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Contest between leaders of the Ummah: Comparing civilizational populisms of PTI and TLP in Pakistan

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Bios

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ABSTRACT

With the recognition of populism emerging in varied forms across the Global South, the lacuna of research on populism in Asia is gradually filling. Yet, research on populism in Pakistan is still limited and focused mostly on the singular case of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his political party Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf (PTI). There is much lesser attention to the populism of Tahreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right movement-turned-party. This paper addresses this gap by comparing the two cases of populism in Pakistan – PTI and TLP – to outline the similarities and differences in their characterization of “the people,” “the elite” and “the others,” using the framework of civilizational populism. The comparative analysis of public discourse of the leadership of two parties shows an extensive use of civilizational rhetoric by both parties, with varying degrees of religious sloganeering, to cater public support. Civilizational dimension forms an overlay over the vertical-horizontal dimensions of populism. Given that 2023 is the election year in Pakistan and both parties are planning to contest elections, this is a timely piece to warn about the treacherous trajectory taken by Pakistani politics.

INTRODUCTION

With the recognition of populism emerging in varied forms across the Global South, the lacuna of research on populism in Asia is gradually filling. Yet, research on populism in Pakistan is still limited and focused on the singular case of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his political party Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021b). There is much lesser attention to the populism of Tahreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right movement-turned-party, as most studies on TLP focus on its radical Islamism and militancy (Abbas, 2022; Matoi, 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022). TLP, however, does not fit the profile of a militant or terrorist organization. It is a registered political party under Pakistan's electoral laws and has contested elections successfully in 2018, securing third highest percentage of votes in Punjab and two seats in Sindh provincial assembly (Chaudhry, 2018). It also mostly employs democratic methods like public protests to meet its political demands, though the protests are turning more violent over time (Basit, 2020). This paper compares the two cases of populism in Pakistan – PTI and TLP – to outline the similarities and differences in their characterization of “the people,” “the elite” and “the others.”

We chose the three-dimensional structuration of populism by Brubaker (2017, 2020) and Yilmaz and Morieson (2022; 2023) as the framework for this comparative research. Extending the work of Brubaker (2017; 2020), Yilmaz and Morieson (2022) point out how populists pit “the people”

with three categories of non-people, each forming a dimension of populist antagonism. Along vertical dimension, populists use the socioeconomic power structure to define “the people” as plebs who have been ruled by the corrupt elite against their will. Horizontally, they define “the people” through cultural identity and target groups with different cultural identities as “the other.” Brubaker (2017) introduced a third dimension of antagonism where populists go beyond the national boundaries to define “the people” as member of a larger civilization who must compete for power with other civilizations. Borrowing from Huntington's clash of civilization, populists usually define civilization based on religious identity (Yilmaz, Morieson, & Demir, 2021). In a seminal work on the connection between religion and civilizational populism, Yilmaz and Morieson (2023: 291) defined civilizational populism as “a group of ideas that together considers that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people, and society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonist groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’ who collaborate with the dangerous others belonging to other civilizations that are hostile and present a clear and present danger to the civilization and way of life of the pure people.”

For this comparative research, we reviewed the public discourse of the main leadership of PTI and TLP from 2000 till 2023, with focus on how they are referring to the people, the elite and the other in their speeches, statements, and

social media posts. The paper begins with an introduction to the two political parties with a brief overview of their political history. It follows a critical analysis of the civilizational populism of two parties individually and ends with comparative analysis of the two.

Given that 2023 is the election year in Pakistan and both parties are planning to contest elections, this is a timely piece to warn about the treacherous trajectory taken by Pakistani politics. With two of its mainstream political parties raising religious slogans against the West and presenting all political leadership as agents of the enemies of Islam, in a security environment of rising religious militancy and terrorism in the country, Pakistan's future is anything but peaceful.



Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan addresses to his supporters during public gathering held on December 11, 2012 in Lodheran, Pakistan.

PAKISTAN TAHREEK-E-INSAAF

Founded in 1996 by Imran Khan, a cricketer and philanthropist, the PTI is one of the three mainstream political parties of Pakistan. It was founded in a period of political chaos when, owing to the constant intervention of military in the political affairs of the country, the two major political parties Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) were busy throwing each other out of power instead of addressing the issues of poor governance, growing inflation and massive corruption (Batool, 2020). The voter turnout in 1993 and 1997 elections was a record low, showing that public support to the political system was in decline. At that moment, Imran Khan tried to present his party as a third force that can offer fresh blood to the dying political body (Batool, 2020).

