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The Deobandi Movement and the Reproduction of Political-Security Power in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of the Deobandi movement in the reproduction of political-security power in Pakistan by moving beyond reductionist interpretations. The central question is through which institutional, discursive, and network-based mechanisms the Deobandi movement participates in processes of power reproduction. The theoretical framework is grounded in the concept of "power reproduction" and is formulated through the integration of historical institutionalism, symbolic capital theory, and discursive approaches to power. The research adopts a qualitative methodology based on historical-institutional analysis and discourse analysis, encompassing religious-political texts, educational literature, and the discourses of religious and political elites. The findings indicate that the network of religious seminaries, the authority of the ulama, and religious symbolic capital have provided an institutional infrastructure for social and political influence. In dynamic interaction with the state and security institutions, these elements have contributed to the production of legitimacy, the framing of threats, and social mobilization, without being reducible to mere instruments of the state. The internal heterogeneity of the movement further suggests that its connections with politics and jihadism are less inherent than they are products of specific historical and geopolitical contexts. The article concludes that security in Pakistan is not a purely material phenomenon but rather a social and discursive construct shaped through the interaction between the state and religious networks. Therefore, analyses of politics and security in Pakistan remain incomplete without considering the structural role of religious actors. By conceptualizing religion as a source of meaning, legitimacy, and mobilization, this study contributes to the literature on political Islam and security studies in postcolonial societies.

Keywords: *Deobandi Movement, Reproduction of Political-Security Power, Religion-State Relations, Political Islam in Pakistan, Religious Networks and Power*

Introduction

The Deobandi movement is one of the most enduring and influential Sunni intellectual-religious traditions in South Asia, and since its emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century, it has played a role beyond that of a merely jurisprudential or educational school. This movement emerged in the context of the collapse of Muslim political order in India, the consolidation of British colonial rule, and the encounter of Islamic societies with Western modernity; conditions that many Muslim scholars perceived as a simultaneous epistemic, moral, and political crisis. In such a context, the Deobandi movement represented an attempt to reconstruct religious authority, preserve the



continuity of Islamic tradition, and establish a form of cultural-epistemic autonomy against the dominant colonial order.

The historical significance of this current is not limited to its project of religious reform; rather, it also lies in its remarkable capacity for institution-building and social networking. The expansion of religious seminaries, the training of successive generations of ulama, and the creation of translocal educational and epistemic ties led to the formation of a socio-religious infrastructure that made possible the continuous reproduction of religious authority and social influence. These networks gradually became spaces for the production of meaning, collective identity, and social action, elevating Deobandi thought from a jurisprudential tradition to an organized social field.

With the establishment of the state of Pakistan in 1947, this religious tradition entered a new phase. As a state that grounded a substantial part of its legitimacy in Islamic identity, Pakistan was from the outset confronted with the question of how to define the relationship between religion and the modern state. In this context, organized religious traditions such as the Deobandi tendency became potential sources of political legitimation and social mobilization. Gradually, the interaction between the state and religious institutions became part of the mechanisms of governance; mechanisms in which religion was not merely an identity element, but also a resource for producing legitimacy, social order, and the framing of security issues.

However, a significant part of the analyses of political Islam in Pakistan has focused either on religious radicalism and political violence or on Islamist party competition. Although such approaches are useful for understanding certain dimensions of reality, they often result in a reductionist reading that reduces the role of the Deoband school to the level of ideology or political behavior. Consequently, the position of this movement in structural mechanisms of power, the production of legitimacy, and the shaping of social order has received less attention. A narrow focus on binaries such as moderate/extremist or traditional/modern obscures the institutional and networked complexities of this current.

By moving beyond such binaries, this study understands the Deobandi current not merely as a religious or ideological movement, but as a socio-institutional actor in the process of reproducing political-security power in Pakistan. Within this framework, power is not a property concentrated in the state, but a network of relations, discourses, and institutions that is produced and reproduced across different social fields. Deobandi networks—from religious seminaries to circles of ulama and religious organizations—function as spaces for producing symbolic capital, religious legitimacy, and the framing of identity and security discourses.

From this perspective, the main issue is why and how Deobandi thought can be regarded as an actor that reproduces political-security power. Answering this question requires attention to the role of religious networks in the everyday mechanisms of power, legitimacy, and social order; mechanisms through which power is reproduced by means of symbolic capital, religious socialization, legitimating discourses, and capacities for social mobilization. In this regard, religious seminaries are not merely educational centers; rather, they are arenas for shaping interpretive frameworks concerning politics, society, and security and for transmitting specific models of religious authority.

Moreover, the symbolic capital of Deobandi ulama, as religious and moral authorities, enables this current to play a role in processes of political legitimation. The reference of political actors to the endorsement or cooperation of ulama demonstrates that religious authority can become a resource for strengthening or weakening political legitimacy, especially during periods of crisis, when religious discourses assume a more prominent role in framing conflicts and defining the boundaries of legitimacy. The historical and sometimes strategic ties of some Deobandi

networks with political and security institutions also indicate fluid relations based on bargaining and overlapping interests, rather than one-sided dependence.

At a broader level, Pakistan's experience shows that security is not defined only within the framework of military or geopolitical threats; rather, it also has identity-based and ideological dimensions. In this context, security is a social and discursive construct formed through the interaction between the state and religious actors. Therefore, studying the linkage among religion, state, and security in Pakistan is not merely the examination of a particular case, but an entry point for understanding the dynamics of political legitimacy, the transformation of the concept of security, and the role of religion in contemporary politics in postcolonial societies. On this basis, the central argument of the study is that the Deobandi intellectual school constitutes part of the socio-discursive infrastructure of power in Pakistan. Through the production of religious symbolic capital, the organization of educational-religious networks, political socialization, and participation in shaping identity and security discourses, this current plays a role in reproducing political-security power. Its relationship with the state is also interactive and based on bargaining, rather than mere subordination. Consequently, understanding politics and security in Pakistan without considering the structural role of Deobandi networks in producing legitimacy, meaning, and social mobilization would remain analytically incomplete. Such an approach makes it possible to understand Deobandism not on the margins of politics, but at the center of the field of power and within its continuous processes of reproduction.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive approach and is based on the integration of historical institutionalism and discourse analysis. This framework makes it possible to analyze the reproduction of power in relation to religious institutions simultaneously at structural and semantic levels. Historical institutionalism is grounded in the assumption that institutions stabilize patterns of action over time and contribute to the continuity of power relations (1). Path dependence and mechanisms of "increasing returns" explain why institutional patterns endure and make change costly (1).

