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Imranophobia: The Systematic Dehumanization and Demonization of Imran Khan and PTI

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The term “Imranophobia” has been coined to draw parallels with Islamophobia, highlighting the systematic dehumanization and demonization faced by Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, and his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). This phenomenon mirrors the global discrimination against the Pakistani nation who fever Imran Khan. This study examines the political landscape of Pakistan following the PTI government’s removal through a Vote of No Confidence in 2022, supported by various state institutions. It investigates how the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) assumed power and strategically responded to Imran Khan and his party. The research traces the rise of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) under Nawaz Sharif and explores the ensuing power dynamics characterized by corruption, elite dominance, and bureaucratic manipulation. It underscores how various elite groups, including military, bureaucratic, industrial, and religious elites, accumulated power and wealth through illicit means over decades, perpetuating a culture of kleptocracy and entrenched political corruption. The fear of Imran Khan disrupting this status quo is central to the concept of Imranophobia. The study highlights the elites’ multifaceted fear: the erosion of traditional landlordism and industrialism, the collapse of corrupt bureaucratic practices, and challenges to established social hierarchies. It also examines Imran Khan’s advocacy for transparency, justice, and accountability and the socio-economic repercussions of Imranophobia, including public backlash against ruling elites, political instability, economic turmoil, and psychological impacts on both the elites and the general populace. Furthermore, it explores Imran Khan’s efforts to revive Pakistan’s Islamic identity and bolster its international standing. Ultimately, Imranophobia encapsulates the elite’s fear of losing their privileged position amidst the profound societal transformation promised by Imran Khan’s leadership.

Keywords: Imranophobia, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Elite Class, Stakeholders, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)

Abstract

Introduction

The term "Imranophobia" has been coined to parallel Islamophobia, highlighting the systematic dehumanization and demonization faced by Imran Khan and his political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). This article explores the origins and consequences of Imranophobia within Pakistan's political landscape, tracing the rise of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) under Nawaz Sharif and the ensuing power dynamics marked by corruption, elite dominance, and bureaucratic manipulation. The study underscores how various



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elite groups, including military, bureaucratic, industrial, and religious elites, amassed power and wealth through illicit means, fostering a culture of kleptocracy and entrenched political corruption.

Origins of Imranophobia

Imranophobia stems from the fear of Imran Khan's potential to disrupt the entrenched status quo. The elites' fear spans multiple dimensions: the erosion of the legacies of landlordism and industrialism, the collapse of corrupt bureaucratic practices, and the challenge to entrenched social hierarchies. Imran Khan's advocacy for transparency, justice, and accountability threatens the established power structures and the economic benefits derived from corruption.

Political Landscape and Elite Dominance

The Pakistan Muslim League (N), under Nawaz Sharif and many other political parties, has long been associated with elite dominance and bureaucratic manipulation. The article traces the rise of PML(N) and the power dynamics that ensued, marked by corruption and the amassing of wealth by elite groups through illicit means. This period saw the entrenchment of political corruption, fostering a culture of kleptocracy.

Fear of Disruption

The elites' fear of Imran Khan's potential to disrupt this status quo fuels Imranophobia. This fear is multifaceted, encompassing concerns over the erosion of landlordism and industrialism legacies, the collapse of corrupt bureaucratic practices, and the challenge to entrenched social hierarchies. Imran Khan's advocacy for transparency, justice, and accountability poses a direct threat to these entrenched power structures.

Economic Ramifications

The economic ramifications of Imranophobia are significant, leading to social backlash against the ruling elites, political instability, economic turmoil, and psychological impacts on both the elites and the masses. Imran Khan's efforts to revive Pakistan's Islamic identity and strengthen its international standing further exacerbate these fears.

Parallels with Islamophobia

Imranophobia can be likened to Islamophobia, defined as the dehumanization and demonization of Muslims, often manifested through



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discrimination and vilification in the media. Just as Islamophobia involves negative perceptions and anti-Muslim campaigns in the West, Imranophobia involves similar tactics against Imran Khan and PTI within Pakistan.

Systematic Dehumanization

The systematic dehumanization of Imran Khan and PTI parallels the dehumanization of Muslims in Western nations. The media plays a significant role in this process, perpetuating negative perceptions and fostering discrimination. This section examines the fundamental reasons behind the emergence of Imranophobia within Pakistani political parties and their leadership.

Elite Fears and Imranophobia

The elites' fear of losing their privileged position is a driving force behind Imranophobia. This fear encompasses multiple dimensions:

Fear of Breaking Legacy of Landlordism and Feudalism

Large landlords in Pakistan, who have owned vast tracts of land for generations, fear that Imran Khan's rise to power would lead to land reforms and the erosion of their legacy.

Fear of Breaking Legacy of Industrialism

The industrial elite, who have benefitted from corrupt practices and amassed wealth through illegal means, fear the loss of their economic advantages and investments, both domestic and offshore.

