

Sectarian Violence, Rhetoric Amplification, and Accomplishments: A Case of Students at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

The sectarianism in Pakistan has had its pragmatic ancestry since the existence of Pakistan. The present time is more critical because Pakistan is facing security threats in the fight against the war on terror. Besides this, sectarianism is prevailing day by day with a grim pace of violence based on rhetoric or some external forces influencing this hegemony and letting the innocent masses become the victims of the consequences. The study was conducted in a public sector university. A quantitative cross-sectional study was conducted through a structured questionnaire with a sample size of 200 students (male and female) through a classified random sampling technique. The data was analyzed and the Chi-square test was applied to check the association among variables. The study findings outline that students have a certain degree of bias based on the sectarian divide on both sides. Students were focusing on their studies as a pursuit of self-realization. The findings also indicate that students do interact with each other in studies and social life frequently. The study findings also found the regional ties that evoke sectarianism and voting attitudes of people in the web of sects and same-sect followers have an incisive understanding but the consensus is found among the masses that this violence stems from external forces.

Keywords: Religious Sect, Religion, Violence, Higher Education, Ideology

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1. Introduction

Sectarianism refers to and adheres to a particular political group or any group based on religious bifurcation that carries out an ideology but a prejudiced and bigoted (Abou-Zahab, 2017; Rieck, 2001; Shoaib & Shah, 2012). The genesis of the word sectarianism stemmed from "sect" which means the group party or framework of the people who have different views on religious teaching and literature while living under the same umbrella of religion (Rieck, 2001; Shoaib, 2021). In sociological studies, 'sect is the religious study that split from the mainstream religion on the grounds of doctrine' (Shoaib, Bilal, Iqbal, Hassan, & Sher, 2012; Son & Wilson, 2012). As Cole (2003) said, 'the Iranian Revolution and Zia's Islamization campaign which were based on a

narrow interpretation of the Sunni Islamic law'. In Islam, two major sects are found along with the further divide of sects into cults of different natures. It is conceived and argued that sectarianism leads to violence (Abdullah, Usmani, & Shoaib, 2023b; Hussain, 1993). Pakistan has a diverse population where external forces work and consequently result in violence (Shoaib, Anwar, & Mustafa, 2022). The reason is that people of different ideologies stick to their beliefs do not compromise with others adhere to a particular sect or religion, develop the feeling of self-righteousness, and adopt an attitude of intolerance towards other sects of the same religion (Feenberg, 1986; Shoaib, 2024). Rieck (2001) argued that in Pakistan Muslim population is in majority and it is further divided into two main sects i.e., Sunni and Shia containing a large about 85-90 and about 10 to 15 percent of the whole population respectively. Among the sectarian divide, Shi'ites are the minority religious group in the country and have always been concerned about prejudices and bigotry injections since the existence of Pakistan (Abou-Zahab, 2017; Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Immediately after the Lahore resolution in 1940, which set the ground for a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent, 'Shia leaders asked Muhammad Ali Jinnah for the provision of safeguards for the protection of religious rights of their community in Pakistan'. Barth (1969) identified the borders of the ethnic groups which are significant for the people of the same ethnicity to adhere to the teachings and contain their identities from the primal standpoint. According to Barth, 'the persistence of boundaries distinguishing two social groups remains, despite there being a flow of personnel across them. Interaction across boundaries in a social system based on ethnic or in this case sectarian identities does not result in the dissolution of these boundaries rather the distinctions separating the two social groups are built inside the social system (Shoaib, Rasool, Anwar, & Ali, 2023). Van der Veer (1994) justified that sectarian identities are neither a 'smoke screen behind which there is a clash of material interests nor *just* a political trick through which leaders seek to advance their political goals. Religious meaning and practice play an important role in the construction of sectarian identities (S. V. R. Nasr, 2000).

