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## Religious Sensibilities as A Political Tool

### Shafia Jamil

Lecturer, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University, Islamabad

Email: shafia.jamil@comsats.edu.pk

### Dr Hanna-e-Kalbi

Assistant Professor, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Email: hanna.kalbi@umt.edu.pk

### Dr Zainab Sadiq

Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University,  
Islamabad

Email: zainab.sadiq@comsats.edu.pk

### Abstract

This study focuses on the historical usage of religion and its impact on society. It seeks to investigate the ethical implications of using religion to gain political power and to analyze the long-term success of diverse political initiatives. It also looks at the growing skepticism about the junction of religion and politics.

Individuals from many religious origins have used religion to attain political agendas throughout history. Notably, Crusaders and Muslims battled for religious causes while displaying distinct moral principles. Modern political figures, US Presidents and Muslim politicians have cited religion while advocating for religious freedom, which has often garnered support.

It is found that Exploiting religious sensibilities in politics is a multifaceted endeavor that includes moral panic, demonization of opponents, manipulation of religious symbols, and religious justification of policies. These strategies use religious sentiments to gain political support and influence the political environment.

Research has revealed that utilizing religious sensibilities in politics can lead to societal polarization, the decline of democracy, the erosion of human rights and religious freedom, and the encouragement of violence and intolerance. These repercussions highlight the significance of religiously-motivated political participation that is appropriate and ethical.

Several major issues have emerged from the study of the relationship between religion and politics, emphasizing the need for awareness, critical thought, positive engagement, and the maintenance of ethical principles. Solutions to those are important. This study employs qualitative analysis to glean insights from historical and current political occurrences.

**Keywords:** Politics, Religious institutions, polarization, Religious sensibilities

## 1. Introduction

"Religious Sensibilities as Political Tools: Exploiting Faith for Power" investigates the complex relationship between religion and politics, specifically how religious sentiments are used for political objectives. The fundamental goal of this research is to analyze and comprehend how political actors strategically employ faith and religious beliefs to gain and consolidate power.

**Religion** is the relationship between humans and what they regard as sacrosanct, sacred, absolute, spiritual, divine, or deserving of special awe. It is also regarded as how individuals deal with ultimate concerns regarding their existence and fate after death. In many traditions, this relationship and these concerns are articulated in terms of one's relationship with or attitude toward gods or spirits; in more humanistic or naturalistic forms of religion, they are articulated in terms of one's relationship with or attitude toward the larger human community or the natural world. In numerous religions, texts are considered to have scriptural status, and individuals are regarded as having spiritual or moral authority. Believers and devotees participate in and are often enjoined to perform devotional or contemplative practices such as prayer, meditation, or particular rituals. Worship, moral behavior, correct belief, and participation in religious institutions are components of the religious life. (Britannica, 2023)

**A religious sensibility** does not constitute a religion. Religions are based on the substructure of perceptions, emotions, and intuitions, to which they owe both the profound similarities that link them to other faiths of the same general age and historical origin and the profound differences that separate them from faiths of different ages and origins. (The Mindful Word, 2013)

In other words, religious sensibility is identical to consciousness-raising. Long-term, consciousness and religion can and should coexist, but for this to occur, what is commonly associated with the term "religion" must shift away from a close association with what has dominated religion for the past several thousand years, any sense that a particular belief in any particular supernatural "being(s)" is required, any association with the tradition of unthinking acceptance and a withdrawal from tyrannical authority.

In a variety of settings, other types of communal celebrations are conceivable. The artificial separation between sacred and profane must be questioned, and creativity must become a core value. Heresy is trendy, enjoyable, and science fiction. What is taken seriously is being polite, but the content does not need to be extremely serious. There is space for exploratory experimentation, the testing of ideas and activities, and their dissemination. (Adam Blatner, 2009)

**Power** is the ability to influence, lead, dominate, or otherwise affect people. Power includes authority, among other things. Power can be illegitimate, unlike authority. (Andre Munor, 2023)

German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) was a leading power theorist. Weber defines power as "any chance (regardless of the basis of this chance) to carry through one's own will (even against resistance)" in social relationships. Weber uses persuasion and coercion to define power. Power exercises based on legitimacy (Herrschaft) are also shown. Elitists saw power as the elite's capital in society's critical levers of social control. As an American sociologist, C. Wright Mills (1916–62) named political appointments, mass media, massive enterprises, the military, and other levers the "strategic command posts of the social structure." American political scientist Robert A. Dahl (1915–2014), acknowledged that power is unequally allocated even in democracies but asserted that many organizations and political actors contest it. (Ibid.)