At the same time, institutional change often occurs gradually and cumulatively, rather than through sudden ruptures (2). These changes are shaped by power balances and intra-institutional conflicts that lead to the reinterpretation of rules and their gradual displacement (2). Accordingly, Deobandi religious seminaries, ulama networks, and religious organizations are examined as social structures that shape political action. Within this framework, focusing on the concept of "path dependence" makes it possible to explain how patterns of the religion-state relationship have been formed and stabilized in the context of historical developments. Moreover, path dependence shows that initial institutional choices can limit or direct the range of subsequent choices (3).

In the discursive dimension, the study examines how legitimacy is produced and how political-security issues are formulated in religious-political discourses. In this approach, discourses are not merely reflections of social reality; rather, they play a constitutive role in shaping it and define the boundaries of what is legitimate and illegitimate (4). From this perspective, religious concepts can become interpretive frameworks for understanding politics and security (5). The role of discourse in constructing political reality and giving meaning to power has also been emphasized (6).

The research data are examined through qualitative textual analysis in order to identify semantic patterns, discursive articulations, and mechanisms of legitimation. In this process, attention to the repetition of concepts,

modes of framing issues, and the ways in which religion is linked to politics and security is of central importance (7).

Overall, the integration of historical institutionalism and discourse analysis makes it possible to analyze Deobandi thought not merely as a set of religious beliefs, but as part of the structural-discursive mechanisms of power in Pakistan; mechanisms in which institutions, ideas, and discourses mutually participate in the reproduction of political-security power.

Theoretical Framework: Religion and the Reproduction of Political-Security Power

The reproduction of power refers to processes through which power relations are stabilized, naturalized, and thereby sustained over time (8). In the literature of political sociology, it is emphasized that power requires social legitimation for its continuity, not merely institutional reliance (3). Educational and religious institutions play a fundamental role in transmitting norms and reproducing social order, and in this way they contribute to the continuity of power structures (9).

Some analyses in political sociology place cultural and religious institutions among the factors that stabilize social order (3). Power is not exercised only through coercion; it also operates through discourses and the production of meaning (10). It is noteworthy that discourse has also been introduced as an instrument for shaping social understandings of political reality (6).

Institutional patterns become stabilized over time, and changing them is costly because actors operate within preexisting institutional paths (1). Path dependence has also been introduced as a factor in the continuity of power patterns (3). Religion can become a framework for giving meaning to politics and security and can play a role in shaping collective perceptions (11). The role of religion in formulating security perceptions has also been emphasized (12).

Institutional Power

Institutional power refers to a capacity derived from institutional rules and structures that directs the behavior of actors without direct reliance on coercion (13). From this perspective, institutions are rule-based frameworks that structure political action, define the range of possible actions, and contribute to the stability of political interactions by creating stable behavioral expectations (2).

Moreover, initial institutional choices can, through mechanisms of path dependence, limit later options and lead to the continuity of power patterns (1). Within this framework, it has been emphasized that institutions stabilize political behavior along specific paths through formal and informal rules, shape actors' expectations, and, through path dependence, contribute to the stability and reproduction of power structures (3).

Discursive Power

Discursive power refers to the capacity to shape social reality through language, meaning, and systems of signification, in such a way that what is perceived as "real," "natural," or "legitimate" is constructed and reproduced within discourses (4). From this perspective, discourse is not merely a reflection of political reality, but an instrument for defining and formulating it (14). Discourses limit and direct horizons of understanding, and consequently the range of policymaking, by determining the boundaries of what can be said and imagined (5).

In the same vein, it has been shown that political narratives play a role in shaping public priorities and political agendas by highlighting some issues and marginalizing others (15). At a more specific level, religious language can provide powerful semantic frameworks for defining legitimacy, identity, and threat, thereby affecting security and political perceptions (16). By the same logic, religious discourses play an effective role in formulating identity-based threats and drawing the boundaries between the “self” and the “other” (12).

Security Power

In contemporary approaches to security studies, security is regarded not as an objective condition, but as a discursive and political construct formed through the process of giving meaning to “threat.” What is called security is the result of actors’ linguistic and interpretive formulations, not merely material realities (17). In the same vein, security has been considered dependent on social perceptions of danger and insecurity (18). The central concept in this framework is “securitization,” meaning the process through which an issue is represented as an existential threat in order to justify exceptional measures and departure from normal politics (17). This process is essentially a discursive act for prioritizing issues and mobilizing resources (19).

In later securitization theory, the role of social context, audiences, and contextual conditions is highlighted, and securitization is regarded as the result of interaction among the actor, audience, and context; therefore, it is not monopolized by states (17). Following this view, security is the product of interaction between the state, society, and a network of actors (20). At the identity level, religion can be a powerful source of meaning and belonging, and in conditions of uncertainty it can provide a framework for defining the “self” and the “other,” and consequently for formulating threat (21). For this reason, religious identity plays an effective role in shaping security perceptions and defining existential threats (22).

Religion as a Source of Legitimacy and Mobilization

In many societies, religion is more than a belief system; it is a source for producing meaning, norms, and consequently political legitimacy. Legitimacy is formed when political power is perceived as justified and morally acceptable, and religion strengthens such acceptance by linking authority to conceptions of truth and moral order (23). Therefore, reference to religion can elevate political action from the level of instrumental interests to the sphere of moral obligation and expand the scope of social acceptance of policies (20).

At the social level, religious networks and institutions provide the ground for the formation of collective identity and the organization of collective action, because bonds of faith increase trust, solidarity, and readiness for mobilization (24). At the same time, religious discourses are capable of redefining political action as a moral duty; however, religion is a fluid resource that, depending on context, can lead both to the reinforcement of political order and to its contestation (25). Accordingly, religion can be regarded as an effective mechanism in the production of legitimacy, social mobilization, and ultimately the reproduction of political-security power.

The Relationship among Religion, Security, and the State in Postcolonial Societies

The relationship among religion, state, and security in postcolonial societies takes shape within the specific context of state-building, because these states have often emerged within colonially constructed borders, identity diversities, and crises of legitimacy; for this reason, the issue of security in these societies is deeply linked to concerns over the consolidation of the state and political authority (26). In such a context, religion can become a

resource for producing collective identity and strengthening political legitimacy, helping the state gain social acceptance (20).

This legitimating function becomes more important when religion, contrary to classical secularization narratives, has not withdrawn from the public sphere; religion can still maintain an active presence in public life (27). Such enduring presence enables religion to influence the definition of social norms and political frameworks (3). Under these conditions, security also often assumes an identity-based formulation; that is, threats are perceived not only as material, but as directed toward the survival and cohesion of collective identity (28). Therefore, the perception of security becomes dependent on social understandings of the “self” and the “other” (18).

