

## Article

# Religion and Populism in the Global South: Islamist Civilisationism of Pakistan's Imran Khan

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**Abstract:** The fusion of religion and populism has paved the way for civilisationism. However, this significant issue is still unresearched. This paper attempts to address this gap by investigating the Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan's Islamist populism and civilisationism as an empirical case study. While Islamism has been explored in the context of Pakistan, this paper goes beyond and investigates the amalgamation of Islamist ideals with populism. Using discourse analysis, the paper traces the horizontal and vertical dimensions of Imran Khan's religious populism. The paper provides an understanding of how "the people", "the elite", and "the others" are defined at present in Pakistan from an antagonistic and anti-Western civilisationist perspective. The paper finds that "New Pakistan" is indeed a "homeland" or an idolized society defined by Islamist civilisationism to which extreme emotions, sentimentality and victimhood are attached.

**Keywords:** religion; populism; civilisationism; religious populism; Islamism; Pakistan; emotive politics; victimhood



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## 1. Introduction

Home to some 216.6 million people, Pakistan today is a haven for Islamist ideals both in political and social domains. Since its foundation, religion has been instrumentalized by politicians in the country and has been sold off as a soothing balm ointment for various ailments of deeply troubled citizenry. Pakistan is a country where malnourished children are a common sight. Some 45 percent of children under five years old are stunted, 32 percent shows signs of being underweight, and 15 percent suffer from acute malnutrition. These harrowing figures are, unfortunately, not unconceivable. Finding a square meal is increasingly becoming hard due to sky-rocketing inflation of staple commodities (currently inflation stands at 9–11% for 2020–2021). Most citizens have opportunities to gain little education and lack functional literacy. Pakistan's literacy rate stands at 59 percent<sup>1</sup> and 44 percent of 5–16 years olds are out of school. To make matters worse, development aid or efforts struggle to reach beneficiaries where corruption<sup>2</sup> is endemic ([Transparency International 2021](#); [UNICEF 2021](#); [World Bank 2020](#); [USAID 2017](#)).

In this socio-economic atmosphere, the inundated and overwhelmed citizenry is provided an 'Islamic' identity (Sunni Muslim majoritarianism). The idea of Pakistan as a pure land for Muslims is now deeply embedded in the collective consciousness which aids Islamists and populists in amassing electoral success. In this atmosphere, liberal, secular, and progressive voices are being forcefully muffled ([Backer 2015](#)) making Islam a staple part of everyday Pakistani politics.

At present, Pakistan is going through another metamorphic transition in its Islamist journey. This socio-political transition from the idea of a Muslim nation to an Islamist one has taken decades in the making ([Yilmaz 2016](#); [Yilmaz and Saleem 2021](#)). Islamism is a complex ideology, and the term has become too nebulous a formulation to provide an analytical guide ([Ayooob 2005](#), p. 952; see also [Yilmaz 2009a](#), [2009b](#); [Yilmaz 2021](#)). However, broadly speaking, Islamism is a set of ideologies based around Islam not only

being a religion but also a political system (Ismail 2004, p. 616). In other words, Islamism refers to transforming Islam into a political ideology in order to pursue political objectives (Denoeux 2002, p. 61). While ‘Islamic’ can mean anything related to Islam, “Islamism” is the political ideology. Under the leadership of the populist government of the *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* /Pakistan Movement for Justice (PTI) (2018–present), the state narrative is now transitioning from Islamist nationalism to Islamist civilisationism (Yilmaz and Shakil 2021a; Yilmaz and Shakil 2021b). This new development is only partly a result of a conducive domestic environment for Islamism and populism. Rather, it is also a part of the global rise of civilisationism (Brubaker 2017; Yilmaz and Morieson 2021). Consequently, Pakistan is no longer simply ‘the land of the pure’, “the pure” are a part of the global *ummah* or Muslim brotherhood (Yilmaz et al. 2021a).

Civilisationism is a highly divisive approach. It not only characterises people’s enemies within the national context, but also takes this categorization to a transitional level. In societies where fear of “foreign” or “non-Muslims” pre-exists, it has a magnetic effect in electoral politics. It is an appealing version of populism; in societies where religion is deeply integrated, this notion causes troubling socio-political changes. This paper is an attempt to focus on the understudied development of Islamist civilisationism in Pakistan, under Imran Khan’s PTI-led populist government, as a national and regional phenomenon. This case study provides an opportunity to explore civilisationism in a deeply conservative Islamised society. Its existence enchants new recruits to the right-wing and emboldens the pre-existing religious extremists. The all-encompassing nature of a civilisational identity, in this case, expands the canvas for extremism and increases the pressure to homogenise society under the “ideal Islamic” principles. In such a society, very little room for liberal ideas or ‘non-conformity’ remains.

This study first introduces its conceptual framework. This overview provides the definitional parameters of key concepts of populism, Islamism and civilisationism used in this paper. The following section uses a literature review along with mapping of Imran Khan’s discourse to discuss various dimensions of his Islamist populism. In doing so, the segment distinguishes his approach from previous Islamists and populists in Pakistan. It also brings forth the evolution of horizontal and vertical dimensions of Khan’s populism. Then, the discussion moves to understand civilisationism as a key characteristic of PTI’s politics. For this purpose, the authors use a collection of Khan’s speeches, Tweets along with news reports, press releases, manifestos, PTI forged bills/laws, and policies, between January 2013 and August 2021. Vocabulary is the central focus of this discourse analysis, which facilitated a deeper insight into the narrative (He 2017; Youmans 1991). The selection of words and their emotive power when discussing ideas of Islam, *ummah*, brotherhood, victimization, anti-Western rhetoric, and civilisation were observed in the texts (a list of sources used can be found in the Appendix A). With the focus on these keywords the populist discourse regarding themes of media, the state of women’s rights, Single National Curriculum (SNC), and interaction with Muslim countries was traced. This segment, thus, shows Khan’s ‘New Pakistan’ formed on the idea of populist Islamist civilisationism. The following segment provides a conclusion that analyses the depth and consequences of this union between populism and religion espoused by Pakistan’s largest political party as its strategy.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Pakistan’s current government is facing a transition that entails mixing Islamist populism being used to form civilisationism. This portion introduces each of these three key concepts.

Populism today is understood beyond an occurrence confined to poorly performing democracies or as a left-wing authoritarian phenomenon. Between 1990 and 2018, the number of populists in power around the world increased from 4 to 20 and it has expanded beyond Latin America and Eastern Europe to flagship democracies in the West and relatively new uncharted regions of Asia (Kyle and Gultchin 2018, p. 4). Despite its surge,

there is no agreement on the exact definition of populism. Mainly, four streams of ideas exist on populism. Scholars largely view it as: political strategy, the discourse of a group using populism, style/behaviour of the leadership, and an ideational concept (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Moffitt 2016; Hawkins 2010; Barr 2009; Laclau 2005; Mudde 2004; Weyland 2001; Yilmaz and Morieson 2021). While it is hard to deduce a precise definition of populism, there is agreement on some key features. The dichotomous nature of populism is essential, which defines “the people” versus “the elite” and, at times, “the others” as part of the “problem” faced by the country/group. For this paper, the definition proposed by Mudde (2004, p. 543) was opted, populism “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.