2. The Study Context

The history of the sectarian violence in Pakistan is attached since its existence and goes on with time while the major shift is evident from Zia's regime when this sectarian divide got impetus (Gupta, 2019; Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2023). In Pakistan, the divide of the population is evaluated as the Sunni sect is the major sect constituting almost 80 percent population while the Shi'ites are a minority group but influential constituting 20 percent of the population, both sects are major parties of sectarian divide (Behuria, 2004; Shoaib, 2023a, 2023b). Ahmed and Akbarzadeh (2020) described sectarian conflict in Pakistan, has revealed itself in innumerable forms since the country's inception in 1947. After the partition of the subcontinent, 'Pakistan emerged as a Muslim majority state with more than 90 percent of the population being the followers of Islam' (Abdullah, Usmani, & Shoaib, 2023a). Abou-Zahab (2017) gauged that the Muslim population of the country is divided largely into the Sunni and Shia sects with Shias forming 15 to 20 percent of the total population. Sectarian conflicts are as old as the country itself but the escalation of these conflicts was observed in the late 1970s and the early 1980s (Grare, 2007; Shoaib, Usmani, & Ali, 2022). Due to internal political changes, the 'Islamic revolution in Iran and the reaction of the Arab World gave birth to sectarianism in Pakistan' (Hussain, 1993; Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). V. R. Nasr (2000) analyzed the political violence between the Shias and Sunnis rose considerably during the last two decades whereby the two sectarian groups systematized themselves in confrontational establishments which swore political and religious empowerment to their corresponding sects in light of the 'Islamic' way of life. This empowerment was to be achieved by marginalizing the followers of the opposing sect through

political or militant action (Shoaib, Mustafa, & Hussain, 2022). Waseem, Kamran, Ali, and Riikonen (2010) assessed the militant action, including the armed attacks on the members of opposing sects as well as their teaching installations have been targeted which resulted in the heavy loss of life on both sides. It is estimated that 'between 1990 and 2002, 992 people lost their lives in sectarian conflicts around Pakistan; 60 percent of them belonging to the minority Shia sect. Recent estimates claim that 1,149 people were killed in 461 incidents of sectarian violence throughout the country between 1997 and 2006, 773 of the total killed belonged to the Shia sect while 376 were Sunnis (Shoaib, Anwar, & Rasool, 2022; Shoaib, Mehmood, & Butt, 2022). In 2012 so far, '84 incidents of sectarian violence have been reported in which 304 people were killed and 312 injured. The majority of the victims belonged to the minority Shia sect'. V. R. Nasr (2000) concluded that over the years sectarian violence has become an important medium through which the Shias and Sunnis in Pakistan try to assert their dominance over the 'other'. The struggle to dominate the other through control of the Islamist discourses and redefinition of state-society relations has brought about major changes in the practice of Islamist politics in Pakistan. Abou-Zahab (2017) studied the sectarian conflict in Pakistan which focused extensively on macro-level phenomena such as Zia's Islamization, the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, and the Afghan jihad as determining factors in the Shia-Sunni conflict (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020; N. Naseer, Shoaib, & Naseer, 2022; Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, & Abdullah, 2022). Although extremely important in explaining the external influences fuelling the conflict, these analyses leave much to be desired towards understanding the local dynamics of the conflict (Anwar, Shoaib, & Mustafa, 2022; Mariam, Anwar, & Shoaib, 2022). S. V. R. Nasr (2000) identified the mainstream assertion of sectarian identities in national politics by the Shias and Sunnis of Pakistan, resulting in a change in the scale and nature of disputes from 'arguments on doctrinal issues to full-fledged sectarian conflict needs to be seen in its specific historical context. The focus on historical context allows us to consider the role of macro analytical factors like the state in addressing the issue of sectarian conflict in the country (Ali, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2022; Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a).

3. Significance of the Study

Sectarian violence has been seen as emerging in Pakistan for the last few decades and with the rise of the rays of terrorism in the country it entailed grave consequences. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the youth aloof from the massacre of sectarian violence so, it is essential to realize the increasing ratio of youth in the age structure of the population and be aware of the consequences. Youth needs to be addressed and deformities should be focused and removed to best utilize their potential and proactive role to fad this volatile chapter of violence.

4. Data and Methods

The present study was conducted in a public sector university to assess the perspective of the students regarding sectarian violence, its rhetoric amplification, and accomplishments of ends and means. Therefore, a quantitative, coherent cross-sectional study design was employed. A sample of 200 students (male and female) had been sampled through classified random sampling techniques from the faculty of social sciences disciplines. A structured questionnaire was administered and used as a tool for data collection. Further, the Chi-square test used to analyze was performed by using SPSS version 21.00, and association among variables was chalked out and hence conclusion was drawn.