At the institutional level, when social institutions enjoy relative autonomy, they can mediate between the state and society and influence the way power is exercised (29). Religious institutions can also play a mediating role in such a situation and become channels for transmitting demands or mobilizing society (30). These dynamics are understandable within a framework that takes into account the institutional legacy of colonialism, because many governance and security structures in these countries are continuations of institutional patterns from the colonial period and have directed trajectories of state-building (31). Therefore, the linkage among religion, state, and security in postcolonial societies should be understood as part of the continuous process of state-building and the search for political legitimacy.

The Position of Religious Movements in the Security Architecture of States

The security architecture of states is not limited to military and intelligence institutions; rather, it includes a network of institutional and discursive arrangements through which threats are defined, prioritized, and managed. Therefore, security is the product of a sociopolitical process, not merely a technical response to objective dangers (17). Within such a framework, security is formed through interaction between the state and society and depends on social perceptions of threat (19). In this context, religious movements, because they possess symbolic capital, moral authority, and extensive social networks, can play a role in formulating threats and giving them meaning within identity-based and value-based frameworks (32).

Thus, the definition of threat does not remain exclusively in the hands of the state, but extends to the sphere of social actors as well (18). This discursive capacity becomes more important when religious movements are able to mediate between the state and society; because under conditions of weak legitimacy or social cleavage, they can help mobilize social support and reduce the state-society gap (11). Such a role can be understood within the theoretical framework of state-society relations as a mediating function of social institutions (30).

However, the relationship of religious movements with the security architecture of states is not fixed or one-directional; depending on the political and institutional context, these movements can help stabilize the existing security order or become a source of challenge and redefinition (31). Therefore, security can be understood as a socio-discursive arena in which religious movements also participate in the reproduction or transformation of power patterns.

The Origins and Internal Logic of the Deobandi Movement

The Deobandi movement emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in a context marked by the decline of Muslim political authority in India and the consolidation of British rule. The collapse of Mughal order and the defeat of the 1857 uprising created a deep identity crisis among Muslim elites; a crisis that many interpreted as the

end of the era of Muslim political supremacy in the subcontinent (33). This transformation has also been analyzed as a turning point in the rethinking of Muslims' religious and social strategies (34).

In response to this situation, part of the ulama sought a strategy of survival in relative withdrawal from power politics and in concentrating on the preservation of scholarly tradition and the religious reconstruction of society; a turn that can be understood as the formulation of a cultural-religious strategy in the colonial era (35). The establishment of Darul Uloom Deoband in 1866 was the institutional embodiment of this approach; an institution formed with the aim of protecting jurisprudential traditions and pursuing cultural resistance against the epistemic and educational influence of the West (33). The financial and social reliance of this seminary on public donations also gave it a degree of institutional independence and provided it with a stable social base (36).

From the perspective of its internal logic, Deobandism was, from the outset, more of a reformist-educational project for purifying beliefs and training religious scholars than a political project. Instead of direct confrontation with colonial power, it focused on the internal reconstruction of Muslim society (37). For this reason, this current gradually gained broad social influence and has been described as a reformist movement with a considerable social base (38).

The outcome of these developments was that Deobandism, from the beginning, became not only a religious seminary but also a socio-educational network capable of institutional reproduction; a network that was able to adapt itself to the transition from the colonial period to the nation-state era and to endure.

Key Ideological Components of Deobandism

Deobandi thought is based on a combination of jurisprudential traditionalism and religious reformism. Its central adherence to Hanafi jurisprudence and strong emphasis on hadith indicate a systematic effort to return to authoritative religious sources and to purify religious beliefs and practices. This current has also been described as a school rooted in the Hanafi jurisprudential tradition (36). In line with this logic, religious reform and the struggle against innovations became one of the identity axes of Deobandism, and many popular rituals and practices were criticized as deviations from authentic religion (33). This orientation has also been interpreted as a project for religious purification and the redefinition of the boundaries of religiosity (35). However, the Deobandis' approach to Sufism was not one of complete rejection; rather, it involved the acceptance of a Sharia-oriented form of Sufism, meaning that spiritual experience was defined within the framework of jurisprudential commitment (37). This effort to create a balance between Sharia and Tariqa has also been noted (39).

The result of these components was the formation of a discourse that possessed traditional legitimacy for religious elites and, at the same time, conveyed a reformist message to the social body; a situation that made the expansion of Deobandism's social influence possible (33). From this perspective, the Deobandi movement can be regarded as an example of intra-traditional reformism that turned from within the jurisprudential tradition toward religious reconstruction (38).

The Network of Religious Seminaries as a Structure of Power

The network of Deobandi religious seminaries was one of the most important mechanisms for the continuity and expansion of this movement, because these seminaries were not merely centers of religious education; rather, they became institutions for reproducing religious authority, transmitting scholarly tradition, and creating durable social ties. The geographical dispersion of graduates of these seminaries led to the formation of a translocal network of

ulama that reproduced a relatively coordinated and broad form of religious authority across different regions (37). In such a model, the religious seminary was not merely a place for teaching texts; it was also a space for the socialization of students within a common intellectual framework and for the formation of enduring teacher-student relations, which strengthened discursive cohesion and the continuity of the Deobandi tradition. For this reason, religious seminaries have also been described as socio-identity centers and producers of religious authority (38).

The authority of Deobandi ulama depended less on formal office or political power than on symbolic capital, scholarly credibility, and social acceptance (33). This reliance on symbolic capital meant that their influence was exercised through informal but effective channels, and that religious authority could direct social behaviors and attitudes. As a result, religious institutions could influence the social and even political sphere without being integrated into the formal structure of the state and could acquire a kind of “informal social power” (35). Thus, the Deobandi seminary network can be regarded as a structure through which religious authority was institutionally reproduced and which granted the movement historical continuity and social influence.

Diversity of Tendencies within the Movement

The Deobandi movement has not been a homogeneous current from the outset; rather, it has included a spectrum of educational, missionary, social, and, in some cases, political tendencies. Therefore, it should be understood as a plural intellectual-institutional tradition, not as a homogeneous current (37). This diversity in the pathways of religious and social action among religious currents has also been noted (40). Within this framework, the linkage of some Deoband-affiliated networks with jihadism cannot be directly derived from classical Deobandi teachings; rather, this linkage was formed primarily in the context of geopolitical developments, the Afghan war, and regional policies (41). Similarly, the securitization of part of the religious seminaries can be explained within the framework of regional security and political dynamics (42). The outcome of these considerations is that reducing Deobandism to radicalism is a form of analytical simplification, because this movement is in fact a diverse set of religious-social tendencies that have evolved in interaction with different historical and political contexts and have experienced different trajectories.

Deobandism and the State of Pakistan: From the Margins to the Center of Power

The Deoband school in Pakistan has followed a gradual path from the margins to the center of power; a path that began with initial distancing from the state and led to structural interaction with it. In the early years after independence, many Deobandi ulama viewed the nation-state-building project with caution and focused on preserving religious authority and expanding educational networks. This approach was rooted in the historical tradition of Deoband, which valued institutional independence from political power (33), and the historical experience of this school also reflected a form of relative distancing from the state (37).

