NBR PROJECT REPORT | APRIL 2009

Islamic Education in Bangladesh and Pakistan

Trends in Tertiary Institutions

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FOREWORD

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States, analysts and policymakers struggled to determine how South Asia had become "lost" to Islamist extremism and terrorism. A small—but vocal—group of Western-based academics suggested that the proliferation of madrasas, or Islamic schools, were at least in part to blame. The controversial debates sparked by these institutions led NBR in summer 2005 to launch a comprehensive three-year survey of Islamic education in South Asia, to examine in depth the relationship between Islamic education and Islamist militancy in the region. NBR assembled a multi-disciplinary team of experts to explore trends in Islamic educational institutions in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and India.

The first year of NBR's South Asia Education Survey provided a comprehensive introduction to the different types of Islamic educational institutions prevalent in these countries, and the context of their historical, political, ideological, and social evolution in Muslim South Asia. In its second year the project aimed to further inform the relationship between Islamic education and Islamist trends in South Asia. In addition, the project introduced a new focus on secular education in a Muslim context, with a particular focus on Bangladesh and Pakistan.

This report represents the culmination of the project's third and final year of research, which focused exclusively on trends in tertiary-level religious and secular education in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Research findings from these two countries continue to shed new light on the emerging socio-political landscape of Muslim South Asia, with critical implications for U.S. policy and security interests in the region.

Given its considerable policy relevance, exploring emerging trends and developments in Muslim Asia will remain a priority research area for NBR's Political and Security Affairs Group. NBR studies have found that there are many and varied roles of Islam in Asia that go far beyond the actions of the radical fringes that have drawn much attention in recent years. In addition to its work on Islamist terrorism, the organization has also sought to engage less visible yet no less critical issues, related to other global economic, political, and cultural trends influencing Muslim societies in Asia today, to broaden the debate and better inform policy leaders. We look forward to continued interaction with the policy community on this subject as well as to a wide distribution of this report's research findings.

I would like to recognize and express appreciation to the members of the research team whose work appears in these pages, as well as to those involved with the project in its earlier phases. It has been a true pleasure to work with each of them, and the project has benefited immensely from their expertise and professionalism. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the NBR project team, fellows, and editors, whose efforts contributed to the success of this initiative.

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Madrasa Reforms and Perspectives: Islamic Tertiary Education in Pakistan

Mumtaz Ahmad

MUMTAZ AHMAD is a professor in Hampton University's Department of Political Science. His main areas of academic interest are the comparative politics of South Asia and the Middle East, Islamic political thought and institutions, and the comparative politics of contemporary Islamic revivalism.

The author wishes to express his thanks to Malik Afzal Khan (PhD candidate, Education Department) and Zia-ur-Rahman (M. Phil student, Comparative Religion Department), International Islamic University, Islamabad, for their help in conducting a survey of madrasa ulama and students. He is also grateful to Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Director, Islamic Research Institute, Islamabad for his valuable feedback on an earlier draft of this monograph.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on previous years' research, this paper examines recent developments in madrasa reform initiatives throughout Pakistan while looking further into the alleged relationship between madrasa education and extremist tendencies. The report assesses the largely negative attitudes of madrasa *ulama* and their students toward the United States, in general, and their hostile views of U.S. aid to Pakistan and U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world, in particular. The paper concludes with an overview of the relation between madrasas and the question of national and Islamic identity in Pakistan.

MAIN FINDINGS

The Pakistani madrasa curriculum remains virtually unchanged. The government blames madrasa authorities for the failure of its reforms. However, these reforms were prepared in haste by government officials with little understanding of traditional education, and without any input from the madrasa *ulama*. The *ulama's* opposition to these reforms was then used by the government to excuse its lack of commitment. Madrasa curriculum may be said to have played a role in creating an environment that encourages hostile or, at least, negative attitudes toward the "other." However, to claim that there is a direct causal relationship between madrasa education, on the one hand, and anti-Americanism or anti-Westernism, on the other, is, at best, a tenuous proposition. Madrasa education *per se* is entirely devoid of political content. With the same curriculum, madrasa students were never shown to be anti-American until the 1990s. Furthermore, anti-Americanism is not something that is exclusively confined to the madrasas or, for that matter, to Muslims alone. The Bush administration's policies in the Middle East; the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq; the scandals of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay; the widely-reported stories of torture and "extraordinary renditions;" and the general perception that the "global war on terror" is primarily directed against Muslims have all irreparably damaged the moral standing of the United States in the eyes of Muslims. There is now a great deal of pessimism among the madrasa *ulama* who largely feel that the situation will not "change for the better." Given their highly negative and hostile views of America, it is no wonder that 76 percent of madrasa students and teachers questioned believe that "waging jihad against America" is justified.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- A large majority of madrasa students and teachers believes that U.S. non-interference in the affairs of Muslim countries and its withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq will prove to be the most critical factors for improving relations between the United States and the Muslim world.
- Among madrasa *ulama*, there is a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for U.S. economic assistance to Muslim countries. Many believe that the United States and the West attempt to control the policies of Muslim countries through aid. This finding should give pause to policymakers who believe that religiously-inspired unrest, extremism, and militancy in the troubled areas of northern Pakistan can be tackled by the infusion of economic aid.

