

US Egalitarianism and Muslim World: A Study into Pakistani Image of US Democracy Project

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Abstract

Besides popular lines of half-truths by different quarters in media and academia in Pakistan, to determine the exact nature, along with limits and scope, of US attachment with global trends in democracy requires objective inquiry. This short paper seeks to identify the trends in images of Pakistanis about US policy towards democracy as it relates with the Muslim World. Thus this paper is limited to gauge the images of Pakistanis about US and for the purpose data is collected through five major urban cities. The results show that majority of Pakistanis, with noticeable difference in percentage from city to city, view that US policy is based on hypocrisy and uses democracy global project just to achieve its own national ends.

Keywords: US and Democracy, Global Democracy, Muslim World, US global Image.

Introduction

The relevance of this study rests on the fact that the United States of America has entered an era of global image-crisis. The super power has lost her “Herculean” image that is based on the principles of “democracy” and “human rights”. The drive to extend the influence across the world via imperialist policies has cost United States badly. These “soft” interventions have empowered her to infiltrate every country but the “hegemonized” states and their residents have profiled the United States in negative terms.¹ The indignation and hostility towards the super power have seen the surge in the last decade. The statistics reveal that US’ powerful image has seen the downward slide post September 11, attacks and subsequent policies adopted by her. The US’ policies towards the Islamic countries have tarnished her image markedly in Islamic countries and Pakistan is no exception.

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The Guardian endeavored to look deep after the tragic wreckage of the September attacks and stated in 2001:

*“Shock rage and grief there has been aplenty. But any glimmer of recognition of why people might have been driven to carry out atrocities, sacrificing their own lives in the process or why the United States is hated with such bitterness, not only in Arab and Muslim countries, but across the developing world seems almost entirely absent.”*²

Following the September attacks, there began a racial profiling of Muslims and the words such as “terrorists”, “violent” and “anarchists” have been used to characterize the Muslims since then.³ Such profiling has agonized the Muslims across the globe resulted in anger against the United States as she is leading the bandwagon. The anti-Americanism has not remained confined to the Islamic countries, only, but is expressed by the Muslims residing in Western countries.⁴ No argument, the September attacks were catastrophic in terms of loss and effects but the Bush administration failed to see behind the picture and labeled the entire Muslim populace.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deal with the subject of US' image as the material things exported by the superpower are accepted and highly regarded but when it comes to “non-material” aspect, that is, US' hegemonic influence on the respective countries; their citizens abhor and oppose it.⁵

Post Afghanistan invasion, Pakistan allied with US in her infamous “War on Terror” as a declared official policy. America leaned towards Pakistan due to her significant strategic location in general and particularly in case of Afghanistan and used her land as a strategic road to reach and fight her war in Afghanistan. It is ironical to note that Pakistan's official stance and public opinion do not harmonize and the rise in anti-Americanism has been witnessed. To gauge the US' image in the Muslim world, Pakistani society offers an appropriate case study as the country has been US ally since cold war era.

Literature Review

Muslim states of the Middle East has always been remained the focus of USA. The authoritarian regimes not only helped to achieve the US interests in the region like geopolitical advantage, oil, rich markets and unconditional support to Israel, but also kept their interests ahead of the interests of their people. A disorganized, weak, undemocratic and divided Middle East could

never achieve the goals of defeating Israel, gaining political and cultural autonomy from the west and completing the process of decolonization. The corrupt regimes in the region for decades undermine the real aspirations of Muslims for growth, freedom and participation in governance.⁶ The eighty years working relationship between USA and Saudi Arabia never brought the demands of improvement in conditions (human and civil rights). The status of “our ally in the region” stopped the Americans to adopt a comprehensive policy for providing the intellectual, political, and cultural growth of the people of Saudi Arabia. No pressure was put on Saudi government to liberalize or democratize the system.⁷