However, the expansion of Deobandi seminaries and the increasing social influence of the ulama gradually turned them into a source of religious legitimacy; a source that the newly established state of Pakistan needed in order to consolidate its identity and political foundations (43). In such a context, part of the Deobandi elite entered formal politics through religious parties, especially Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and played a role in political coalitions (44). Thus, their presence in political competition became a stable part of the reality of Pakistani politics (45).

This process assumed newer dimensions at the security level, such that the state, at certain junctures, used Deobandi symbolic capital and social networks to strengthen the Islamic narrative of political authority (46). In this

regard, the army and security institutions played an important role in regulating and managing this linkage (47). As a result, Deobandism became an influential actor in the field of power, participating in the reproduction of political-security power in interaction and sometimes tension with the state (41). This position can also be traced in Pakistan's more recent developments (37).

The Initial Relationship with the Nation-State-Building Project

The initial relationship of the Deobandis with the nation-state-building project was multilayered and cannot be reduced to simple support or opposition. Many Deobandi ulama in the late colonial period, within the framework of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, supported coexistence-oriented anti-colonial nationalism and regarded the survival of Islam as dependent on the continuity of scholarly tradition, not territorial borders (33). According to some analyses, the protection of Sharia and religious institutions was considered prior to the idea of the nation-state (38). On the other hand, a state-oriented tendency emerged within the Deobandi tradition that viewed a Muslim state as a more suitable context for implementing Islamic rulings (37). Some studies show that for a number of ulama, Pakistan was more an opportunity for Islamic influence than an ideological ideal (40).

After 1947, the reality of the new state pushed many Deobandis toward practical interaction with the state structure, and their attention increasingly turned to the Islamic orientation of the state (43). Within this framework, the authoritative role of religious institutions in defining and formulating the Islamic identity of the state was also highlighted (35). The outcome of these developments was the formation of a gradual and negotiation-oriented relationship between the ulama and the state, which in turn paved the way for the later entry of Deobandis into formal politics.

Gradual Entry into Formal Politics

The entry of Deobandis into formal politics was a gradual and context-dependent process. In the early years after independence, many ulama avoided direct party participation and focused on preserving religious authority. However, disputes over the Islamic nature of the state and the place of Sharia in the legal and political structure gradually drew them closer to the political sphere (43). The most important channel for this proximity was religious parties rooted in the Deobandi tradition—especially Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam—which sought to pursue religious demands through parliamentary and legal channels (37). Within this framework, the political participation of the Deobandis has been interpreted not merely as a power-seeking act, but as an effort to protect the position of Sharia and guide the Islamic orientation of the state (40).

At the same time, the state also needed interaction with the ulama to strengthen its Islamic legitimacy. Out of this mutual need, a two-way relationship emerged in which the state benefited from the symbolic capital of religion, while religious ulama gained access to official mechanisms and platforms (43). This pattern has been described in some studies as an instrumental-mutual relationship (38). It gradually made the boundary between religious authority and political action more fluid and prepared the ground for the institutionalization of Deobandi presence in formal politics.

Interaction with Institutions of Power

The interaction of Deobandi ulama with institutions of power had a dynamic and negotiation-oriented nature. Their broad social base provided a form of symbolic capital that acquired particular importance for states during

periods of legitimacy crisis and encouraged them to interact with the ulama (43). On the other hand, the ulama did not view this interaction merely as political alignment, but as an instrument for preserving religious influence, protecting religious authority, and expanding their educational networks. Therefore, their influence was often manifested at the normative level and in the field of Islamic legislation (37). This pattern of interaction acquired new dimensions from the 1970s onward, alongside regional developments and the Afghan war. During this period, contact and cooperation between some Deobandi networks and military-security institutions increased; a proximity that was shaped more by geopolitical and security considerations than by ideological alignment (41). In the same vein, some studies have emphasized the mediating role of religious institutions in linking the state and society (38). Within the theoretical framework of power reproduction, this pattern can be understood as a form of mutual reproduction of legitimacy, in which the state and religious institutions each help strengthen the other's position.

Religious Legitimation of Security Policies

The role of some Deobandi networks in religiously legitimating security policies can be understood at the discursive level. Within the theoretical framework of securitization, when an issue is formulated as "defense of Islam," it can be elevated from a political dispute to an identity-based threat and thereby facilitate acceptance of exceptional measures (17). In this regard, some ulama, by participating in the production of semantic frameworks of threat and redefining conflicts in religious language, have given security policies a form of normative cover (46). This dynamic has become more prominent especially during periods of political and security crisis (45). However, the Deobandi movement is not unified in this respect, and there is a significant distinction between Deoband's interpretive traditions and foundational teachings on the one hand, and the political-security uses of religion on the other. From an analytical perspective, expressing security in religious language can lead to the institutionalization of security meanings in the social sphere; a process that can be explained within the Foucauldian idea of the linkage among knowledge, discourse, and power (10). In the same vein, studies in political sociology have emphasized the linkage between discourse and legitimacy (3), and discourse studies of politics have highlighted this relationship at the level of reproducing meaning and authority (6). Consequently, religious legitimation of security policies can be regarded as part of the broader process of power reproduction (48).

Reproduction of Political Power through Deobandi Parties

Deobandi parties in Pakistan have been a mechanism for transforming religious symbolic capital into political influence and participation in the reproduction of political power. Through elections, coalitions, and legislation, these parties play a role in shaping political legitimacy, defining the Islamic identity of the state, and regulating policy priorities (44). In this process, their relationship with the state is largely based on mutual bargaining, such that the state uses the religious backing of this school to strengthen legitimacy, while religious parties use access to formal mechanisms of power to consolidate their own position (43). Thus, religion in party form becomes not only an instrument of mobilization, but part of the institutional-discursive infrastructure of the continuity of power in Pakistan.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and Politics

The most important channel for reproducing Deobandi political influence can be found in organized entry into party politics and participation in formal arrangements of power. In this regard, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), as the most prominent party arising from Deobandi thought, has played a central role in creating an institutional linkage

between religious authority and formal politics. Relying on networks of ulama, religious seminaries, and deeply rooted social ties in local communities, this party has been able to reproduce its social base continuously; a base that is not merely the product of electoral competition, but rests on religious trust, the spiritual authority of ulama, and enduring network relations (44). Therefore, the logic of this party's political mobilization relies less on modern ideological party programs than on socio-religious capital and traditional mechanisms of religious authority (37).

