

Movement Strength Without Electoral Consolidation: Jamaat-E-Islami Under Qazi Hussain Ahmad, 1987-2009

Umul Baneen¹, Ghazala Hayat²

1 Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.

Email: baneenkhan888@gmail.com

2 Assistant Professor, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan. Email: gazalaraja2018@gmail.com

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Abstract

The leadership of Qazi Hussain Ahmad of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) between 1987 and 2009 in the form of the following central puzzle of Pakistan political history: how can a highly disciplined Islamist movement increase its publicity and reach, welfare availability, protest potential, and coalitions relevance without turning its resources into any kind of stable independent electorate? The study incorporates documentary evidence, five semi-structured interviews with experienced JI organizational actors in Sargodha using a qualitative historical case-study design. Party publications, election and parliamentary records, contemporary reporting, policy material and academic scholarship are all examples of documentary sources; strategies on national decisions and how the local perceive them are interpreted through interviews. The article believes that Qazi era can be seen as an accommodation in the continuity of ideology. By enlarging political discourse on social justice, accountability, welfare, popular involvement, anti-authoritarianism, and national sovereignty; Qazi superimposed Maududian constitutions of Islamic constitutionalism, moral renewal, disciplined organization, ideological education and training, and consultative power. The effects of his leadership were the strengthened mass contact, networks of youth and women, and legitimacy of welfare, alliances, and mobilization of masses. These advantages however revealed a sustained movement-party predicament, coalitions enhanced representation but obscured independent identity; and unofficial electoral tests showed constituency frailty; and election boycotts served a virtuous purpose of guarding principle at the cost of a discontinuity of parliamentary, presidential and electoral continuity. The consequence of this trend was high mobility of movement without a complete electoral consolidation. A social-political influence and conversion at constituency level could give a more balanced interpretation to JI under Qazi Hussain Ahmad and further help in broader discussions on the role of Islamist parties, organizational adaptation and democratic competition in Pakistan.

Keywords: Jamaat-e-Islami; Qazi Hussain Ahmad; political Islam; Islamist parties; electoral politics; Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal

1. Introduction

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) is a peculiar body in the history of the Pakistan politics. It is among the most structured ideological parties in the country, which has been able to assert its influence in the form of the religious discourse, student activism, welfare networks, protest politics, professional associations and political alliances. Nevertheless, its track record at the polls has often been modest in regard to its size of organization and publicity. Such a comparison can not be narrowed down to a mere electoral miscarriage story. It poses a more general analytical question on how movement organization relate to

party competition: it is possible to create and use political influence in terms of institutions, networks, welfare, moral authority, street mobilization, and agenda-setting, even in the absence of a party consistently winning large numbers of seats. An analysis of this issue is particularly beneficial with references to the period in the life of Qazi Hussain Ahmad, which is particularly useful to study this issue. He served as Ameer of JI since 1987 and served to 2009, coinciding with multiple very different political conditions: the last years of the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, an unstable system of civilian government, frequent conflicts between the elected institutions and the military, the rule of General Pervez Musharraf after 1999, the 9/11 regional crisis, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), and renewed democratic transition. JI was thus working within a system wherein there was a constant shift in electoral rules, alliances, constitutional space and civil-military connections.

The current literature offers valid backgrounds of interpreting JI yet it gives an opportunity to concentrate on a close reevaluation of the period of Qazi. The classical study of Nasr defines JI as an ideologically-trained elite force whose organizational structure could not be decoupled to an intellectual tradition of Abul A'la Maududi (Nasr, 1994). The entry into modern politics and social involvement would later be demonstrated by Iqtidar (2011) to bring about some type of adaptation without necessarily diluting the Islamist identity. Bano (2012) has proven that welfare activity can not be simplified to mere vote seeking and has pointed out the riddle as to why high level of welfare offering does not necessarily lead to electoral victory. Still more recent literature still shows the overrepresentation of the electoral magnitude of the parties associated with religion in comparison to the wider political role in Pakistan (Hussain, 2024; White, 2025). Yilmaz and Shukri (2024) focus on the ways in which the movement can be supported by the organizational structure of JI, and at the same time, limit the mass electoral growth. Ranjha (2023) aligns the role of welfare on such intersection as a religious duty, engagement with the society, ideological outreach, and political strategy.