While seemingly unidimensional, populism is highly versatile. At first glance, it is “thin-centred” and “lacking the sophistication of other ideologies such as socialism or liberalism”; thus, it is readily “combined with other beliefs and ideas of politics” (de la Torre and Anselmi 2019, p. 7). This makes populism a part of both right and left-wing spectrums which can take the form of cultural, anti-establishment, and socio-economic populism (Kyle and Gultchin 2018) or becomes a ‘catch it all’ form of populism. Kyle and Gultchin (2018, pp. 33–34), in their global survey, found that cultural populism is one of the most diverse and widespread occurrences.

Populism’s dichotomy is not mono-dimensional when it comes to defining the “enemies” of the people. Taguieff (1995, pp. 32–35) calls this the vertical and horizontal categorization of populism where the former is “the elite”, whereas the latter is “the others”. “Outsiders” are determined due to their social, political, economic, or ethnic standing (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013; Taguieff 1995).

In the global North, the recent wave of immigration, mainly of refugees from Muslim countries, has aided populists in Western Europe and the United States. This has manifested in the rise of Donald Trump, the increasing bluntness of Dutch Geert Wilders, leader of the Partij voor de Vrijheid/Party for Freedom (PVV), as well as Brexit, where the general sentiment revolves around “the others” being either a cultural threat or nuance to the ‘Judeo-Christian’ values and norms (Ozzano and Bolzonar 2020; Brubaker 2017; Roy 2016; Mudde 2007). On a closer inspection there are differences in how identarian populism is used in the West. Western European countries use an identarian populist outlook where “the people” are not following scripture word-to-word; rather, it is a secularized idea of a ‘Judeo-Christian’ identity. This helps define “the people” on lines of “the culmination of two-thousand years of Judeo-Christian and Humanist culture” which “faces an existential threat” from “the others” such as “Muslims and the Islamic Civilization” (Brubaker 2017; Ozzano and Bolzonar 2020; Mudde 2007, p. 296).

Trump’s “religious nationalism” is another face of this identarian populism that shows a more profound linkages with faith groups and its attachment with nationalism. Brubaker (2017) calls it “religious nationalism”. In this context, the secularized dimension is not as profound and the Christian faith’s practise and identity is conjoined with nationalism. This merger has long been part of conservative politics in the US, also called the “American Civil Religion” by Bellah (1967). In its present populist form, with Evangelical support, the “corrupt institutions of US Government” are targeted; nativism, nationalism, and religion are combined to create the identity of “the people” (Young et al. 2019). Thus, a part of the Trump movement focuses on appeasing the practising “Christian Americans” which distinguishes it from the rather secularized identarian populism of Western European (Brubaker 2017; McCaskill 2016). Trump’s choice of Mike Pence as his Vice President and holding the Bible before ordering a crackdown, on unarmed protestors, exemplified the unique characterises of “religious nationalism” in the American case (BBC 2021a; McCaskill 2016).

The flexibility of this concept has allowed for identarian populism to take a civilizational form in India and East Asia, as part of the ‘Saffron Wave’ (Yilmaz et al. 2021a).

Civilizationism in India takes the shape of Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and groups such as the Ma Ba Tha and Bodu Bala Sena, respectively, in Myanmar and Sri Lanka use it to create a populist narrative (Thu 2021; Pirbhai 2020; Jaffrelot and Tillin 2017; Anderson and Damle 2005). For example, the Ma Ba Tha monks are religious figures, but their rhetoric is closer to civilisationism rather than a call for reviving Buddhism scripture's teachings themselves (Pirbhai 2020). Both Buddhist groups also show transitional support for each other's populist cause (Sirilal 2014). This gives them a shared civilizational discourse. India also shows a reliance on identitarian populism, to create the idea of a 'Hindu civilization'. Since Hinduism itself lacks the grounds to be binary, Hindutva provides the dimensions for divisive populist civilisationism (Pirbhai 2020). Thus, Hindutva is used in an identitarian populist style. However, given the geographical realities, BJP has no transitional partners. However, it has transitional "enemies" such as Pakistan. Islamophobia towards Indian-Muslims and "terrorist" Pakistanis is a core part of its populist civilisationist "crises" (Leidig 2020; Maizland 2020; Shamim 2019; Waikar 2018; Hafeez 2015).

A huge part of populist civilisationism hinges on the emotional appeal. In cases of both identitarian or religiously constructed populism, negative and positive emotions play a key role in categorizing society. Negative emotions that incite fear and victimhood are key in forming the existentialist crises of "the people". In this model the anger towards "the elite" and "others" help populists perform quite well. They use ideas of "repressed shame that transforms fear and insecurity into anger, resentment, and hatred against perceived 'enemies' of the precarious self" are provocative emotions (Salmela and Scheve 2018, p. 434). This helps in cognitively legitimizing the idea of a "clash of civilizations". This concept grants immense pride and longing in "the people" for their idealized "homeland" or "society". This emotional dimension legitimizes violence and non-democratic measures to "safeguard" the "civilisation" and its "people" (Yilmaz and Barton 2021; Yilmaz and Morieson 2021; Demertzis 2019).

In the Muslim world, Turkey is perhaps the most prominent example, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan led *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/Justice and the Development Party (AKP) (Yilmaz et al. 2021a; Yilmaz 2021). The impact of the populism is such that this wave has reversed nearly seven decades of Kemalist push for secularization (Yilmaz 2014b; Sullivan 2019; Yavuz and Öztürk 2019; Christofis 2018). Taş (2020, p. 2) categorizes the Erdoğan's populist civilisationism nexus between "Islamism, nationalism, and populism" (Taş 2020, p. 2). While the traditional "elites" are the Kemalists, there are also "the others" such as the liberals, leftists, Kurds, Alevis, Gulenists and other critical voices (Yilmaz et al. 2020; Yilmaz 2021). AKP, thus, goes beyond simple nationalism or right-wing populism; it combines various layers to create the idea of a greater Muslim civilisation which is not only in competition with the Western civilisation (Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020), but also under existential threat. Turkey is the protagonist of this narrative with its allies and well-defined antagonists. AKP also displays signs of exporting its populism on Islamist civilisational lines. Öztürk (2021) observes, "Weaponised in foreign policy, Islam has become both an instrument and an objective of the repressive AKP, and Turkey has emerged as a front runner in a race among countries increasingly using religion as a foreign policy tool". Diyanet (Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs) has substantially grown in its stature and power during the AKP era. It acts as a mouthpiece for cultivating pro-state and Islamist populist sentiments within Turkey (Yilmaz et al. 2021b; Yilmaz and Albayrak 2022) and amongst diaspora who attend its mosque services (Öztürk 2016, 2019). In addition, its Sunni outlook spreads the idea of an *ummah* and Turkey's neo-Ottoman role in the Muslim World. In addition to using the pulpit, AKP has been exporting historical fiction dramas to Muslim countries and beyond to cultivate a neo-Ottoman illusion that imparts the populist civilisationist narratives (Bhutto 2020; Çevik 2019; Berg 2017; Jabbour 2015). A recent example is the drama *Dirilis: Ertugrul*. Aired in Pakistan during 2020, the drama series broke viewership records in the country (Yilmaz and Shakil 2021d). It is believed that a part of its appeal is based on the pro-jihad ideas of "tribal intrigues, blood, murder, and



conquest” embraced by protagonist Muslims against the non-Muslim and “hypnotical” antagonists in the plot (Hoodbhoy 2020a). In a wider sense, Hadiz (2018, p. 567) notes that Muslim majority countries have seen contemporary populists use Islamist civilisationism where, “cultural idioms associated with Islam are required (...) for the mobilisation of a distinctly ummah-based political identity in contests over power and resources in the present democratic period”.