From the perspective of political function, the entry of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam into formal politics can be regarded as a transition from purely religious authority to institutionalized political authority. By participating in elections, maintaining a presence in parliament, and entering governing coalitions, this party has sought to formulate religious demands in legal and legislative forms. As a result, religion in this political discourse often becomes a source of legitimation within the existing order, not necessarily an ideology for overturning it (45). This same institutional logic, while preserving religious identity, has strengthened a pragmatic, negotiation-oriented, and coalition-based approach. In other words, the experience of this party shows that political Deobandism is not necessarily synonymous with radicalism or order-disrupting politics; rather, it can operate in the form of institutional participation, political bargaining, and adaptation to the rules of the formal game (37). This pattern also shows how a religious tradition can participate in the process of reproducing power within the structure of the nation-state through party institutions, without necessarily seeking the complete negation of the existing political order.

Structure, Social Base, and Political Ideology of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI)

The structure of this party has a dual nature: on the one hand, it participates in electoral competition and parliamentary mechanisms as a formal party organization; on the other hand, it relies on an informal network of ulama, religious seminaries, and mosques, which enables it to bridge religious authority and formal politics (44). This dual linkage has caused the social base of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam to form mainly among students of religious seminaries, local clerics, and traditional social strata, and its political mobilization relies more on religious authority and religious trust than on modern party programs (37). At the ideological level, this party defends the role of Islam in legislation and education, but in practice it operates within the framework of the parliamentary system, political coalitions, and the formal rules of competition. Therefore, the Islamism of this party often assumes an institutional, gradual, and power-compatible form, rather than an approach that disrupts the political order (45).

The Role of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam in Parliament, Coalitions, and Political Crises

In Pakistani politics, this party is less a majority-making party than an "effective coalition actor," and through parliament it can exercise influence beyond its numerical weight, especially when governments need parliamentary support or religious legitimacy (44). This position enables the party to obtain concessions in areas such as religious legislation, educational policies, and identity issues (37). During periods of political crisis, the strategy of this party has sometimes shifted between cooperation with governments and joining protest coalitions, demonstrating that political expediency is an important element of its behavior (45).

The Political Function of Deobandism in Managing and Controlling Religious Society

The function of the Deoband school cannot be limited to party action; at the level of religious society, this current also plays a role in shaping religious norms and determining the boundaries of "acceptable religiosity" through networks of seminaries, mosques, and the authority of ulama (37). This influence operates mainly through symbolic

authority and the process of internalizing norms, rather than through direct coercion, such that desirable behavioral and interpretive patterns gradually become institutionalized in the everyday actions of believers (8). In many regions, Deobandi institutions, in addition to their educational function, also undertake social mediation and informal arbitration in resolving local disputes, thereby acquiring a quasi-institutional position in regulating social relations (33). Such a position enables them to operate at the boundary between religious authority and social order and to participate informally in the management of religious society. This norm-making capacity can be transformed into political capital, because directing religious opinions and sensitivities affects political and even security perceptions. However, continuous competition with other religious and interpretive currents shows that this authority is not fixed and definitive; rather, it constantly requires social and discursive reproduction. Therefore, Deobandi influence should be understood as a dynamic process that is redefined in interaction with intra-religious competition and social transformations.

Deobandism and Identity-Sectarian Politics

Deobandi thought in Pakistan has also been influential in the arena of identity-sectarian politics, because religious identity in this space is linked to social mobilization and political boundary-making. By promoting specific definitions of religiosity, Deobandi networks play a role in drawing identity boundaries between themselves and other religious traditions. However, sectarianism cannot be reduced merely to doctrinal differences or religious interpretive traditions; a significant part of these tensions is formed and reproduced in the context of power competition and political conditions (43).

Competition with Barelvis and Shiites

The competition between Deobandis and Barelvis is rooted in ritual, theological, and doctrinal differences, and in practice it has extended into disputes over religious authority and the control of mosques and religious seminaries (33). The relationship with Shiites has also, at certain junctures, been influenced by anti-Shiite discourses as well as ideological and geopolitical rivalries (43). A number of studies show that these rivalries are intertwined with regional politics and power equations and do not have a merely intra-religious nature (49). However, reducing all of Deobandism to a sectarian project does not provide an analytically precise account, because a significant part of this current's activities has focused on religious education and preaching, and many sectarian tensions are shaped by political contexts and power rivalries, not merely by religious differences.

Influence on Domestic Politics and Social Stability

The influence of the Deoband school, through its extensive network of seminaries and mosques, has gone beyond the sphere of teachings and doctrinal debates and has affected domestic politics as well, playing a role in shaping moral and identity discourses (37). At the local level, this influence sometimes has a stabilizing function, in that institutions affiliated with this current help resolve disputes and strengthen social order through social mediation and informal arbitration (33). However, when part of Deobandi networks become involved in political or sectarian competition, the possibility arises for religious cleavages to be transferred into the political sphere; a process that can affect patterns of social coexistence and levels of internal stability (43). From the perspective of the theory of power reproduction, these networks participate in reproducing norms and semantic frameworks, and thus they can

affect collective perceptions of order, legitimacy, and threat. Therefore, depending on the political and social context, the consequences of their presence can be both stabilizing and tension-generating.

Sectarianism as an Instrument of Power

Sectarianism in Pakistan cannot be reduced merely to doctrinal differences; rather, it should be analyzed within the framework of competition over social and symbolic power. Within this framework, sectarian identities can become resources of political mobilization and redefine power conflicts in the form of religious boundary-making (43). From the perspective of symbolic power theory, drawing boundaries between the “self” and the “other” makes it possible to acquire and accumulate religious legitimacy and transforms religious competition into competition over social influence and semantic authority (8). These dynamics have also been intensified in the context of political and regional developments, such that events such as the Afghan war have contributed to strengthening patterns of sectarian mobilization and the securitization of religious identities (37). In the same vein, some analyses highlight the linkage between sectarianism and regional security dynamics and show that geopolitical rivalries can further activate religious cleavages (41).

The function of sectarianism in this regard is dual: in the short term, it can help mobilization and intra-group cohesion, but in the long term it increases the risk of social polarization and the erosion of social capital (8). Studies have also shown that religious identity can become an instrument for mobilizing and organizing social power (3). This understanding has also been strengthened in discourse analyses of politics (6). Therefore, sectarianism can be regarded as part of the mechanisms of power reproduction in Pakistan; a mechanism that, through the production and reproduction of identity boundaries, contributes to the distribution and stabilization of social power (48).

Reproduction of Security Power

The reproduction of security power in relation to Deobandi thought and jihadism should be analyzed at a structural-discursive level, not merely in terms of the actions of specific organizations or groups. In the context of the Afghan war and regional geopolitical rivalries, some networks emerging from the Deobandi tradition participated in the discourse of jihad and played a role in the formulation of threat, the mobilization of forces, and the legitimation of security policies. In this process, “jihad” shifted from a jurisprudential-ethical concept into a framework for security meaning-making that made the boundary between religion and security fluid and turned it into a shared language for explaining threat and response. However, this dynamic cannot be regarded as representative of Deobandism as a whole; rather, it should be understood as the outcome of the overlap of specific political, security, and regional conditions. The analytical importance of this process lies in showing how religious discourse can participate in defining threat, directing collective perceptions, and formulating security policies, thereby becoming part of the semantic infrastructure of security power.