This paper is building on that literature as it focuses on the connection between leadership, ideology, organization and electoral conversion in the leadership of Qazi Hussain Ahmad. The main point of its argumentation is that the Qazi era cannot be classified as the era of either an ideological modification and break with Maududi or as the era of an organizational continuation. Rather, this was a period of change of continuity. The party retained its bedrock commitments: Islam as a total moral and political system, constitutional struggle, ideological indoctrination, indoctrinating membership and consultative power. More clearly altered were a political speech, mass mobilization, strategic tools and the size of coalition and welfare politics. Qazi used the themes of established Islamism and linked it with corruption, accountability, social justice, poverty, education, sovereignty, and with the resistance to authoritarianism. He was also very active and visible in his leadership, which broadened the political repertoire of the party by protests, unions, parliament and social networks and welfare-minded interaction. The major conclusion, however, is that there was no equal independent electoral consolidation as a result of organizational and social expansion. JI was able to impact on the public discourse, coordinate disciplined protest, maintain networks, and bargain within the alliances even beyond the electoral cycle. In 2002, the MMA gained the greatest opportunity in the parliament, with their performance in elections. During that election, the MMA not only won 45 seats in the National Assembly, but is also the third-largest party in parliament, and became the provincial government in the former North-West Frontier Province (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002; Khan, 2011). But this success was that of a religious coalition, which acted in a political opportunity structure that was highly specific. It failed to develop a long-term JI-only vote base. On the other hand, constituency level frailties were revealed in independent experiments and election boycotts in 1997 and 2008 interrupted gradual process of candidate-building and electoral stability.

The recent research of religious parties in Pakistan still gives an indication of poor quality of electoral performance on national level regardless of ideological presence, organizational performance, and political exposure (Hussain & Alvi, 2024; Aslam et al., 2026). The still analytical relevance of the movement-versus-electoral-power dichotomy is indicated with the help of the recent literature not to

project the developments during the post-2009 to the tenure of Qazi. The article poses three questions, which are interrelated: How did Qazi Hussain Ahmad manage a balance between ideological persistence and organizational and communicative accommodation? What political strategies made JI more relevant to the country, what was the cost? And why do, more mobilization, welfare legitimacy, coalition experience not yield consistent independent electoral power?

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

2.1 Jamaat-e-Islami as an ideological organization and political actor

Intellectual and organizational uniqueness of JI starts with the idea developed by Maududi about Islam as the whole order and not the personal faith which is not intertwined with the life of the population. His works connected moral reform, social change with power of the state and constitutional organization and made a disciplined movement central in the political change (Maududi, 1960). The impact of this worldview on the structure was great. JI formed hierarchical nature of membership and support, focus on training and ideological shaping and institutionalization of consultation in the form of shura. The structure of authority within the party as compared to other personalized parties in South Asia was laid in such a way that the party survived even after replacement of leadership. Nasr (1994) hence defined JI not only as an electoral group but as a vanguard the ambitions which it had towards political plane could not go without the ideological and organizational discipline.

Repeatedly the literature on the electoral politics of JI under Qazi is caught in this tension. Afridi, Ullah, and Gul (2016) demonstrate the way JI switched between the alliances, participation as an independent, and boycotts between 1987 and 2009, and they pay attention to the impact of social structure, local voting patterns and organizational choices on the election outcomes. Awan and Kokab (2016) highlight how political change under Qazi in the democratic regimes of 1987-1999 happened with his efforts to increase the public reach of his party and change strategies without eroding organization identity. Combined, these analyses move beyond the focus on doctrine, towards the decisions, by which an ideological party is in competition. The types of adaptation can be explained with the help of Iqtidar (2011). Her discussion makes it complicated to make assumptions of the way in which an increased political involvement only moderates the Islamist parties in a linear fashion. Interaction with the contemporary institutions, welfare, popular discourse, and democracy can re invent the language of politics and organizational conduct and retain sizeable ideological commitments unchanged. This observation applies to the Qazi era: the language and strategy of the party evolved more than its world-view. To create an opposing ideological teaching like Maududi, Qazi simply reiterated already existing ambitions in terms of welfare, accountability, social justice, popular rights, and anti-authoritarianism.

