State Responses to Ethno-political and Ethnoreligious Conflicts in Pakistan: A Comparison of Military and Democratic Regimes (2001-2018)

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Abstract:

The study aims to compare the nature and patterns of the state's response to ethno-religious and ethno-political conflicts during the Military Government period (1999-2008) and the Democratic period (2008-2018) in Pakistan. It also evaluates the state's underlying motivations behind these responses. This study employs a qualitative methodology, using descriptive and interpretive methods to address the research objectives. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources, with thematic analysis applied to interpret the findings. The study finds that the military government adopted an approach of dominance toward ethnic groups, while democratic governments offered amnesties and accommodated ethnic groups through economic and political concessions. However, these efforts did not satisfy ethnic groups as operations continued, and the strategies remained flawed. Religious identities, on the other hand, appeared to face repression under both military and democratic governments. This repression was not perceived as genuine, as alliances between the state and religious groups on strategic and political matters remained intact. In contrast, ethnic identities did not play this role and, at times, opposed the state's objectives. The study concludes that a practical approach involving compromise for ethnicities and integrating religious identities would foster a more stable and inclusive political environment.

Keywords: Pakistan, ethnic and religious identities, political conflicts, state response, dominance, compromise, national integration

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic and religious diversity is a prevalent feature of the world today, and Pakistan stands out as a region predominantly affected by this phenomenon. All four provinces have multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-lingual, and multi-religious social compositions (Ahmar, 2013; Khan et al., 2019). Based on their nature and base, identity conflicts can be divided into two main categories in Pakistan: ethno-political and ethno-religious (Corsi, 2004; Siddiqi, 2012; Haleem, 2003). The primary roots of ethno-political identities are in languages, culture, races, and political and economic marginalization (Majeed, 2010; Ejaz & Rehman, 2022a). State elite, from the very

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beginning, adopted nation-building strategies based on central tendencies. Alvi (1988) argued that the concentration of power made it imperative for communities to access the power through ethnicity. Five main ethnic groups disagree and conflict with the state: Baloch, Muhajirs, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Pashtuns (Ahmar, 2013; Akhtar, 2013; Khan et al., 2019).

The politicization of ethno-religious identities is somehow a recent phenomenon. The state's passionate propagation and implantation of ideology based on religion created an extremist and radical mindset (Haqqani, 2005). The country's elites exploited religion as a compelling card for their interests. Islamic identities gradually assumed political agency in their own right and opposed the change in laws within and outside of powerhouses (Waseem, 2011). The groups that exploit religion for identity and violence can be divided into two categories: Jihadi and sectarians (Haqqani, 2005; Khan A. U., 2005; Rana, 2018).

The state reacted dubiously to the demands and contention of ethnicities in democratic and military governments. The cynical response of the state created reactions and generated security, political, and economic issues (Grare, 2013; Ejaz et al., 2023). The reaction to religious identities is also mixed and complex. Until 9/11, as a strategic asset of the state, it received liberal concessions that over-accommodated these identities. Their collaboration created extremism, sectarianism, Jihad, and decimation of the politicians and civilians. The international pressure after 9/11 compelled the state to change its stance; therefore, it banned and tried to disregard some of the organizations (United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2019; Haqqani, 2005; Waseem, 2011; Hashmi A. S., 2016; Ejaz & Khan, 2021). This study attempts to evaluate the nature and patterns of state responses to ethno-religious compared to ethno-national during the Military Government (2001-2008) and Democratic Period (2008-2018) and to discern the state's real intent behind these responses. The main objectives of the research are to evaluate the nature and patterns of state responses from 2001 to 2018 to ethnic and religious conflicts and to assess the drive behind these responses logically.