Civilisationism is not only embraced by political parties. In Indonesia, it has surfaced as part of an Islamist movement/organisation the Front Pembela Islam/Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). Before a recent ban, FPI used the idea of an *ummah* to galvanize support against “the corrupt” government and the Indonesian Catholic Chinese community “the elite”. The group played a central role in the anti-Ahok protest during 2016–2017. The nationwide protests, supported by FPI and other right-wing parties, led to the dismissal and imprisonment of Jakarta’s ethnically Chinese and religiously Christian governor, on accusations of alleged blasphemy (Yilmaz and Barton 2021; Mietzner 2018; Hadiz 2016). These actions were taken to ‘safeguard’ the *ummah* who were “offended” by the comments made by the former governor. FPI has been known to maintain links with jihadist outfits in the Middle East, the organization receives Salafi funding for its educational programs, its leader has been educated in the Saudi Arabia and was hosted there during his self-imposed political exile (Yilmaz and Barton 2021). With a history of constant attacks on China, West, and its own non-Muslim population along with links to Saudi Arabia and jihadist groups, the FPI uses populism that is rooted in Islamist civilisationism.

The two examples show civilisationist populists make excessive use of the horizontal dimension of populism to define “the others” who are seen as an existentialist threat to the culture of “the people”. Compared to Islamist populism, civilisationism goes beyond nationalism and focuses on religion to constantly contrast “opposing” civilisational identities. This makes the populist civilizationism “particularly important in the populist construction of “the people” and designation of enemies. Moreover, the vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism may be couched within a deeper civilization frame, allowing for elites and others to be portrayed as threatening to “the people” and their civilization” (Yilmaz et al. 2021a).

Populism due to its ‘thin’ existence is in a constant quest to ‘thicken’ itself. In the past, left- and right-wing populism have served as classic examples of this attachment. At present, its global presence has expanded its ability to ‘latch on’ a variety of ideas. The instrumentalization of Islam by politicians is a common occurrence and it has been used by populist leaders and groups as well. Civilisationism, a rather new concept, is a variation in the manifestation of twenty-first century populism. It remains relatively well discussed in the context of the West, with little focus on Muslim majority countries. It is important to study religious populism in a geography where faith is a lived experience and deeply embedded in the lives of citizens. Its presence in such a society allows civilisationism a greater appeal. This idea encapsulating faith and populism under the umbrella of civilizationism becomes a dangerous rhetoric and ideology, in a deeply conservative and divided society such as Pakistan.

### 3. Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Khan’s Populism

Imran Khan is not the only populist or the first one to instrumentalize faith in Pakistan. His evolving rhetoric provides a useful insight into what makes him stand out as a populist using Islamist civilisationism.

Pakistan’s formation can be seen as a populist movement where “the people” were the Muslims of India, who sought a separate country, away from the elite political hegemony of not only the British, but also the Hindu majority (Rastogi 2021; Ahmad 2020). This trend continued. In 1965, the first populist leader of Pakistan surfaced when Fatima Ali Jinnah, the youngest sister and political companion of Qaid-e-Azam, ran a pro-democracy campaign against the “elite” with the promise of a “real democracy” so that the “people’s will” could prevail (Zaheer and Chawla 2019; Paracha 2018). In the 1970s, Z. A. Bhutto

and his Pakistan's Peoples Party (PPP) formulated a left-leaning populism for "the people" that held a strong anti-corruption and anti-capitalist rhetoric against the military and oligarchical "elite" (Niazi 1987; Nanda 1972; Yilmaz and Saleem 2021). Bhutto showed an anti-Western attitude and tried to co-opt with Muslim "brother" nations which led to efforts such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) oil embargo in the 1970s (Khan 2003). In the 1980s, military dictator Zia-ul-Haq used Islamization, at an unprecedented scale, which shariatized the constitution. For instance, the Federal Shariat Court was established which allowed the body to deem any law un-Islamic. Gender-biased laws, such as the hudood ordinance were introduced, and driven from sharia (Yilmaz 2011, 2014a; Ahmed and Yilmaz 2021; Snellinger 2018; Lodhi 2012). Between 1988 and 2001, PPP's brand of populism and Islamist populist conservatism, of Zia's protégé, Nawaz Sharif dominated Pakistani politics.

After the General Pervaiz Musharraf's military coup d'état (Afzal 2014; Morgan 2011; Looney 2008), Islamism and populism surfaced outside the parliament. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targeted "the elite", "puppet gunmen", and "kafirs" (infidels) (Khan 2005; Cohen 2004). Post 9/11, religious movements/organizations such as Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TL) have manifested as Islamist populist groups. TL enjoys public support and has been able to walk free after sporadic violent protests and now contests in general elections (Malik 2018).

In this context, Imran Khan began his political career after retiring from professional international cricket. He was hailed as a national hero for being the team captain when Pakistan won its first, and only, International Cricket World Cup in 1992. His philanthropic work in the form of establishing the first Shaikat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital, in 1994, earned him a highly favourable reputation. Khan formally entered politics in 1996 by establishing the PTI. In its initial days, the party possessed a populist ideology that criticized "the elite's" dynastic politics. "The people" in this context were shown as deprived of their basic rights. Khan's decision to not join any pre-existing political party established his "honest image" (Mir 2018). He presented himself as someone who is an advocate of ending corruption and clearing out the political mafias. The PTI did not secure a major victory until 2013, and existed as an anti-establishment and reformist voice. These features are still a core part of PTI's vertical populism.

Khan as an international celebrity and an upper-class Pakistani had spent most of his youth living a "Western lifestyle". His habits earned him the image of a "playboy" in the 1980s by becoming a constant feature in tabloids. Once Khan entered politics, he 're-discovered' his Muslim heritage and gradually changed his style, outlook and even statements in Islamic fashion. Yet, these personal changes did not yet form the horizontal dimension of his populism in his initial years in politics.

In the initial years, Khan was a "reformist" populist who stood out as a unique politician due to his non-political background. Combined with his anti-establishment and corruption calls, he gathered a small but loyal following. His persona assumed a traditional and Muslim style, which was pragmatic for survival in the conservative atmosphere in Pakistan. PTI in the pre-9/11 context was using anti-establishment and socio-economic populism. For instance, Khan focused on criticizing the lack of human development such as access to education and healthcare during this phase. He also blamed the trend of dynastic politics for their lack of empathy towards electoral representatives and the issues of "the people" (Sajid and Latif 2019; Abbas 2018).