This paper builds on previous years' research for NBR's South Asia Education Survey project and examines the following: the recent developments—or lack thereof—in implementing the madrasa reform package introduced by the government of Pakistan in 2002; the relationship between madrasa education and extremist tendencies in the country; the attitudes of the madrasa *ulama* toward the United States; and the role of the madrasa *ulama* in politics, professional organizations, and civil society institutions, especially their increasingly significant presence in recent years in social welfare, education, and disaster relief. We also explore the *ulama*'s views on various issues, including the role of women in society, democracy, pluralism, and religious minorities.

The report is based primarily on field work in Pakistan involving interviews with madrasa *ulama* and government officials; focus group discussions; government reports and publications of the madrasas; and a questionnaire-based survey of a sample of 88 madrasa teachers and graduate students from the three main Islamic schools of doctrinal orientation in Pakistan—the Deobandis, Barelwis, and Ahl-e-Hadith.

Madrasa Reforms: Objectives, Policies…And Failure

According to government statistics, there are currently 11,491 madrasas in Pakistan,[1] although unofficial sources have estimated their numbers to range from 12,000 to 15,000 with a total student enrollment of 1.7 million. *Pakistan Education Statistics* gives the total number of madrasa students in the country as 1.518 million out of which 140,431 have been listed as enrolled at the tertiary levels, i.e., in Sanavia Aama, Sanavia Khassa, Alia Almia and Darja-e-Takhassus. In this report, our primary focus will be on tertiary education and on madrasas that impart higher secondary and higher levels of Islamic education in Pakistan. In the majority of cases, madrasas recruit students at the elementary level and the students graduate from the madrasas where they had started their education. Inter-madrasa transfer of students that was quite common in the past is rarely encouraged these days. Most madrasas are identified with a particular school of doctrinal orientation—Deobandi, Barelwi, Ahl-e-Hadith and Shia.

Each doctrinal school has established its own federation (*wafaq*) of affiliated madrasas that prescribes curriculum, establishes standards, conducts examinations, and issues diplomas. The following table gives an overview of the major madrasa federations in Pakistan:

TABLE 1 Central Boards of Madrasas in Pakistan

Name	Doctrinal Affiliation	Headquarters	Date Established
Wafaq-ul-Madaris	Deobandi	Multan	1959
Tanzim-ul-Madaris	Barelwi	Lahore	1960
Wafaq-ul-Madaris Shia	Shia	Lahore	1959
Rabitatul-Madaris-al-Islamia	Jamaat-e-Islami	Lahore	1983
Wafaq-ul-Madaris-al-Salafia	Ahl-e-Hadith	Faisalabad	1955

SOURCE: Offices of the respective madrasa boards.

[1] Government of *Pakistan, Pakistan Education Statistics, 2004-225* (Islamabad, 2006).

Historically, there has not been much cooperation between these organizations representing rival schools of religious thought. In times of external threats, however, they have been quick to join hands and form a united front against any government attempt to introduce madrasa reforms or constrain their autonomy. Thus, madrasas of all schools of thought joined together to oppose Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's attempt to bring them under government control in 1976. Similarly, when the Musharraf government announced its intention in August 2001 (i.e., four weeks before the events of September 11) to modernize madrasa education, all five madrasa federations united in the Ittehad Tanzimat-e-Madaris-e-Diniya to oppose any unilateral move by the government that would adversely affect their autonomy.

The then religious affairs minister, Ijaz-ul-Haq, defined the objectives of "The Pakistan Madrasa Education (Establishment and Affiliation of Model Dini Madaris Board) Ordinance, 2001," prepared by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and promulgated on August 18, 2001, as: establishing model madrasas; improving and securing the uniformity of the standard of education and integration of the system of Islamic education imparted in madrasas within the general education system; securing the registration, regulation, standardization and uniformity of the curricula and standard of education of madrasas; imparting specialized Islamic education in Pakistan along with the general education system; maintaining the autonomous character of religious schools; bringing education and training imparted in religious institutions in consonance with the requirements of the modern age and the basic tenets and spirit of Islam; providing greater opportunities in national life for the graduates of madrasas; according recognition of the degrees, certificates and *asnad* (certificates) awarded by madrasas; and regulating their examination system.

