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Islamophilia as a Predictor of Islamophobia in Pakistan: whether the Political Instability and Extremism Triangulate the Relationship



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Abstract: *This quantitative study looks into the relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and extremism & terrorism in Pakistan. A convenient sampling technique was used to collect 137 responses from students pursuing BS and MS degrees in Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities. The findings reveal a significant relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia, with Islamophilia inadvertently contributing to the rise of Islamophobia. Consequently, this heightened Islamophobia has consequences with respect to political instability and the rise of extremism & terrorism within Pakistan. These findings put the spotlight on the need to adopt an all-inclusive and broad method to address both Islamophilia and Islamophobia to promote and advance political stability and effectively counter extremism in the country. The study provides a valuable grasp on recognizing the complex dynamics between these factors, shedding light on useful comprehension for policymakers and researchers working towards a more secure and tolerant society in Pakistan.*

Key Words: Islamophilia, Islamophobia, Political Instability, Extremism & Terrorism, Pakistan.

Introduction

Islamophobia means fear, hatred and/or hostility towards Islam or Muslims. Islamophobia is not a new concept, but it has witnessed an upsurge since the 9/11 attacks. The concept of Islamophilia has evolved and progressed over time and has been studied in different backdrops. Initially, Islamophilia pointed to a positive attitude towards Islam and Muslims in the West, especially among intelligentsia and artists mainly due to the exoticism and mystique of the Islamic culture. In the early 20th century, scholars such as Louis Massignon and Max Weber were among the first to study Islamophilia as a social and cultural phenomenon. (Sealy, 2021).

Lately, Islamophilia has evolved rather broadly in the context of immigration, integration, and multiculturalism. Some scholars have suggested that Islamophilia can result in promoting tolerance and respect towards Islam and Muslims, while others have been critical, terming it a

form of Orientalism which furthers stereotypes and romanticises all things Islamic. (Helbling, 2020)

The present research on Islamophilia is complicated and diverse. While some studies, as mentioned earlier, have encouraged the idea that Islamophilia can end up in a positive view of Islam and Muslims, then there are other studies which say that it can also lead to unrealistic expectations and disappointments that may produce hostility and hatred towards Islam as an end result.

Literature Review

The concept of Islamophilia is relatively new, and research is limited at the moment on this issue. However, there are many studies at present which have attempted to look into the relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia. One such study is by Safiyya Hosein and Peter Hopkins, done in 2016, which tried to investigate a connection between Islamophilia and Islamophobia among youth in the UK. Interestingly, the study found that young people who had a positive view of Islam were more likely to be Islamophobic. This finding is supported by similar other research, including one by Baboolal (2020) which also reached the same conclusion that found that Islamophilia could lead to Islamophobia.

These findings are still up for debate. Some scholars argue that a strong appreciation and admiration for Islam can lead to the romanticization of the religion, which, in return, can end up in disappointment and disillusionment when the admiration and a strong liking fail to match the idealized image (Jones, 2018). This disappointment can then lead to hostility towards Islam and Muslims. Others argue that Islamophilia and Islamophobia, on the contrary, are two sides of the same coin and reflect the dichotomous thinking that indicates the current discourse around Islam and Muslims (Najib & Hopkins, 2019). As per this view, the focus on Islam as a monolithic institution leads to the dichotomy of good vs evil, which can lead to both admiration and fear.

However, it is pertinent to keep in mind that not all studies found the same relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia. A study by Asmaa Soliman (2021) found that Islamophilia and Islamophobia were independent ideas and that one may not necessarily lead to the other. This finding suggests that the relationship between the two may be far more complex than previously thought.

One possible explanation for this relationship is the end result of unrealistic expectations resulting from Islamophilia and the romanticization of Islam. When the ground realities fail to match the idealized image, the end result is disappointment and disillusionment. This disappointment can then take the shape of hostility and fear towards Islam and Muslims, leading to Islamophobia (Ejiofor, 2023). Another possible explanation is that Islamophilia and Islamophobia are two sides of the same coin, reflecting a dichotomous thinking on the current discourse around Islam and Muslims.

This further proves that the relationship between the two is not simple, but rather very complex and may depend on many factors including social context, individual differences, and the type of admiration or love for Islam.