The slogan of change did not work, and the party could only win one seat in the 1997 general elections. With military coup of General Pervez Musharraf in 1999, the PTI tried to grab public support through anti-establishment slogans built mainly around criticism of Pakistan's decision to support the US government in war against terrorism. Targeting both the main political leadership and the military leadership for their inability to serve masses and appeasing Western powers, Khan's politics took a strong anti-elitist and anti-American turn during Musharraf period.

In the second half of 2010s, as agitation against Musharraf's liberal policies saw a rise, the PTI emerged as an important political actor, organizing massive rallies in Pakistan's urban centers (Paracha, 2019).

It could tap into the apolitical segments of societies such as middle-class urban women and young educated voters (Mulla, 2017). In 2013 elections, it received second highest number of votes and third highest number of seats in the national assembly. In addition, the party was voted in power in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) – the Pashtun dominated province bordering Afghanistan – reflecting the success of Khan's discourse against the war on terror. As an opposition in the center, PTI gave a new peak to its populist politics, organizing protests and long march against the PML-N government.

The 2013 elections brought a major shift in both the political sloganeering of the party and its make-up. After being unable to win majority seats in the 2013 elections, Khan extensively used horse trading to chip off senior politicians from other political parties – a practice known in Pakistan as “politics of electable” (Islam et al., 2019). Meanwhile, he started adding religious references in his talk more explicitly and frequently (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021b). Khan's anti-elitist rhetoric targeted specifically the dynastic political parties while he excluded the military establishment from his definition of “the elite” – a sign that he was trying to win the support of establishment. The experiment worked, with PTI scoring major victory in 2018 elections, forming government in center as well as Punjab and KP provinces. Imran Khan became the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. However, upon coming to power, the party mostly failed in addressing the economic and governance issues in the

country and was ousted from power in 2022 through a parliamentary no-confidence motion against Imran Khan. Currently, Khan has restarted his dharna (protest) politics and is demanding early elections after dissolving assemblies of Punjab and KP (Rafiq, 2023). In the current environment of political instability, economic turmoil and growing insecurity, Khan has good odds to come back to power (Batool, 2022).



Khadim Hussain Rizvi, head of religious political party Tehreek Labaik Pakistan, speaks to supporters during a protest against the Dutch politician Geert Wilders in Lahore on August 29, 2018. Photo: A.M. Syed.

TAHREEK-E-LABBAIK PAKISTAN

A relatively new political contender, TLP is a Barelvi (a Sunni sect) party born from a movement to protect Mumtaz Qadri, the assassin of then Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer in 2011 (Batool, 2021a). Taseer was a strong proponent of revising the blasphemy laws, as he believed the laws were used to persecute non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects. He was campaigning for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman alleged to have committed blasphemy. Qadri, who was a government employee serving as a security guard of Taseer, justified his actions claiming the governor of Punjab had committed blasphemy by advocating for Asia Bibi (Yilmaz & Saleem, 2021). Following Qadri's arrest, Khadim Rizvi, a Barelvi Muslim

cleric having strong following in Punjab, established the Tehreek Rihai Mumtaz Qadri (a movement for the release of Mumtaz Qadri) naming Qadri the Mujahid of Islam (Maṭoi, 2021; Yusuf, 2019; Sevea, 2018). The movement got intensified after the judicial execution of Mumtaz Qadri, was renamed as Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasoolallah (TLYP), and later adopted its current title of TLP (Sabat et al., 2020). The party was led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi till his death in 2020. Since the death of Rizvi, the party's leadership has passed on to his eldest son Hafiz Saad Hussain Rizvi.

Unlike other Islamists parties, TLP has shown a remarkable electoral performance, receiving third highest number of votes from Punjab in 2018 elections and winning two seats in Sindh Assembly

is far better performance than any other religious political party contesting elections for the first time. Moreover, the party has been able to showcase its strength through street power. The main success of these protests is the one-point agenda built around any sensitive religious issue such as the finality of prophethood or sanctity of Islamic personalities and symbols. Although there are some rumors of the decline in party's popularity, mainly after its inability to secure much success in by-elections of 2022 (Yousufzai, 2023), the party's political presence is evident through its public rallying and its strong social media campaigning.