Subsequently, the Madrasa Education Board was established to supervise the three newly-opened model madrasas in Rawalpindi, Karachi and Sukkur. The government had hoped that the private madrasas would respond positively to the incentives offered and would affiliate themselves with the Board. The federation of the different organizations of the madrasas, however, refused to cooperate with the government either on the registration issue or on the question of curriculum reform. Madrasas of all denominations decided not to allow the government to "impinge upon" their autonomy and regulate their activities. Only a small number of madrasas, mostly of Barelwi persuasion, agreed to get registered with the government. Many others contended that they were already registered under the Cooperative Societies Act (1860) and, therefore, did not need any new registration.

The second ordinance regarding madrasa reforms, the *Deeni Madaris* (Voluntary Registration and Regulation) Ordinance 2002, sought the voluntary registration of madrasas, establishment of provincial madrasa education boards, and a ban on admissions to foreign students without valid visas.

To fulfill the declared objectives of madrasa reform, a five year project was formulated by the Ministry of Education at the cost of approximately $100 million. The plan was to provide facilities to 8,000 madrasas in terms of teachers' salaries, textbooks, stationary, libraries and computers. Again, the federation of the madrasa organizations, Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaris-e-Diniya, refused to oblige despite a series of meetings between its representatives and the officials of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. The government announced several deadlines for the madrasas' registration but the response from the madrasas was of continued defiance. It was only when the second ordinance was amended to remove the requirement of reporting the income and expenditure statements to the government that the madrasas agreed to register.

Before the promulgation of the ordinance of 2005, about 6,000 madrasas were registered under the Registration of Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act, 1860. From 2005 to 2007, 8,072 more madrasas were registered. The total number of registered madrasas at the end of 2007, according to the former religious affairs minister, was 14,072. It is apparent, therefore, that despite their contestations, a large number of madrasas in Pakistan are now registered with the government, although their registration could not be attained under the newly-issued ordinances.

The curricula of the madrasas are regulated by their respective boards, and have not undergone any significant changes in their core content since inception in the 19th century. Some modern subjects such as English, history, math, etc., have been introduced in several madrasas, especially at the elementary level, and some large madrasas have started some specialized courses on Islamic economics and finance. However, in an overwhelming majority of cases the higher level madrasas remain committed to their traditional curriculum.

At the tertiary level, madrasas are especially reluctant to introduce any changes in view of their emphasis on training *ulama* well-versed in traditional Islamic learning and law. In response to our survey questions on madrasa curriculum, an overwhelming majority of respondents (91.5% teachers and 77.1% students) agreed with the statement that the present system of madrasa education in Pakistan is adequate and does not need any changes. At the same time, however, a significant majority of teachers (57.1%) and students (65%) were of the opinion that madrasas should also include science courses in their curriculum. Given the madrasa teachers' near complete satisfaction with the existing curriculum, the concession with regard to the introduction of science courses on their part seems cosmetic. Further probing on the question of science courses made it clear that the *ulama* were willing to introduce an introductory general science course for elementary students only.

At the tertiary level, madrasas are especially reluctant to introduce any changes in view of their emphasis on training ulama well-versed in traditional Islamic learning and law.

The entire emphasis of the government reform package with regard to the curriculum reform was on asking the madrasas to introduce some modern subjects *along with* their traditional curriculum, rather than on any qualitative change in the core Islamic sciences. The reform package promised to provide madrasas with all kinds of facilities to facilitate the teaching of English, natural sciences and computer skills, the assumption being that these subjects would orient the madrasa students toward more modern, liberal attitudes and behavior. However, as Candland has noted:

> The real problem in the Islamic educational institutions is not that students do not learn computers and natural sciences. Many *madaris*, *darul uloom*, and *jamia* do teach these subjects. But a natural science education is not a guarantee of an enlightened mind. Indeed, many of those most committed to violence in the name of Islam were educated in the natural sciences. The real problem in

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Views from the Madrasa: Islamic Education in Bangladesh

