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Islamist Populists in Power: Promises, Compromises and Attacks on Democratic Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper comparatively examines the ruling religious populist governments in Turkey and Pakistan through a theoretical framework that focuses on populists' promises, their compromises, and their attacks on democratic institutions. Through our three-legged framework, we examine how these religious populists behave in power and how strategic necessities, the realities of governing, and structural constraints shape their policies. Similar to the other populists in other parts of the world, before coming to power, Islamist populists make sweeping promises to the people and quick fixes to major problems of the country—most famously, quick and substantial economic development. While they may want to retain their uncompromising style and lofty goals, the realities of governing force populists to make serious compromises to their designated 'enemies' and on their values once they are in power. Finally, like other

authoritarian politicians, Islamist populists attack formal institutions of democracy such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society; they politicize them, evacuate them, and eventually capture them from within.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of political populism among ruling elites in different parts of the world—but especially in Asia, Europe, and the United States—has raised questions about the durability and resilience of democracy as a political order. This experience is especially relevant to Pakistan and Turkey, as both countries have a contentious history between religion, democracy, and authoritarianism via military rule. More importantly, Islamist populist actors have captured political power in both countries: Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, and Imran Khan in Pakistan. This begs the question: How do Islamist populist leaders behave in power? This research will examine the practices of Islamist populists in power to reveal the main patterns of their behaviour—and the implications for democratic institutions.

This paper has three aims. First, it attempts to comprehend the main features of the ruling Islamist populist governments in the Muslim world by comparing populist actors in Turkey and Pakistan. The rise of populism in Turkey and Pakistan is a sign of a broader phenomenon where populist actors have been threatening democratic institutions and norms via populist discourses. However, comparative studies of populisms in the Muslim world are almost absent in the literature. Moreover, the relationship between Islamism and populism is relatively understudied (Hadiz, 2018; Yilmaz, Morieson & Demir, 2021). Scholars have described populists in Europe as ‘hijacking’ religion or as secular actors that instrumentalize religion

to win and keep power (Marzouki et al., 2016; Morieson, 2017). In Islamic majority nations, something similar yet more complex appears to be taking place. Indeed, as this paper shows, Islamist populists in Pakistan and Turkey draw upon Islam when they make promises to defend their respective nations from foreign forces ‘seeking to destroy the nation’ and its people and when they promise to rejuvenate their nations via a return to Islamic values and ways of life. They also, at times, portray themselves as ‘holy’ Islamic figures with the power to ‘save’ their peoples from their religious enemies. However, as the paper shows, they are also willing to compromise their Islamic values to remain in government.

We present a theoretical framework that examines Islamist populists in power, focusing on their promises, their compromises, and their attacks on democratic institutions. Our framework allows for an examination of how populists behave in power as well as how strategic necessities, the realities of governing, and structural constraints shape their policies. We show that similar to the other populists, Islamist populists make sweeping promises—before coming to power—involving giving power to the people, quick fixes to major problems, and of widespread economic development. These promises, the paper shows, are designed to provoke an emotional response in voters and to elicit feelings of fear of cultural disintegration and anger toward ‘elites’ but also nostalgia for a past golden age and hope for a better future. However, while they may

want to retain their uncompromising style and lofty goals, the realities of governing forces populists to make serious compromises to their designated 'enemies' and on their values. Finally, populists attack formal institutions of democracy such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society; they politicize them, evacuate them, and eventually capture them from within.

This study provides a fresh analysis on the impacts of Islamist populism on democracy in the Muslim world. This study will provide a systematic analysis focusing on populists' promises, rejection of compromise, and authoritarianism vis-à-vis their use of socio-cultural elements. In doing so, it will also demonstrate how the Islamist populist governments in Pakistan and Turkey have manoeuvred around principles of democracy and political accountability—sometimes subtly, sometimes openly—to dilute its safeguards and erode democratic institutions.

In what follows, we first document the rise of populism in Turkey and Pakistan. Then we introduce our conceptual framework based on the populists' promises, compromises, and attacks on democratic institutions. Following this, we comparatively examine the Turkish and Pakistani cases by applying this framework. The final section summarizes our findings.



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ali Erbas, the head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) is seen during a public rally in Istanbul on the second anniversary of failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

RISE OF POPULISM IN TURKEY AND PAKISTAN

In this article, we follow the performative-relational approach to populism that has been developed by Ostiguy et al. (2020). This approach incorporates socio-cultural and style elements and focuses on performances, discourses, and speech acts. The performative-relational approach combines theatre, representation, embodiment, and making the marginal visible (Ostiguy et. al. 2020). In particular, it examines how the leader embodies the people and their demands through certain performances such as language, clothing, bodily image, and other socio-cultural references. The leader's style generally challenges socio-cultural standards of 'proper behaviour,' hence low politics (Ostiguy et. al, 2020), and is characterised by "bad manners" (Moffitt, 2016). The bad (subversive) manners find resonance in the populists' dirty institutionality when they are in power. The dirty institutionality refers to personalism, decisionism, rule-erosion, and antagonism.

Since at least 2011, Turkey has undergone a dual process of democratic backsliding amid the emergence of a new, authoritarian regime under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, Turkey's overall democracy score dropped from 5.73 in 2011 to 4.09 in 2019 (The Economist, 2019). Turkey's political system has been transformed into a presidential system that has given most executive and legislative functions to President Erdogan, eliminating the principle of separation of powers as well most checks and balances on executive authority (Tas, 2015). In addition, an important component of the ruling-AKP's political strategy has been populism (Yilmaz, 2018). In Turkey, the AKP government's adherence to populism has been well documented by several scholars (Aytaç and Öniş, 2014; Taş, 2020; Baykan, 2021).

Erdogan depicted himself as

the man of the people, the son of a modest migrant family in Istanbul, and a devout Muslim educated in an Imam and Preacher School. In his own self mythology, he “knows the streets of city,” has devoted his life to working for Islamist political organisations and has suffered for his political ideas. In the Erdoganist narrative, the Kemalists and Westernised people are cast as evil elites (Beyaz Türkler, or White Turks) who are out of touch with the ‘real,’ authentic values of ‘the people,’ and they are charged by Erdogan with historical horrors against simple people—all committed in the name of Westernisation (Çapan and Zarakol, 2019: 276). In this narrative, the White Turks are framed as responsible for anything that goes wrong in the country (Yilmaz, 2017: 499).