CIVILIZATIONAL POPULISM OF PTI

While Imran Khan established PTI in 1996, he added Islamist populism in its political discourse during the late 2000s, when Pakistan was transitioning from its latest military dictatorship to a democracy (Batool, 2023). It coincided with the bitter impacts of 9/11, particularly of the “war on terror” in Afghanistan and the birth of the global wave of Islamophobia. Because of Pakistan's involvement in the war on terror, the country had lost some 83,000 lives while its economy was drained of some \$126 billion (Jamal, 2021). This hefty economic and human burden provided Khan the ideal space to play the role of an anti-Western and pro-Muslim voice.

As the Afghan conflict spilled over into Pakistan, Khan openly started to defend the Taliban and blamed “the West” for its militarized actions. He considered the presence of US airbases in Pakistan as an issue of tarnished sovereignty and vowed

to end “foreign” influence from the country (Afzal, 2019; Bokhari, 2019; Khan, 2021). For him, the Taliban were jihadist heroes who are indulged in a “holy war” by trying to reclaim their home and faith from the “foreigners” or “colonists” (Boone, 2012; Ellis-Petersen, 2021; Muzaffar, 2021). This explicit support to the Taliban earned him the title of “Taliban Khan,” which is a symbol of pride and “resistance” for him (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021a & 2021b)

The civilizational political framework also started mirroring in Khan's domestic politics – he called politicians in power “puppets” or “stooges” of the United States, who were letting the Western powers kill Pakistani and Afghan Muslims through drone attacks. He constantly criticized “the elite” for taking the “begging bowl” to the IMF which turn Pakistanis into “slaves” and the country into a “puppet state” (Business Standard, 2023; The Express Tribune, 2023). Khan vowed never to bend before the Western powers (Kari, 2019).

After PTI formed its first provincial government in KP in 2013, Khan coined the idea of “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan), which encompasses all dimensions of PTI's populism relaying heavily on Islamist civilizationalism. On the horizontal dimension, Khan presented “Naya Pakistan” as one where Islam is a model for all aspects of life and where people are not “misguided” by Western ideas. He held that the only solution to all issues faced by Pakistan is by embracing the ‘true’ ideals of Islam thus, making Pakistan a homeland for Islamic civilization. On the vertical dimensions, Khan argued that he would bring the

“looted” wealth of Pakistan from the bank accounts of Europe (Ahmed, 2022; OCCPR, 2018). Once returned, this would fund “New Pakistan,” while an import driven economy would sustain long-term development. This silver bullet solution was a dream come true for voters. The hero worshippers of “idol smashers” now had a contemporary hero who would free them from the influence of Judeo-Christian “civilization” and their alleged ill intentions (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021a & 2021b).

The anti-corruption campaign to “empty” the “Swiss bank accounts” of PPP and PML-N leadership grew aggressive amidst the Panama Papers leaks (Cheema, 2018). Interestingly, PTI’s demand for accountability from political elite had an Islamist angle. PTI used the constitutional article 62(1), introduced by Zia regime for Islamization of Pakistani constitution, to declare that “corrupt mafias” of Pakistan are no more eligible to hold office because they do not fulfil the criteria of being “Sadiq” and “Ameen.” The court ruling based on this article resulted in life-time disqualification of Nawaz Sharif just a few days before the 2018 elections. Not surprisingly, PTI was finally able to score electoral victory in 2018.

Upon coming to power, PTI remodeled its populist vision for “New Pakistan” on Riyasat-i-Madina – an Islamist populist utopia rooted in the lost, idealized and fictionalized society of the first city state established by the Prophet (Shaukat, 2021). In this version of a promised land, Khan used a dash of nostalgia to mobilize a largely Muslim society around resurrecting the “lost” golden

Muslim age.

Khan fashioned himself as a leader of the Muslim world and not just Pakistan (Yilmaz & Morieson, 2021). He advocated for a transnational Islamic order hosting OIC summit of the Council of Foreign Minister in Pakistan. He also used his social media and international platforms to highlight the victimhood of the Ummah (Muslim Nation). During his time in office, he called out increasing incidents of Islamophobia in the West and labelled bans on hijab as “secular extremism” (Raza, 2021; United Nations, 2020).

