

Abstract only

Title: Contentious “Junoon” and Violence
A Study of the Use of Vigilantism in the Case of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan

Assignment Component
Thesis

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A Study of the Use of Vigilantism in the Case of the
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Abstract

Since its foundation as a political party in 2015, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has left a strong mark on the Pakistani socio-political landscape, going out from the 2018 general elections as the fifth largest party in Pakistan and third in the province of Punjab. While the TLP did not receive such a comparable success in the recent 2024 elections, it has nevertheless had a strong effect on Pakistani politics and society, particularly through its use of vigilantism. This thesis asks the question of how the TLP’s use of vigilantism has affected the political behaviour and discourse of mainstream political parties and Sunni-Islamic organizations in Pakistan, regarding the topics of blasphemy and the status and rights of religious minorities. It specifically makes a three-fold argument to explain the effect of TLP vigilantism on mainstream parties and Sunni organizations: Firstly, by using vigilante violence to punish, compel and deter behavior it deems unacceptable in the social and political space, the TLP is able to enforce ‘red lines’ of political behavior and discourse, to which mainstream political parties and other Sunni-Islamic organizations must adhere and conform to be considered legitimate and accepted contestants for political power in Pakistan. Secondly, the relatively high degree of impunity enjoyed by the TLP as a result of their appeal to emotions of “junoon”, specifically related to topics like blasphemy and *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* and/or support enjoyed by the military, makes the effect of their vigilante violence even more effective. Thirdly, the TLP’s appeal to core Sunni-Islamic ideas like blasphemy and *Khatm-e-Nabuwwat* allows for a transcendence beyond traditional theological divisions (e.g., Barelvi and Deobandi), which resultingly pushes other Sunni-Islamic organizations to also extend beyond such divisions and adopt behavior and discourse which aligns with the TLP’s mission. Such an alignment between Sunni-Islamic organizations suggests a pull towards Sunni-majoritarianism in current Pakistani politics, often at the expense of other religious minority communities.