This study is processed as follows. The first section is the methodology that explains the approaches and techniques of data collection and analysis; the second section is the literature review that explores the relevant and recent data on the subject. The third segment is the theoretical framework that explains the theory of the state's response to ethnic and religious conflicts. The fourth is about applying the theoretical framework in the context of Pakistan. The last part is a conclusion that reflects the summary, primary findings, and further avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic conflicts have been the central interest of scholars for the last fifty years. The ethnic conflicts can be divided into border categories, ethno-political and ethno-religious conflicts (Fox, 2004; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009; Carment & James, 1997). Ethnonational conflicts arise from ethnic movements that prioritize ethnic groups and their distinctions, such as political and economic autonomy in talks and agendas, relegating class, religion, and sect to a secondary place (Horowitz, 1985; Angew, 1989; Carment & James, 1997; Joireman, 2007). An ethnoreligious group is an ethnic group that derives its identity mainly from religious beliefs and associated discourses. Numerous studies, including those by Fox (2000, 2004), have concluded that religions often serve as catalysts

for ethnic conflicts. Fox (2000) characterized ethnoreligious conflicts as conflicts where the involved groups are distinguished by their religious affiliations (pp. 2-3). Kadayifci-Orellana (2009) asserts that religious identity establishes clear distinctions between parties and enhances group mobilization. Civilian casualties are "legitimized" through religious texts and imagery. The post-Cold period witnessed the settlement of several intractable ethnic conflicts, but a bulk of new inter-communal violent conflicts also erupted (Carment & James, 1997). Ethic groups remain in peace and do not object to the rights of others until the state fails to adjust these elements (Saideman, 1996; Lake & Rothchild, 1998; Lobell & Mauceri, 2004; Cordell & Wolff, 2011). Societies that are more fragmented on ethnic lines are more prone to violence than those that have fewer identity cleavages (Horowitz, 1985). Ethnic identities create rebellion against the state if their goals and aspirations are denied (Gurr, 1993; Saideman, 1996).

A growing body of literature has recently been produced on ethno-nationalism and slightly on ethnoreligious conflicts in Pakistan. The conflict of Baloch ethnicity revolves around self-control, resource exploitation, and racial alienation (Ejaz & Rehman, 2022; Ejaz et al., 2023; Ejaz et al., 2024). The Muhajir ethnicity mainly stood on language issues (Verkaaik, 2004). Pashtun's ethnicity stems primarily from Punjabi domination, and the new transmuted nationalism led by Manzoor Pashteen has the narratives of alienation of their racial identity (Mir, 2018; Shah, 2019). The Sindhis stood on central domination, income inequalities, and uncontrolled migrations (Akhtar, 2013; Sharma, 2022). A group of academicians attributed the outpouring of ethnic conflicts to institutional imbalance (Siddiqi, 2012; Khan M. S., 2014). A majority attached it to cultural diversity, economic and political sidelining of minority elements (Ayres, 2009; Shehzad, 2011; Levesque, 2013; Khan M. S., 2014; Ayaz & Azhar, 2017). The state labelled these identities as miscreants and challengers of the state's writ (Grare, 2013; Ayaz & Azhar, 2017).

The literature on religious conflicts has a contemporary origin. Still, those that foreign writers have produced lack explicit elucidations. Most scholars attached the rise of ethnoreligious conflicts to the elite's exploitation of religion to their personal and strategic interests (Haqqani, 2005; Farmanullah, 2009; Waseem, 2011; Tankel, 2018). Some attached it to Afghan Jihad (1979-1988) and the proliferation of Madrasahs (Waseem, 2011; Riffat, 2015; Abbas, 2015) attributed to the propagation of Jihadi literature (Waseem, 2011; Riffat, 2015; Abbas, 2015). A group attached it to foreign involvement (Haqqani, 2005; Farmanullah, 2009; Tankel, 2018). These all leverages made the religious identities a powerful establishment that actions control the society (Haqqani, 2005; Waseem, 2011; Hashmi A. S., 2016).

A little scholarship is available on the responses to ethno-political actors. To the majority, the state has one fixed framework for dealing with them: coercion (Basit & Sial, 2010; Siddiqi, 2012; Ali, 2013; Hashmi, 2015; Tasneem, 2015). The literature on religious identities is rich (Mirahmadi et al., 2012; Johnston et al., 2016; Basit, 2020). However, studies on the Musharraf Period and the Democratic Regimes of PPP and PML.N are hard to trace. Some indirect references have been found from the works of Khan et al. (2018), Orakzai (2019), Kukreja (2020), Latif (2022) and Akhtar & Jan, 2022. Still, the research dealing directly with the comparative analysis is not available.