His Islamization project was aimed at alienating masses from their cultural lineage and connecting them with the Arab society, equating Middle Eastern culture with Islamic culture. While in power, Khan promoted “Muslim content,” importing and mainstreaming pan-Islamist and neo-Ottomanist shows from Turkey (Hoodbhoy, 2020a). At the same time, he pushed local media to feature “Muslim heroes” and “educate” the youth about Islam (The News, 2021). Following this policy, in 2021, the Imran Khan-led government launched a National Amateur Short Film Festival (NASFF), with the aim to promote “soft image” of Pakistan. In the prize award ceremony of NASFF, Khan stated: *“Speaking English and wearing Western clothes does not project a soft image, it only speaks of an inferiority complex... Soft image is projected through self-reliance... So, first respect yourself and the world will respect you in turn”* (The News 2021).

At the same time, the Pakistan

Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) banned shows with strong female leads, movies that call out the abuse carried out in religious seminaries and shows that discuss the culture of child abuse in Pakistan (Isani & Alavi, 2020). This populist rhetoric alienates the liberal Pakistanis for voicing a different narrative (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021 a).

In addition to popular media, the “New Pakistan” project also attempted to instill “Islam” and “Muslims ethics” via formal education. A prime example of this was the hurriedly imposed Single National Curriculum (SNC). This idea advocated for a centralized syllabus for schools for ensuring “quality” education but also on protecting youth from “Western education.” Khan explained, on the launch of the first of the three phases of SNC: *“I had a vision to introduce the Single National Curriculum, but the elites making the most of the current system will not change that easily... When you acquire English medium education, you adopt the entire culture and it’s a major loss because you become a slave to that particular culture”* (Dawn, 2021).

Hoodbhoy (2020b), a long-term critic of Islamism in Pakistan, notes that, “the huge volume of religious material they (SNC) contain beats all curriculums in Pakistan’s history.” Apart from the already compulsory Islamiyat (Islam studies) subject, SNC introduced two additional compulsory subjects of Muamilaat (social matters) and Islam aur daur e hazir ke taqazay (Islam and requirements of the modern world), designed with close coordination with Ittehad

Tanzimat ul Madaris Pakistan – the central board of Pakistani Madrassahs (Geo News, 2021).

However, Khan struggled to materialize most of his promises around establishment of a just society free from corruption. To mask his shortcomings, he increasingly instrumentalized religion. The circle of “the others” was expanded to blame “rebel” groups such as Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and Baloch separatists for not letting him focus on policy matters, while criticizing Western governments, non-Muslim ‘enemy’ states such as India, and political opposition for scheming against him. Critics of Khan’s policies in media and civil society organization were deemed ‘liberal fascists’ (Kermani, 2021; Hamid, 2018; Backer, 2015). The failure to control rape crimes and violence against women were deflected to ‘Western’ induced immoralities (Taseer, 2019). Similarly, a culture of economic corruption in the country was linked to the moral and religious corruption of society (Hoodbhoy, 2021).

In 2022, as Khan was ousted from office through a parliamentary vote of no-confidence, his Islamist civilizationalism reached a peak (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022d). In various interviews and public addresses during the last weeks of March 2022, he claimed that Pakistan’s sovereignty was under attack from internal “traitors” who were conspiring with Western powers. Out of office, he now openly names an American official to write a “letter” threatening of dire consequences if he was not ousted from office (Syed, 2022; Hussain,

2022). He constantly uses his misconstrued version of colonial history, labelling PDM leadership as “Mir Jaffar” and “Mir Sadique.” With PTI actively campaigning for 2023 elections, the saga of the “all evil” and “all good” continues to be part of political narrative.



*Supporters of the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) Islamist political party chant slogans as they protest against the arrest of their leader in Lahore, Pakistan on April 16, 2021.
Photo: A.M. Syed.*

CIVILISATIONAL POPULISM OF TLP

Khan's instrumentalization of religious populism pales in comparison to that of TLP's. Much like the PTI, this group feeds on the negative experiences faced by Pakistanis in the aftermath of the US "war on terror." TLP projects the growing wave of Islamophobia and right-wing populism in the West as a "threat" to Islam (Maṭoi, 2021; Yusuf, 2019; Sevea, 2018). The group uses civilizational lens to present a world divided among the Muslims and the non-Muslim enemies of Islam and advocates for a foreign policy that unite Ummah against the Western powers. Many of TLP's protests are a response to any comment or act in a Western country that the group saw as blasphemous. The leadership demanded "immediate" action by Pakistan by severing diplomatic ties or even taking military action

against the blaspheming country (Maṭoi, 2021; Sabat et al., 2020; Sevea, 2018; Yusuf, 2019; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022). It was not uncommon for Khadim Rizvi to demand use of Pakistan's nuclear weapons to "blow" Western blasphemous nations.