Erdogan’s charismatic leadership played an important role in enabling the AKP to increase its popularity and remain in power (Turk, 2018). He presented himself as the “voice of deprived ‘real people’ and the champion of their interests against the old elites” (Dincsaahin, 2012). He also increased his popularity with the working class through such populist acts as having his hair “cut in the poor neighbourhood where he grew up,” which helped to show that his “newly acquired power has not changed him” (Kirdiş and Drhimeur, 2016: 606). Erdogan’s peculiar populist style carried important similarities with Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa’s in Venezuela and Ecuador, respectively (Selcuk, 2016). Castaldo (2018), on the other hand, claims that Erdogan’s populism has allowed him to acquire unchecked control over state institutions and use this power

against the opposition.

The AKP has been particularly successful in harnessing the negative emotions of the Turkish public. Yilmaz, for example, notes that negative emotions such as fear have been the dominant constitutive components of modern Turkish nationhood and among the deep conviction of Turkey’s nation-builders, who attempted to create a homogenous nation of desired citizens by assimilating or eliminating ethnic, religious, and political minorities (Yilmaz, 2021a). Yilmaz argues that the AKP draws upon “fear, anger, rage, desire to own the homeland forever,” a “need for a smile,” a desire to “sacrifice blood for the country, and desire to enjoy freedom of the God-worshipping nation,” along with feelings of “victimhood, resentment and siege mentalities” (Yilmaz, 2021a: 3) in order to build its political power and support for Erdogan’s rule.

Erdogan’s populism also carried an anti-institutionalist attitude. He opposed horizontal accountability structures such as the judiciary and the Constitutional Court and blamed them for the ills of society. Erdogan asserted the moral and normative supremacy of the national will (Yabancı, 2016; Selcuk, 2016), and, acting as if he was the embodiment of the national will, he vilified his critics such as Kurdish nationalists and Gulenists, as traitors and the “enemies of the state” (Gencoglu-Onbasi, 2016).

In Pakistan, Imran Khan “rose to power on a classic populist platform” by presenting his party as the

non-corrupt alternative to Pakistan's two biggest political parties of the era, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) (Afzal, 2019: 1). With anti-Western and pro-Taliban rhetoric, Khan's populism has been labelled both left wing and right wing. For example, his pro-poor social welfare policies draw from the left, and so, too, does his foreign policy, which aims at reducing dependence on the West (Yilmaz, 2020). Based on an assessment of the 2018 elections that brought Khan into power in Pakistan, Shah describes Pakistan as having a "pseudo-democratic façade covering the reality of continued military tutelage" (2019: 128). There continues to be criticism of Khan's populism as not being pure because of the military backing during and after the 2018 elections. This is mainly because military dictators directly ruled the country for nearly three decades, and the military continues to sustain its influence in domestic politics (Ganguly, 2009), as well as the fact that the Khan government has been close to the military leadership (Afzal, 2019).

There are many examples which show how the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) government benefited military leadership. This includes the much-criticized case of the current army chief's extension in 2019 (Afzal, 2019). In addition, there are numerous examples of former military generals taking up civilian jobs. For example, a retired brigadier was declared the head of the National Database and Registration Authority (Pakistan Today, 2021). In 2019, a former three-star general was appointed to head

the newly established China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority, a former air marshal to head Pakistan International Airlines, and a two-star general to head the country's space agency. Citing these and many more examples, critics of the PTI government call it a "puppet" of Pakistan's army (Khan, 2021).

Imran Khan, whilst in office, was certainly supported by the military; however, this does not contradict his populist character. In fact, military establishments have historically supported right-wing populists in other countries, including Brazil and Mexico (Scharpf, 2020; Yilmaz and Saleem, 2021). Imran Khan is another example of a military establishment deciding to support a populist party in a win-win situation, in which the military establishment maintains its unconstitutional power vis-à-vis civilian authorities, and the populist party gains necessary political power in a highly fragmented political environment.

Since the start of his political career, Khan has targeted the opposition parties—the PML-N and PPP—as the corrupt elites (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2022; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021a; 2021b). Khan's Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) has also targeted other political parties/leadership as friends of the West and India. One key aspect of Khan's populism is antagonism towards the global powers and the West, especially the US. Like Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Khan consistently emphasizes an anti-imperialist discourse in his speeches and statements. Pakistan, according to Khan, has always been subservient to foreigners: first the

British and then the Americans. At the heart of Khan's rhetoric is an emphasis on Pakistan's sovereignty—the idea that Pakistan should be an independent nation unaffected by foreign influence (Aslam, 2015).

Khan emphasized the concept of “Islamic socialism” to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Pakistani Muslim population. As such, Khan's “most fervent new supporters were the poor and working class of Karachi” (Judah, 2018). His emphasis on “Islamic socialism” helped him to dismiss the policies implemented by former Pakistani politicians and elites. For Khan, “the corrupt political elite is trying to protect itself. We have hit rock bottom. The poor are getting poorer, and a tiny number of people are getting richer” (Campbell, 2018). Benefitting from rampant anti-Westernism in Pakistan, Khan has also advocated for the revival of Islamic values. This has been reflected through his infatuation with the Muslim-era under the Ottoman Empire as well as broadcasting a famous Turkish soap opera, *Dirilis Ertugrul* (English: *Resurrection Ertugrul*), which airs with Urdu dubbing on Pakistan Television (MEM, 2020).

Besides using religion in domestic politics, Khan's foreign policy is also inspired by Islamic identity. Khan associated himself with historical religious figures with references to the Ottoman Empire and the state of Medina dating back to the era of Prophet Muhammad (Bukhari, 2018). Taggart (2004) believes that this kind of association with religious figures also helps bolster support in the populist religious “heartland.”

Other issues that were prominent in the PTI's agenda were linked to the ‘War on Terror’ and how that had brought both losses and shame to Pakistan (Aslam, 2015). For Imran Khan, ‘puppet governments’ in Pakistan received US aid which, in turn, destroyed the country (Jeffries, 2011). In contrast, Khan has portrayed the PTI as a party with ‘pure’ intentions for the country and an antagonistic stance toward the ‘West.’ For example, before being elected to office, Khan promised that he would not, unlike past governments, take the “begging bowl” to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Bokhari, 2019). In addition, during the US’ Afghanistan withdrawal, Khan made clear that Pakistan would “absolutely not” allow its airbases to be used by the US (Zompa, 2021).