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The author wishes to express his gratitude to Dr. Mahmudul Hasan (Department of English) and Dr. Iftekhar Iqbal (Department of History), Dhaka University, for their valuable contributions to this study. Dr. Mahmudul Hasan helped in data collection, survey research, and organizing focus group discussions for this study. The author also wants to thank Shah Abdul Hannan (former Deputy Governor of Bangladesh Bank), Dr. Razia Akter Banu (Political Science Department, Dhaka University), Dr. Abdur Rahman Siddiqui (Department of Sociology, Rajshahi University), and Dr. Hasan Muhammad (Department of Political Science, Chittagong University) for sharing their insights on madrasa education in Bangladesh, and for their generous hospitality. Above all, the author finds himself in immense debt of gratitude to all the madrasa ulama in Bangladesh who welcomed him in their midst with utmost generosity and easy dignity, extended their traditional Bangladeshi hospitality, and answered his often critical questions with patience and candor.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines tertiary-level Islamic education in Bangladesh, providing in-depth analysis of the relationship between madrasa education and Islamist and radical politics. The report examines the political consciousness of madrasa teachers and graduate students in Bangladesh, and analyzes their worldviews with regard to the West and the United States. The report reviews student and teacher responses to negative media coverage of madrasa education in Bangladesh while also looking at the alleged connections between madrasas and militancy. The paper concludes with a look at the mushrooming growth of *ulama*-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh.

MAIN FINDINGS

Little evidence links Bangladeshi Quomi madrasas with radical politics or militancy. Those tied with militant activities had largely Alia madrasa and general education backgrounds. The common denominator among those indicted for terrorist activities, furthermore, has been the experience of the Afghan jihad, not madrasa education. While Quomi madrasa students and teachers appear to be largely apolitical, Alia madrasa affiliates are actively involved in partisan politics. Their political affiliations range from the secular Awami League to the centrist Bangladesh Nationalist Party to the Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami. Alia madrasa "agitational" politics is often focused on the so-called "Islamic-political" issues, such as Taslima Nasreen, the alleged "un-Islamic" activities of certain NGOs, enforcement of Shariah laws, and international "Islamic" hotspots. Many students and teachers of madrasas link U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, among other issues, to the perceived Western anti-Muslim campaign in the name of a war against terrorism. Survey research for this paper revealed that anti-Americanism among madrasa respondents was largely driven by specific U.S. policies, and not due to some inherent Muslim hatred of America; despite their belief that U.S. policies are hurting Muslims "all over the world," the majority of madrasa respondents surveyed disapproved of "jihad" against the United States.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Madrasa teachers and students fear that the United States uses democracy promotion to interfere in the internal affairs of Muslim countries. Significantly, an overwhelming number of them support democracy and think that truly democratic governments in Muslim countries may end U.S. domination and its negative influences in the Muslim world. They regard democracy as the best way to establish Islamic rule in Bangladesh and believe that Islamic law cannot be introduced through violence and terrorism.
- The growing involvement of the *ulama* in social welfare and community services through *ulama*-led NGOs has further strengthened their organic links with local communities, and has provided them with opportunities for more frequent interaction with government officials. Their participation in the modern public sphere has opened up new avenues for them to disseminate their views on issues of socio-religious and cultural concerns to a wider audience.

Madrasa education is an integral part of the Bangladesh education system. Its origin dates back to the colonial period and it has continued to operate alongside the general education system since the birth of Bangladesh. Although now entrenched in the country's educational landscape, madrasa education has always had its critics—especially following Bangladesh's independence in 1971—among secular intellectuals who are opposed to this very system of education and have repeatedly urged successive governments to abolish madrasa education and introduce a unified education system. However, such demands never gained either public support or approval from successive Bangladeshi governments. In the past, the common critiques against madrasa education have been that it is obsolete, backward and unfit to keep pace with modernity; that it is unproductive in the sense that madrasa graduates are ill-equipped to run public offices and, thus, to contribute to the country's development; and that it produces only religious functionaries like mosque imams and *kazis* (or *qadi*, Islamic judge).

Madrasa education in Bangladesh came under intense scrutiny and received renewed critical attention in the wake of the 9/11 attacks against the United States and then, more so, after the 2005 erratic, and rather inept, bombings in different parts of Bangladesh.[28] The focus on madrasas was partly generated by the iterated claims of the Jamiatul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB), the self-declared perpetrator of the August 2005 bombings, that its members "have taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law [...] If the government does not establish Islamic law in the country [... and if it] resorts to repression on *ulama*, the Jamiatul Mujahideen [JMB] will go for counteraction."[29] As Islam and madrasa education are traditionally pigeonholed together, and as madrasa graduates are collectively called "*ulama*" in Bangladesh, both the domestic and international media covering the bombing incidents did so with the assumption that madrasa education may have played a role in these incidents, and that madrasas were a breeding ground for militant recruits. As Supriya Singh states: "Madrasas have been blamed for fomenting extremism in Bangladesh and are believed to play an important role in the training and recruitment of militants."[30] Moreover, Dr. Asadullah al-Galib, leader of the Ahl-e-Hadith Andolan, Bangladesh (AHAB)—a close ideological affiliate of the JMB—is reported to have said that he gave "military-style training to madrasa students."[31]