Domestically, the party presents the Barelvi Sunni as a majority, while otherizing Shias, Ahmadis and liberal moderate Muslims. In 2018, they successfully campaigned to remove Atif Mian from the Pakistan Economic Council because he was a member of the Ahmadi community (Hashim, 2018a). Despite its Sufi roots, the party follows a very stringent and non-tolerant attitude, particularly towards the issue of blasphemy of Holy Prophet and his companions. (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022).

Another horizontal dimension of TLP's civilizational populism

hinges on gender conservatism. Unlike PTI, this party has a louder and harsher stance over “modernization” of women. TLP leaders explicitly endorse limiting women to the domains of homes and ending their participation in the work force. In their public speeches, they use gruesome depiction of punishment in hell for women who do not conform to “Islamic” ideas of womanhood. The anti-feminist program of TLP is gradually gaining the form of a globalized agenda. Saad Rizvi strongly opposed the ban on veil in the province of Karnataka in India and deemed it a part of a global war against Muslims. In 2022, TLP supporters actively used Twitter to demand abolition of the 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. This act provides basic rights to the transgender community in Pakistan such as right to access identity cards, education, positions in public offices, and other freedoms enshrined in the constitution (Geo, 2022). Saad Rizvi also became a prominent voice critiquing bill by terming it directly “clashing with sharia” (Rizvi, 2022).

In addition to this horizontal divide, TLP also attack “the elite” calling them as “morally” compromised or “bad” Muslims for not defending Islam and its Prophet. Khadim Rizvi was of the view that the Pakistani political elite is secretly empowering the Ahmadis to appease their American and Western allies (Rizvi, 2020). In 2018, he called for the resignation of the then Minister of Law and Justice, Zahid Hamid, over changes to the wording of the Elections Bill 2017 drafted by the government (The News, 2017). The changes were in

oath concerning commitment to the finality of Prophet Muhammad from “I solemnly swear” to “I believe.” Zahid Hamid’s home was attacked, and TLP vigilantes staged sit-ins until he was forced to resign (The News, 2017). Clashes with police injured some 200 and killed four (Abbas & Rasmussen, 2017). TLP again caused mass violence in 2018 when the Supreme Court overturned the previous conviction of Aasia Bibi. TLP called for the judges to be killed for the acquittal, forcing them to leave the country (The Express Tribune, 2018).

When asked about the party’s economic policy on a popular television show, Rizvi showcased both his political acumen (using the language of people’s everyday experience) and apparent lack of economic expertise (eschewing detailed policy commitments), noting that when the Nizam-e-Mustafa was established, the country would prosper because the government would, like any ordinary household, just live within its means. However, when pressed for a specific policy, he launched into a classic rant against the state and used civilizational rhetoric to blame the elite for lacking piety as the cause of all problems. Following in his father’s footsteps, Saad Hussain Rizvi has also provided ‘quick’ fixes for the economy rooted in populist civilizationalism. In early 2023, as balance of payment crisis ushered in the country. S. H. Rizvi offered his solution: *“They are sending the Prime Minister (Shehbaz Sharif), his entire cabinet and chief of army staff to other countries to beg for economic aid... I ask why they are doing this. They said the Pakistani economy is in*

danger. [...] Instead, I advise them to take the Quran in one hand and the atom bomb suitcase in the other, and take the cabinet to Sweden, and say that we have come for the security of the Quran. If this entire universe does not fall under your feet, then you can change my name!" (Rizvi, 2023).