Populism is becoming increasingly influential in the Muslim world, particularly in Muslim democracies. Turkey and Pakistan were, for some time, considered as model democracies in the Muslim world. However, as the AKP experience showed, when combined with populism, Muslim democracies may falter. It appears that Pakistan is following a similar trajectory with Imran Khan increasingly using populist rhetoric to erode democratic institutions. Comparing these two cases makes sense—not only because of such similarities between them, but also because the insights gained from this exercise can be applied to other cases in the Muslim world, such as Malaysia, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Morocco.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POPULISTS IN POWER



Hugo Chavez is seen during his last campaign for presidency. **Photo: Luis Arismendi**

Between 1990 and 2018, the number of populists in power around the world has increased a remarkable fivefold, from four to 20. This includes countries not only in Latin America and in Eastern and Central Europe—where populism has traditionally been most prevalent—but also in Asia and Western Europe. (Kyle and Gultchin, 2018). There is a new and growing literature on populists in power, thanks to the increasing electoral success of populist parties and leaders in the Western world. The literature in Europe has mainly focused on populist political parties, since the European political system is mainly dominated by political parties (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2007, 2015; Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Pappas, 2014, 2019; Enyedi and Whitefield, 2021; Schwörer, 2021).

Whether these parties are successful at fulfilling their promises remains unknown. However, there is no doubt that they can sustain their respective governments in power, sometimes over long periods. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2007, 2015) investigated Lega Nord in Italy and PDL in Switzerland in this respect. Both parties were junior coalition members in broader conservative-ruling coalition governments for several years. These otherwise marginal right-wing parties have become acceptable partners for mainstream parties in government. The authors' findings contradict the abovementioned consensus and reveal that these populist parties are neither inevitably episodic nor are they destined to failure in government.

They can introduce key policies in line with their core ideologies and election promises. They can focus on the issues that their supporters care about. They may also increase their votes once in government and learn from their previous experiences and mistakes in power.

Nonetheless, these parties face a peculiar dilemma in power: they may need to let go of their flashy, uncompromising style and learn how to make compromises in politics. Moreover, choosing to participate in government alongside other parties requires them to field suitable candidates for bureaucratic positions in the government, a resource that they may not have.

The literature shows that populists in power, as in the case of Rafael Correa in Ecuador (De la Torre and Ortiz, 2016) “can act strategically and consistently to both head off and undermine possible opposition.” Correa has been able to co-opt political actors by bringing them into the regime and by establishing an informal alliance with a great part of the business community. He also attacked social movement organizations and political activists and has been at war against privately owned media and created state-owned media outlets that are sympathetic to the government and its populist discourse. Correa also kept alive the populist myth of the people confronting powerful elites by constantly campaigning, establishing a ‘permanent campaign.’ Correa’s project was also built on the notions of national sovereignty, critiques of US imperialism, and attempts

to create alternative supranational Latin American institutions without US influence.

Correa is continuing a rich vein of Latin American populism of which Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez is the most recent prominent example. Originally, ‘Chavismo’ was a democratic response to widespread failures of democratic governance such as corruption and inequality. As Hawkins (2016) argues, Chavez’s populism was “unusually intense and consistent.” Similar to Correa, Chavez’s populism was consistent in that it manifested high levels of populism from Chavez’s first days as a democratic politician until his death as an autocrat. He consistently followed an aggressive foreign policy against US imperialism in Latin America and led the ALBA initiative that brought together leftist, populist Latin American governments—such as Correa’s—for this purpose.

Traveling across the Atlantic, Batory (2016) argues that in contrast to populist right-wing parties in Western Europe, Fidesz was the major, mainstream centre-right alternative party in Hungary for two decades. This is similar to the mainstream centre-right phenomenon in Turkey. During the 2000s, Fidesz refashioned itself into a vote-winning machine based on its claim to be champion of the common people’s interests against foreign interests. After gaining a majority in the government in 2010, Fidesz single-handedly adopted a new constitution and electoral law that curtailed the power of the independent judiciary, media, and civil society organizations. Fidesz utilized now-well-known populist narratives

that portrayed the country's external enemies as conspiring with domestic forces wanting to pull the country back to a discredited, dark past. The party identified elitism and liberalism as its 'other.'

These cases show that populists can remain popular in government without moderating their rhetoric or falling apart, and in fact, they might well own too many issues to diffuse or mimic their appeal.

For this comparative analysis of populist governments in power in Turkey and Pakistan, we present a theoretical framework focusing on their Promises, their Compromises, and their Attacks on Democratic Institutions. Our framework fits the performative-relational approach toward populism. The three-dimensional analysis promises an intellectually rigorous framework for this study.

PROMISES

To examine how populists behave in power and what makes that behaviour distinctive, we start with looking at their promises during election campaigns. 'Promise of fullness' is an important component of populist performance (Ostiguy et al., 2021). Populist performance promises to remove obstacles that prevent the community from redemption. While making promises is a normal trait of electoral politics, populist promises are different due to populists' rejection of any limits on their claims to embody the will of the people (Espejo, 2015: 61), the contradictory character of their

promises, and populists' propensity to make grandiose promises characterized by quick fixes to major issues.

An important 'promise' that populists make involves bringing 'democracy,' i.e. 'power to the people.' They favour 'direct democracy' and promise to put 'the people' in power, at the expense of technocrats and the political establishment. They promise a better world through action by the sovereign people—and that they can deliver on this promise, because they belong to the people (rather than the establishment). This usually means getting things done through majoritarianism. In making this claim, populists overlook the fact that it is not quite possible for 'we, the people' to combine diverse interests and opinions into a coherent collective will. Despite populist leaders' claims to the contrary, divisions remain within societies in terms of opinions, interests, and aspirations.