The level of knowledge of Islam is another factor that can influence the relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia. Studies have found that individuals with a deeper knowledge of Islam are less likely to hold negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam (Abbas, 2015; Hossain, 2017). Therefore, it is possible that Islamophilia and Islamophobia are not related per se, but rather, they are related to the level of knowledge of Islam. Individuals who hold a positive view of

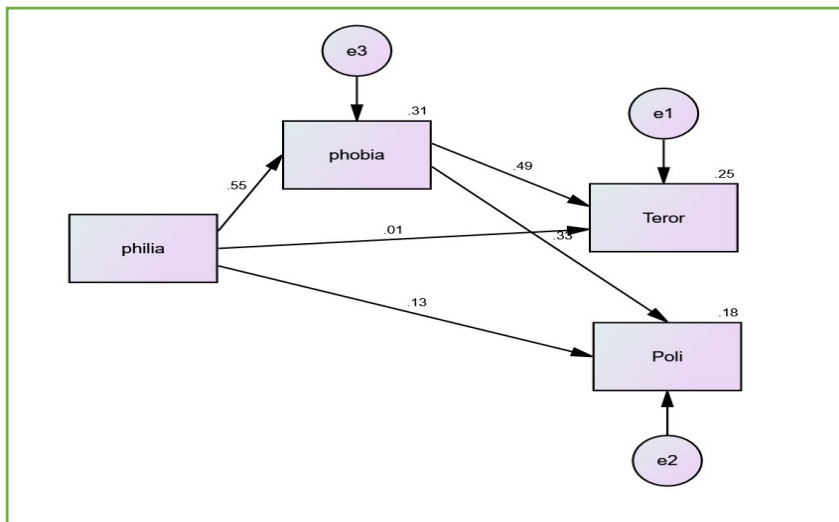
Islam may be more likely to pursue a deeper understanding of the religion, which can in return lead to a decrease in Islamophobia.

In conclusion, the relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia is complex and still a matter of debate. While some studies have found a correlation between the two, others have found no relationship at all. The underlying reasons for this inconsistency may be due to differences in methodology, sample size, and cultural context. Regardless, the issue of the relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia is an important one, and understanding the two may provide deeper insights into how to combat negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

Andrew Shryock in his book "Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of the Enemy and Friend," described Islamophobia as a 'generalized fear of Islam and Muslims', whereas Islamophilia is understood as a 'generalized affection for Islam and Muslims. Dr. Zafar Iqbal, a renowned scholar defined Islamophobia as an extreme fear and dislike of Islam as a religion, an ideology and a political force, which includes prejudice, discrimination and hostility towards Islam and Muslims. Other scholars look at these definitions in terms of dislike or prejudice against Islam or Muslims, especially as a political force. In Pakistan, the relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism presents difficult challenges (Iqbal, 2019). Despite the prevalence of Islamophilia, the study tries to investigate how it unintentionally adds to the rise of Islamophobia, which then has implications for political stability and the promotion of extremist ideologies in the country. This complex interaction between these factors creates a cycle of violence and insecurity that needs an in-depth understanding for effective intervention and policymaking. However, there should be attempts to reduce the gap in knowledge with regard to the extent and nature of this relationship, particularly in view of the student population in Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities. Therefore, this study scouts to explore the complex relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism in the Pakistani context, focusing on students pursuing BS and MS degrees in these cities.

Research Model

Figure 1



Hypothesis

Based on this literature following hypotheses are proposed;

- H1: The prevalence of Islamophilia in Pakistan is positively correlated with the rise of Islamophobia within the country.
- H2: The presence of Islamophobia in Pakistan negatively affects political stability, leading to a suitable environment which can promote extremist ideas and acts of terrorism.
- H3: The intricate relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism in Pakistan creates a vicious cycle, wherein the presence of one factor amplifies the others, further extending the cycle of violence and insecurity in the country.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the prevalence of Islamophilia in Pakistan contribute to the rise of Islamophobia within the country?
2. How does the presence of Islamophobia in Pakistan impact the political instability of the nation?
3. What are the implications of political instability and the promotion of extremist ideologies for terrorism and extremism in Pakistan?
4. How does the cyclical relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism manifest in the context of Pakistan?