5. Results and Discussions

This section provides the results and discussion based on primary data. It has consisted of socio-economic characteristics and inferential outcomes to the association of sectarian violence. Table 1 depicts that the male and female were taken equally for the study and hence enumerated. The age

structure of the students varies because students are from different educational programs, as 33.3 percent of students were found in the age group 15-19 years, 36 percent were instituted in 20-24 years while 20 percent were established in the age group 25-29 years and only 10 percent constituted the students of age 30-34 years. The educational level of the students varies as 30 percent of students were constituting the BS program while 46.5 percent institute the master's degree and 23.5 percent students were enumerated having the M. Phil degree on campus. The most important divide of this study has been the sectarian axes which were, 66.5 percent of students belonging to the Sunni sect while 13.5 percent constitute the Shi'ite sect. The rest of the 10 percent were either from sub-sects of the preceding sectarian divide which magnifies a separate state and hence addition to this divide. The study findings had been aligned with the result of several scholars such as Shoaib and Ullah (2021b), Shoaib, Rasool, and Anwar (2021), Shoaib, Iqbal, and Tahira (2021), Shoaib, Fatima, and Jamil (2021), Shoaib, Ali, and Akbar (2021), and Shoaib, Ali, and Naseer (2021).

Table 1

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Students

Variables	F (%)	Variables	F (%)
Sex		Qualification	
Male	100 (50.0)	BS	60 (30.0)
Female	100 (50.0)	M.Sc.	93 (46.5)
Total	200 (100.0)	M.Phil.	47 (23.5)
Age		Total	200 (100)
15-19	67 (33.5)	Sect	
20-24	72 (36.0)	Sunni	133 (66.5)
25-29	40 (20.0)	Shi'ite	27 (13.5)
30-34	21 (10.5)	Others	40 (20.0)
Total	200 (100.0)	Total	200 (100.0)

The results lead to the inference and policy development based on the conceding process. The following results are portrayed and hence deducted from the conclusion. In Table 2, horizontally showed referents are abbreviated for the first four variables as Strongly Agree = SA, agree = A, Uncertain = U, disagree = DA, and strongly disagree = SDA. Other variables have been displayed with the full version of referents in succeeding variables.

Table 1 Association of Sectarian Violence with Various Indexes of Sects

Sectarian Attachment is Necessary for Religious Obligations

Sectarian Conflict	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	Total
Strongly Agree	23(11.4)	45(22.5)	19(9.5)	18(9)	17(8.5)	122(61)
Agree	02(1)	24(12)	11(5.5)	7(3.5)	06(3)	50(25)
Uncertain	03(1.5)	06(3)	03(1.5)	01(0.5)	07(3.5)	20((10)
Disagree	02(1)	00	00	01(0.5)	00	03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	00	00	00	00	05(2.5)	05(2.5)
Total	30(15)	75(37.5)	33(16.5)	27(13.5)	35(17.5)	200(100)

Religion or Sect is for the Pursuit of Self-realization

Sectarian Conflict	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	Total
Strongly Agree	49(24.5)	40(20)	15(7.5)	12(6)	06(3)	122(61)
Agree	21(10.5)	13(6.5)	09(4.5)	03(1.5)	04(2)	50(25)
Uncertain	06(3)	11(5.5)	01(0.5)	02(1)	00	20((10)
Disagree	00	00	02(1)	01(0.5)	00	03(1.5)