Populist promises are also characterized by bombastic rhetoric and grandiosity that often sounds too good to be true. Nonetheless, whether it's promises of sweeping economic development or quick fixes to major problems, populists catch voters' attention—and in some cases, their votes. For example, when Hugo Chavez came to power in Venezuela in 1998, he promised to eradicate corruption and tackle the country's pressing economic problems, including poverty and social inequality. By 2015, Venezuela was languishing in one of the biggest economic crises in Latin American history.

Religion-based, civilisational identity politics is often an element in populist promises and discourses (Yilmaz, Morieson, Demir, 2021; Brubaker, 2017). For example, European right-wing populists often claim that Muslim immigration places Judeo-Christian values under threat from migrants who fail to assimilate (Morieson, 2021; Cap, 2018; Zúquete, 2017; Ádám and Bozóki, 2016; Baker-Brian, 2011). Simultaneously, populists also promise a solution to the 'crises' if they are voted into power, insofar as they promise to rejuvenate their respective nations by returning to the Judeo-Christian tradition that made it great (Yilmaz, Morieson, Demir, 2021; Damhuis, 2019).

This trend of promising to restore the homeland to its lost glory while 'otherizing' segments of society is found outside the West, too. The 'saffron tide' in India and East Asia has seen local politicians instrumentalize Hinduism and Buddhism (Artinger and Rowand, 2021; Jayasinghe, 2021; Chatterji et al., 2020; McDonnell and Cabrera, 2019; Peker, 2019). In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has, for the last two terms, created an antagonistic environment for non-Hindus and most of its discriminatory policies—from 'love jihad' to citizenship laws—are justified by claims that they are part of the revival of the great and ancient Hindu kingdoms (Saleem, Yilmaz and Chacko, 2021; Saleem, 2021). Muslim democracies have also seen an increase in populist politicians using religiously driven crises and promises (Yilmaz, 2021a; Yilmaz, Morieson, Demir, 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021c).

COMPROMISES

Populist leaders demand transparency; they denounce backroom deals, shady compromises, complicated procedures, secret treaties, and technicalities that only experts can understand. They abhor pragmatic party politics and its compromises. These issues tap into a deep vein of public disillusionment with the political establishment. Moreover, the polarising and divisive nature of populist appeals prevent negotiations and compromise among contending political actors (Panizza and Stavrakakis, 2021). Moreover, populism presents a Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not simply people with different priorities and values; they are evil. Populism's black-and-white views and uncompromising stance inevitably leads to a polarised society, and its majoritarian attitude denies legitimacy to opponents' views, weakening the rights of minorities.

Consistency would require that populists continue this uncompromising stance once ensconced in power. However, once in power, populists are bound by the same structural limitations and necessities that affect all mainstream parties. This means that they must negotiate with other parties, groups, and countries in an increasingly interdependent environment. Once in power, populists pursue pragmatic, opportunistic policies that go against their promises of radical change, and they make compromises with the domestic and international actors that they previously criticized.

Populists also do not abstain from making compromises to their 'enemies' once they are in power. Populism is a thin ideology that divides society into two opposing camps, the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite' (Mudde, 2017). Populists create enemies in their discourses during election cycles. Despite their idealistic claims otherwise, populists are political actors who pursue power. Once in power, their main goal is to stay in power, which requires them to make pragmatic decisions, including compromises. In this context, populists make 'friends' or 'allies' from some of their previously declared 'enemies' for the sake of gaining political favours.

Research on populism also point at populists' pragmatic and opportunistic approach to political issues and concepts once they are in power. Populists in power have a similar incentive structure to all other politicians. As such, they strive to stay in power as much as possible. To do so, they are willing to ignore their earlier promises and make compromises to their designated 'enemies' if they consider this to be necessary. In order to generate an illusion of consistency for their followers, populists in power usually implement non-radical policies and try to masque them with radical rhetoric.

ATTACKS ON DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

As mentioned above, the populist leader's style generally challenges socio-cultural standards of 'proper behaviour,' (Ostiguy et. al 2021) hence low politics and is characterised by "bad manners" (Moffitt, 2016). The bad (subversive) manners of the populist finds resonance in their "dirty institutionality" when they are in power. The dirty institutionality refers to personalism, decisionism, rule-erosion, and antagonism (Panizza et al, 2020). Levitsky and Loxton (2013) argue that populism—the election of a personalistic outsider who mobilizes voters with an anti-establishment appeal—is a major catalyst for the emergence of competitive authoritarianism. Lacking experience with representative democratic institutions, possessing an electoral mandate to destroy the existing elite, and facing institutions of horizontal accountability controlled by that elite, populists have an incentive to launch plebiscitary attacks on institutions of horizontal accountability. Where they succeed, weak democracies almost invariably slide into competitive authoritarianism. Thus, populists in power invariably attack democratic institutions. As a recent report by Grzymala-Busse et al. (2020: 1) mentioned, "Populists undermine formal institutions such as the courts, legislatures, and regulatory agencies as creations of the 'corrupt elite.' As winners of democratic elections, they fail to constrain themselves and instead hollow out and politicize formal institutions of liberal democracy."

In this article, we will focus on three sets of institutions that populists most famously attack: the judiciary (the Constitution, regulatory agencies, laws, judges, lawyers), the media, (media organizations, journalists, the internet, social media), and civil society (NGOs, INGOs, trade unions). Our discussion will focus specifically on how Erdogan and Khan attacked, captured, and/or dismantled these institutions. In our discussion, we will examine how specifically the populism of these actors informed their actions and led to their eventual success at corrupting these institutions. In particular, we will discuss populists' politicization, capture, and hollowing out of the institutions.



Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman, Imran Khan addresses to public meeting held at Shahi Bagh in Peshawar, Pakistan on May 27, 2015. Photo: Awais Khan

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POPULISTS IN TURKEY AND PAKISTAN

PROMISES

A notorious trope of populist discourse is the promise of ‘direct democracy,’ with populists framed as direct representatives of ‘the people.’ In Turkey, Erdogan is notorious for constantly articulating such statements contrasting himself and his party to the Kemalists, which he considers the elitist, anti-religious group. During various election cycles, Erdogan referred to himself and supporters as ‘Black Turks’ (who were wronged by the elites, by the ‘White Turks’ who tend to be Kemalist and secular). The trope of the Black Turk is well-worn ground for Erdogan, a staple of his self-branding as the great outsider who is removed from the politics of 20th century one-party rule and corruption. He has continuously invoked victimhood narratives that hail the conservative Turks (his base) as the real people who historically suffered under the Kemalist secularist

regime (Demiralp, 2012; Yilmaz, 2021). The general notion is that conservative Turks in Turkey have historically been victimized by the Kemalist elites.