The French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault (1926–84) enlarged power theory to include the social creation of thoughts, wants, identities, truth, or knowledge. The prison, school, hospital, and crazy asylum all developed from the modern quest to comprehend human nature; therefore, power and knowledge are inextricably linked in modern society. Foucault believed that power-knowledge linkages socially construct agents who impose their will. In international relations, power can be used to compare states—when one has more or less power than another—or classify states as regional powers, great powers, or superpowers. (Ibid.)

### **1. Scope of Research**

This research is crucial for several reasons. It helps in understanding power dynamics. It gives light on the strategies used by politicians and leaders to sway public opinion and obtain political clout by exploiting religious emotions and ideals. This study can educate policymakers, leaders, and the general public on the need of keeping religion and politics separate in order to create a fair and just government system. In short, this research topic tries to unearth the subtleties of the junction of religion and politics, providing significant insights into a phenomenon with far-reaching implications for communities around the world.

### **2. Objective**

The objective of this study is to analyse historical and contemporary instances where religious sensibilities have played a significant role in constructing political landscapes, making it relevant to understanding current global politics. By researching how religious feelings are influenced in politics, this research adds to a better understanding of how such activities affect societies, communities, and individuals. It investigates the ethical implications of using religion as a tool for power, raising questions about the boundaries between religion and politics and the potential repercussions of blurring these limits.

### **3. Methods**

This investigation adopts the qualitative analysis method, which is literature-based and analyzes the situation based on History.

#### **4. Historical Examples of the Use of Religious Sensibilities in Politics**

Religion and politics have frequently been intertwined throughout history, determining the destiny of nations and civilizations. Here are some historical examples of the political use of religious sensibilities, along with references for further study:

##### **4.1. The Crusades**

The Crusades (1096-1291) were a series of religious wars sanctioned by the Catholic Church to reclaim the Holy Land from Muslim rule. Religious zeal was a significant motivator for European Christians to participate in these military battles. Popes like Urban II used religious rhetoric to gain support for the Crusades, assuring participants heavenly rewards. The Crusades demonstrate how the mediaeval world utilised religious sentiments for political and territorial ends (Rhys & Weber, 2016).

##### **4.2. The Protestant Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation (16th century) was a theological and political movement that challenged the Catholic Church's authority. Religious autonomy was emphasized by leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, who also criticized the Church's corrupt exercises. This movement led to the establishment of Protestant nations and conflict between Catholic and Protestant forces in Europe. The Reformation illustrates how religious sentiments can provoke political turmoil and discord (Ibid.).

##### **4.3. Colonialism**

Colonial administrations utilized religious divisions to justify and solidify their dominance. For instance, European colonial administrations utilized religion as a means of control and conversion. The British Empire, for instance, utilized Christian missionaries to exert influence in its colonies. The British escalated tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India, leading to political divisions. Colonialism is an example of the use of religion for political dominance and social engineering (Dianne Kirby, 2018).

##### **4.4. The Cold War**

The ideological conflict between the United States (representing democracy and capitalism) and the Soviet Union (representing communism) was the defining characteristic of the Cold War (1947-1991). In this geopolitical conflict, religion has become a battlefield. The United States positioned itself as a defender of religious liberty and utilized religious organizations to resist communist influence, especially in Latin America. In the interim, the Soviet Union incorporated atheism into its ideology. Religion and politics have merged in a global context during the Cold War (Huntington, 1996). These historical examples illustrate the intricate relationship between religious sensibility and politics, demonstrating how

religion has been utilized to accomplish diverse political goals and agendas throughout time.