Fear of Breaking Legacy of Bureaucracy

Corrupt bureaucrats, many of whom hold dual nationalities, fear accountability and the potential loss of their ill-gotten wealth and power under an honest leadership.

Fear of Breaking Power-Oriented Social Structures

The entrenched concept of master and slave, prevalent in both rural and urban areas, is threatened by Imran Khan's promise of justice and equality, challenging the authority of local power brokers.

Fear of Breaking Legacy of Social Values and Norms Imposed by Authoritarianism

The elite's control over social values and norms is challenged by Imran Khan's advocacy for freedom and equality, which resonates with the middle and



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working classes, threatening the elite's dominance.

Fear of Breaking Established Political Discourse

The elite families, who have dominated Pakistan's political landscape for decades, fear the loss of their political influence and the breakdown of established discourses that have perpetuated their power.

Fear of Breaking the Concept of a Poor Society

Elites fear that Imran Khan's message of freedom and independence from Western influence will resonate with the masses, challenging the notion that Pakistan is destined to remain poor and dependent.

Effects of Imranophobia

Social Perspective

Imranophobia has led to a social backlash against the ruling elites, with public disdain and rejection of PDM leadership becoming increasingly visible. This section explores the social consequences of Imranophobia, including public protests and the erosion of the elite's social standing.

Political Perspective

Politically, Imranophobia has destabilized the ruling parties, with PTI gaining significant public support despite the crackdown on its leadership and workers. This section examines the political implications, including the reluctance to hold general elections due to fear of PTI's victory.

Economic Perspective

The economic impact of Imranophobia includes business closures, economic instability, and the flight of capital due to the crackdown on PTI supporters and leaders. This section delves into the economic consequences and the broader implications for Pakistan's economy.

Psychological Perspective

Imran Khan's political strategy includes a significant psychological component that instills fear in his opponents. His opponents are aware of his unblemished record, lack of foreign assets, and the Supreme Court of Pakistan's recognition of him as "Sadiq and Amin" (truthful and trustworthy). Khan's transparency, honesty, and fearlessness, coupled with his vow to fight for justice, cause psychological stress among the leadership of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and the establishment. They fear accountability under his



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leadership, knowing that their corrupt activities and abuses of power will be exposed and punished if Khan regains power.

Religious Perspective

Imran Khan has emphasized Pakistan's Islamic identity, drawing inspiration from the concept of the Madinah state. His actions, such as promoting national dress, founding Al-Qadir University for Islamic education, and defending the honor of the Holy Prophet at international platforms like the UN, have bolstered Pakistan's standing in the Islamic world. These measures have earned him respect globally, particularly within the Muslim community. However, they have also sparked fear among forces hostile to Pakistan, who worry that Khan's efforts to unite the Islamic world could pose a threat to Western interests.

Individual Perspective

Imran Khan's leadership has instilled pride in the common Pakistani, who sees his global recognition and respect as a reflection of their own dignity. Khan's international praise contrasts sharply with the negative reputation of opposition leaders, particularly from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), whose corruption has brought shame to the country. This has fostered a sense of personal and national pride among Pakistanis, further intensifying the public's support for Khan against the backdrop of opposition efforts to eliminate him and his party from Pakistan's political history.

Research methodology

For this research paper, Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic has been applied as a research methodology to analyze the concept of "Imranophobia" as a political phenomenon. The Master-Slave Dialectic, from Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit", explores the dynamics of power, recognition, dependency, and self-consciousness, making it a useful framework for analyzing political and social relations.

In the context of "Imranophobia", presumably a term referring to fear, opposition, or resistance to Imran Khan (former Prime Minister of Pakistan), by utilizing Hegel's dialectic to understand the power relations between different political actors, factions, or even ideologies. There are the following ways to



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frame it.

Master-Slave Dynamics

The term “Master”: In this case, are those political powers or social groups that hold dominance and shape the narrative against Imran Khan (the State, opposition parties, media elites, etc.). The term “Slave”: Imran Khan and his supporters, who are subjected to various forms of oppression, marginalization, or de-legitimization by the dominant groups. The dialectic focuses on how the "master" seeks recognition and domination over the "slave" while the "slave" seeks freedom and self-consciousness.

Struggle for Recognition

The master (those in power) denies recognition to the slave (Imran Khan or his political movement, PTI). However, the master also depends on the slave for recognition. In this analysis, it could be explored how this struggle manifests in political discourse, media narratives, or state actions that attempt to suppress or delegitimize Imran Khan’s political stance.

Reversal of Power

According to Hegel, the slave, through labor and struggle, can eventually become the master by attaining self-consciousness and freedom. It could be investigated whether the opposition to Imran Khan Results in his supporters becoming more self-aware, organized, or politically empowered, potentially leading to a reversal of power dynamics.

Fear and Dependency

The master (those opposing Imran Khan) is inherently dependent on the slave (Imran Khan’s existence) to maintain their position. It can be analyzed whether "Imranophobia" stems from the fear that without a clear opposition like Imran Khan, the ruling powers would lose legitimacy or support, revealing their own vulnerability. By applying Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic to "Imranophobia," this can be illuminated the deep political and social struggles embedded in this phenomenon, focusing on themes of domination, recognition, fear, and eventual shifts in power dynamics.