Strongly Disagree	00	01(0.5)	00	02(1)	02(1)	05(2.5)
Total	76(38)	65(32.5)	27(13.5)	20(10)	12(6)	200(100)
Interaction among the Same Sect Triumph Integration						
Sectarian Conflict	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	Total
Strongly Agree	32(16)	30(15)	8(4)	44(22)	8(4)	122(61)
Agree	04(2)	17(8.5)	06(3)	23(11.5)	00	50(25)
Uncertain	00	06(3)	04(2)	10(5)	00	20((10)
Disagree	03(1.5)	00	00	00	00	03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	01(0.5)	01(0.5)	02(1)	00	01(0.5)	05(2.5)
Total	40(20)	54(27)	20(10)	77(38.5)	9(4.5)	200(100)
Sectarian Violence and External Factors						
Sectarian Conflict	SA	A	U	DA	SDA	Total
Strongly Agree	68(34)	30(15)	10(5)	07(3.5)	07(3.5)	122(61)
Agree	22(11)	11(5.5)	07(3.5)	07(3.5)	03(1.5)	50(25)
Uncertain	06(3)	02(1)	04(2)	06(3)	02(1)	20((10)
Disagree	01(0.5)	02(1)	00	00	00	03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	02(1)	00	03(1.5%)	00	00	05(2.5)
Strongly Agree	68(34)	30(15)	10(5)	07(3.5)	07(3.5)	200(100)
Total	99(49.5)	45(22.5)	24(12)	20(10)	12(6)	200(100)
Sectarianism Evoke Voting Attitude						
Sectarian Conflict	Yes			No		Total
Strongly Agree	77(38.5)			48(24)		125(62.5)
Agree	29(14.5)			21(10.5)		50(25)
Uncertain	06(3)			11(5.5)		17(8.5)
Disagree	00			03(1.5)		03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	02(1)			03(1.5)		05(2.5)
Total	114(57)			86(43)		200(100)
Regional Alliances Promote Sectarianism						
Sectarian Conflict	Yes			No		Total
Strongly Agree	55(27.5)			67(33.5)		125(62.5)
Agree	16(8)			34(17)		50(25)
Uncertain	09(8.5)			11(5.5)		17(8.5)
Disagree	03(1.5)			00		03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	05(2.5)			00		05(2.5)
Total	88(44)			112(56)		200(100)
Behaviour of People towards Sectarian Violence						
Sectarian Conflict	Supportive	Avoiding	Criticizing	Humiliating	Others	Total
Strongly Agree	10(5)	28(14)	60(30)	14(7)	10(5)	122(61)
Agree	00	16(8)	23(11.5)	09(4.5)	02(1)	50(25)
Uncertain	03(1.5)	01(0.5)	09(4.5)	07(3.5)	00	20((10)
Disagree	00	02(1)	01(0.5)	00	00	03(1.5)
Strongly Disagree	01(0.5)	02(1)	00	00	02(1)	05(2.5)
Total	14(7)	49(24.5)	93(46.5)	30(15)	14(7)	200(100)

The overhead table depicts that among 200 respondents, 15 percent respondents strongly agree that people consider their sectarian attachment as a religious obligation 37.5 percent agreed, 33 percent remained uncertain to answer 27 percent disagreed and 35 percent strongly disagreed. The

chi-square result endorses the result that more than 52 percent of respondents admitted that bias falls in the obligatory attitude towards sects. Similarly, 38 percent of students strongly agreed on the issue of the sect as self-realization by the followers whereas 32 percent agreed and 13.5 percent of respondents were confused about answering such a question on the other hand, 10 percent of students disagreed and 6 percent strongly disagreed in this regard. A greater number of students, 70 percent agreed that sect is taken as the pursuit of self-realization in the society. Among the enumerated population, 20 percent of students strongly agreed that they interact and communicate with people of opposite sects while 27 percent agreed 10 percent remained uncertain to answer and 38.5 percent strongly disagreed along with 4.5 percent who disagreed that they do not interact and are prejudiced in doing so. A higher ratio of students, 47 percent agreed and showed no hesitation in the interaction which is supported by the chi-square value, most significantly associated with sectarian violence.

The hegemonic assertion of external forces is explained, 49 percent of students strongly agreed that this violence is externally sponsored by the hegemony of some forces, 22.5 percent agreed on the other hand 24 percent made a neutral sense and 10 percent disagreed 5 percent strongly disagreed. Overall, more than 70 percent of students agreed that sectarian violence is caused by some external factors. The chi-square value significantly supports the hypothesis. Students were asked about the voting attitude correlating in their responses as 57 percent endorsed that voting attitude most often tends toward the sectarian attachment while 43 percent disagreed and negated this tendency while the chi-square test endorsed the result most significantly. The regional ties give rise to sectarian violence as supported by 44 percent of students and negated by the 56 percent that it does not promote sectarian hormone. The greater ratio of students, 56 percent verified that regional ties or alliances are not the factors of promotion. The chi-square is deliberately significant and hence associated. The behavior towards sectarian violence was sought and different calculations were made by the respondents as 7 percent responded it supportive, 24.5 percent responded as avoiding, 46.5 percent expressed as criticizing, 15 percent as humiliating, and 7 percent described as intolerable and shameful. Most of the respondents categorized it as criticizing and asked for remedial measures from responsible executives either religious or political. The chi-square analysis was found highly significant and associated. However, these results are dissimilar to the study findings of multiple studies including Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, and Shaukat (2021), Shoaib, Ali, Anwar, Rasool, et al. (2021), Shoaib, Ahmad, Ali, and Abdullah (2021), (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021), Shoaib and Abdullah (2021), and A. Naseer, Shoaib, Ali, and Bilal (2021).