Pakistan's fourth military rule period and the "war on terror" were two major events that were coincidentally aligned. During this period the Musharraf regime had a very clear pro-West policy against 'terrorism.' In this period, Khan distinguished himself with an "anti-establishment" image that was broadcast on primetime shows (Hasan 2017). After the regime fell, in 2008, Khan won a seat in the National Assembly (NA). It was during this period that his party PTI added a second layer to its populism which was rooted in Islamism, justified in the guise of 'human rights'.

The Afghan conflict spilled over into Pakistan. The scale of the devastation was mammoth. The country lost some 83,000 lives while its economy was drained of some USD126 billion due to a lack of peace and security (Jamal 2021). A hefty burnt was faced in the form of human and economic losses (Iqbal 2018). The 1980s Soviet–Afghan war left a favourable pre-disposition in many Pakistanis towards the mujahedeen or Taliban (Janjua 2019). It was not surprising when Khan openly started to defend the Taliban and blamed “the West” for various problems being faced in the region.

Khan began to openly call out Musharraf receiving “US backing”, criticized the US drone attacks on Pakistani soil, led a blockade of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supplies from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and even went on to organize a vehicle caravan political rally in the militant insurgency area of Western Pakistan (Chowdhry and Houreld 2012). His ideas were rooted in Islamism disguised under “human rights”, as he argued, “Are these people (drone attack victims) not humans? These humans have names. Drone attacks are a violation of human rights” (Chowdhry and Houreld 2012). It was part of a larger “clash of civilization”-like ideology, where “the West” and its supporters were deemed the antagonistic and conspiring other. Khan has since defended the Taliban by saying, “We (Pakistan and the CIA and USA), created these militant groups to fight the Soviets . . . Jihadis were heroes then . . . the US packs up and leaves Afghanistan . . . and we were left with these groups . . . . Pakistan again joins the US (post 9/11) in the war on terror and now we are required to go after these groups as terrorists . . . so, Pakistan took a real battering in this” (Press Trust of India 2019).

Similar to Turkey’s Erdogan (Yilmaz 2021), emotions and making use of anti-Western resentment have always been central in Khan’s and PTI’s rhetoric. In 2005, Khan mainstreamed a video where a Quran was damaged during the Afghanistan conflict. He sparked sentimentalities of the conservative crowds, both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Khan’s words, “This is what the US is doing . . . desecrating the Quran”, motivated many to come out on the streets (Rajghatta 2005). Khan’s emotive rhetoric fumed anti-Western feelings, which led to rioting at anti-America protests, resulting in the death of sixteen people in Afghanistan (The Week 2020).

Under this Islamist populist framework, Khan went beyond Islamism and gave his rhetoric a ‘clash of civilisation’ dimension where it became the “West versus Muslims”. He has justified the Afghan Taliban as “good”. In his perspective, the Afghan Taliban are freedom fighters against “foreign” occupants, while the TLP at home are “bad” Taliban who attack citizens and are allegedly funded by India and others to “destabilize Pakistan” (Afzal 2019; Mullah 2017). The Taliban have been presented as “the people” combating the “intruders” that symbolized a fight of the *ummah*. He casually explained, “It is very clear that whoever is fighting for their freedom is fighting a jihad . . . The people who are fighting in Afghanistan against the foreign occupation are fighting a jihad” (Boone 2012; Dawn 2012). At home, he started his affiliation with ultra-right parties by joining the coalition *Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal* (MMA) which opposed the domestic military’s actions against homegrown jihadists (The Guardian 2005).

The name “Taliban Khan”, given to him by several newspapers, has become a symbol of pride and “resistance” for Khan. Over the years, his Islamism has expanded to various issues; however, this initial foundation of his horizontal religious populism is still in place. These views are reflected in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Khan cheered the Taliban as he explained “(Taliban have) broken the chains of mental slavery in Afghanistan”, again, resonating the bases of his civilizationism-based Islamist populism of the “West vs. Islam” (Ellis-Petersen 2021).

PTI won a major electoral victory in the 2013 general elections by gaining a significant number of seats in KPK, where it formed its provincial government. This period led Khan to refine and consolidate his populism.

Khan maintained his ‘rude’ and ‘blunt’ attacks against the political “elite”, mainly the PPP and PML-N. The call for anti-corruption became a PTI-led “tsunami”, both on social media and in the form of festive political rallies (Mullah 2017; Mufti 2016; Mehdi 2013). This

period completely vilified existing political parties and presented Khan as the ‘saviour’. At the same time the vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism merged under Islamist civilisationism. “The elite” were portrayed increasingly as puppets of the “West” and prone to taking the “begging bowl” to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which made Pakistan their “slave” or a “puppet state”. Khan vowed never to bend the knee to “Western” powers and organizations, to bring back “integrity”<sup>3</sup> (Kari 2019). Ironically, during the first tenure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), PTI never questioned the “foreign money” being supplied by the federal government for various development projects (Gishkori 2020). It also remained silent over the military operations in KPK to drive out militants.

Additionally, Khan’s collation partners, the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (JI), a hard-line right-wing party, Islamised the curriculum which was presented as an effort to “indigenise” the syllabus in line with the “religious” and “cultural” values of Pakistan. Additionally, Quran classes were also made mandatory in schools (Abbasi 2017; Dawn 2014). Additionally, under the madrasa “reforms”, Khan’s government granted 300 million PKR (estimated 3 million USD at that time), in 2016, to a *Darul Uloom Haqqania* (a jihadist seminary that is also linked to the murder of former PM Benazir Bhutto) and a 277 million PKR (2.8 million USD) was again delivered to the radical seminary in 2018 (The News 2018; Dawn 2016). Khan again justified the ‘soft image’ of the madrasa system by saying the clerics aided in gathering support for polio drives or dismissed responsibility by arguing that previous governments had given similar grants to the network (Dawn 2016). Outside of KPK in 2014, PTI joined forces with right-wing Islamist preacher Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri for orchestrating a mass sit-in in Islamabad. This was a prolonged sit-in demonstration called the *Azadi* March (Freedom March) that targeted the “corrupt elite” and symbolically displayed PTI’s willingness to form coalitions with Islamist right-wing groups.

At this point, Khan backtracked from a lot of his earlier convictions. For instance, PTI welcomed “corrupt” politicians via horse-trading, and it used projects in a pork-barrelling fashion (Sadaqat 2017). This made PTI no different from existing political parties other than Khan’s non-political background. It was during this phase that Khan coined the idea of “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan), for the 2018 election campaign, which encompasses all dimensions of PTI’s populism relaying heavily on Islamist civilisationism. Relying on this idea, Khan presents a picture of an ideal Pakistan where not only the “elite” and “corrupt” are non-existent, but Islam is a model for all aspects of life. Young people embrace Islamic ideas and are not “misguided” by Western ideas and the Islamic welfare and justice system is in place. The country violently opposes all things ‘unIslamic’ and became the flagship for Islam. All solutions to the issues faced by Pakistan are supposedly addressed by embracing the ‘true’ ideals of Islam. Thus, creating an Islamist civilisation homeland and identity for “the people”.