Mainstream scholarship has generally neglected the nature and reasons of responses. This study attempts to bridge this gap while collecting relevant material and personal reflection.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The mainstream theories of ethnic conflicts, such as primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism, overlooked the state's response to identities. This study, while drawing inspiration from the work of Gurr (1970), Williams and Rhenisch (1977), Horowitz (1985), Burton (1990), and Joireman (2007), developed a theory to understand better the response of the state to these conflicts.

Gurr (1970, 1993), Williams and Rhenisch (1977), and Burton (1990) stated two responses to ethnic conflicts. Generally, these approaches are constructive and non-constructive: dominance and compromise, accommodation and denial, and coercion and concession. This research, while taking inspiration from Horowitz (2000), Joireman (2007), Lyon (2012), and McGarry (2024), added a third response integration (ethnic equalitarianism).

The dominance explained by Williams and Rhenisch (1977) is the collective action of the state, often with the support of forces to crush others. It carries the methods of destruction, annihilation, and deportation to withdraw the main actors either by social exclusion or physical separation. Often, the purpose is to end the conflict by weakening the opposite. The main dominance methods are military operations, dismastment, and preventive diplomacy (Stofft et al., 1995). Many scholars consider this approach ineffective because it creates reactions (Joireman, 2007).

Compromise means the parties transform their aspirations and goals in such a way it would become conciliatory. The parties involved in conflict accept something different than the original goals that escalate conflicts (Williams & Rhenisch, 1977). The compromise and concessions are the reinforcement of federation, inclusiveness, power sharing, autonomy, pluralism, and, notably, the accommodation of the concerns of the marginalized (Gurr, 1993; Joireman, 2007). The conflict management mechanism is established to bridge the negotiation gap between the state and minorities (Williams & Rhenisch, 1977; Isajiw, 2000; Joireman, 2007). Joireman (2007) concluded it is a practical approach to managing ethnic conflicts.

Integration (Ethnic equalitarian) is the answer to the situation of over-accommodation. It is a strategy in which elites organize the preferred identity with concessions and disorganize their opponents (Kymlicka, 1995; Horowitz, 2000; McGarry, 2024). Ethnic equalitarian is the principle of providing equal treatment, rights, and opportunities to all ethnic groups and eliminating systemic inequalities and hierarchies based on ethnicity. It emphasizes equal representation in governance, employment, and justice (Rawls, 1971; Young, 1990; Kymlicka, 1995; Horowitz, 2000). The state promotes the common public identity, makes ethnically blind policies, and prefers individual rights rather than communal rights (Gurr R. T., 2000; Lyon, 2012). The state also adopts a secular policy, commits to neutrality, and does not favour, promote, or disfavour discourse and religious or non-religious beliefs over others (Kettell, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Social science research carefully studies social reality events, experiences, and facts to help answer complex questions (Newman, 2015). Research methodology guides us to objectively understand the social world (Dooley, 2004; Newman, 2015; Bryman, 2016). It answers the question, "How do I conduct research?" This study employed the qualitative research strategy because the main aim

was a theoretical understanding of the state's response. As the central queries of the research were related to "why" and "how," both descriptive and interpretive methods were applied within the qualitative research paradigm.   The data is collected mainly from two sources. The physical, non-structured interviews were conducted with ten (10) activists. The non-random purposive sampling technique was utilized for sampling. The archival data was collected through government documents, books, research papers, websites, periodicals, newspapers, and reports of different civil societies operational in Pakistan. The data was analyzed and transcribed using thematic analysis. The celebrated thematic analysis method sketched by Braun and Clarke (2006) has been used for systematic and unbiased study.

DISCUSSION AND DATA ANALYSIS: THE RESPONSE OF THE STATE

The state's response to the ethno-political and ethno-religious conflicts was not similar in the period selected for this study.