The Intellectual and Institutional Linkage of Deobandism with the Afghan Taliban

The linkage of some Deobandi networks in Pakistan with the formation of the Afghan Taliban should be analyzed within the framework of the geopolitical developments of the 1980s and 1990s and the consequences of the Afghan war. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the formation of Afghan jihad, and then the rivalry of regional and extra-regional powers created an environment in which religious mobilization became intertwined with security and strategic considerations. In such a context, religious networks, including some circles influenced by the Deobandi

tradition, came to play a role in the process of social mobilization and the training of the younger generation; a role that was less party-political than it was expressed through religious education, the accommodation of migrant students, and the reconstruction of religious identity under conditions of crisis.

The education of a number of early Taliban leaders in seminaries influenced by the Deobandi method created a form of educational and pedagogical overlap, but this overlap should not be regarded as the direct or complete transfer of Deobandi thought into the Taliban's political project (41). Many of the Taliban's intellectual and behavioral elements took shape in interaction with wartime conditions, local cultures, the experience of life in refugee camps, and the logic of seeking order in conditions of instability. Therefore, the Taliban cannot be considered merely the outcome of a particular religious school; rather, it should be regarded as the result of the intersection of identity-religious factors with wartime contexts and the crisis of political order (37).

During this period, religious seminaries mainly had a socio-educational function and provided young generations with identity-based, moral, and disciplinary frameworks (43). In many cases, these seminaries replaced weakened state educational and welfare institutions and created a minimal form of social order. Thus, their role should be understood in relation to institutional vacuums of states and postwar conditions, not merely in terms of the production of political ideology. At the same time, religious language and symbols played an important role in formulating concepts such as "establishing order," "fighting corruption," and "defending the Islamic community," and gave mobilization a legitimate meaning (41). At this level, religion became a resource for political-security meaning-making, but this does not necessarily mean that the Taliban were identical with the Deobandi intellectual method; rather, it indicates the capacity of religious discourse to frame action under conditions of crisis.

Accordingly, the relationship between Deobandism and the Taliban should be understood as historical, contextual, and multilayered. The Deobandi method includes a diverse spectrum of educational, missionary, social, and political tendencies and has taken different forms in different historical contexts. Reducing this broad tradition to the Taliban experience is a reductionist analysis that overlooks the social, geopolitical, and institutional complexities of Taliban formation. A more precise analysis requires attention to the overlap of religion, war, fragile state-building, and regional rivalries in the reproduction of power in Afghanistan and its surroundings.

Deobandi Seminaries and the Production of Jihadi Human Capital

Deobandi seminaries in Pakistan are originally institutions for traditional education and religious socialization that play a role in shaping religious identity, moral order, and the behavioral patterns of students (37). However, in the 1980s, alongside the Afghan war, some seminaries located in border regions were exposed to the discourse of jihad. This encounter was influenced less by the formal curricula of these seminaries than by geopolitical conditions, war-induced population displacements, and the regional security environment (41). From the perspective of the sociology of education, educational institutions can carry and transmit cultural capital and semantic frameworks, but their mode of influence depends on surrounding social and political contexts (9). Within this framework, Deobandi seminaries should be regarded as a plural and heterogeneous network with diverse educational and social functions, only some components of which may participate in jihadi processes under specific conditions (37). Therefore, generalizing the experience of one part of this network to the entire Deobandi method produces a simplified image of the complex reality of these institutions.

The Role of Deobandism in Pakistan's Regional Policy

The role of Deobandism in Pakistan's regional policy should be understood in relation to religious discourses, geopolitical considerations, and security concerns. Deobandi networks have generally acted not as independent designers of foreign policy, but as part of the socio-ideological environment surrounding regional decision-making; an environment that can affect threat perception, the formulation of identities, and the legitimization of some foreign policy approaches (43).

Afghanistan has been the most important arena of this indirect influence. The Afghan war and the migratory waves resulting from it created transnational religious, educational, and social ties between communities on both sides of the border. However, many of these ties resulted less from planned ideological alignment than from Cold War conditions, population displacements, and the security strategies of the Pakistani state (41). In this regard, seminaries and religious circles functioned more as social and identity-based settings than as formal instruments of foreign policy.

The continuity of scholarly and educational relations among ulama on both sides of the border also indicates the transnational nature of Deobandi thought; a thought whose knowledge-based and religious networks go beyond national borders, without necessarily implying a direct diplomatic role (33). Therefore, the influence of Deobandism should be analyzed mainly at the discursive-social level and within specific political and security contexts; that is, as an influence on the semantic and identity spaces within which regional policy is understood and justified, not at the level of direct diplomatic agency (37).

The Instrumental Use of Jihad in National Security Strategy

At certain historical junctures, "jihad" shifted from a jurisprudential-ethical concept into a framework within national security discourse; a framework that made it possible to formulate external threats in religious language and facilitate social mobilization around them. In the context of the Cold War, jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan became aligned with Pakistan's geopolitical interests and was represented in the form of defending Muslims (41). This representation turned religious concepts and symbols into legitimating resources for some security strategies and enabled policymakers to justify regional actions within a moral-identity framework (43). Later, this same logic was reflected in calculations related to Afghanistan and, to some extent, Kashmir, where indirect support for jihadi actors was regarded in some assessments as a lower-cost option than direct military intervention (46). However, within Pakistan's power structure there was no complete consensus regarding the extent and manner of reliance on jihadi groups, and different perceptions existed among political, military, and security institutions (47).

Over time, the unintended consequences of these policies—including the spillover of violence, the strengthening of nonstate armed networks, and the increasing complexity of the internal security environment—became a challenge for the state itself (41). Therefore, the "instrumental use of seminaries" should be understood less as the product of a stable ideological commitment and more as the outcome of geopolitical calculations, security considerations, and short-term strategic assessments; calculations that, over time, encountered unforeseen costs and consequences.

The State, the Army, and Deobandism: A Reciprocal and Contradictory Relationship

The relationship of the Pakistani state and army with Deobandi networks should be understood as reciprocal, fluid, and context-dependent, in which cooperation, containment, and tension have existed simultaneously. At certain junctures, the state has used the social and symbolic capital of religious networks to strengthen legitimacy and advance security objectives (43). In return, Deobandi actors have interacted with the power structure to preserve their educational and religious spheres of influence (37). This pattern has been based more on security calculations and power considerations than on ideological alignment.