In 1953 the removal of democratic government of Muhammad Mossadeq in Iran with the help of CIA was a step to create a client in Middle East who supported the US agenda in the region. The US action in Iran not only deprived the people of Iran from democracy but also restrained the facilitation of democratic process in the region. The events during this period in the region helped recognize the scholars of the discipline about the dual standard of US regarding the support of democracy when they compare the situation in Iran, the unelected government of Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. A conclusion can be drawn that US was not opposed to Islam rather democracy and popular government was the target in the region.⁸

Algeria in 1992, witnessed a military coup which was finance and supported by France with the help of US. The reason behind the coup was to prevent the Islamists from coming to power who won the clear majority in election.⁹ The act of US provides a vindication to the claim of radical Islamists regarding US malice against Islam. Even though US have no vital interest in Algeria, but blocking the way of democracy has clear indication that US does not favour democratic form government in the Middle East.¹⁰ The call for democracy in Middle East by the Americans giggled many Islamists because of the fact that US is close ally of almost all the authoritarian rules in the region. Pakistan is another classic example where support for dictators by the US shows that democracy is meaningless for Americans as far as their interests are concerned. No arguments can be seen about democracy or progressive states in those countries which under US influence like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Yemen etc. A quick study of recently held election in Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain and Turkey clearly indicates the pattern the democracy is a close ally of Islamists.¹¹ Democratization in the Muslim world would lead to Islamization. The Islamists will come to power through legitimate means and

thus would resist to American interests in the Muslim world. The main hurdle in bringing the Muslim world towards democratic form of governments is the US policies.¹²

Research Methodology

The main focus of this study is to evaluate the image of USA in urban Pakistan on the issue of American policy towards Muslim world. As this study is the combination of qualitative and quantitative research so to achieve this objective both primary and secondary sources are used. The available secondary sources are used in the form of books, research journals, newspapers, magazines and official websites. The next step was preparing the questionnaire and sampling, which is discussed in detail in the following section.

The quantitative data utilized for this article is extracted from dataset collected for the PhD thesis containing number of variables and questions. To conduct the survey in the five urban centers of Pakistan the technique of probability sampling was used. The sample was further stratified into five urban centers Pakistan i.e. Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad and Quetta. For making the sample more representative the Probability-Proportional-to-Size technique was used. For getting better response respondents from every walk of life were contacted face to face.

Four provincial capitals and a federal capital were chosen for distribution of survey and sample was distributed in these five major urban centers of Pakistan. The sample was distributed and conducted during 2014-15.

Breakup of Respondents

Five urban centers of Pakistan were selected for this study. It includes the federal capital Islamabad, and four provincial capitals namely, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. Survey was distributed in proportion to population. Out of total male respondents, 17.1% respondents were from Islamabad, 22% from Karachi, 20.4% from Lahore, 21.8% from Peshawar and 18.6% respondents were from Quetta. The female respondents' ratio were 11.2% from Islamabad, 33.3% from Karachi, 24.8% from Lahore, 15.8% from Peshawar and 14.9% respondents belong to Quetta.

Table 1: Breakup of Respondents

Residence					Total
Islamabad	Karachi	Lahore	Peshawar	Quetta	

Gender	Male	Count	160	206	191	204	174	935
		%	17.1%	22.0%	20.4%	21.8%	18.6%	100.0%
		within Gender						
	Female	Count	62	184	137	87	82	552
		%	11.2%	33.3%	24.8%	15.8%	14.9%	100.0%
		within Gender						
Total		Count	222	390	328	291	256	1487
		%	14.9%	26.2%	22.1%	19.6%	17.2%	100.0%
		within Gender						

USA and Support for Democracy in Islamic world

Democracy is the most practical form of government in the modern world which ensures the personal freedom of human beings along with economic opportunities, accountability of the governments and sense of participation among the citizens of a state. USA is among the oldest democracy of the world and promoting democratization in other parts of world as her stated policy. Richard N. Haass stated that:

*“America must stand firm for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property”.*¹³