Dominance

In the past, military actions, especially in military regimes, have been the state's traditional response to deal with ethno-political conflicts. The centralized concentration of the state made it sense that it is an end itself, and maintaining security and its writ is the unchanging primary objective. It considered peace talks longstanding and operations quick and exemplary outcomes. The Musharraf Period was the extension of the previous forceful policy. Baluchistan was unremitting, whereas Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) occasionally experienced coercive actions. The forces had some level of success but overall failed to neutralize the situation and, instead, in reaction, gave birth to secessionist movements. The initial demand for autonomy in Baluchistan has been replaced with independent Baluchistan (Ejaz et al., 2023; Ejaz et al., 2024). The ethnic tensions reached its zenith in Sindh with the May 12, 2007 clash, where 30 people lost lives and many were injured (Husnin & Nelson, 2007). The mishandling of ethnic identity also increased the ethnic violence in KP ("Musharraf's rule in Pakistan," 2004). The civilian governments of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) reconstructed the destroyed relationship and tried to avoid dominance (Basit & Sial, 2010; Akhtar, 2013; Muzaffar et al., 2018). However, both continued the military operations in Baluchistan and Karachi. The nationalists did not blame the civilian governments for the operation because they said they had no mandate to launch the operation (Akhtar & Jan, 2022; Ejaz et al., 2023).

Musharraf ended the long-term partnership with religious identities in the post-9/11 environment and launched operations. The primary operations were Freedom (2001-2002), Al-Meezan (2002-2006), North Waziristan Operation (2006), Operation Silence on Jamia-i- Hifza (2007), Islamabad, *Rah-i- Haq* in Swat (2007-08), *Rahi-i- Raast* (2007-09), Operation *Zalzala* in North Waziristan (2008) and Operation *Sher Dil* (2008) in Bajur (Orakzai, 2019). These operations had been carried out against both the jihadi and sectarian militant groups. The operations made identities tense and somehow broke their channels, but they could not remove the threat, as they made alliances with Al-Qaeda and other transnational terror groups such as Daesh. The operations against the religious identities were not based on genuine political will and were also ill-panned and ill-fated. PML-N and PPP governments continued the military operations, and paramount among these were *Rah-i-Najat* (2009-2010), Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014-2018) and Operation *Rad-ul-Fasad* (2017 Onwards)

(Orakzai, 2019; Latif, 2022). The PPP formed the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) in 2009 to counter the terrorists. PML.N announced the first-ever National Internal Security Policy: 2013-18 (NISP) in 2014, further extended it to 2023. NISP is the engagement of politicians, armed forces, media, and social organizations. NACTA implemented hard and soft methods. The modern, well-equipped Rapid Response Force (RRF) was established in coordination with the police, army, and civilian governments (Rumi, 2015).

The state also defused the power of ethnicities with the weapon of other ethnicities, anti-state narratives, and exploitation of religious identities. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and General Zia adopted this tactic. Musharraf divided the Baloch nationalists while patronizing the opponents. He also patronized the Muhajirs against Sindhis to extinguish the support and power of the PPP (Haleem, 2003; Akhtar & Jan, 2022). He, following the path of Zia, neutralized the power of Baloch while empowering and increasing the number of Pashtuns through migrations and illegal registrations in Baluchistan. Religion has been exploited for political advantage and defusing the power of Baloch and Pashtun ethnicity (Haqqani, 2005; Waseem, 2011). Haleem (2003) and Waseem M. (2011) noted that the establishment cultivated the religious parties, particularly Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of religious parties, as a rampart against the widespread support of regional identities. The anti-state narrative through systematic media campaigns further undermined their position. The authorities have been confused about the issue of Pashtuns. The secular nationalism of Ghaffar Khan dealt with the allegations of traitor and anti-Pakistan discourses (Mian Iftikhar, personal communication, January 18, 2019; Mohsin Dawar, personal communication, January 12, 2019). Generally, it is perceived, as also said by Mian Iftikhar (personal communication, January 18, 2019), that PPP and PML.N, by and large, did not adopt the policy of diffusion in their tenure. However, the state of Pakistan continually viewed the ethnic claimers as traitors and enemies of Islam (Khan et al., 2018). PTM, the new nationalism in KP, was at once labelled as anti-Pakistan during PML-N tenure (Akhtar & Jan, 2022; Latif, 2022). The political elites of both parties defused the powers of ethnicities by increasing political conflicts. The PPP dominated the province of Sindh and was allegedly involved in the tussle among the Mohajirs, Pashtuns, and Sindhi Nationalists (Akhtar & Jan, 2022). The PML-N did the same in Punjab, neither accepting the division of Punjab nor recognizing the apparent ethnic divide in the province (Latif, 2022). The social and economic deprivation further undermined their position (Khan et al., 2018).