Support, Control, and Containment

The dominant pattern of interaction between the state and Deobandi networks can be described as a form of “selective cooperation” accompanied simultaneously by monitoring and regulation of religious activities. In some regional conflicts, parts of the security structure used the socio-religious capacities of these networks to mobilize public opinion and advance strategic objectives (41). This use indicated, more than complete institutional integration, a form of selective and targeted utilization of the social resources of religion.

At the same time, fear of the emergence of independent and uncontrollable influence by religious actors pushed the state toward supervisory and controlling policies (46). Thus, the interaction between the state and Deobandi networks has always taken shape within an unstable balance between support and containment. This situation reflects a broader pattern in the state’s relationship with powerful social forces; a pattern in which the instrumental use of social capacities is accompanied by concern over the independence and autonomy of actors (47).

Deobandism as a “Strategic Asset”

In some political-security analyses, part of the networks affiliated with the Deobandi school have been described as a “strategic asset”; a term that mainly refers to specific junctures in the conflicts of Afghanistan and Kashmir, not to the Deobandi current as a whole (46). This concept refers more to security assessments of the tactical function of some religious actors under specific geopolitical conditions than to an official and comprehensive policy toward the Deoband school. The state of Pakistan has never officially applied this title to the entirety of this tradition (47).

Afghanistan has been the most important arena in which this discourse emerged, especially during the anti-Soviet jihad and its aftermath. However, the issue is not limited to Afghanistan. In conflicts related to Kashmir and during certain periods of regional tension with India, religious networks also played a role in the discursive and mobilizational environment surrounding security policy. Moreover, the transnational consequences of these policies were reflected in other countries such as India, some Central Asian republics, and even in interactions with Middle Eastern actors, although these reflections were often indirect and dependent on broader regional developments.

However, Deobandism is a plural current whose main focus lies in religious education, preaching, and religious socialization (37). Reducing this broad tradition to security or regional functions presents a reductionist picture. Experience has also shown that tactical reliance on nonstate actors in complex regional environments can produce unpredictable consequences and security spillovers both inside and beyond borders (41). Therefore, the use of the term “strategic asset” should be understood as contextual, episodic, and limited to specific historical conditions, and should not be generalized to the entire Deobandi tradition or to all of Pakistan’s regional policy. A more precise

analysis requires attention to the interaction among security considerations, regional rivalries, religious social networks, and power dynamics at national and transnational levels.

Unintended Consequences for Internal Security

The strengthening of the discourse of jihad in the 1980s and 1990s gradually led to the normalization of the language of armed mobilization in some social spaces and made the boundary between religious action and security action more fluid (41). In this process, some of the networks that had been supported or utilized within the framework of strategic considerations gradually acquired greater operational autonomy, such that the distinction between “security instrument” and “security threat” became blurred (46). The ideological, organizational, and network infrastructures formed in that period later became active in some internal conflicts as well and led to the increasing complexity of the internal security environment (43). The emergence of the Pakistani Taliban can be regarded as one of the clearest examples of this spillover of insecurity into the country; a phenomenon showing that cross-border dynamics can turn into internal challenges (47).

Following these developments, the state was forced to reconsider its previous approaches and adopted policies aimed at containing extremism, regulating the activities of religious institutions, and strengthening security oversight (37). Thus, the experience of previous decades showed that short-term tactical calculations can have long-term strategic consequences for internal security.

Unintended Consequences for Internal Security

The discourse of jihad, which was strengthened in the 1980s and 1990s within the framework of regional conflicts, gradually became part of the legitimating vocabulary of the public sphere and institutionalized the capacity for armed mobilization in some social environments (41). This transformation was not merely a temporary phenomenon; rather, it led to the formation of networks and organizational capital that later acquired the capacity for independent action. As a result, the distinction between tactical instruments of security policy and potential sources of threat became increasingly complex (46). The institutional and discursive infrastructures emerging from that period had the capacity to be activated under different domestic conditions and made the security environment more multilayered and unpredictable (43). Events such as the emergence of the Pakistani Taliban showed that transnational linkages and regional policies can have consequences beyond their initial sphere (47). In response to these developments, the state moved toward re-regulating its relationship with religious institutions, strengthening oversight, and limiting radical capacities (37). From an analytical perspective, this experience shows that the strategic use of mobilizing discourses at the regional level can, in the long term, transform domestic security equations and force the state to manage the unintended consequences of the very policies it once pursued.

Challenges Facing the Reproduction of Deobandi Power

The reproduction of Deobandi power in Pakistan today faces important structural transformations. The expansion of modern education, digital media, and the plurality of sources of religious authority have weakened the traditional monopoly of ulama and made the structure of religious authority more multipolar. At the same time, domestic and international pressures to contain extremism and monitor religious seminaries have limited the scope of action of religious networks. In this regard, the continuity of Deobandi power depends on their capacity for institutional adaptation and the readjustment of the function of religious institutions in the public sphere.

Decline of Social Legitimacy

Social legitimacy, which is one of the foundations of the reproduction of power by intellectual institutions, has faced challenges in recent years. Among part of public opinion, a perceived linkage has emerged between some regional security developments and the conduct of some religious actors, leading to a relative decline in social trust (41). After the events of September 11, 2001, a tendency toward less politicized and more individualized readings of religion also strengthened among part of urban society; a transformation that subjected traditional patterns of authority to rearrangement (46).

From a theoretical perspective, whenever a gap is perceived between actors' normative claims and the social consequences attributed to them, their symbolic capital is exposed to erosion (43). Moreover, the expansion of new media and the plurality of sources of meaning production have pushed the privileged position of some traditional institutions in organizing religious discourse into a more competitive environment (37). In this regard, at certain historical junctures, some readings attributed to the Deoband tradition have been instrumentally used within the framework of political and security calculations; a matter that reflects not the essence of this tradition, but the contexts of power and specific strategic considerations. Thus, social legitimacy has increasingly become a dynamic process dependent on continuous reproduction within a polyphonic arena.

Intra-Movement Cleavages

The Deoband school has been a plural current from the outset, and no complete internal unity has existed within it. Disagreement over the relationship between religious tradition and politics, as well as over the manner of interaction with the state, has led to the emergence of internal cleavages (33). Some ulama emphasize the continuation of the traditional educational and missionary role and prioritize institutional independence, while others regard more active participation in politics as necessary for protecting religious interests (37). Moreover, not all currents affiliated with Deoband have accepted violence-oriented approaches, and some have explicitly opposed armed actions (43). In addition to discursive disagreements, competition over institutional resources, social base, and political influence has also reduced the symbolic cohesion of this thought (46).

Thus, the internal plurality of the Deoband school has two different consequences at the same time: on the one hand, it increases the capacity for flexibility and adaptation to changing conditions; on the other hand, it makes it difficult to maintain a unified discourse and a coherent image of this current.