Consequently, a number of subsequent media reports insinuated that there were some "links" between militant tendencies and madrasas in Bangladesh. Prominent secular intellectuals appeared on television talk shows and wrote in newspapers to make their point that madrasa education was breeding militancy and, therefore, needed to be reformed or merged with mainstream education. Thus, the traditional critiques against madrasa education were replaced with this new, overshadowing indictment that madrasas had become harbingers of militancy. And, although it was the Quomi section of madrasa education that was mainly subjected to detailed surveillance,[32] the Alia sector was by no means given the benefit of the doubt. In the aftermath of those militant

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[28] Mumtaz Ahmad, "Islam, State, and Society in Bangladesh," in *Asian Islam in the 21st Century*, eds. John L. Esposito, et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

[29] "Leaflets Ridicule Democracy, ask for Islamic Rule," *The Daily Star*, August 18, 2005, referenced in Supriya Singh, "Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB): A Profile," IPCS Special Report 11, New Delhi: Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, February 2006, 2.

[30] Supriya Singh, "Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB): A Profile," IPCS Special Report 11, February 2006, 6.

[31] Julfikar Ali Manik, "Evidence, confessions point at JMB hallmark," *The Daily Star* (Dhaka), August 16 2005.

[32] "Qawami madrasas came to the fore after August 17 serial blasts across the country last year," says Sakhawat Liton ("Qawami Madrasa Education") *The Daily Star* (Dhaka), August 23, 2006.

activities, many madrasas—both Quomi and Alia[33]—received visits from researchers, media representatives and foreign diplomats. In fact, both pre- and post-August 2005, media reports tended to establish a clear link between madrasas and militancy.[34]

The change from the traditional critiques against madrasa education to this new, superseding arraignment of militancy is worth analyzing. While the traditional set of charges was mainly related to the madrasas' syllabi and pedagogical tradition, the present condemnation of madrasa education is obviously politically charged. The earlier criticism was concerned with the supposed "unworthiness" of madrasa education and its implications for the development and modernization of Bangladeshi society; the current critique has an international dimension and is viewed through the prism of 9/11. In other words, the current debate on the madrasa system in Bangladesh—as elsewhere in the Muslim world—is prompted both by the international war on terrorism and by concerns about the political activism of madrasa *ulama*.

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Keeping the above observations in perspective, this report provides an overview of political trends in tertiary-level Alia and Quomi madrasas in Bangladesh, and provides an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Islamic education, on the one hand, and Islamist and radical politics, on the other. The report examines the political consciousness of madrasa teachers and graduate students in Bangladesh, and analyzes their worldviews with regard to the West, especially the United States, and their views on socio-political issues of current concern. The report draws on discussion with key individuals associated with madrasa education in Bangladesh, and explores their views on Islamic education, the politics of religious groups, madrasas and militancy, and their responses to the continuous negative media coverage of madrasa education in Bangladesh.[35]

Given that the military engagements of the West in Muslim countries (Afghanistan and Iraq) in the post 9/11 era have been quite unpopular among Muslims, this report will examine whether madrasa teachers and graduate students have any added reasons that may possibly incite their antipathy toward the West. The report will also address some of the key issues of militancy in

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[33] Alia and Quomi are the two main streams of Islamic education prevalent in Bangladesh. Quomi madrasas are private, receive no financial support from the government, and are supported by religious endowments or by zakat, sadaqa, and community donations; Quomi madrasas are predominantly of Deobandi persuasion and teach the standard Dars-i-Nizami curriculum. Alia madrasas are, predominantly, government-controlled and funded, and supervised by the government-appointed Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board; in addition to a revised version of the Dars-i-Nizami, Alia madrasas also offer modern subjects such as English, Bangla, science, social studies, math, etc.

[34] See "Madrasa man with 'Taliban link' under sharp watch," Daily Star (Dhaka), May 26, 2004; "Trade Fair Blast: Police pick up hurt madrasa student," Daily Star, (Dhaka), December 27, 2005; "Playing politics with education," Daily Star (Dhaka), August 22, 2006; "Qawami Madrasa Education," Daily Star (Dhaka), August 23, 2006; "Madrasa misadventure," Daily Star (Dhaka), September 03, 2006).

[35] This report is based on extensive visits to a number of madrasas (both Alia and Quomi) in Bangladesh, and on comprehensive focus group discussions with madrasa teachers and graduate students. Field surveys were supplemented by a structured questionnaire comprising 60 questions, through which madrasa teachers and students provided their views and opinions about contemporary domestic and global issues affecting Muslims.

Bangladesh and will assess the likelihood, or otherwise, of the involvement of madrasa graduates and teachers in militant activities.