In his bid to promote Turkey as a ‘great power,’ and—more importantly—himself as a great leader, Erdogan also criticized the structure of the UN Security Council that is composed of five major powers (the US, Russia, China, France, and the UK) for failing to represent the oppressed people of the world, including (and, again, most importantly) Muslims. He has famously declared, on countless occasions, that “the world is greater than five” (in reference to the five members of the UNSC). He has also exclaimed that “the world is greater than five; it is certainly greater than one [referring to the US].”

Moreover, sweeping, lofty promises have been the staple of Erdogan’s—and the AKP’s—election campaigns. On numerous occasions

since 2010, Erdogan and the AKP promised to make Turkey one of top 10 economies in the world. Erdogan and the AKP also made promises of producing national cars, airplanes, and jet fighters—even falsely declaring on several occasions that they have already been produced. In the 2011 parliamentary election cycle, the AKP put adverts in many cities that declared “Our National Airplane is in the Air.” The AKP made further announcements about the “National Airplane,” this time called the TRJET, in the 2015 election cycle, claiming that it will be in air by late 2019. However, no step has been taken even to make a factory yet (Evrensel, 2019).

In Pakistan, Khan has often claimed that as a Western educated and famous cricketer, he could have easily chosen to live a life of luxury but instead chose to serve the people. He promised to live a “simple life” after becoming the prime minister and has portrayed himself as living simply by selling his luxury cars (Klasra, 2018). Equally, he presents himself as a common citizen who wears simple non-Western clothing and is connected to the lower segments of society.

Promises of quick fixes and sweeping economic development have been a standard part of Khan’s discourse. His big promise has been to build a New Pakistan (Naya Pakistan), which has several components: fixing the status quo of destructive politics, never seeking compromises for the sake of power, never compromising on the principles of justice and change, building an Islamic welfare state, and entrenching

the rule of law (PTI, 2018: 6-7). The constant references to Riyasat-e-Madina demonstrate a religion-based populist approach through which Khan has been promoting the idea of a “sacred” Islamic welfare system to address the grievances of people failed by the previous “corrupt” rulers (Hassan, 2020; Yilmaz, Morieson and Demir, 2021). While speaking in favour of tax reforms by his government, he stated, “All successful societies are run by people making money [and] paying taxes and those being spent on health and education; that is the state of Medina” (Dawn, 2020a). Another dimension of Khan’s Islamist promises features a ‘moral’ society. Over the course of his premiership, he emphasised the “moral corruption” of youth under alleged Western influences. For instance, talking about rising sex crimes in the country, Khan blamed Hollywood: “I gradually realised that we have scholarship to determine where [do these crimes stem from]. They come from Hollywood, then move to Bollywood and the same culture is later adopted by our people” (Express Tribune, 2021).

In another controversial interview Khan blamed the West for spreading the trend of divorce and open sexuality, which he termed a danger to Pakistani youth and society: “When I was 18, I went to Britain for the first time; it wasn’t the society it has now become. It was the beginning of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. I saw it with my own eyes as the immorality increased. First with adult films that started spreading widely. It started appearing in the media. What happened with that? There was a direct impact on the family system”

(Bol TV, 2021).

As part of his promised Riyasat-e-Madina, he promised the nation a pious youth inspired by the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad that would counter these “Western” influences (Geo TV, 2021).

Khan also promised to end corruption in 19 days and terrorism in 90 days once he came to power (The Express Tribune, 2012). Additionally, he would bring “back every single penny of the looted money from the corrupt political leaders” (The News, 2020). On several occasions, he blamed former ruling parties for taking turns for corruption (Zafar and Karni, 2018). Referring to them during the election campaign of 2018, Khan said, “the self-proclaimed kings go abroad and buy palaces and expensive properties. They siphon funds from here, and their kids sit abroad on billions in businesses” (The News, 2018). Since his ousting from office following a non-confidence vote, Khan has increasingly linked the PPP- and PML-N-led coalition with the historical figures of Mir Jaffar and Mir Saddique[1] (Dawn, 2022a). In one of the many addresses, where he used the term “boot polisher” to describe the current Prime Minister, Khan said: “Have some shame, Shehbaz Sharif. You are the Mir Jafar that I talk about” (Dawn, 2022a).

He has promised ‘the people’ that he would hold the ‘imported government’ accountable for acting as “stooges” for “foreign” governments (Express Tribune, 2022; Iwanek, 2022). Khan’s rationale behind losing power rests on an explanation

in which he blames internal “traitors” and “Western forces,” who he claims are the civilizational enemies of the Muslim population of Pakistan—and by extension, himself. He has promised revenge against “the traitors” as he continues to pressure for fresh elections, saying: “I’m giving this imported government six days to declare new elections. Otherwise, I will re-enter Islamabad with 2 million people” (Mogul & Saifi, 2022).

Since his removal from office, Khan has been making new promises to hold the corrupt accountable, rid Pakistan of “foreign influences,” and to improve the lives of the common people.

COMPROMISES

Once in power, populists pursue pragmatic, opportunistic policies that go against their promises of radical change. They make compromises to the domestic and international establishment and institutions that they initially criticized. One of the most obvious cases of compromise by the AKP and Erdogan was their alliance with one of the Kemalist establishment parties, the Turkish nationalist MHP, after 2015. For over a decade—since 2002—the MHP was one of the fiercest critics of the AKP and Erdogan. The tacit alliance between the AKP and MHP emerged following the June 2015 elections, in which AKP lost its majority in parliament for the first time. The alliance was made official in 2018 as the “People’s Alliance” to support Erdogan’s election as president of Turkey. This was in stark contrast to

the 2014 presidential elections, when the MHP supported the opposition candidate, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, together with the Kemalist CHP. The AKP's alliance with the MHP is a major U-turn for Erdogan and the party and constitutes a major compromise.