2.2 Influence beyond elections: welfare, networks, and street politics

A second literature describes the other types of political power that cannot be envisioned in terms of the number of seats. Bano (2012) demonstrates that JI welfare activity in Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot be sufficiently viewed as the limited electoral investment. Religious obligation also takes shape in other welfare activity, strengthens the sense of organization, creating social presence, and maintaining long-term participation. Significantly, the puzzle that Bano points to is the key puzzle that this article is devoted to: the widespread welfare provision can result in the formation of respect and trust without providing equal representation in parliament. Ranjha (2023) recent analysis makes this argument even more solid by revealing numerous justifications behind the social welfare work of JI in Pakistan: a religious obligation, civil society involvement, ideological actions, and a political maneuver. These motives overlap. Welfare has the capacity to benefit communities, train volunteers, expand networks, bring about moral legitimacy, and people that would not be at a political gathering. But like this contact is politically undecided. A welfare organization can be respected by a beneficiary

who is voting to a different party due to the strength of the candidate, biradari, strategic considerations or due to the perception that a bigger party has higher chances of forming the government. This goes to show why in many instances; JI has seemed to have a greater political presence than its election counts led it to seem to have. Hussain (2024) also locates religious parties in a, even, more extended historical context of bargaining, accommodation, opposition, and instrumentalization of each other between political-religious parties and the state. The recent analysis of the Islamist parties in Pakistan by White (2025) also emphasizes the idea that even comparatively small electoral parties can acquire some leverage due to the presence of institutional networks, ideological legitimacy and through strategic relations with state and non-state players. Whereas in his central focus, White is interested in the interaction of the Islamic extremist parties as well as the state and anti-state violence, his organizational analysis comes in handy in this case since it focuses attention on the internal discipline, the affiliated relationship, weakness and the structural environment within which the party decision-making is taken.

2.3 Political opportunity and the problem of coalition success

The results of the elections depend not only on the organization within a country but also on the political opportunity. The 1987-2009 Pakistani party system had been upset multiple times by the presidential dismissal, military intervention, judicial conflict, fluctuating rules of elections, engineering to favor elites and uneven executive power of the civilian governments. The root of such instability lies in the history of political stability and institutional instability in Pakistan with Jaffrelot (2015), Rizvi (2000) and Shah (2014) pointing at the legacy of the military and the complex interaction between the state institutions and Islamist actors. These factors influenced the strategic environment where JI made alliances, counter-campaigning, negotiation and boycotts. The 2002 election portrays how opportunity structures are relevant. Positions during the 9/11 political landscape featured severe criticism of the leadership-led war on Afghanistan championed by the United States, a lock on the key figures in the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and fiery regional response in the Pashtun belt. The MMA unified six religious parties and decreased the competition between these parties. It secured 45 seats in the National Assembly, and was the provincial government of the then NWFP (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002; Khan, 2011). The success was historic in nature and the success of the coalition could not be viewed as the mere addition of stable party vote bank. The relationship between electoral engineering, regional circumstances, anti-Americanism and religious-party unity have been highlighted by International Crisis Group (2003). The subsequent problems of the MMA further proved that not everything which unites a coalition in opposition is what integrates an organization in government (International Crisis Group, 2011).

