made it to the educational system to indoctrinate the students in a purely political and ideological lines.

4. Conclusion

This paper discussed the role of religion and religious seminaries in electoral politics in Shergarh. The study highlights how the religious beliefs and political orientation have been framed in the religious seminaries in Pakistan. As the study focused on Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia and Jamia Miftah ul Uloom, that has explicit and direct links with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) for Dar ul Uloom and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) for Jamia Miftah ul Uloom respectively. Students of both seminaries said that they participate in politics and they in clear lines made it explicit that they will always do religious politics which is a religious duty for them. The study highlights that the students had a very clear inclination and political and ideological orientation towards the respective political parties. The students of the Dar ul Uloom Islamia Arabia support the political ideology and the political standpoint of JUI. According to them JUI is the only true and authentic party to be supported and trusted in Pakistan.

These students embody the values, ideology, beliefs and knowledge about politics they have been taught in their respective seminaries. The indoctrination will have a real and longer impact on their lives. The leadership of their respective political parties is the only authentic and best leadership in Pakistan. Other leaders have several issues according to them. It means that they have been taught about all these things at the seminaries. On the other hand, students at Jamia Miftah ul Uloom shows loyalty and support to JI, believing it to be the only party that representative of their understanding of Islam. The leader of the party, Hafiz Naeem Ur Rehman is believed to be represent their ideas and ideal system they want to implement in Pakistan. The commitment to JI is not merely a political choice but an extension of their

religious identity, reinforcing the notion that Islamic principles should guide political action. This ideological alignment cultivates a strong sense of belonging and responsibility among students, motivating them to actively engage in political processes that reflect their beliefs.

The implications of this religiously motivated political alignment extend beyond individual beliefs. The collective support for JUI and JI creates a vibrant yet polarized political landscape in Shergarh. Each party mobilizes its supporters around a shared vision of governance rooted in Islamic teachings, resulting in the potential for increased civic engagement among students. This activism is often channelled through educational initiatives, community outreach, and political campaigns, allowing students to actively participate in the democratic process while reinforcing their religious identities.

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