Another one of Erdogan's major U-turns happened in regard to the Ergenekon trials. Started in 2008, the trials included high-profile Kemalist military officials, opposition lawmakers, and members of Kemalist civil society associations who were alleged to have conspired against the ruling AKP by plotting a military coup. Despite serious irregularities regarding the legal proceedings of the case, Erdogan, who once called himself the "prosecutor" of the trials, and the AKP government fervently supported the trials, as they were aimed at Kemalist establishment figures who had long dominated Turkish politics. Nonetheless, Erdogan changed his stance on Ergenekon after his implicit alliance with the faith-based Gulen Movement, which was fully supportive of the problematic legal cases, faltered in late 2013. Not only did Erdogan dismiss the original Ergenekon trials, but he also claimed that it the Gulen Movement became the "neo-Ergenekon" after 2014 (Filkins, 2013; Erdogan, 2014).

In a similar vein, Erdogan's other major U-turn and compromise happened in relation to Israel, as exemplified by the case of the Gaza Flotilla Raid. In 2010, Israel stopped ships from breaking the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip and delivering aid to Gaza. The Turkish-owned ship Mavi Marmara was

caught in a military operation that resulted in the deaths of ten Turkish activists. This raid led to a diplomatic rift between Israel and Turkey that lasted six years. In the wake of the raid, Erdogan asserted that Israel's attack on the Mavi Marmara was a *casus belli* (an act that justifies a war). Rather than making a war against Israel, in 2016, he signed a deal that restored full ambassador-level relations with Israel. In the wake of the agreement, Erdogan this time blamed the organizers of the Gaza freedom flotilla, who criticized the agreement between the two countries.

In Pakistan, Imran Khan has also contradicted his own positions. This has been most visible in relation to his opposition to the Mullahs and how he has dealt with them in politics (Khan, 2011: 53). Despite his clear anti-Mullah stance, Khan decided to form an alliance with the biggest and oldest Islamist party in Pakistan, Jamat-e-Islami, to form a provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that lasted for five years, from 2013-18 (Samaa TV, 2018). During the popular *dharna* (sit-in) in Islamabad in 2014, he formed an alliance with another religious party called the Pakistan Awami Tehreek, led by a cleric, Dr. Tahir ul Qadri (Shahid, 2017). His government led the Islamization of education and curricula: in June 2020, the Punjab government made Quran learning compulsory for university students (Ahmed, 2020).

In Khan's anti-Western rhetoric, a significant focus is on how the West does not understand Islam and how this leads to Islamophobia in the West (Gulf News, 2019b). He has repeatedly

spoken about the oppressed Muslims of Jammu, Kashmir, and Palestine. The Khan government has compared the Modi government's measures in Jammu and Kashmir to the Israeli brutalities against Palestinians (Stone, 2019). As Khan has spoken for the ummah, including Muslims in majority-Muslim and other states, it has come as a surprise that he has completely avoided the issue of the Uighur Muslims of Xinjiang, China (Wescott, 2019). This is another compromise that Khan has made for his survival by instead applauding China for a poverty alleviation program. He's even suggested Pakistan can draw lessons from China (Xinhua, 2019).

Aligned with the party's anti-Western/American agenda was the promise that a Khan-government would not beg the IMF for loans. He once said, "I would rather die than go with a begging bowl to the IMF" (Findlay and Bokhari, 2019). The realities of running the government, however, were tougher than expected—especially the country's dire financial situation. This forced the Khan government to return to the IMF for more loans to address the emergent challenge of balancing payments (Farmer, 2019; Landler, 2009).

Other key ingredients of Khan's populist rhetoric were taxing the rich to give concessions to the lower classes and to bring the corrupt to justice. However, the IMF deal has basically meant more taxes for everyone, including the poor (Bokhari, 2019). The situation under Khan—following the IMF loans—is

not any different, as the middle-class is mainly paying the price of taxation reforms (Shah, 2019). In addition, the local businesses have demonstrated against increased sales taxes as part of the IMF deal (Shams, 2019).

A major compromise for Khan's PTI was visible in its preference for electable politicians leading up to the 2018 elections. Desperate for a victory in the elections, Imran Khan offered seats to experienced politicians with former ruling-party affiliations—including from the parties that Khan claimed had looted the country. A federal minister in Khan's cabinet, Fawad Chaudhry, was a spokesperson for the previous pro-Western Musharraf government and a minister in the left-wing PPP government of Yousaf Raza Gillani (Zaman, 2018). Other prominent names in the PTI government include Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Sheikh Rasheed, both of whom had long political careers in the PPP and right-wing PML-N, respectively.

Khan spoke about reversing his stance on this issue during the election campaign: "You contest elections to win. You don't contest elections to be a good boy. I want to win. I am fighting elections in Pakistan, not Europe. I can't import European politicians" (Rehman, 2018). After the vote of no confidence during the Punjab byelections, PTI is once again making alliances with groups the party once deemed 'corrupt.' For example, Khan formally criticized the Elahi brothers and their party due to their comfortable alliance with the military regime in the early 2000s. However, in 2022, to secure their

influence in the province of Punjab, the PTI nominated Pervaiz Elahi as its candidate for the seat of Chief Minister of Punjab (Naya Daur, 2022). This was a clear contradiction of PTI's call to eliminate corrupt politicians and shows their newfound acceptance of members of the former regime once labelled "pro-West" by Khan (Sareen, 2022).

DIRTY INSTITUTIONALISM

Once they are in power, populists attack formal institutions of democracy such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society; they politicize them, evacuate them, and eventually capture them from within. This process has been apparent both in Turkey and Pakistan, with the former completing the erosion of institutions and the latter being at the early stages. Simultaneously, populists also build or support institutions which back them.

Judiciary

In Turkey, the attacks on democratic institutions go back to the early 2000s, when the AKP came to power. During its first decade in power, the AKP worked to undermine political institutions—most importantly the judiciary, which it hoped to capture from within. For Erdogan, the judiciary was a key institution controlled by Kemalists; it needed to be eliminated and captured due to the Kemalist opposition to Islamist politics in Turkey. Indeed, the AKP faced a major closure case in 2008, which further underlined the threat represented by institutions of horizontal accountability. Collaborating with

the Gulenists, Erdogan and the AKP assaulted this crucial branch of state administration with a judicial reform submitted to a popular referendum in 2010. Only two out of 26 amendments stimulated an intense debate, since they were meant to restructure the constitutional court and the Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), enlarging their ranks and setting new selection procedures.