Muslim world is not an exception regarding this. The reality is quite different from the theoretical assumption of support for democracy in the Islamic world. The Middle East and South Asia remained the focus of US attention during the important phase of Cold War. The oil factor and protection of Israel in the Middle East made it a hub of political attention of both the superpowers during Cold War. Majority of the Islamic states were under the authoritarian rule throughout the period of cold war but US did not pay attention to the ideals of democracy in this Muslim world. Support for democracy in some parts of the Muslim world and opposing the ideals of democracy in the oil rich region of Middle East indicates the pattern of the US policy choices guided by the dominant theory of realism.¹⁴

Pakistan and Iran presented the ideal case to judge the reality of American support for democracy in Islamic world. The overthrown of the democratic government of Muhammad Mossadeq by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 1953 and the installation of Shah's government in Iran is the vital example

of American belief over the ideals of realism.¹⁵ Opposition of Islamic government in Iran, favouring the Mujahedeen in Afghan episode of containing communism and subsequent support for the military rule of Zia-ul-Haq by USA shows the double standards of Americans towards democratization in Islamic world. The American support for authoritarian rules in Africa, Middle East in South Asia indicates American duplicity regarding the support for the democratic rules in Islamic world. Pakistani public remained doubtful and is still dubious over the principle of support for democracy in Islamic world by USA and viewed US image as negative.

Table 2: Images of Respondents

Urban Center	USA always supports democracy in the Muslim World.	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	Total
		Islamabad	Count	75	135
	%within Residence	33.80%	60.80%	5.40%	100.00%
Karachi	Count	144	201	45	390
	%within Residence	36.90%	51.50%	11.50%	100.00%
Lahore	Count	126	189	13	328
	%within Residence	38.40%	57.60%	4.00%	100.00%
Peshawar	Count	104	162	25	291
	%within Residence	35.70%	55.70%	8.60%	100.00%
Quetta	Count	89	164	3	256
	%within Residence	34.80%	64.10%	1.20%	100.00%

Source: Field survey by the author

Elucidation

Table reflects the public opinion in Pakistan regarding the issue of support for democracy in the Muslim world. Out of total respondents living in Lahore supported the argument more with 38.40% respondents responded as agree while Islamabad remained with lowest support for US policy of democratization in the Muslim world when 33.80% respondents answered as agree. American image is more negative on her support for democracy in

Muslim world in the city of Quetta where 64.10% respondents replied as disagree while the less anti-American city in Pakistan in this regard is Karachi where 51.50% respondents responded as disagree. Nearly one third respondents in urban centers of Pakistan saw the US image as positive while two-third respondents viewed the American image as negative.

Conclusion

Historical trends reveal that USA adopted a number of approaches for supporting the principles of democracy in the Muslim world. These approaches include support for autocratic rules in the Muslim world where stability is preferred over democracy like Saudi Arabia, and in most of the Middle Eastern countries. The other approach can be seen in shape of sanctions or military actions against those countries where there is direct threat to Israel or to her interests. Egypt and Iraq are the best examples of this approach. Pakistan, an important part of Muslim world witnessed both versions of these approaches by the USA. People of Pakistan with majority rejected the American posture of universal support for democracy in the world. Majority of the five selected urban centers rejected the notion of universal support for democratic norms and principles by the USA.

Images play an important role in formulating the foreign policy of a country. All the states in the world tried their best to build positive images in the world by investing huge resources. Pakistan is a state where anti-Americanism is extremely high for many reasons. One of the most important factors among these is the US policy towards Islamic world. The dual standards of USA regarding her support for democracy in the Muslim world limited the choice for Pakistani policy makers in the Islamabad.

The conversion of negative image to positive in Pakistan is a difficult and long term task but US should take concrete steps to achieve this goal. Adoption of single-handed approach towards the support for democratic principles and norms throughout the world including the Muslim world would help to build positive image of USA in Pakistan.

Notes & References

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