Compromise

Compromise is a constructive measure and is the opposite of repression. Compromise was not the first viable method for Musharraf. He repeatedly announced, "Whoever challenges the writ of the state, we will crush them" (Baloch, 2025). For him, peace talks and dialogues were not the first options for conflict resolution. To engage religious identities as a strategy, he concluded peace deals with religious identities. The peace deals with religious identities included the Shakai Agreement (2004), the Saratoga Peace Deal (2005), the Miran Shah Peace Accord (2006) and the Khyber Agency Pact (2008) (Ali, 2013; Orakzai, 2019). These deals were more between the army and warring parties (Rumi, 2015). Mona and Greenwood (2013) observed that these attempts were never translated into a kind of formal agreement. Johnston et al. (2016) and Fayyaz (2020) concluded that these deals affected some militants, but the success was short-lived. The political elites (2008-2018) just took the initiative in the Swat Agreement (2008) under the PPP

government. Nawaz Sharif government also initiated the dialogue and constituted the committee for peace talks with the Taliban but never reached an agreement (Bukhari, 2014; Naazer et. al. 2017).

The government had always left peace deals with ethnicities as the last option. Regarding the Musharraf Period, Hussain and Effendi (2018) concluded that Sindh ethnicity, particularly Karachi, has never experienced a peaceful dialogue process. The political discourse in Baluchistan was almost lacking (Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO), 2013). Basit and Sial (2010) argued that dialogue with insurgents was never an option. Hashmi (2013) and Yousaf (2019) mentioned Musharraf constituted two high-level peace committees for peace recommendations, but all his efforts lacked genuine political will (Hashmi, 2013; Tasneem, 2015; Hashmi, 2015). The PPP government formed the All Parties Parliamentary Committee to probe the issues. Hashmi (2013) said that former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gillani, (2008-12), apologized, gave amnesty, released some political prisoners, and offered confidence building measures (CBMs). There were also rumours of a peace deal with the separatist Baloch Republican Army (BRA), a Baloch terrorist group. The PML-N also made certain attempts to settle the matters with ethnicities. Attempts were also made to pacify the emerging PTM. However, the lack of mandate in security matters restricted the democratic Governments to move further (Mohsin Dawar, personal communication, December 12, 2018).

The democratic regimes of PPP and PML-N announced amnesties and concessions for Baloch and Pashtun militants (Kukreja, 2020). The longstanding demand for self-rule of identities had been respected, and Pashtun and Bloch Nationalists were allowed to form their governments. The 18th Amendment provided political, administrative, and financial autonomy to the smaller provinces. The initiative of "Aghaz-i-Haqooq-i-Baluchistan" has been launched. The other concessions were non-interference, self-control, and increasing the quota for jobs and educational scholarships. Because of the government's reward and compassion, many insurgents surrendered before the civilian Governments. Changing the province's name by PPP and introducing reforms in FATA by PML-N also calmed down the situation in KP though it also created new controversies such as demand of creation of new provinces (Naazer, 2024). The reconstruction of the infrastructure due to terrorist activities and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would also have impacts on the harmony (Basit & Sial, 2010; Akhtar, 2013; Muzaffar et al., 2018). The religious identities were already accommodated; therefore, the civilian Governments of PML-N and PPP did not make further attempts. Despite concessions, because of the presence of security forces, the conflict in both KP and Baluchistan continued (Basit & Sial, 2010; Akhtar, 2013; Muzaffar et al., 2018). However, the accommodation of Pashtun ethnicity created the reaction of Hazarawals, who also demanded a new province (Adeney, 2012; Latif, 2022). The Bloch Nationlists declared ceaefire but army did not reciporcate (Khan et al., 2018). The separatists in Balochistan did not accept the packages, as they declared it as the price of their struggle (Akhtar & Jan, 2022). Furthermore, they also suspected civilian governments could not deliver independently on their commitment (Kukreja, 2020). These developments slightly undermined the policy compromise by the governments of PPP and PML-N.