Theoretical Frame Work

Agenda Setting Theory: This theory propounds that the media plays an important part in shaping public opinions, perceptions and attitudes by deciding which issues receive more attention and how they are presented/framed. In this context, the Agenda Setting Theory can be used to explore how media coverage of Islamophilia and Islamophobia shapes public opinion, political discourse, and the consequent implications for political stability and the promotion of extremist ideologies in Pakistan.

Framing Theory: This theory underlines the power of media framing in shaping public understanding and interpretation of events and issues. By analyzing how Islamophilia and Islamophobia are put together in media, this study can examine the implications of various frames on the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of the public, as well as the potential aftermath for political stability and the prevalence of extremist ideologies in Pakistan.

Cultivation Theory: This theory looks into the long-term effects of media exposure on individuals' perceptions of social reality. In this context, the Cultivation Theory can be applied to examine how repeated media portrayals of Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, terrorism, and extremism in Pakistan can affect individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions on these issues, thereby influencing their actions and contributing to the cycle of violence and insecurity.

By amalgamating these media and communication theories, the study can provide a comprehensive framework for understanding this complex relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism in Pakistan, while also highlighting the role of media in shaping these dynamics.

Research Methodology

The research method used in this study is quantitative, employing a cross-sectional survey approach. The objective is to collect data from a specific population to explore the relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism in the context of Pakistan. The study utilizes a simple sampling method to select participants. The sample consisted of students enrolled in BS and MS programs in Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities. A total of 150 closed-ended questionnaires were distributed among the students, and 137 questionnaires were found to be workable for further analysis.

Questionnaire Development: The researchers designed a closed-ended questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with various statements related to Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and terrorism & extremism. The questionnaire was designed to capture relevant variables and concepts explored in the study.

Data Analysis: The collected data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS Amos. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis and regression analysis, were conducted to examine the relationships between variables and test the research hypothesis.

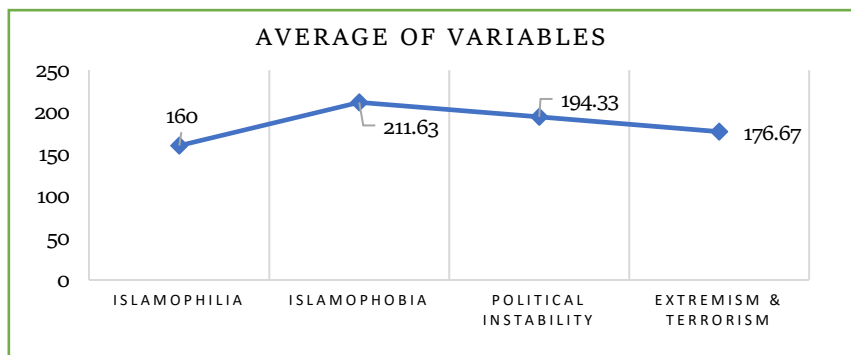
Results and Findings

Out of 137 respondents, 70 were female and 67 were male. 90 respondents were from the BS program and 47 students are studying MS program in private sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad cities. For the co-relationship of Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability and extremism & terrorism, SPSS Amos software is used.

Table 1

Variables	Average
Islamophilia	160
Islamophobia	211.63
Political Instability	194.33
Extremism & Terrorism	176.67

Figure 2



The result showed that the participants displayed a fairly high level of Islamophobia with an average score of 211.63. This suggests that a sizable portion of the respondents had unfavourable

attitudes or were afraid of Islam. The average score for Islamophilia, on the other hand, was 160, which denotes a moderate level of favourable attitudes or affinity towards Islam.

Political instability and extremism & terrorism, the dependent variables, also had average scores of 194.33 and 176.67, respectively. These results imply that political unrest and extremist behaviour are pervasive in the context of the study.

It becomes clear that political instability may have an impact on how Islamophilia and the dependent variables are related when considering its role as a moderator. With an average score of 194.33, political instability has the potential to either exacerbate or mitigate the effects of Islamophilia on terrorism and extremism. This suggests that depending on the degree of political stability in the environment, the effect of Islamophilia on extremist tendencies may change.

In conclusion, the study's findings show that participants had a high prevalence of Islamophobia and a moderate level of Islamophilia. The existence of political instability, extremism, and terrorism serves to further highlight the intricate dynamics at work. Political instability's potential to influence the relationship between Islamophilia, extremism and terrorism is suggested by its role as a moderator, underscoring the need for more research and analysis in this area.