It is a trade-off between access and autonomy that coalitions develop. They are able to minimize the vote fragmentation, share funds, improve parliamentary representation and bring a minority party to the limelight with regard to forming government. However, they will also defuse individual party identities and inhibit the essence of picking candidates, and condition citizens to pro-coalition but not to actually deep-root a connection with a single individual component party. The same reasoning can be made to JI as it is engaged in the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI). This alliance made more votes reach out to a greater anti-PPP electoral bloc but it also linked JI to coalition dominated by bigger players and to a later time that would be linked to establishment effect. The Pakistan Islamic Front was an effort to get out of that dependence through the creation of a more populist and independent platform, yet failure to perform well at the election revealed flaws in constituency-level organization, and viability among its candidates (Awan and Kokab, 2016; Afridi et al., 2016).

2.4 Strategic adaptation and the movement-party tension

Four concepts are united in the framework of analytical aspects of this article. The first one is ideological continuity, that is, the continuity of foundational world view of Islamic constitutionalism, the moral reform, organizational discipline, and consultative authority. Second is strategic adaptation,

i.e. modifications in language, leadership style, outreach, alliances, mode of protests, welfare politics, and electoral politics in which there may not be any fundamental modification of the doctrine of the party. Third is a political opportunity, i.e. institutional external conditions and geopolitical situations such that certain strategies prove more efficient at certain points in time than others. Fourth is tension of movement-party which refers to the challenge of maximizing ideological richness, party discipline, social change, electoral flexibility among masses, and competitiveness in mass-voting places, and so on. The tension of movement-party is not faced with here as an assumed incapacity of the ideological organizations to have electoral success. Instead, it finds a grouping of trade-offs occurring. A movement has the advantage of selective membership, socialization based on ideology and disciplined activists and long time perspectives.

Those competitive electoral parties must also have candidates who are locally rooted, who have the flexibility of forming a coalition, a wide popularity amongst the electorate, material resources, constituency presence and a realistic chance of being elected into office. Needs may overlap but, alternatively, they may also be in opposite directions. A highly disciplined set up will be able to withstand fracturing but fail to accommodate locally potent electables. Instead, an alliance will be able to gain seats at the expense of an independent brand. A boycott may defend the moral individual, but lay institutional space. Trust can be established through welfare but has no ability to defeat tactical voting. The research gap is, thus, not the lack of the works on JI. And it is the necessity of an account that is integrated to take into account ideology, organizational practice, mass contact, alliances, state relations, welfare legitimacy and the disjuncture between mobilization and converting the masses on a constituency level. Fusing documentary data with organizational insights, through interviews, this article aims at explaining why, as well as what JI did between 1987-2009 but why the various areas of political performance were moving in opposite directions.

3. Methodology

This is a qualitative historical case-study study that looks at Jamaat-e-Islami during the ten-year period of Qazi Hussain Ahmad as the Ameer since the year 1987 to 2009. It is explanatory but not statistical in design, where how ideology, leadership, organization and strategy interacted within various changing regimes and how organizational actors could think about the costs of their own decisions are of interest. The unit of reference, however, is not as a unit of individual leadership, but as the interaction of leadership practice with an institutionalized movement-party in the course of elections, alliances, protest, welfare and constitutional politics. It is in this framing that ideological continuity, organizational resilience, mobilization, parliamentary representation, coalition leverage and independent constituency performance are separated as opposed to considering the number of seats being viewed as the sole outcome of value.

There are two types of evidence which are combined. The former is documentary: JI publications and public statement, election material, reports of the Election Commission of Pakistan, Archives of the National Assembly of Pakistan, newspaper coverage during the time, scholarly books and journal articles, policy studies and research as far as history is concerned. To re-construct political sequencing, confirmation of the formal conclusions, juxtaposition of official or external explanations, and differentiation between events that are seen and those that are inferred was conducted by the use of documentary analysis. Using Bowen (2009), documents are considered as situated sources that have their origin, purpose and limitations that need to be considered. The threshold can be set by a party declaration of how a boycott was publicly justified but not the authoring of internal dissent; an election report can hand down the outcome but not the motives of voters. To compute 2002, representation is determined by Election Commission and National Assembly; and political opportunity structure is determined based on contemporary and scholarly analysis (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002; National Assembly of Pakistan, 2002-2007).