Table 3 indicates that the association was found highly significant between the variables that endorsed that the sectarian conflict leads to violence in which the sectarian divide can be the matter of the fact how people are attached to their ideology and seek ends. Therefore, sectarian violence has its roots in religion. Sectarian attachment and interpretation along with self-realization to meet the ends. External factors are found the basic influences from different forces are injected and finally violence is the result while voting attitude is also linked with the regional ties of the sectarian strife and hence behaviour. Nonetheless, these outcomes are contradictory to the study conclusions of numerous scholarships including A. Naseer, Shoaib, Ali, and Ahmad (2021), Anwar, Shoaib, and Zahra (2021), J. Ahmad, Shoaib, and Shaukat (2021), J. Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, and Shaukat (2021), A. Ahmad, Shoaib, and Abdullah (2021), and Abdullah and Shoaib (2021).

Table 3

Inferential Outcomes to the Association of Sectarian Violence

Variables	Pearson	df	P-Value
Sectarian Attachment is Necessary for Religious	46.432	16	0.000
The sect is for the Pursuit of Self-realization	36.151	16	0.003
Interaction of Sect Triumph Integration	41.938	16	0.000
Sectarian Violence and External Factors	33.915	16	0.006
Sectarianism Evoke Voting Attitude	35.898	8	0.000
Regional Alliances Promote Sectarianism	13.170	4	0.010
Behaviour of People towards Sectarian Violence	34.797	16	0.004

Sectarian violence in Pakistan is the most imperative promising concern being explored but student attention has not been sought toward such issues that cause distances among them (Abou-Zahab, 2017; Alam, 2004; Gupta, 2019; Kfir, 2014; Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020). The conscious division is more lucrative and seeding hesitation and the ultimate results are discouraging (Gupta, 2019; Hasan, 2011; Kfir, 2014; Shoaib & Abdullah, 2020). Students were pretty promising and devoted to wiping out the differences that resulted in calculating conformity towards the one nation under one code that's unity and consensus (Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). However, these results are dissimilar to the study findings of multiple studies including Shoaib, Shaukat, Khan, and Saeed (2013), Shoaib, Latif, and Usmani (2013), Anwar, Shoaib, and Javed (2013), Shoaib, Munir, Masood, Ali, and Sher (2012), Shoaib, Khan, and Shaukat (2012), Shoaib, Bilal, et al. (2012), Shoaib, Khan, and Khan (2011), Shoaib, Khan, and Ashraf (2011), and Shoaib, Khan, and Abid (2011).

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that sectarian violence was sought and concluded. Students admitted that bias falls in the obligatory attitude towards sects. Conversely, the study findings outline students believe that sect is taken as the pursuit of self-realization in the society. A higher ratio of students agreed on the interaction of the students and intended that it happen frequently. They never show any hesitation in their interaction with other sects. However, sectarian violence caused by some external factors was felt as the epicenter of the discussion. It has been found that all the students on both sides strongly agree that sectarianism is because of external forces. The study asserts that the voting attitudes were correlating. Students' response endorsing the voting attitude toward the sectarian attachment. Additionally, the very fact unpacked by the students is that regional ties or alliances are less the factors of promotion. It is thus concluded that students have a certain degree of bias based on the sectarian divide on both sides. The regional ties also evoke sectarianism and the voting attitude of people is found in the web of sects. Students of the same sect have incisive understanding but the consensus is found that violence stems from external forces.

7. Recommendations

The study suggested that religious and political leadership must realize the responsibility to address the marginalized sections of society through effective religious interpretation as well and grievances should be tackled. Further, religious ideology should be made united by inculcating religious injections in syllabi at the school and college level whereas literature should be published with the consent of the Government.

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