Unlike PTI, or other populists in the past, TLP's no-tolerance attitude towards blasphemy and support for Qadri like fanatics has encouraged "the people" to carry out violent acts in a vigilante style. In the last five years, several individuals, claimed to be motivated by Rizvi's speeches, have committed cold murders of innocent civilians. On January 23, 2018, Sareer Ahmed, during school hours attacked and killed his school's principal who had reprimanded him for skipping classes to attend a TLP sit-in (Muhammad, 2018). The same year PML-N politician and National Assembly Member, Ahsan Iqbal, was critically wounded by Abid Hussain, who charged Iqbal with committing blasphemy (Hashim, 2018b). Next year, Khateeb Hussain, a young boy, killed his professor during a lecture over allegations of blasphemy (Imran, 2019). Next year in the city of Khushab, a bank manager was shot dead by the bank's own security guard for identifying as Ahmadi (Gabol & Niazi, 2020). In 2021, the lynching of the Sri Lankan factory manager in Sialkot was also inspired by TLP supporters who declared him blasphemous for removing TLP banners from factory walls (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022). In 2022 an angry mob stoned a mentally ill person to death for allegedly damaging a copy of the Quran (The Guardian, 2022).

While Khadim Rizvi was laid to rest in 2020, the legacy continues. Much like Qadri's, Rizvi's funeral

procession became a huge fanfare with thousands flocking to support the man who is now revered as a baba jee (a saint) by his followers (Shah, 2020). Under the leadership of his son Saad Rizvi, the party has held several rounds of protests against the blasphemous comment of French President (Batool, 2021b). Rizvi junior has staged a major sit-in during 2021 and pressured the state into discharging him when he was being tried for inciting violence (Batool, 2021b). Online, the party has amassed a strong following and regularly run anti-state, anti-Ahmadiyah and anti-Western social media campaigns (Chowdhury, 2021; Sareen, 2021). It has continued its sit-in and subsequent vandalism in the name of "saving the Prophet's sanctity" at the cost of damaging peace, spreading hatred and loss of life of TLP members and security forces (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2022). Now that TLP seems to be busy preparing for the next general elections where it will contest against the PTI, the country is going to witness a strong contest between the two claimants of the leaders of Ummah.



Rawalpindi, Pakistan, December 2008. Electoral poster of Imran Khan, the 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan and the chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on one of the city streets.

PTI'S RIYASAT-E-MEDINA AGAINST TLP'S NIZAM-E-MUSTAFA

Comparing the two cases demonstrate that while TLP and PTI differ significantly in their formation, leadership and even audience, at the core they share very similar ideas. These ideas are rooted in populist civilizationism (See table below). On both vertical and horizontal fronts, they use civilizationalism to disrupt social trust and pluralism in the country. However, PTI has a much larger following than TLP, and has formed government both at the center and in provinces. Following catch-all populism, PTI's characterization of Islamism is also milder as compared to TLP's. Yet considering the gradual increase in PTI's reliance on Islamic civilizationalism, one cannot rule out further radicalization of its political slogans and stances.

The difference in the intensity of Islamism in the two parties is rooted in the difference of leadership. The founder of PTI, Imran Khan, was a sports celebrity belonging to an upper-class family, educated in elitist institutes like Oxford, and married to a member of British glitterati. He gradually transformed his persona to match the populist discourse, changing from casual sports wears to formal starched plain-colored Shalwar Kameez. Known as a playboy in his youth, he had to do much religious showcasing like offering prayers in public and holding Tasbeeh in hand to prove himself as a savior of Muslim Ummah. A pharisaic for whom religion is a means to reach his political ends, Khan's Islamism is no match for Rizvi for whom religion was a source of power much before politics. Politics in fact is a

way for them to consolidate their religious authority. Knowing well that TLP voters are mainly Sunni Barelvis, Rizvis' acrimony towards the non-Muslims or Muslims of other sects is more real and profound in comparison to Khan whose party membership and voter base is not limited to Sunni Muslims.

SUMMARY COMPARISON OF POPULIST CIVILIZATIONALISM OF BY TLP AND PTI

Civilizational characterization	TLP	PTI
The people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Bareilvi Sunni Muslims- explicit favor of the sub-sect. · Outright rejection of other Muslim sections and religious minorities. · Narrative of injustice and victimhood applied to “the people.” · Urged to be pro-active protectors of faith: this leads to street violence and massive roadblocks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Caters to the sentiments of Sunni Muslims – no specific subsect. The term used is “Muslim.” · No outright rejection but discriminatory attitude towards other sects and minorities noticed in actions, statements and, at times, silence. · Narrative of injustice and victimhood applied to “the people.” · Urged to be pro-active: this leads to online activism and political rallies/protests.
The elite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · All political parties in power since the inception of Pakistan. · State institutions are blamed for not adopting sharia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · All political parties in power since the inception of Pakistan.