These amendments would put the judiciary under Erdogan's control, since the AKP could pack both organs with loyalists. The amendments were voted on in parliament by the AKP majority and then submitted to a nationwide referendum. Erdogan employed a populist, anti-establishment appeal, which divided society between 'the people' supporting the reform and 'the elite' opposing it. He presented the reform as a new tool to empower the nation and to hold secularists accountable. He depicted the opposition as a "coalition of evil," which could not agree on any issue except the fight against the amendments that would make 'the people' stronger. The referendum result was a success for the AKP, allowing it to pass the necessary amendments to capture the HSYK, a key institution of the judiciary. Erdogan also changed the constitution to switch the governing system from parliamentary to a strong presidential system without credible checks and balances.

In Pakistan, the PTI government and Imran Khan attacked the judiciary with similar populist tropes. The Khan government confronted the judiciary on behalf of the military, which was

behind Khan's success in the last elections. A federal minister from the PTI criticized the judiciary over a death sentence awarded to former Army chief and President General Pervez Musharaf in a treason case (Gulf News, 2019a). Fawad Chaudhry, a federal minister, said, "You pushed the institution [army] against the wall. It is an honour-based institution. If you keep doing this, won't they react?" (Haider and Qayum, 2019). As is clear from the remarks, it was a direct threat to the judiciary.

In another case, the Supreme Court of Pakistan blocked the extension of the current army chief for which approval was granted by the PTI government and Khan (Pal and Shahzad, 2019). Khan stated, "The confidence of the people in the country's judicial system has been shaken and now they are looking towards the PTI government for improvement in the system" (Dawn, 2020b). In April 2022, when the Supreme Court of Pakistan stood by the Assembly's vote of no-confidence, Khan showed his clear discontent with the judiciary. He said: "I was disappointed with the Supreme Court decision, but I want to make it clear that I respect the Supreme Court and Pakistan's judiciary." He continued to weave a conspiracy, blaming the courts as on the side of the "imported" government, adding: "There is a conspiracy from abroad. This is a very serious allegation ... that a foreign country conspired to topple an entire government" (Welle, 2022).

Since April 2022 he has attacked the judiciary and called upon citizens to observe the alleged "foreign conspiracy" he claims ended his time as Prime Minister (ANI, 2022).



The Erdogan regime appointed trustees to Zaman daily in Istanbul on March 4, 2016. A protester chaining hands during freedom of the press protest in front of the Zaman daily.

MEDIA

The media was perhaps Erdogan's most important preoccupation. Erdogan attacked secular, opposition media institutions at virtually every opportunity since he came to power in 2002. He blamed the opposition media for attacking the national will and national values and for being indecent and vulgar. To capture the media, the AKP pursued an elaborate scheme whereby politically connected businesses were supported through the state budget and favourable tenders; these businesses then purchased existing media conglomerates and put them under the AKP and Erdogan's service.

A key example is the Dogan Media group's eventual capture by a pro-AKP businessperson. For

decades, Dogan was the most important player in Turkish media and provided secularist coverage. Dogan media became the key pillar of opposition to the AKP government in the early 2000s. Infuriated by Dogan's opposition, Erdogan started a campaign against his businesses through tax evasion cases and constant bureaucratic harassment, which eventually forced Dogan to sell his media conglomerate. In cases where the opposition media organization was not willing to be sold, Erdogan simply shut it down, arrested the journalists and the owners, and destroyed the organization entirely. Here, the most prominent cases are the Gulen-affiliated media organizations and Ipek media (which was also connected to Gulen) that

were taken over by the government and then completely shut down.

In later years, Erdogan completely colonised the remaining TV and print media outlets; now, with few exceptions, they are firmly under his control. These media outlets “continuously reinforce Erdogan’s worldview and self-projected image as an embattled leader moulding Turkey into a global power” (Tahiroğlu, 2020: 2).

Khan’s rise to power as a populist was attributed to the media’s coverage of his famous sit-in. Many private TV channels provided live coverage of the PTI dharna (sit-in) in 2014. Therefore, many were shocked to see how his government curtailed media freedom. Through various restrictions, such as censorship, the PTI government showed that it was against any criticism of its policies and actions. Through the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), the PTI government also issued a directive stopping TV news from sharing their personal views, which was declared a punishable offence (Ellis-Petersen and Baloch, 2019). PEMRA and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) have also been blamed for following the government’s agenda in targeting certain media houses: for example, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, the head of the biggest media group in Pakistan, the Jang Group, was arrested by NAB on corruption charges in March 2020. Following the arrest, PEMRA directed local cable operators to shutdown Geo TV (Geo News, 2020).

Imran Khan’s time in office saw

a rise in efforts to control all forms of the media, including print, electronic, and social, especially through the newly formed Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority. This desire was reflected in his remarks on local media at the World Economic Forum where he said that the Pakistani media is “free” and “vibrant” but also “crosses the line” often (Mahbubani, 2020). Since the Khan government was criticized through social media, it approved a bill in February 2020—“the Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules 2020”—to control social media. Many believed the bill was used to “stifle dissent and free speech.” The language of the bill was ambiguous, as the new social media restrictions aim to also prevent the live streaming of content on “terrorism, extremism, hate speech, defamation, fake news, incitement to violence and national security” (Al Jazeera, 2020). Local journalists and human rights groups have criticized such reforms. A journalist based in Islamabad argued that the international community needs to “force Pakistan’s hybrid civil-military regime to stop this continued crushing of normal free speech in the country” (Rehman, 2020). In July 2020, a prominent journalist and critic of the military and the government, Matiullah Jan, was kidnapped in broad daylight but later released. Jan blamed the security and intelligence agencies for his kidnapping (The Guardian, 2020).

Ironically, once out of office Khan’s attitude towards media oppression has changed. Various pro-PTI advocates on social media have been unconstitutionally arrested and abducted by the state due to critical

remarks they made regarding the military (Dawn, 2022b). The very laws that the PTI put into place are now being used against its supporters, to whom Khan is dismissive (Daily Times, 2022). In addition, he remarked that social media was the carrier of truth and urged his supporters to follow his social media accounts for current and direct news from the party and himself (Khan, 2022).