Integration (Equalitarian Policy)

The state patronage for two long decades made religious entities too strong. These identities started dictating the laws and policies of the state. The geo-strategic shift after 9/11 induced Musharraf to introduce the policies of enlightened moderation, de-radicalization, counter-narratives, and institutionalization of security management. Enlightened moderation was a sort of secularization. For an alternative system and to defuse the powerful Wahhabis and the Salafi cult, Sufis (mystical) were utilized. The National Sufi Council was launched, and International Sufi Conferences were organized (Fayyaz, 2020). The Islamic message of humanity, modernization, tolerance, and co-existence was propagated through education and media. Sajjad and Ahmad (2019) argued that Musharraf acknowledged Western nationalism and transformed Zia's "Islam First" to "Pakistan First." The narratives based on integration, inclusiveness, peace, and harmony were disseminated and popularized through media. The radical Jihadi literature and advertisement for funding had also been banned. Following 9/11, the state introduced a series of legislative laws to enhance institutions' capacity. The amendments in the Anti-Terrorist Act of 1997 increased the powers of anti-terrorist courts, freeze the finical assets, and banned certain sectarian and jihadi outlets (Fayyaz, 2020). The Madrasah Registration Ordinance 2008 regulated the independent religious seminaries all over Pakistan, and at least 200000 of them were registered (Mirahmadi et al., 2012; Fayyaz, 2020; Mirahmedi 2012). The PPP government (2008-13), through a systematic campaign, disclosed, in some way, the accurate violent picture of jihadi and sectarian militants in public (Fayyaz, 2020). The government had also started the de-radicalization process through education and mass media. The army, with the support of PPP and PML-N governments, also established some de-radicalization centres in partnership with civil societies to reintegrate the extremist youths into society (Johnston et al., 2016; Ejaz et al., 2022b; Ejaz et al., 2022c). The education reforms were also brought, and the jihadi literature from books was replaced with peace (Mirahmadi et al., 2012; Fayyaz, 2020). Ethnic identities welcomed the positive moves, including reforms; in contrast, religious identities considered the reforms to be an attack on them.

However, these drives failed to make positive impacts, as these were face-saving activities that lacked the political will. The state continuously, both in the military and democratic period, propagated the extremist ideology initiated by Zia (Sajjad & Ahmad, 2019). It adopted tolerant behaviour with clerics, seminaries, and their ideologies. The glittering efforts of defusing the influence of religious identities, in reality, were nothing more than a show-off.

This study attempted to compare the nature and patterns of state responses to ethno-religious and ethno-national conflicts of the military and democratic period (2001–2018) and identify the state's motivations for these reactions. The state of Pakistan, right from its inception, estimated the nation as a fundamentally unitary sphere that conflicted with the co-existence of diverse sub-nations. Therefore, a comparatively strong centralized federal system was adopted, the language and religion were imposed, and heterogeneity and pluralism were not recognized (Rahman, 2007; Ayres, 2009; Mushtaq et al., 2011; Ayaz & Azhar, 2017).

The intense political assimilative policies unilaterally excluded ethnic identities from decision-making (Rahman, 2007; Shehzad, 2011; Ayaz & Azhar, 2017). The conflicts between state and ethnicities prevailed, not because of diversity but because of the state's dominant response (Ayres, 2009; Siddiqi, 2012; Khan M. S., 2014; Kukreja, 2020). The state because of ideological, political, and

geopolitical interests embraced a religious ideology and propagated it interminably (Haqqani, 2005). Additionally, it patronized the religious groups and parties to pressurize the political elites (Waseem, 2011). The over-accommodation of religious identities proved more perilous than ethnic identities. Religious elites paralyzed the state by dictating curriculum, media, and almost everything, and the state had to bow its head before these groups. The violence is not new for Pakistan; the "peaceful image of Pakistan was never destroyed before the religious uprisings."

CONCLUSION

The nature of the state's response to ethnic conflicts during the Pervez Musharraf Era was complicated and multifaceted. The ethnic identities, except Muhajir's identity, irrespective of the province, cause of rise, narratives, and demands, were considered entities that challenged the state's writ. As found, he adopted the historical patterns and re-initiated the narratives of anti-state elements and foreign agents to intimidate, defuse, or take military action against the resistive forces. Though the state made certain attempts at dialogue and formed committees for settlement with Bloch nationalists, recommendations were not accepted. Pacific means, such as peace deals, were never utilized because the military government did not consider them viable options. The attempts for dialogue were not the first option. Further, these were hollow and lacked genuine political will. The supportive voices, pro-ideological campaigns, and sympathizers were silenced with spoils, pressure, and force. The response of democratic regimes was also multifaceted. The democrats attempted to reconstruct the destroyed relationship, made committees to resolve issues, and offered amnesty. Both allowed the nationalists to form governments in their respective provinces and announced the political and economic packages as a compromise. However, both sustained the military operations in Karachi and Baluchistan. The absence of a mandate in security matters constrained the democratic governments from moving further. The packages also created reactions to the smaller identities of the respective provinces.

