

Haq_Abstract

Project Title: Sacralizing the State: Islam and Democracy in Pakistan

The project explores a process, that I call the "sacralization of the state," whereby governments have selectively used and inserted Islamic law in order to strengthen their political power. However, when selective Islamic elements are inserted onto post-colonial states, it becomes next to impossible to interrogate, reform, or reassess the outcomes of ensuing laws and their broader repercussions. I aim to demonstrate that statutes such as Blasphemy Law and Hudood Ordinance have increasingly facilitated "mob rule." Even though the government has not brought many cases invoking these statutes, growing numbers of individuals and groups have used these laws to target and victimize their opponents. I will also show that despite enormous criticisms of these statutes, even the elected government of more liberal secularist Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was unable to remove or significantly modify the Blasphemy Law and similar Islam-based legislation, because by voicing criticism or opposition to anything to do with sharia (as a sacred law), any position that advocates modifying these statutes is viewed as blasphemous. The unique contribution of my project is that I engage the growing scholarship on Islamist political parties in the electoral process, and the emergence of civil Islam, to explore the mechanisms that allow for accommodation of faith in public life without focusing exclusively on making the state Islamic.