The anti-corruption campaign to “empty” the “Swiss bank accounts” of PPP and PML-N leadership grew aggressive amidst the Panama Papers leaks (Cheema 2018). Before the 2018 elections, Nawaz Sharif was convicted in one of the court cases and went into a self-imposed exile on the pretext of “health issues” (Cheema 2018). With a clear hope of gaining a national majority, PTI presented its populist vision for “New Pakistan”, modelled on *Riyasat-e-Madina* (the first Islamic state of Madinah). This Islamist populist utopia is a reformist idea rooted in Islamic welfare. It promises to rebuild the lost, idealized and fictionalised society, of Madina by providing homes for all, health insurance for the poor, skills training for the young, income programs for vulnerable groups, food kitchens, quality education, and the all-encompassing list goes on (Dawn 2021a; Shaukat 2021). Khan argued that the “looted” wealth, once returned, would fund “New Pakistan”, while an import driven economy would sustain long-term development. This financial stability would guarantee that the country would never take its “begging blow” to IMF nor be America’s “puppet”. This “silver bullet” solution on paper was idealistic, but failed to provide pathways leading to achieve the promises. Khan only provided piecemeal solutions and usually relied on rhetoric which showed his ambitions of following “the examples of the



four rightly guided caliphs of Islam”, while he urged “the pious” people to steadfastly face the “struggles” such as the good Muslims of the early Islamic history.

By the time Khan and his party were voted into office, he ideologically espoused Islamist civilisationism embedded in the vision of “New Pakistan”. The vertical dimension of this populist narrative focuses on “the political elite”, while “the others”, or horizontal dimensions are mainly Western governments, non-Muslim ‘enemy’ states such as India, and pro-liberal voices amongst Pakistanis. A growing part of ‘the others’ is also internal voices that are critical of Khan. These mainly include liberal and secular voices that harshly curbed by being deemed ‘un-pious’ or ‘too Western’ (Kermani 2021; Khan 2020; Hamid 2018; Backer 2015). Post-2018, Khan’s populist civilisationism and its dimensions have expanded and concretized.

Pakistan has been a fertile ground for both populists and Islamists. PTI holds the distinction of successfully coupling the two ideas and mainstreaming it as populist civilisationism. It has transitioned from a reformist, anti-state, and anti-corruption party to one that constructs a grant Islamist narrative of a civilisation under attack from “the others”. Simultaneously, it offers solutions for “the people” based off a populist-religious rhetoric that is tinted by civilisationism. Its victory in general elections has emboldened it, which has led Khan to tangibly create a “New Pakistan”.

#### 4. The Materialization of Islamist Civilisationism in Khan’s Populism

This portion of the paper looks at PTI’s post-2018 general elections<sup>4</sup> transition. The focal point is to understand “New Pakistan” being turned into a real-life model by Khan using populist Islamist civilizationism. Being a populist leader, Khan had made impossible promises which did not materialized, earning him the title ‘U-turn Khan’. This combined with the poor policy and governance, during the three years of his tenure, built pressure on the leadership (Dawn 2020, 2021b; Mumtaz 2021; Dunya News 2020; Ismail 2020; Shah 2019). Civilisationism is a key defence mechanism used by Khan to maintain his appeal in a deeply conservative society, while deflecting blames to “the enemies” of “the people”. For instance, the failure to control rape were deflected to ‘Western’-induced immoralities and liberals were blamed for their lack of faith in ‘New Pakistan’ (BBC 2021b; IANS 2020; Taseer 2019).

Khan promised a nostalgic revival of the “lost” golden Muslim age by following the way of the Prophet. He claimed this is what originally made Muslims “the greatest civilisation” and, thus, he would follow the footsteps. A Tweet by Khan expressed the romanticized longing and pride with the past *Riyasat-e-Madina*, “Fifteen centuries ago, our Holy Prophet (PBUH) set up the first welfare state in Madina: based on the rule of law, meritocracy, compassion and tolerance, and where the quest for knowledge was made a sacred duty. In a couple of decades, Muslims became the greatest civilisation for the next few centuries” (Geo News 2021a). He instils hope regarding PTI’s welfare Islamism which will lead Pakistan to become a “model” for the Muslim world (AIR News 2020). At an inauguration of one such welfare program, he boasted, “PTI is the first government which is focussing on the welfare of the oppressed and neglected people through the provision of health cards and housing facilities”<sup>5</sup> (The News 2021a), whereas there are no data yet to support how beneficial and widespread these policies are for the intended population. However, Khan has strongly defended his utopia, “By Naya (New) Pakistan, I mean a complete new vision and *Riyasat-e-Madina* is the role model for Naya Pakistan” (Dialogue Pakistan 2019).

Sixty percent of Pakistan’s population is under the age of thirty-five years, and Khan has paid special attention to their “moral” guidance. Batool et al. (2021) noted, PTI’s social media engaged with the youth and played a significant role in its 2018 campaign. This pattern has persisted post-elections as well. Khan directly engages with young Pakistanis and shares his ‘wisdom.’ Regular Tweets from his official accounts share themes of post-colonial criticism of the West blended with populist Islamist civilisationism. He took care to directly inform the youth about their “own culture” as well. These efforts ranged

from sharing pan-Islamist poetry to suggesting “Muslim” television shows (Khan 2020; The Nation 2021). In a famous television interview during 2020, he warned the nation, based on his “first-hand experience”, of the West. Khan highlighted the dangers of the West’s “Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n Roll” culture. He further expressed frustration over the mainstreaming of these ethos via pop-culture which, according to Khan, are the leading cause behind “social issues” such as high divorce rates (The Tribune 2020). In the same interview, he blamed Hollywood and Bollywood for spearing “vulgarity and immorality” in Pakistan. He expressed sadness over the issue as, “Unfortunately it has made its way into our products too, and as a consequence, in our society” (The Tribune 2020).

Khan has actively taken steps to promote what he calls “Muslim content”. This trend has opened a new era of importing and mainstreaming pan-Islamist and neo-Ottomanist shows from Turkey, as part of this effort. He explained the logic during an interview: “There are always two paths. I acknowledge one cannot ban (Western content . . . However, I just wanted to provide an alternative, so makers can realise the Turkish Islamist and neo-Ottomanist shows such as *Dirilis: Ertugrul* can also be created and watched by millions” (The Tribune 2021). The release of *Dirilis: Ertugrul* has set in motion a new appetite for Islamist civilisationism-embedded content. Making sure not to miss the momentum, Khan’s government imported more shows from Turkey and has pushed for local production. In 2021, the government launched a National Amateur Short Film Festival (NASFF), with the aim to promote “original content”. Young filmmakers were urged to promoting the “soft image” and “original image” of Pakistan. The Prime Minister himself awarded the cash prizes. During a speech at the occasion, he provided “guidance” to the youth, “Speaking English and wearing Western clothes does not project a soft image, it only speaks of an inferiority complex . . . Soft image is projected through self-reliance . . . So first respect yourself and the world will respect you in turn” (The News 2021b).