The nature of the response to the religious conflicts was also problematic during the Musharraf period. In the post-9/11 environment, as found, the state terminated the longstanding alliance and launched many military operations against jihadi and sectarian groups. Further, it banned the organizations that were promoting ethnoreligious conflicts. It is a general impression that operations broke the channels of warring parties; however, these identities gained further strength. The operations lacked genuine political will and were ill-planned and ill-fated, which allowed the organizations to make alliances with international terrorist organizations. The policy of the democratic regime was not that different as it continued its operations. Further, it also created institutions and military forces such as NACTA and RRF. PML-N government also announced the first-ever internal security policy NISP. Overall, it is perceived, in both military and democratic regimes, clandestinely, religious identities were given leverage to grow. Identities made alliances with foreign entities, but the state kept silent. The anti-ideological war, as observed, was a face-saving exercise because of international pressure. The policies and structures that made these strong lingered on with more strength.

Musharraf also started the integration policy and attempted to curtail the influence of historically patronized, over-accommodated religious identities by introducing the strategies of enlightened moderation, counter-narratives, de-radicalization, and institutionalization of security management. Likewise, he empowered the mystical groups against Wahhabis. Further, as found, he registered the

seminaries and brought about reforms in media and education. The process was continued by liberal PPP and even PML-N, and additionally, they disclosed the actual violent picture of religious identities before the public. However, this study found all these activities were face-saving because of global pressure and lacked genuine will. Military and democratic regimes continued to promote General Zia's old policy. The impressive-looking policy was nothing more than a show-off.

The ethnic identities, as perceived, commonly tried to check the state's elites' central tendencies and growing power—the religious identities, comparatively, traditionally sided with the state elites for recognition and spoils. By and large, the state created narratives against ethnic identities, and religious groups popularized these narratives. Ethnic identities did not play the role of spoiler, to threaten or pressure the powerful politicians that were playing the role of opposition against the state's declared ideology and strategic interests. In the Musharraf period, as found, ethnic identities opposed the geopolitical and geo-strategic designs of the state; however, religious identities were surreptitiously sustained to play the role of mercenaries. During this period, the state also realized that ethnic nationalists were potential political contenders, as they enjoyed the popular support of the ethnic groups. The religious identities had street power but fewer potential contenders, as the public did not accept these for political offices. Therefore, the state showed violent behaviour in ethnic conflicts while responding with cautiousness and dubious manners to religious elites' jihadi and sectarianisms. Additionally, the discourse for federation may weaken the state's central approach, but more religiosity creates a sentimental lot that can be used for political and strategic purposes. The democratic governments, though adopting the policy of compromise, espoused the same policy for the same gains but with less assertive means.

The study recommends that the state adopt a compromise policy and promote the national identity of inclusiveness that integrates and respects all cultural and religious identities. The transfer of power to regional identities, sharing resources and decision-making, demilitarization of regions, and provision of equal opportunities are also a part of this all-inclusiveness. Creating a new social contract on religious policy and leaving the patronage of selected identities is vital. The formation of inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue forums and the involvement of civil societies in addressing the root cause of the grievances and conflicts may pacify the situation.

This empirical investigation was an endeavour to make a comparative analysis of the state's response to ethnic and religious conflicts. The literature was reviewed only from the available and accessible resources, and methodologically, the basics for generalization were based on secondary information. Therefore, its results have partial solicitation for generalization. Though the scope of the study was broad, many interrelated gloomy themes were still unexplored. These themes are state response to sectarian conflicts, the role of the Pakistani federation in ethnic conflict management, the secularization and religious conflicts, and the state-civil society partnership in responding to conflicts.

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