Discussion

The phenomenon of *Imranophobia*, as articulated in this article, provides a conceptual lens through which the systemic opposition to Imran Khan and the



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Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) can be understood. Much like Islamophobia, which is characterized by the dehumanization and demonization of Muslims in Western societies (Bakali, 2016; Pratt & Woodlock, 2016), Imranophobia emerges as an indigenous political construct that encapsulates the fear of elite classes losing their entrenched privileges. This fear manifests in various dimensions, including political, social, economic, and psychological, thereby destabilizing Pakistan's democratic trajectory.

Parallels with Islamophobia

The article effectively draws parallels between Islamophobia and Imranophobia. Islamophobia has been described as a post-Cold War instrument to maintain power hierarchies in the West (Bazian, 2018). Similarly, Imranophobia functions domestically in Pakistan by portraying Imran Khan as a political disruptor whose agenda threatens elite dominance. Just as anti-Muslim campaigns in Western contexts rely on media-driven vilification (Khan, 2021), the Pakistani media has played a pivotal role in perpetuating negative perceptions of Khan and PTI, framing them as destabilizing agents rather than reformers (Hashim, 2022). This suggests that Imranophobia is not merely political opposition but a systemic discourse that ensures the continuation of elite hegemony.

Elite Capture and Structural Resistance

Pakistan's political history demonstrates how entrenched elites—bureaucratic, military, industrial, and religious—have consistently resisted reforms that challenge their vested interests (Jalal, 1995; Shafqat, 2013). The study underscores that Imran Khan's calls for transparency and accountability directly threatened these power structures. Previous scholarship confirms that political elites in Pakistan have historically manipulated institutions to sustain kleptocracy and clientelism (Hussain, 1979; Shoukat & Gomez, 2018). In this context, Imranophobia is an extension of elite capture, whereby the ruling classes mobilize state and media apparatuses to delegitimize Khan's leadership, fearing the erosion of their economic and political advantages.

Psychological Dimensions of Power Struggles

The article insightfully employs Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic to explain the fear and dependency inherent in Imranophobia. The ruling elites (masters) rely on delegitimizing Khan (slave) to sustain their recognition and dominance, yet their



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legitimacy paradoxically depends on his continued existence as a political opponent. This is consistent with Hegel's notion that the master's Survival is contingent on the slave's acknowledgment, even as the slave gains empowerment through struggle (Hegel, as cited in Shoukat & Gomez, 2017). Khan's unblemished reputation, recognition as "Sadiq and Amin," and global respect exacerbate the psychological anxiety of elites, who fear eventual accountability under his leadership (Raja, 2023). Thus, Imranophobia is not only a form of political resistance but also a psychological reaction to the potential loss of control.

Socio-Economic Repercussions

The article highlights how Imranophobia contributes to political instability, capital flight, and economic downturns. This aligns with Gardezi's (1998) analysis of Pakistan's systemic failure of capitalism due to elite-driven exploitation and corruption. By suppressing PTI and resisting electoral processes, the ruling coalition inadvertently intensifies public resentment and deepens socio-economic crises. Furthermore, the public's rejection of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) leadership suggests a growing disconnect between elites and citizens, echoing Nasr's (1992) assertion that governance crises in Pakistan stem from the inability of ruling classes to align with democratic legitimacy.

Religious and Identity Politics

Imran Khan's emphasis on reviving Pakistan's Islamic identity resonates with historical efforts to define national legitimacy through religion (Nasr, 1992). His initiatives—such as promoting national dress, founding Al-Qadir University, and defending the Prophet's honor at international forums—have strengthened his legitimacy among masses and the global Muslim community. However, this also reinforces elite anxieties, as aligning politics with Islamic values undermines their Western-dependent and secularized models of legitimacy. This duality situates Imranophobia within the broader struggle between indigenous identity and globalized elite interests.

Toward a Transformative Discourse

The findings suggest that Imranophobia is not merely an elite fear of political competition but a broader struggle over Pakistan's future trajectory. If Khan's



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populist discourse succeeds, it may dismantle entrenched hierarchies and realign Pakistan's governance with accountability, justice, and transparency. Conversely, sustained Imranophobia risks perpetuating authoritarian practices, economic instability, and social fragmentation. This tension reflects the "crisis of governability" in Pakistan, where entrenched elites suppress reformist movements to preserve power (Nasr, 1992). Ultimately, Imranophobia illustrates the paradox of Pakistan's democratic aspirations: elites invoke democracy while simultaneously undermining its practice.

Conclusion

Imranophobia encapsulates the elite's fear of losing their privileged position and the profound societal transformation that Imran Khan's leadership promises to bring. This article highlights the systematic dehumanization and demonization faced by Imran Khan and PTI, drawing parallels with Islamophobia and emphasizing the need for a transparent and just political system in Pakistan.

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