Quoting pan-Islamist poets, sharing content from Muslim authors, encouraging youngsters to soul search their “roots” (liked to Islam but with mention of their South Asian heritage), and the introduction of Islamist pro-jihadist shows are part of Khan constructing his populist civilisationism. “New Pakistan” is a land where the media would “cleanse” itself of alien content deemed “vulgar”. This medium is now a means to ‘rediscover’ “the people’s” heritage by making media hospitable for Islamist content from not only Pakistan, but also “brother” countries such as Turkey. At the same time, content that questions this narrative or presents alternatives is not welcome. Liberal and secular themes are deemed “vulgar”, “morally misleading”, or simply not in line with “Islamic values”. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) during the Khan era banned shows with strong female leads, movies that call out the abuse carried out in religious seminaries, and shows that discuss the culture of child abuse in Pakistan (BBC 2020; Isani and Alavi 2020). This populist rhetoric framed in the form of motivational speeches and media broadcasts adds to the idea of Western content deemed “immoral” and “bad” compared to “good” and “moral” Muslim alternatives. It also alienates Pakistani citizens as “the others” for voicing a different narrative.

During Khan’s time in office, critical voices of human rights organizations and liberal factions of civil society have come under increased pressure. One of the most profound aspects of Khan’s populist Islamist civilisationism has been its focus (or lack of it on) women. The female body and its behaviours have been scrutinized and policed by Khan to define the “ideal” caricature of a “Muslim” woman. In a civilisationist style, the former is contrasted with the “vulgar” and “un-Islamic” ideals of “Western” women. Khan has unapologetically condemned feminism’s presence in the country. In a statement following Women’s Day marches, he explained, “It was evident at the *Aurat March*<sup>6</sup> that people stand divided and there were distinct cultures in the same country. This is a cultural issue, and it arises from the schooling system; this will be our first step towards synthesising our education system so that it is equal for everyone and socio-economic class differences are eliminated.” (Images-Dawn 2020). He portrays feminism as a product of Western culture and only embraced by “elite” Pakistani women. Women demanding human rights have

been accused of “using” this “foreign” idea. It is not clear to what end women are being accused for “using” feminism, yet those seeking liberal democratic rights are deemed as deviants and “otherised”. As a counter, Khan used an Islamist when discussing “the Muslim” way of women’s rights. In another statement, Khan voiced his dislike for the idea by turning it into an issue of social integrity, “Children learn from their mothers. The mother tongue comes from mother . . . I disagree with the feminism movement that has degraded the role of a mother” (Sethi 2018). As always, there is no explanation for what he means by “degradation”. It is simple rhetoric which draws emotional support in a conservative society.

The statements have only progressively worsened. Amidst the rising cases of assault, murder, and rape targeting women and young children in Pakistan, Khan blamed victims by saying “women’s dressing and the corresponding rise in sexual violence in Pakistan” (Geo News 2021b). On another occasion, he explained, “If a woman is wearing very few clothes, it will have an impact, it will have an impact on the men, unless they’re robots. I mean it’s common sense . . . We do not have discos here, we do not have nightclubs, so it is a completely different society, way of life here. So, if you raise temptation in society to the point where all these young guys have nowhere to go, it has consequences”, (The News 2021b). Khan’s whole emphasis on women’s issue is framed to support the idea of a “clash of civilisation” between the Islamist and Western ideals. These are highly emotionally provocative issues.

In 2021, nearly every single day, Twitter hashtags demanding “#justice for” a raped, murdered, and tortured woman or child have trended in Pakistan. After public fury peaked in July, Khan issued a single statement. This came a week after the brutal murder and assault of a former diplomat’s daughter in the heart of Islamabad. He stated, “Anyone who commits rape, solely and solely, that person is responsible. So, let us be clear about that”, but in the same interview he added, “Islam gives dignity, respect to women. In fact, let me say, having travelled all over the world, I find that, in Muslim countries, in Pakistan, even in other Muslim countries I have seen, women having—far more treated with respect and given more dignity. You have odd cases everywhere in the world, but you look at the situation in Pakistan even now, I mean, look at the rape cases here. Compare it to Western countries. They are minuscule compared to them. Yes, we have our issues. We have some cultural problems. Every nation has that. However, that comes with cultural evolution, with education. However, as far as a woman’s dignity goes, respect, I can say, after going all over the world, this society gives more respect and dignity to women” (Images-Dawn 2021).

Matters worsened in August. During the Independence Day celebration in Lahore’s crowded Greater Iqbal Park, a woman Tik-Tok star, was harassed by a mob of 400 men who mercilessly groped and tossed her in the air, which tore parts of her clothes off (Gabol 2021). The ordeal was captured on cameras by several in the crowd. The woman was clothed in Pakistan’s national dress (a *kurta shalwar* with a *dupatta*) and her dress represented the national flag colours when she faced this torment. Khan never issued a public statement in the initial phase. He only ordered a directive of ensuring that no bail was available once the accused were in police custody (Gabol 2021). With the poor track record on the police and justice system, it is questionable whether the mob of 400 men will ever be sent to court. As multiple videos of women being harassed at different locations on Independence Day surfaced on the internet, Khan made a statement. In an address, he failed to mention the role men played in these acts and rather stated, “Sexual crimes are on the rise due to the misuse of mobile phones. We need to educate our children about the supreme qualities of Seerat-e-Nabi (PBUH)” (The Express Tribune 2021).

The lives of Pakistani women have been reduced to another hotly contested populist aspect of “New Pakistan”. This has aided in amassing conservative approval for Khan’s party. Connecting feminists and humanitarian voices with “imported Western” ideas delegitimizes their cause. It has made women feel insignificant and unsafe in a populist Islamist utopia. It has worked favourably for Khan, as it feeds the larger narrative of a

cultural “battle” that must be won by “the people” to protect their society from “foreign influences” and local “brain washed liberals” to safeguard “New Pakistan”.

Khan’s populism has always envisioned “equity” in the education sector as part of “New Pakistan”. Since being elected to office, he has pushed for a Single National Curriculum (SNC). This is a centralized system of education which has little to do with improving equity or quality in education. Rather, it is another way of Islamising the country’s syllabus in a populist civilisationist fashion. Khan has always targeted “English medium” schools for using “someone else’s culture” and “misguiding” the youth of the country. In Khan’s logic, a wholistic education on Western standards is questionable because, “When you adopt someone’s culture, you believe it to be superior and you end up becoming a slave to it” (Dawn 2021a). Under the SNC, Pakistan is now seeing a top-down implementation of a single curriculum designed by the Centre being forcefully imposed on both private and public schools (Hoodbhoy 2020b). Those who have been critical of this venture have been “otherised”. Khan explained, on the launch of the first of the three phases of SNC, “I had a vision to introduce the Single National Curriculum, but the elites making the most of the current system will not change that easily . . . When you acquire English medium education, you adopt the entire culture and it’s a major loss because you become a slave to that particular culture” (Dawn 2021a).