CIVIL SOCIETY

It is well-known that, especially since the Gezi Protests of 2013, Erdogan has constantly attacked civil society organizations that represent non-AKP interests, particularly those who oppose his rule or those packed by people who dislike Islamism. These have included prominent secularist organizations such as Atatürkist Thought Association, Association for the Support of Contemporary Living, and various socialist organizations and labour unions.

During his first 10 years in power, Erdogan verbally attacked these organizations for being elitist, anti-people, anti-Muslim, and against the national will. After the mysterious coup attempt in 2016, he intensified his crackdown against the liberal and leftist journalists, such as Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan, Şahin Alpay, Mümtazer Türkone and Nazlı Ilıcak, Ahmet Şık, Can Dündar, Kadri Gürsel, and Osman Kavala. With the Gezi Park trial, he managed to get many more liberal and leftists dissidents imprisoned (Yilmaz and Shipoli, 2022: 326).

When he could not manage to co-opt the pro-Kurdish HDP, he got hundreds of HDP members imprisoned (Yilmaz, Demir, Shipoli, 2022). Almost all mayors of Kurdish municipalities were suspended and replaced with Erdogan loyalists. Hundreds of pro-Kurdish civil society organisations have been declared terrorists and shut down (Yilmaz and Shipoli, 2022: 329). After the mysterious coup attempt, about 150,000 people were detained and more than half a million people have been prosecuted on terrorism charges. Universities, private schools, thousands of civil society institutions, hundreds of media outlets, including TV stations, newspapers, news agencies, and radio stations were either shut down or turned into Erdogan's mouthpieces (Yilmaz and Erturk, 2021: 1531-1532)

Moreover, Erdogan established his own so-called civil society organizations to propagate his views and raise a new generation loyal to him and his party. AKP-controlled religious and CS organizations such as TURGEV and Ensar started to work together with state institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and Diyanet, to provide religious and educational services funded by public resources (Yabancı, 2019).

In Pakistan, the Imran Khan government expanded attacks against civil society organizations. Channelling anger over the US's bin Laden operation in 2011, attacks on both local and international NGOs intensified, as local intelligence believed the Save the Children NGO provided intelligence to the US (Boone,

2015). There are new regulations and security checks which have already forced several international organizations to shut down their operations in Pakistan. Under the Khan government, such measures expanded, as a notice was issued to 18 international organizations, including ActionAid in October 2018, to leave Pakistan (Sayeed, 2018). The Ministry of the Interior said such prominent international NGOs posed a threat to national security and were “anti-state agents” (Asad and Khattak, 2018). The government also expanded such restrictions to target members of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), a civil society movement critical of the army’s role in the ‘War on Terror.’ A case was also lodged by the Federal Investigation Authority against Gulalai Ismail, a prominent member from a local NGO, Aware Girls, for allegedly receiving millions from India. It was claimed that her organization was involved in suspicious activities (The

News, 2019).

The PTI also actively supported Islamist agendas. These involved mandating religious studies (Islamic studies) at all levels of tertiary education, mandating Quran and Hadith learning classes in educational institutions, and introducing special moral development courses for undergraduates based on the life of Prophet Muhammad (Geo TV, 2021; Hoodbhoy, 2020). One of the most extensive centralized curriculum development initiatives spearheaded under the PTI government was the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which was highly controversial due to perceptions that it was indoctrinating students with the PTI’s ideals (Mahar, 2021; Vinayak, 2021; Torwali, 2020).

CONCLUSION

As the cases of Fidesz in Hungary, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela showed, populists can remain in power through strategic manoeuvring. Taking their examples as a basis, this paper compared the ruling populist governments in Turkey and Pakistan. We showed that in Turkey and Pakistan, the ruling governments followed populist political performance that divide society into the 'pure, Muslim people' and the 'corrupt, anti-Muslim others' (also sometimes frames as 'the elite'). Religion, therefore, is important to populists in Turkey and Pakistan and plays an important role in portraying the leader as a sacred figure capable of 'saving' the nation and eliciting emotions in the voting public. In particular, Erdogan and Khan are adept at portraying the political opposition as enemies of Islam and at making promises that link religion and national rejuvenation. However, the paper shows that even these religion-based promises may be disregarded when populists in Turkey and Pakistan need to make compromises to maintain power. This suggests that retaining power and deepening their control over the nation is more important to them than following through on their promises to defend Islam and make their respective nations 'great' by returning to Islamic values and ways of life.

We devised a three-dimensional framework to comparatively examine these ruling religious populists. Our framework focused on populists' promises, their compromises, and their

attacks on democratic institutions. This allowed an examination of how Islamist populists behave in power and how strategic necessities, the realities of governing, and structural constraints shape their policies. We argued that populists make sweeping promises of power to the people and quick fixes to major problems of the country—most famously sweeping economic development—before coming to power. While they may want to retain their uncompromising style and lofty goals, the realities of governing force populists to make serious compromises to their designated 'enemies' and on their values once they are in power. Finally, populists attack formal institutions of democracy such as the judiciary, the media, and civil society; they politicize them, evacuate them, and eventually capture them from within. This study provided a fresh analysis on the impacts of populism on democracy in the Muslim world.

Our findings confirm three aspects of populists in power. First, religious populists in power have a similar incentive structure to all other politicians. As such, they strive to stay in power as much as possible. To do so, they are willing to ignore their earlier promises and make compromises to their designated 'enemies' if they consider this to be necessary. Therefore, the uncompromising attitudes that populists usually convey may not reflect their actual behaviour when in power. As such, it is important to examine political opportunity structures surrounding populist politicians in order to

understand their behaviour. Second, populists' ideological stances tend to be shallow and pragmatic. Based on the necessities of power, their ideological enemies may become friends and vice versa. This means that populists' ideologies are secondary to their pursuit of power. Third, religious populists, like many others, tend to undermine democratic institutions and eventually either capture or dismantle them. This emanates not only from their ideological stances but also the strategic preference to rule through illiberalism.

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[1] These are two historical figures who betrayed their local Nawabs/ Sultans to gain the favor of the British during colonization. Both played a key role in securing British victories over two key Muslim-held territories in India during different time periods.



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