Civilizational characterization	TLP	PTI
The others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Western countries which are threatened directly with violence. · Shows clear signs of antisemitism (Jewish lobby). · Local liberal/secular left-wing factions- seen as Western inspired, pawns of the West and bound to hell. · Other sects such as Ahmadis and Shias usually painted as non-Muslims or blasphemers. · Active acts of violence (sometimes leading to death) target religious minorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Western countries- seen a hard and soft power threat. · India is also portrayed as an enemy of the people. · Local liberal/secular left-wing factions- seen as Western inspired. Usually seen as agents of the West or misguided youths. · A mixture of silence over atrocities faced by non-Sunni sects and outright discriminatory actions and comments as well. · No direct comment made about religious minorities. · No direct comment made about “Jewish lobby” conspiracies.
Ideal homeland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hard-line sharia driven state having Nizam-e-Mustafa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A modern inception of sharia driven state also called the Riyasat-i-Madina.

Civilizational characterization	TLP	PTI
Portrayal as saviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saviors of “the people” from all “the others” and “the elite.” · A leader who is the voice and representations of ‘the people’s desires. · Seen as guides for the “rightful” for a peaceful afterlife. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Saviors of “the people” from both “the others” and “the elite.” · A leader who is the voice and representations of ‘the people’s desires.

CONCLUSION

In this comparative work we found that leaderships of both PTI and TLP employ civilizational populism with varying degree of religious sloganeering to cater public support. Interestingly, the civilizational dimension forms an overlay over the vertical-horizontal dimensions. This result is consistent with that of Yilmaz and Morieson (2022: 18) who in their comparative research on civilizational populism in India, Turkey and Myanmar reported that civilizationism “gives content to populism’s key signifiers: ‘the pure people,’ ‘the corrupt elite’ and ‘dangerous others.’ In both cases studied herein, with important differences, “the people” are described as “good Muslims” who are willing to sacrifice for the sanctity of Islamic values and personalities. Along vertical dimensions, both Khan and Rizvi refer to “the elite” as “bad Muslims” who have given up on their civilizational identity for worldly gains. The main target for the Khan and Rizvi is the mainstream political parties while TLP also criticize state institutions for not implementing Shariah in the country. For Khan, “the others” include foreign countries and their supporters in Pakistan who fear the rise of Islam in the world. TLP leadership also include non-Muslims or Muslims of other sects, but PTI refrain from such explicit othering of Shias or Ahmadis.

However, what distinguishes the case of Pakistani populism from other cases reported by Yilmaz and Morieson (2022) is the absence of territoriality. While defining the ideal homeland for the people, PTI and TLP seek inspirations from the 7th century Arabian Peninsula

instead of referring to the Muslim empires in South Asia. In contrast, Indian populists talk of Ashoka and other Hindu rulers while Turkish populists dream of reviving the Ottoman Empire. This total absence of territoriality make religion the only defining feature for the civilizational identity. As a result, populists detach the local population from their culture and land and try to impose a foreign Arab culture in society. While all prior studies on civilizational populism have reported religion to be of prime importance (Barton et al., 2021; Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2021), in case of Pakistan, Islam takes a central stage and compete with cultural identities of the people. Populists, hence, discard the ethnonationalist movements as against the spirit of Islam and declare all nationalist parties as the traitor – “the other” (Batool, 2023).

Given that Pakistan was founded on the principle of Muslim nationalism (Paracha, 2019), and the state has since been using religious symbolism to homogenize a culturally and ideologically diverse society, populists do not face much trouble in propagating the civilizational discourse. However, since the same discourse is being used by the Islamic militants, the anti-Western rhetoric of populists would fuel the militancy in the country. The country is constantly seeing a rise in terrorism after the departure of the US and The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces from Afghanistan (Rana, 2023). Meanwhile, the two populist parties are openly calling for Jihad against the corrupt and pro-Western elite of Pakistan. No political actor is currently strong enough to compete

with them as they thrive on extenuating existing crises to make people insecure and position themselves as their only source of salvation. Civilizational populism is dragging Pakistan to darker depths with no silver lining in sight.

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