The syllabus content is highly problematic in its nature. It has the capacity to build a foundation of a new generation of Pakistanis who believe in Khan’s brand of Islamist civilizationism as “historical facts” and “truths”. Hoodbhoy (2020b), a long-term critic of Islamism in Pakistan, notes however “the huge volume of religious material they (SNC outlines) contain beats all curriculums in Pakistan’s history. A column-by-column comparison with two major madressah systems—Tanzeemul Madaris<sup>7</sup> and Rabtaul Madaris<sup>8</sup>—reveals a shocking fact. Ordinary schools will, henceforth, impose more rote learning than even these madressahs. Normal schoolteachers being under-equipped religiously, SNC calls for summoning an army of madressah-educated holy men—hafiz’s and qaris—as paid teachers inside schools”. In addition, apart from the already compulsory Islamiyat (Islam studies) subject, two additional subjects of *Muamilaat* (social matters) and *Islam aur daur e hazir ke taqazay* (Islam and requirements of the modern world) have been added to the SNC. These two courses were designed after close coordinating with Ittehad Tanzimat Ul Madaris Pakistan (the central board of Pakistani madrasas). Khan has even made these subjects compulsory at middle school versus high school. He feels that it is better to teach children about Islam at an early age for their “moral” development (Geo News 2021c). Additionally, the PTI-led Punjab government has embraced Islamist civilisationism in higher education. It is now mandatory for university pupils to be taught the “teaching of the Holy Quran at the college and university level. Without passing the required examination, no student will be able to obtain a BA, BSc, BE, ME, MA, MSc, MPhil, PhD or medical degree” (Hoodbhoy 2020b). These attempts to Islamise curriculums in the guise of equity and indigenization is part of the largest populist civilizationism. “New Pakistan” tends to alienate from “foreign” or “Western” standards while it embraces right-wing Islamist ideas. This only deepens the “otherization” process of the perceived populist antagonists such as religious minorities, liberals, and progressive ideas along with demonization of the West.

Another aspect of “New Pakistan” features its efforts of diversify its link with the *ummah* beyond Saudi Arabia and the Gulf (Bezhan and Khattak 2020; Siddique 2020). Muslim majority countries such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan are personally wooed by the Khan, the President, Foreign Office, or the country’s military leadership (Huseynov 2021; TRT World 2021; Kowalski 2019). Most notable of these is the Turk–Pak alliance. In the context, “the people” or “the pious” and the “others” go transnational. The broad concept of “the others” encompasses the West, non-Muslims, liberals, and, usually, non-Sunni groups. This category is accused of allegedly imposing “foreign culture” and posing security threats to “the homeland”. An example of this “crises” surfaced when Khan visited the families of a terror attack targeting the Shia Hazara community. The bereaved community was informed about India’s alleged role in the attack.



Khan stated, “no doubt what happened was part of a bigger game”. He further urged the community to call of protests as he explained his vision, “my mission is not only to unite the whole country but the entire Muslim ummah. To end this divide, we have tried to remove differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran” (Shahid 2021). Khan, ambition to fashion himself as a leader of the Muslim world and deflect blame to the “enemies”, is part of his populist civilisationism.

On other occasions, Khan has used his social media and international platforms to highlight the victimhood of the *ummah*. He has called out increasing incidents of Islamophobia in the West and has labelled bans on hijab/headcover as “secular extremism” (Dawn 2021c; Raza 2021; UN 2020). This concern is not humanitarian, rather another aspect of Islamist populist civilisationism. Gannon (2020) notes that Khan has never taken measures to stop the frequent occurrences of vandalism targeting worship places, forced conversions, and false jail sentences handed to non-Muslims in Pakistan. Even when talking about the Muslim ‘causes’, there is radio silence over China’s “re-education” of its Uighur population (Yilmaz and Shakil 2021c). The genocide is denied by Khan, “Because we (Pakistan) have our very strong relationship with China, and because we have a relationship based on trust, so we actually accept the Chinese version. What they say about their programmes in Xinjiang, we accept it” (Al Jazeera 2021).

Khan’s selective outreach to ‘brother’ Muslim countries and West bashing are part of his populist Islamist civilisationism. This concept helps with the creation of an existentialist threat that deems the *ummah* as victims. Instilled with anxiety, “the people” are urged to cling to their “Muslimness”. At the same time “the conspirators” and their non-Muslim and Western allies are demonized and dehumanised. This process only instils greater fear, resentment, misjudgement, and distrust of “the others”. This civilisational divide increases the need for a “strongman” Islamist populist such as Khan.

Tracing Khan’s experimentation with media, education, stance on women’s rights and the tendency to engage with Muslim “brothers” this section was able to bring forth the tangible shape of “New Pakistan”. Each realm demonstrates how “New Pakistan” is modelled to portray not only Pakistanis, but also the Muslim *ummah* as the protagonist, while Western ideas are labelled as the antagonistic hegemony/colonization of minds. Khan has used populist civilisationism laced with Islamism to portray himself as the protector of society in “crises”. All those opposing narrative are “otherised”. The dissenting voices from Pakistan are, allegedly, brainwashed by Western influences or they are simply co-conspirators in efforts against “the people” and the *ummah*. This has removed room for dissent and there is a shirking place for pluralism. In a society where radical right-wing religious ideals are already worshiped, this form of populism is readily espoused at the cost of alienating “the others” and deepening xenophobia towards other nations, races, and religions.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper’s main aim was to address the gap in the existing scholarship regarding the nexus between populism combined with Islamist civilisationism in the context of Pakistan. Tracing the narrative of Khan’s “New Pakistan” demonstrates the domestic and transitional dimensions, being thick and multi-layered. While it has its unique manifestation, it shares characteristic with other populist governments as well.

In nearly three decades Khan has evolved his populist politics over a variety of attractive spectrums. This change was aimed to ensure that PTI remains as the legitimate representative of the *volonté générale* (general will) of “the people”. Given his pragmatic and survivalist approach, Khan has used “New Pakistan” narrative to transition beyond the image of an anti-establishment populist to a leader with a vision. The voter bank’s positive predisposition to Islamist ideas is well understood by Khan. This has given rise to an unprecedented trend of populist Islamist civilisationism. By combining the three, this new narrative creates a clear and highly appealing idea of “the people” versus “the enemies”. Civilisationism allows for not only a dichotomous populist identity, but it also

grants a sense of pride and longing for the ideal “homeland”. With the “evil West” and its malevolent intents, “the pure people” are urged to protect themselves from “crises” by embracing Islamist ideals. Mixed with the sanctity of religious themes and call for survival, it become a highly convincing narrative for “the people”.