Islamic Education and Militancy

Both radical Islam and madrasa education came to the spotlight after the sudden outbursts of militant incidents in Bangladesh on August 17, 2005. As Quomi madrasas are not controlled by the government in the way the Alia madrasas are, and are doctrinally affiliated with the Deoband School—the school that inspired the Taliban movement in Afghanistan—they received more media attention. The autonomy of Quomi madrasas also generated considerable curiosity and suspicion among civil society groups, academia and the international community. Hathazari Madrasa,[36] one of the oldest and arguably the most reputable Quomi madrasa in the country, was at the center of media reports for quite some time. Generally, these reports suggested that the madrasa was a haven for "terrorist" training.[37]

During our earlier visits to Hathazari Madrasa in 2005, 2006 and 2007, we were told by the madrasa authorities that, while some of their graduates who had pursued higher education in Pakistani madrasas did volunteer for the Afghan jihad during the 1980s, the Hathazari Madrasa itself had not participated in any recruitment campaign for the Afghan jihad. Several students from the Lal Bagh Madrasa in Dhaka, however, went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets through their teachers' contacts with the Pakistani Deobandi madrasas. Similarly, a few dozen students from other Quomi madrasas, including some from the Ahl-e-Hadith madrasas in northern Bangladesh, also journeyed to Afghanistan through Pakistan, both as volunteer fighters as well as teachers in the Afghan refugee camps.

However, aside from these incidences, there is hardly any evidence to link the Bangladeshi Quomi madrasas with any radical politics and militancy. Those who were linked with the militant activities of the JMB and its affiliated clandestine networks primarily had Alia madrasa and general education backgrounds. Among those who were arrested and indicted for terrorist activities during 2005-2007, only fifteen were reported to have attended Quomi madrasas, and nine of them had attended madrasas affiliated with the Ahl-e-Hadith.[38] But even here, the common denominator was the experience of the Afghan jihad, and not madrasa education.

Maulana Ahmad Shafi, the Muhtamim (Principal) of Hathazari Madrasa, acknowledged that madrasa education today faced a magnitude of difficulties and hostility that it had never faced before—not even under British rule.[39] Referring to local and international media reports on the allegedly "secret location" of the Hathazari Madrasa, Maulana Shafi noted that the local police headquarters and the office of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) were only a stone's throw away from the madrasa, and that the UNO and the District Commissioner (DC) came regularly to the madrasa, especially for their Friday prayers; thus, if there were any extremist activities

[36] This madrasa is situated in the heart of Hathazari town, Chittagong, and hence is commonly known as Hathazari Madrasa. But its actual name is Al-Jameatul Alia Darul Uloom Moinul Islam. With its impeccable Deobandi credentials, Hathazari madrasa ranks among the top ten madrasas in the subcontinent in terms of its academic standards and reputation.

[37] A *Daily Star* report titled "Barguna Islamic militants charged with sedition," July 02, 2004, suggested that "Hathazari Madrasa of Chittagong" provided "military training" to its students.

[38] Interview with an official of the Ministry of Interior, Dhaka, January 2007.

[39] The Quomi madrasa system dates back to the period of British colonial rule in the Indian sub-continent. First established in 1896, the Hathazari Madrasa has existed in its present location since 1901. Although there have been recent media allegations linking the madrasa with extremist/terrorist activities, this is the first time in the madrasa's long history that such allegations have been made.

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Religion, Politics, and the Modern University in Pakistan and Bangladesh

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides an account of the relationship between religion and politics in the public- and private-sector universities of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Acknowledging that religion and religious education are thoroughly institutionalized (even in ostensibly non-religious universities) through compulsory and elective coursework, hostel-based activities, and numerous student organizations, this paper focuses on the ways in which public-sector universities have been affected by a history of violent clashes involving the student wings of various political parties (especially the Jama'at-e-Islami). The paper goes on to note that a growing number of elite students have sought to escape from this pattern of violence with a retreat to private-sector universities featuring a nominal ban on campus politics. However, the paper argues that more often than not, although this shift has succeeded in permitting an escape from violence for some, it has not succeeded in revising the link between religion and politics for most. In most cases, the dominant role of parties like the Jama'at-e-Islami has merely been replaced with a greater emphasis on transnational religious reform movements affiliated with Hizb ut-Tahrir and, especially, the Tablighi Jama'at.