## **5. Contemporary Examples of the Use of Religious Sensibilities in Politics**

In contemporary politics, populist leaders frequently appeal to religious sentiments to garner support. These politicians employ religious identity, beliefs, and symbols in order to communicate with their voter base. In order to strengthen their political influence, leaders such as Narendra Modi in India and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have adopted Hinduism and Christianity, respectively. They present themselves as protectors of religious and cultural values, appealing to those who feel their religion is under attack. As evidenced by India's religious tensions and Brazil's cultural conflicts, this populist use of religion can lead to social polarization and division (Ihsan Y. & Raja M. Ali S. 2021).

### **5.1. What are the potential consequences of the rise of populist leaders?**

- a. According to Mounk (2018), populist politicians frequently characterize politics in terms of "us vs. them," which can lead to growing polarization and division within societies. This cleavage is evident in the way populist politicians have mobilized their supporters by targeting minorities, immigrants, and anyone labelled "opponents." In Brazil, for instance, Bolsonaro's presidential campaign centered on demonizing the left and minorities, resulting in significant polarization within the country.
- b. According to Mudde (2017), populist politicians can undermine democratic institutions such as the court and the press by assaulting their legitimacy or attempting to limit their power. In countries like Turkey and Hungary, populist leaders like Erdogan and Orban have been accused of suppressing journalistic freedom and judicial independence (Mudde, 2017).
- c. Policy shifts: Populist leaders frequently implement policies that deviate from old orthodoxies. According to Stiglitz (2019), populist politicians may enact protectionist policies aimed at bolstering domestic industry, while others have reduced taxes or enacted policies aimed at restricting immigration. The economic policies of Donald Trump, which emphasize protectionism and America First, are an example of such policy shifts (K. M. Roberts, 2019).
- d. International relations: Populist leaders' ideals have a considerable impact on international relations, whether they break with traditional alliances or promote a more nationalist or isolationist agenda. Roberts (2019), for instance, argues that Trump's approach to international institutions like NATO and the United Nations has established a new

norm in international relations, thereby influencing the direction of international cooperation and peace building (J. E. Stiglitz, 2019).

- e. Economic stability: According to Stieglitz (2019), some populist policies aimed at strengthening domestic industry or safeguarding employees might have unforeseen implications for economic stability, such as increasing inflation or deteriorating trade agreements. The protectionist policies of the Trump administration have been linked to trade disputes with China and other nations, disrupting global trade relations (Urbinati, 2019).

The rise of populist leaders has the potential to substantially alter political and economic systems, with both positive and negative consequences. However, the excesses and potential consequences of populist leaders should be carefully considered and analyzed.

## **6. The Political Influence of Religious Organizations**

Religious institutions use substantial influence in modern politics. They frequently advocate, support candidates, and mobilize individuals on the basis of their religious beliefs. In the United States, organizations such as the Christian Right have been instrumental in defining conservative political agendas and supporting candidates who share their religious beliefs. Similarly, the religious establishment in Iran possesses considerable authority and the capacity to influence government decisions. In political discourse, the influence of religious organizations can contribute to the prioritization of particular moral and social issues (Nick Baines, 2018).

### **6.1. The Use of Religious Rhetoric in Political Campaigns**

In order to appeal to electors, political campaigns frequently use religious discourse. To establish moral authority and communicate with religiously inclined audiences, politicians employ religious language and symbols. In the United States, for instance, presidential candidates frequently mention their faith in order to appeal to religious electors. This strategy has the potential to influence both voting behavior and public opinion. However, it can raise concerns regarding the separation of church and state and the exclusion of nonreligious individuals from political dialogue (Efe & Emily, 2021).

### **6.2. Drawbacks of Using Religious Language in Politics**

Despite the fact that the use of religious discourse in politics can have a number of negative repercussions, there are a few other considerations to make. Because religious rhetoric in politics frequently appeals to a particular religious group or ideology, it excludes others and fosters polarization.