“New Pakistan” is not new in its foundational philosophy. As the paper demonstrates, religion has always held a significant role in politics of Pakistan—it has become a “must-have” for political survival. However, Khan’s religious populism has combined and repackaged these pre-existing ideas and sentiments in a more targeted fashion. It empowers and, at the same time, angers “the people” who are the victims of mental and physical “slavery” of the West. “The people” are constantly reminded of a glorious past such as the State of Medina or the rosy image of the rightly guided first four caliphs of Islam. The hope of achieving a lost society and status is a highly attractive feature for a country that has seen generations of impoverishment with leaders never bothering to tell them about a “glorious past” or hopes of regaining it. Similar to any populist’s tale, there is always a need for deflecting blame for the misfortunes of the nation. Khan has blamed “the people” for losing their way to “slavery” by watching Western media and gaining English medium education. Yet, these are redeemable acts; thus, “the people” are salvageable. He reformed, so can the people reform. However, the hindrance in the process are “the elites” who want to maintain the order and prevent “New Pakistan” from forming. Adding to the worries are the alleged Western “puppets” within Pakistan and their paymasters such as India, the United States, etc. Civilisationism ensures that “the others” are the main culprits of this populist religious civilisational war. Liberal Pakistanis and “enemy” foreigners allegedly harm the *ummah* by their values and ideas. If a woman demands safe streets, she is labelled as a “liberal feminist”. She fails to see the “respect” granted to her by Muslim conservative values. Western media, as well as Indian content, is seen as a guised tool to misguide the youth and deprive them of “pride” in their own culture. Any criticism from civil society on deteriorating conditions of the nation’s minorities is seen as “Western-planted propaganda” or simply downplayed. At the same time the cause of stopping Islamophobia takes precedence. The *ummah*, across borders, is urged to untie against a common enemy.

“New Pakistan” comes completely equipped with a school pack and entertainment media that support the narratives of populist Islamist civilisationism in educational and popular culture realms. It is ruthlessly ‘brave’ in its denunciation of the “corrupt elite” and renders the internal “others” as the ‘brainwashed’ Anglophiles who are a product of the “Western sex, drugs, and rock and roll culture”. Whereas the non-Muslims, such as the West, Israel and India, cannot be trusted and are blamed for deviating “the youth” of Pakistan. It also provides a list of “friends” and “foes” within and outside the country. Thus, the bounds of Khan’s populism are not limited to Pakistan, the transnational nature which seeks to collaborate with the *ummah* gives it a global outlook with allies such as Erdogan. Consequently, “New Pakistan” is a “just Islamic state” that protects its “pious” citizens and lends a hand to its overseas Muslim brothers.

Amidst the highly sensational and emotive happenings of “New Pakistan” it is hard to focus on the U-turns or failures of Khan. They are simply muffled under the loud “pious” populist rhetoric. Other times, he is simply forgiven by “the people” because of the urgent need of a messiah to save the endangered civilisation. “New Pakistan”, thus, becomes a hospitable place for the majority Sunni population where the millions of non-Sunnis and non-Muslims find themselves as the “others”. Their worship places frequently decimated or their children forcefully converted to Islam do not matter (Gannon 2020). It is a country where Taliban are openly hailed as heroes for defeating the “Western terrorists” and women demanding the right to live freely are subjective to all levels of violence and ridicule (Geo News 2021b; The News 2021b). Children are now taught highly Islamised lessons across the country, whereas basic compassion for human diversity is lacking (Hoodbhoy 2020b). In its quest to consolidate ties with the Muslim *ummah*, the ideas of *jihad* (that do not physically hurt but instil passionate hate for “the others”) are normalized. “New Pakistan” is a populist construct, but it is more of a battle of ideologies between “the people” and

“the others”. Khan’s new ointment balm of Islamism is instantaneously soothing with its indigents of populist civilisation. However, it deepens pre-existing fissures in society and widens them, at a national and regional scale.

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## Appendix A

### Content Analysis: List of Khan’s Speeches, Tweets and Statements

Topic/Theme	Links (All URL links were accessed on 2 July 2021)
The Beginning Pro-Taliban and Anti-West rhetoric	<a href="https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-pakistan-seeing-a-surge-in-taliban-support/a-58317041">https://www.dw.com/en/why-is-pakistan-seeing-a-surge-in-taliban-support/a-58317041</a> <a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-drone-protests-idUSBRE89609Q20121007">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-drone-protests-idUSBRE89609Q20121007</a> <a href="https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/imran-khan-says-joining-us-war-on-terror-after-9-11-attack-was-biggest-blunder-2105964">https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/imran-khan-says-joining-us-war-on-terror-after-9-11-attack-was-biggest-blunder-2105964</a> <a href="https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/Holy-mess-US-mag-blames-Imran/articleshow/1111381.cms">https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/Holy-mess-US-mag-blames-Imran/articleshow/1111381.cms</a> <a href="https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/14/imran-khans-incomplete-taliban-narrative/">https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/10/14/imran-khans-incomplete-taliban-narrative/</a> <a href="https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/6735/2162">https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/6735/2162</a>
	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/14/imran-khan-taliban-afghanistan-islam">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/14/imran-khan-taliban-afghanistan-islam</a> <a href="https://www.dawn.com/news/760981/khan-taliban-and-the-crackpot-science">https://www.dawn.com/news/760981/khan-taliban-and-the-crackpot-science</a> <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/16/china-russia-pakistan-expect-increase-influence-afghanistan">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/16/china-russia-pakistan-expect-increase-influence-afghanistan</a>
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Maturing of Civilisationism Ideas of Islamic societies, civilisation, and New Pakistan: -Contrasts with West -What Naya Pakistan looks like -Alliance with “brother” ummah	<a href="https://images.dawn.com/news/1188092">https://images.dawn.com/news/1188092</a> <a href="https://images.dawn.com/news/1184828/pm-imran-khan-says-aurat-march-is-a-result-of-cultural-differences-like-its-a-bad-thing">https://images.dawn.com/news/1184828/pm-imran-khan-says-aurat-march-is-a-result-of-cultural-differences-like-its-a-bad-thing</a> <a href="https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/feminism-degrades-role-of-mothers-says-imran-khan-starts-twitter-war-1869328">https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/feminism-degrades-role-of-mothers-says-imran-khan-starts-twitter-war-1869328</a> <a href="https://www.geo.tv/latest/365458-pm-to-launch-first-phase-of-single-national-curriculum-on-monday">https://www.geo.tv/latest/365458-pm-to-launch-first-phase-of-single-national-curriculum-on-monday</a> <a href="https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274877/hamza-ali-abbasi-imran-khan-talk-journey-to-islam-counterculture-and-medias-responsibilities">https://tribune.com.pk/story/2274877/hamza-ali-abbasi-imran-khan-talk-journey-to-islam-counterculture-and-medias-responsibilities</a> <a href="https://www.dawn.com/news/1629100">https://www.dawn.com/news/1629100</a> <a href="https://www.dawn.com/news/1640988">https://www.dawn.com/news/1640988</a>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Shakir et al. (2012) noted the problematic nature of this count as, “For reporting the literacy rate, the government does not take any test to test their literacy skills of the people. It merely counts the numbers and reports the literacy rates”.
- <sup>2</sup> Pakistan is ranked 124 out of 180 on the global corruption index.
- <sup>3</sup> Ironically, PTI, such as those before them, have entered a new IMF program.
- <sup>4</sup> Except for the province of Sindh.
- <sup>5</sup> These are false statements. The housing scheme is yet to materialize and PTI is not the first government to issue health cards.
- <sup>6</sup> Annual women’s march observed in various cities in Pakistan.
- <sup>7</sup> Sunni Board of Madrasa.
- <sup>8</sup> Another government board of madrasa-run schools.

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