MAIN FINDINGS

Studies of the relationship between religion, religious education, and contemporary politics in South Asia must begin to move beyond an account of local *madrasas*. Increasingly, the most important trends require an account of "religious" education in the context of ostensibly "non-religious" schools. The politicization of religious education is not confined to the poor. In the context of local universities, the politics of religious education is closely tied to members of the upwardly mobile, highly educated, urban middle classes. Students politicized along ostensibly religious lines are rarely students of religion. What distinguishes them is not their subject of study, but their general reluctance to acknowledge differences of religious and/or political opinion. Politicization along ostensibly religious lines takes many different forms. In many cases, the ideological cleavages between and among different "religious" parties may matter more than those between "religious" and "non-religious" parties.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Frustration with the violence surrounding party-based "politics-as-usual" in public sphere universities has led many students to re-engage the terms of "religion" *apart from* any formal "political" processes. This rejection of standard forms of political negotiation and compromise is, in certain respects, *just as important* as the decision to abjure violence.
- Where university administrators have sought to clamp down on religious activism with force, their efforts have failed to address underlying religious tensions.
- Efforts to ban specific political parties (or politics in general) have merely pushed existing groups underground while giving a boost to the formation of new groups.
- The most effective response to religious and political activism appears to involve an effort to acknowledge the importance of religion on campus while, at the same time, working to protect those who might wish to articulate specific expressions of dissent.

For several years, the relationship between religious education and contemporary politics in South Asia has been discussed in terms of *madrasas*. How are the terms of a modern religious education constructed and conveyed in the context of local *madrasas*? Who studies in these *madrasas*? Who teaches in them? How are *madrasas* tied to, or separated from, the institutions of the modern state?

In previous research for NBR's South Asia Education Survey project I sought to look beyond this narrow focus on *madrasas* to include an account of "religious" education in the context of (ostensibly) "non-religious" schools. This effort focused, specifically, on public and private primary and secondary schools in Pakistan and Bangladesh, drawing attention to the ways in which religious education has become virtually inescapable *across the educational landscape*.

Many parents, for instance, engage several different "part-time" enrolments in an effort to provide their children with more than one type of education at the same time—a "religious" education in the context of their local *madrasa* each morning, for instance, followed by an ostensibly "non-religious" education in the context of their local public (or private) school later in the day.

Others, however, find that religious education is already an intrinsic part of their children's education *even in the context of their local public or private school*. Indeed, primary and secondary schools in Pakistan and Bangladesh almost invariably include Islamic Studies, or Islamiat, as a *compulsory* part of their curricula for all Muslim students (Classes 1-10).

Even as the findings from this research argued that future studies must begin to move beyond an exclusive focus on "full-time" *madrasa* enrolments to include a deeper understanding of "part-time" enrolments as well, then, it additionally went on to note that future studies must *also* begin to move *beyond the madrasa altogether* in an effort to account for the terms of "religious" education in the context of (ostensibly) "non-religious" public and private schools.

Building on previous years' research, this paper seeks to move beyond the question of religious education in the context of "non-religious" primary and secondary schools to include an account of public and private *universities* as well.

How are the terms of "religion" and "politics" connected in the context of the modern *university*? How have the terms of this connection changed over time? And, more importantly, how do different *types* of universities—for example, public-sector universities and private-sector universities—articulate different *types* of connections? What follows is a detailed response to this new set of questions.

The first part introduces the main characters in this account of religion, politics, and the modern university, drawing particular attention to those allied with mainstream political parties like the Jama'at-e-Islami (for example, the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba in Pakistan and the Islami Chhatra Shibir in Bangladesh) as well as those who seek to move *beyond* "national" politics toward an idealized space of "transnational" religious and political solidarity.

For the most part, party-based groups like the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba and the Islami Chhatra Shibir dominate the on-campus political landscape in Pakistan and Bangladesh. But, as I will explain, this situation is slowly changing. In particular, I will argue that a growing sense of frustration with the often violent terms of party-based "national" politics has led a growing number of students, faculty members, and administrators to embrace alternative forms of religious and political expression. And, cutting straight to the chase, I will argue that this shift in favor of

"alternatives" reveals itself, most prominently, in the expanding presence of transnational religious groups like Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), the Tablighi Jama'at, and (in Pakistan) Da'wat-e-Islami.

The second part draws on this cast of characters to provide a detailed account of the various ways in which religion, politics and the modern university have come together, *in practice*, over time. Here, special attention will be paid to a series of debates regarding campus-based politics, faculty recruitment, and the shifting terms of student residential life (particularly in the context of local hostels).

Throughout, I will argue that the relationship between religion and politics on campus is neither growing "more intense" nor becoming "more relaxed" in any quantitative sense. Instead, this relationship is merely changing its contours and, in many ways, becoming more complex.

Part three of the paper presents a more detailed discussion of this increasingly complex environment, drawing special attention to the networks of influence that link each campus to specific religious and political allies within the community as a whole. Here, my comments will focus, primarily, on the relationship between students, individual members of the faculty, and their ties to the various groups previously mentioned, namely national political parties and emerging forms of transnational religious and political solidarity.