- a. Excessive use of religious rhetoric may subvert the secular nature of the state, leading to preferential treatment for one religion over others in violation of the values of equal representation and religious liberty (Maciej, 2016). In certain instances, extremist organizations may use religious language to incite violence and radicalization, employing

- religious texts and symbols to justify their actions (Zimmerman, 2019). When political leaders employ religious rhetoric that predominantly represents the dominant faith, minority religious communities can feel marginalized and excluded from the political process (Vaishnav, 2019).
- b. **Interference with Policy:** The incorporation of religious terminology into policymaking may impede evidence-based decision-making, resulting in policies that are influenced more by religious beliefs than by practical concerns, which may be detrimental to the well-being of citizens. Using religious discourse in international relations can impair diplomatic ties because it is perceived as religious involvement in international affairs. Risk of provoking a reaction from secular or non-religious segments of society, thereby undermining political support, if religious terminology is overused (Vaishnav, 2019).
  - c. **Religious Exploitation in Conflict and Terrorism:** Religion continues to be utilized in numerous global conflicts and terrorist attacks. Extremist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda use religious sentiments to recruit followers and to justify violence in the name of religion. Frequently, profound historical and religious tensions exacerbate religious conflicts, such as those in the Middle East and parts of Africa. Governments may also employ religious rhetoric to justify military operations. The intersection of religion, conflict, and terrorism highlights the complexity and volatility of religious sensibilities in contemporary geopolitics. (Rabasa, 2004)

### **6.5. Strategies for Exploiting Religious Sensibilities in Politics**

Religion has long been a potent political tool. Numerous strategies have been developed to exploit religious feelings for political gain:

- a. **Inducing of Moral Panic:** In politics, moral panic is the exaggeration of perceived threats to religious ideals and beliefs in order to garner religious support. Anxiety and fear are frequently employed to galvanize religious communities. This method attempts to portray concerns such as the advance of secularism, the influence of religion, and the moral decline as existential threats. Politicians employ this strategy to garner religious support and establish themselves as defenders of faith. One example is the use of the "war on religion" narrative to mobilize religious electors (Wood, 1999).
- b. **Opponents' Demonization:** Demonization of opponents involves depicting political opponents as adversaries of the faith or as individuals who threaten religious values and beliefs. It seeks to discredit adversaries by associating them with religious or moral faults. Politicians portray opponents as corrupt, immoral, or religious persecutors through rhetoric. To destroy their reputation and persuade religious voters, they use

- accusations of being "anti-religious" or "irreligious." This strategy aims to foster religious cohesion among believers who view themselves as defenders of their faith (Maciej, 2016).
- c. **Manipulation of Religious Symbols and Beliefs:** This technique entails strategically employing religious symbols, traditions, and beliefs for political gain. To appeal to religious constituents, politicians may participate in religious rituals, cite religious texts, or don religious attire. By associating themselves with religious symbols and practices, politicians attempt to establish a solid rapport with religious communities. This may imply that they share the same values and perspectives as their religious constituents. During election campaigns, candidates may be observed visiting places of worship, partaking in religious ceremonies, or quoting religious scriptures to demonstrate their religious commitment. (Zimmerman, 2019)
  - d. **Policy Justifications Based on Religion:** Using religious justification to justify policies involves presenting political actions as consistent with religious teachings and ideals. Politicians assert that their policies are divinely inspired or in the best interests of their faith. This strategy attempts to legitimize political actions utilizing religious doctrine. Politicians may rely on religious teachings and beliefs to defend their positions on issues such as abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and social welfare. According to them, these measures uphold religious values and beliefs, which will appeal to religious electors who value faith-based decision making (March, 2009).

In conclusion, exploiting religious sensibilities in politics is a multifaceted endeavor involving moral distress, demonization of opponents, manipulation of religious symbols, and religious justification of policies. These strategies use religious sentiments to gain political support and influence the political environment.

### **6.6. The Impact of Exploiting Religious Sensibilities in Politics**

The application of religious sensibility in politics can have far-reaching effects on society and government. This section examines the consequences of such exploitation, supported by references.

**The Social Polarization Explanation:** The exploitation of religious emotions frequently results in the religious polarization of society. To consolidate their support, political leaders who leverage religious sentiments may intentionally create schisms within religious organizations. This polarization can result in heightened tensions, mistrust, and violence within religious communities.

Polarization has the potential to undermine social cohesion, constructive dialogue, and national unity. As seen in various locations across the globe.