Table 2

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		P-value	Conclusion
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Terror<--- phobia<---phillia	0.01 (0.519)	0.213	0.132	0.302	0.000	Full Mediation
Pholi<--- phobia<---phillia	0.12 (0.397)	0.163	0.0741	0.259	0.000	Full Mediation

The above tables describe the following interpretation;

The direct effect of "Terror" on "Phobia" is 0.01. The indirect effect of "Terror" on "Philia" through "Phobia" is 0.213. Confidence Interval: The confidence interval for the indirect effect ranges from 0.132 to 0.302. The p-value associated with the indirect effect is 0.000, indicating statistical significance. The results suggest full mediation, meaning that the relationship between "Terror" and "Philia" is fully explained by the mediating variable "Phobia." The direct effect of "Pholi" on "Phobia" is 0.12. The indirect effect of "Pholi" on "Philia" through "Phobia" is 0.163. The confidence interval for the indirect effect ranges from 0.0741 to 0.259. The p-value associated with the indirect effect is 0.000, indicating statistical significance. Similar to the previous relationship, there is full mediation between "Pholi" and "Philia" through the mediating variable "Phobia."

In both cases, the p-values are less than 0.05, suggesting strong evidence of mediation. The confidence intervals for the indirect effects do not include zero, further supporting the conclusion of full mediation. Therefore, based on these outcomes, we may conclude that the relationships between the variables involve full mediation, indicating that the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables are fully explained by the mediating variables. Studies have shown that individuals who possess a high degree of Islamophilia, characterized by a positive

perception of Islam and Muslims, can still harbour latent Islamophobic attitudes. This incongruity points out that Islamophilia does not necessarily protect against Islamophobia, and individuals may unknowingly hold contradictory beliefs. Research indicates that Islamophilia can inadvertently contribute to the essentialization and stereotyping of Muslims. When individuals romanticize or idealize Islam, they often oversimplify the diverse experiences and beliefs within the Muslim community, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and ultimately fueling Islamophobic sentiments. Islamophilia can sometimes lead to an attribution bias, where positive aspects of Muslims are attributed to Islam, while negative actions are blamed on individual or cultural factors. This bias can aggravate a skewed perception of Muslims and contribute to the stigmatization of the entire Muslim community. Islamophobic attitudes and policies can marginalize and alienate Muslim communities within their own countries. This marginalization can lead to social unrest, political dissatisfaction, and a sense of exclusion, thereby destabilizing the political landscape. Holding Islamophobic ideas can increase interfaith and interethnic tensions within societies, leading to conflicts that undermine political stability. These tensions can demonstrate social unrest, communal violence, and political polarization, further exacerbating the challenges of governance and stability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study spells out the complex relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and extremism & terrorism in the context of Pakistan. The findings reveal an important relationship between Islamophilia and Islamophobia, pointing to the fact that the presence of Islamophilia inadvertently contributes to the rise of Islamophobia within the country.

This heightened Islamophobia, in turn, has far-reaching consequences for political stability and the promotion of extremism & terrorism in Pakistan. The findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both Islamophilia and Islamophobia to effectively deal with these challenges. It is crucial to recognize that political instability and the promotion of extremist ideologies can be fueled by the interplay between these factors.

The study underlines the importance of promoting a balanced perspective that respects religious diversity and promotes tolerance, while also countering extremist narratives. Policymakers and stakeholders should consider strategies that encourage a delicate understanding of Islam and counter negative stereotypes and prejudices. Additionally, efforts to increase political stability through inclusive governance and effective conflict resolution mechanisms are vital in curbing the spread of extremism.

By providing empirical evidence on the relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and extremism & terrorism, this study contributes to the existing knowledge base. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers striving to create a more secure and tolerant society in Pakistan.

However, it is vital to acknowledge the limitations of this study, such as the use of a convenient sampling technique and the focus on a specific student population in two cities. Future research is needed for broader and more inclusive samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, qualitative approaches could be employed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by these dynamics.

Overall, this study serves as a stepping stone towards a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between Islamophilia, Islamophobia, political instability, and extremism & terrorism in Pakistan. It provides a foundation for further research and informs the development of evidence-based strategies to promote tolerance, political stability, and peace within the country.

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