As I will explain, the shifting terms of student politics—in effect, the movement *away from* mainstream national political parties *toward* transnational religious and political groups—are reflected in, and, in many ways, encouraged by, individual members of the faculty and, in some cases, by the university (in effect, the administration) as a whole.

The fourth and final part concludes with a more elaborate discussion of this shift *away from* national political parties *toward* emergent transnational religious and political groups, focusing on the terms of this shift in *private-sector* universities. As I will explain, private-sector universities lie on the cutting edge of this transition. I will also draw upon the work of Mahfuz Sadique (2006) to explain exactly why this is the case.

Campus Politics: Actors

Returning from the University of Chittagong, in Bangladesh, one member of my four-pronged research team summarized the larger context within which the relationship between religion, politics, and the modern university must be understood: "It's not a matter of religion," she said. "It's just politics."[83]

She went on to explain that a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion, politics, and the modern university must begin, not with an account of competing *religious* ideas, but rather with an account of competing *political* parties—parties that routinely draw on "religious" ideas to construct their identities, articulate their positions, and justify their actions. In particular, she explained, "Religious parties are not the most important parties. They're just the most influential."

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[83] In Bangladesh, my research team was composed of four (part-time) women and two (full-time) men. This group included four Muslims, one Christian, and one Hindu. Three studied at Dhaka University (public-sector); two at North South University (private-sector); and one at *both* Dhaka University *and* North South University. In Pakistan, my team included four (full-time) men—three Sunnis and one Shi'a. All four studied at the University of Peshawar (public-sector).

Actors (Party v. Non-Party)

In Pakistan, the focus on competing parties draws our attention to a familiar spectrum. Apart from the Peoples Student Federation (PSF) representing the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and the Muslim Students Federation (MSF) representing the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), the most important officially recognized student group on campus is the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba (IJT) representing the Jama'at-e-Islami.[84]

In addition to these three main groups, however, different campuses in different parts of Pakistan also bear the influence of specific *regional* groups—groups like the Punjab Students Association (PSA), the Baloch Students Organization (BSO), the Pakhtun Students Organization (PSO), and the All-Pakistan Muttahida Students Organization (APMSO), representing *muhajir* students throughout urban Sindh (with close links to its parent party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or MQM).[85]

In Bangladesh, the political spectrum is very similar. The main political parties are represented by their student wings as follows: the Awami League is represented by the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL); the Bangladesh National Party is represented by the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD); and of course the Jama'at-e-Islami is represented by the well-known Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) and its sister organization the Islami Chhatri Shangstha.[86]

However, whereas in Pakistan the three main political parties were joined by several *regional* parties, the situation in Bangladesh is somewhat different. In Bangladesh, these three parties are joined by a range of (considerably less active) *religious* groups, including the Buddha Asrom that caters to Buddhist students, the Ramakrisha Mission and the Loknath Sheba Sangho catering to Hindus, and the YMCA/YWCA catering to Christians.

The importance of these national, regional, and "sectarian" or "confessional" parties cannot be overstated. In fact, as the remainder of this report will explain, a deeper understanding of the relationship between religion, politics, and the modern university is, almost invariably, channeled through a detailed understanding of party-based campus conflicts involving the Islami Jamiat-e-Tulaba (IJT) and the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS).

There is, however, a second group of actors in both countries—one that specifically seeks to *reject* this pattern of party-based, Jama'at-dominated "politics-as-usual." This second group tends to be associated with Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Tablighi Jama'at, and Da'wat-e-Islami in Pakistan.

The first group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, does not reject the notion of party-based politics *per se*. It merely shifts its party-based attention away from the capture, the reconstruction, or the rehabilitation

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84 In Pakistan, the IJT is also joined by a sister organization known as the Islami Jamiat-e-Talibat.

85 In addition to these national and regional political parties, Shi'a students are represented by the Shi'a-specific Imamia Students Organization (ISO).

86 Siddiqul Islam (a.k.a. Bangla Bhai), an important leader of the Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) who was tried for various acts of terrorism and sentenced to death in May 2006, was an active member of the Islami Chhatra Shibir during his student days at Azizul Haq College in Bogra. (See, for instance, Shamim Ashraf, "All 7 JMB Shura Men Had Links to Jamaat, Shibir," *The Daily Star*, April 28, 2006.) Also, it should be noted that Islami Chhatra Shibir has been implicated in *several* murders. With reference to local universities, see in particular the murder of Professor S. Taher Ahmed (Geology, Rajshahi University, died February 2006), Dr. Mohammad Younus (Economics, Rajshahi University, died December 2004), and Professor Gopal Krishna Muhuri (Principal, Nazirhat College Chittagong, died November 2003).