It can lead to social upheaval, violence, and even intergroup conflict. (US, 2002 Special Report)

Taking advantage of religious sensibilities has the potential to erode democratic norms and institutions. Politicians who utilize religion may prioritize their own religious group's interests over the larger democratic values of equality and inclusion. This may manifest as discriminatory policies or exclusion of minority groups from political participation. Democracy erosion can result in authoritarianism, diminished civil liberties, and weakened democratic institutions. It undermines fundamental democratic norms such as minority protection and the rule of law. (Lluís Maria de Puig, 27 November 1998).

### **7. Consequences of Undermining the Human Rights and Religious Freedom**

Taking advantage of religious sensibilities can have detrimental effects on human rights and religious liberty. Politicians may use religious rhetoric to rationalize restrictions on the freedoms of expression, religion, and assembly, especially for dissenting voices and religious minorities.

This violates fundamental human rights guaranteed by international law and can result in the persecution of religious minorities, discrimination, and the suppression of diverse viewpoints. It can also create an atmosphere where individuals are hesitant to express themselves openly. (Aditi Gorur and Julie Gregory, 2021, January 2022).

The use of religious sensibilities for political gain can promote violence and intolerance. Politicians who appeal to religious sentiments may incite, if not directly provoke, violence against perceived opponents or minority groups. This can result in hate crimes, religiously motivated violence, and communal strife. The propagation of violence and intolerance can have grave societal consequences, such as loss of life, displacement, and long-term social divisions. It is capable of destabilizing regions and instilling terror and insecurity. (Vaishnava, 2019, April 4)

### **Conclusion**

Utilizing religious sensibilities in politics can lead to societal polarization, the decline of democracy, the erosion of human rights and religious freedom, and the encouragement of violence and intolerance. These repercussions highlight the significance of religiously-motivated political participation that is appropriate and ethical.

Several major issues have emerged from the study of the relationship between religion and politics, emphasizing the need for awareness, critical thought, positive engagement, and the maintenance of ethical principles.

#### **1. The Value of Consciousness and Critical Reflection**

Concerning the intersection of religion and politics, awareness and critical thought are indispensable. Individuals, policymakers, and society as a whole must recognize the potency and potential consequences of religious sensitivity in politics. Awareness can aid in preventing the manipulation of

religious sentiments for political gain and encourage a more informed and accountable response to religious issues in the political realm.

#### 1. The Potential for Effective Religious-Political Engagement

Despite the fact that the exploitation of religious sensibilities in politics can have negative consequences, it is essential to acknowledge that a positive relationship between religion and politics is conceivable. Religion frequently plays a significant role in shaping and directing the moral values and ethical standards of individuals. When used constructively, religious beliefs can motivate legislators and policymakers to promote social justice, equality, and compassion. Consequently, it is essential to investigate how religion and politics can cooperate constructively to address societal issues.

#### 3. The Importance of Maintaining Ethical Standards in the Political Use of Religious Sensibilities

Regarding the political application of religious sensibility, it is non-negotiable to uphold ethical values. Politicians and policymakers must adhere to ideals of fairness, justice, and inclusivity when addressing religious concerns. Respecting religious freedom, protecting minority rights, and avoiding the promotion of hostility, bigotry, or violence in the name of religion are essential. The ethical application of religious sensibility can contribute to the establishment of a more tranquil and equitable society in which religious diversity is celebrated rather than exploited.

Managing the complex relationship between religion and politics requires a delicate balance of awareness, ethical behavior, and positive engagement. By approaching this intersection with consciousness and accountability, society can leverage the potential for positive change while avoiding the pitfalls of religious exploitation in politics.

#### **Findings**

It is found that politicians take leverage on religious institutions in the following ways to get political advantages:

- Religious institutions are used to gain the required support from the public
- Wars are waged in the name of religion
- Making people feel that their religion and ideology is under threat.
- Religious discourse and mottos are used to win elections
- Creating moral panic and demonization of opponents
- Conflict and terror is justified by religious reasoning.
- Targeting the minorities and immigrants to widen the gap.
- Controlling the media and judiciary
- Maintaining international relation according to the personal interests giving it religious reason.
- Conflict and terror is justified by religious reasoning.

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