International Pressures and the Changing Security Environment

After 2001, the fight against terrorism became one of the main axes of global politics, and Pakistan came under increasing international pressure (46). This transformation pushed the state toward increasing oversight over religious institutions and readjusting its relationship with religious networks (41). In such an environment, the linkage between the religious sphere and security became more sensitive, and the position of religious ulama in the public sphere was rearranged (43). At the same time, institutional revision in security policies and efforts to contain extremism became part of the state's official agenda (47). Thus, the new security environment not only changed the rules of internal interaction, but also exposed the process of reproducing religious power more than before to the influence of international variables (37). From this perspective, transnational developments have become a determining factor in shaping the relationship among religion, state, and security in Pakistan.

The Emergence of Rival Religious Actors

Developments in recent years show that the position of Deobandis in Pakistan's religious sphere no longer operates within the framework of a stabilized relative superiority, but is redefined in an environment with changing competitive rules. Competition with Bareilvi currents and Shiite networks is not merely a religious dispute, but a competition over access to social resources, representation of religious identity in the public sphere, and influence over policymaking (43). Moreover, the political and media organization of rival currents has reduced the historical monopoly over social mobilization and discourse production (46). The expansion of private media and digital space has also made it possible to bypass conventional intermediaries and has challenged authority based on classical educational networks (37). Thus, the field of competition has expanded from older institutions to the arena of public opinion and media space.

Under such conditions, competitive advantage is formed not only through historical background or institutional reach, but also through the ability to produce persuasive discourse, respond to social demands, and adapt to the new communicative environment. From this perspective, the emergence of rival actors should be regarded as a sign of transformation in the structure of the religious field; a transformation that makes the reproduction of power by each current dependent on its capacity for adaptation and strategic rearrangement.

Conclusion

By focusing on the linkage among religion, state, and security in Pakistan, this study sought to present a reading of the Deobandi movement that goes beyond reductionist narratives. Its main argument was that Deobandi thought cannot be analyzed merely as an educational method or as a phenomenon subsumed under extremism; rather, it should be regarded as a socio-institutional actor that participates in the processes of reproducing political-security power. Within this framework, the religious sphere is not a marginal variable, but part of the social and discursive infrastructure of power in Pakistan, playing a role in producing legitimacy, meaning, and political identity.

The historical-institutional analysis showed that the current position of the Deoband school is the result of an accumulative and path-dependent trajectory. The formation of Darul Uloom Deoband and its affiliated network of seminaries created an educational-social infrastructure based on relative independence from the state, popular support, and extensive networking. This infrastructure made possible the reproduction of religious authority even under conditions of political weakness and, after the establishment of Pakistan, entered the field of politics in the context of state-building, legal Islamization, and regional geopolitical developments. Therefore, the influence of Deobandis should be understood as the result of the gradual accumulation of institutional and symbolic capital, not as the outcome of episodic decisions or short-term state support.

At the discursive level, the findings showed that the power of the Deobandi movement is not confined to educational or organizational institutions, but is also rooted in the ability to produce and circulate meaning. Religious discourses have played a role in political legitimation, the framing of security threats, and identity boundary-making. Thus, security in Pakistan does not rely only on the material capacities of the state; rather, it is a social-discursive construct formed through the interaction of the state, ulama, and religious networks. This result highlights the limitations of purely state-centered approaches in security studies and shows that without attention to religious actors, understanding Pakistan's security dynamics will remain incomplete.

The relationship of Deobandis with the state and the army has also had a reciprocal and context-dependent nature. This relationship was neither complete dependence nor absolute confrontation; rather, it reflected a pattern of bargaining, overlapping interests, and conditional interaction. At certain junctures, states have benefited from the spiritual mobilizing capacity and legitimating power of religious discourses, and some Deobandi networks have also benefited from proximity to power in order to consolidate their institutional position. However, Pakistan's historical experience shows that tactical linkages and the instrumental use of religious concepts in the security sphere can create unintended consequences and complicate internal equations. Therefore, what is influential in this interaction is the manner of formulating and using spiritual resources in the field of power, not the essence of religion.

The study also emphasized the internal heterogeneity of this school. Deobandism includes a spectrum of educational, social, and political tendencies, and reducing it to radicalism or jihadism presents an inaccurate image. A large part of Deobandi networks have focused on education, moral guidance, and social activity. This internal plurality, while strengthening the capacity for adaptation, weakens discursive cohesion.

Finally, the future influence of Deobandis depends on a set of structural and contextual factors: generational transformations, the expansion of modern education, media pluralization, international pressures, and intra-field competition. Despite these challenges, the social rootedness and institutional capacity of these networks show that the Deoband school will remain an important part of the equation of power in Pakistan. Therefore, any realistic analysis of politics and security in this country must understand the role of this socio-institutional actor; an actor that moves along the boundary between society, institution, and state and contributes to the reproduction of political-security power.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study showed that the framework of “the reproduction of political-security power” has considerable capacity for analyzing religious movements in postcolonial societies, because it formulates the linkage among institutions, discourse, and social networks within a single analytical model. However, the generalization and deepening of this framework require its development along several theoretical and empirical paths.

First, systematic comparative studies can expand the explanatory scope of this approach. Comparing the Deoband school with Islamic currents in different regions, especially in contexts with different state structures and distinct experiences of state-building, would make it possible to distinguish context-specific elements from generalizable components of the reproduction of religious power and elevate the present framework to the level of middle-range theories.

Second, generational and media transformations within religious traditions require serious attention. The expansion of modern education and digital media has moved religious authority from a hierarchical model toward networked forms. Future studies can examine whether this process leads to the decline of classical authority or to its rearrangement in the form of hybrid authorities. The study of Deobandi diasporic communities can also show how religious authority is reconstructed in minority contexts.

Third, the micro level of social reproduction—especially the role of women—is a key but less examined area. Women play a central role in transmitting norms and religious symbolic capital. Analyzing informal religious education, religious upbringing within the family, and kinship networks can clarify the everyday mechanisms of the reproduction of religious authority and strengthen the linkage among gender studies, religion, and security.

Fourth, the political economy of religious institutions requires independent examination. Financial resources, charitable networks, and transnational financial ties show that the reproduction of religious power is not only discursive, but also dependent on material and organizational infrastructures.

Fifth, the use of mixed methods and digital data analysis can provide a more precise understanding of the diffusion of religious discourses and patterns of mobilization, and can show how religious authority is reproduced or transformed in the age of new media.

Overall, comparative, interdisciplinary, and multilevel approaches—from the family to geopolitics—can contribute to the theoretical deepening of debates on religion and security and present religion not as a fixed variable, but as a dynamic phenomenon intertwined with power and society.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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