The second evidence stream will be five semi-structured interviews of JI actors of organizations in Sargodha. The sampling was purposive as the aim was to get information rich organizational views as opposed to a statistically representative sample. The 5 interviewees had a variety of experience including; senior district leadership and national-district communication, administration, tarbiyah, and membership practices, electoral politics, candidates, alliances, and boycott decisions, youth and student organization, and women welfare, education and family outreach. The respondents were anonymized using numbers R1-R5. The interviews were held in Urdu or English (anywhere between 30-45 minutes), transcribed, and other relevant material in the Urdu language was translated into English to be analyzed. In every interview the objective of the research was spelt out, informed consent was obtained and audio recording consent was sought. All necessary generalization of identifying details was done, and interview information could only serve an academic purpose. These processes are based on the consent, confidentiality and anonymization procedures that are outlined in the thesis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the words brought up during the interview as per the general progression related to Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, general coding, cross-case comparison, expanding in themes, reviewing it, defining themes and writing about analytically. The cores such as shura, accessibility of leadership, continuity of the ideology, tarbiyah, youth and women participation, welfare trust, alliances, boycotts, relations with the state, biradari, candidate viability, tactical voting and mobilization vs electoral conversion. They formed six themes, which were interconnected, the consultative authority and mass contact through charismatic face; ideological continuity and reinterpretation in context; controlled organizational growth and grassroots mobilization; alliances, and independent electoral experiments; and boycott costs, conditional engagement with the state and its political players; and socially legitimate, electoral constraints, and Qazi legacy. Conflicting judgments were left on the surface instead of being coerced into agreement, especially when the respondents appraised alliances, or boycotts differently based on the competing criteria of principle, representation, autonomy, and constituency effectiveness. The two evidence streams have complementary functions that they carry out. Chronology, formal decisions, the stands of the nation, elections, institutional arrangements, and the country-wide political situation are best met by documentary evidence, organizational memory, perceived motives, catalyzing national decisions into local structures, and trade-offs encountered by party participants are best found in interviews. Triangulation is employed where appropriate and documentary fact is separated out in behavioral response to interpretation. The research has obvious limitations, however: five interviews of Sargodha cannot reflect all the membership of JI or all electorate; The retrospective accounts are vulnerable to the recollection and affiliation bias; those insiders might conceive of the leadership and welfare in a more sympathetic light than the former members, the rivals, and those who were not tied to the party; and access to internal party files was limited. However, the article asserts analytical, as opposed to statistical generalization. The historical findings are put in the context of current debate, and thus post 2009 scholarship, does not serve as empirical research to make decisions made during the tenure of Qazi.

4. Political Context of the Qazi Era, 1987-2009

In 1987, Qazi Hussain Ahmad took over the leadership of JI, when there was a transition. The party had experienced the leadership of Maududi and gained experience of opposition, constitutional politics, interaction with Zia regime and growth of the party organization. Qazi also inherited a party that had a good ideological base but was faced with the task of trying to position itself after ten years when the movement on Islamization had been linked to the military. His leadership thus started on a twin problem to maintain the Islamic identity of JI and create a political image not replicable in the Zia era. The late 1980s and 1990s were marked by a strong focus on change and instability of elected governments, the two main movements the PPP and the PML-N, presidential dissolution, interference of non-elected institutions, the ethnic strife in Karachi, and continuous questioning of the equilibrium

between the civilian government and the military. JI attempted to find its way to the mainstream in this environment by a combination of alliance politics, opposition politics and independent positioning. Particulation in the IJI enabled the party to access a significant anti-PPP electoral aftermath and yet the owning also subjected JI to a larger conservative group which was overrun by bigger players. The latter was later tried by Qazi who tried to build more autonomy by building the Pakistan Islamic Front during the 1993 election. The experiment had a more populist overtone and highlighted that there could be a third force, but did not lead to a significant electoral breakthrough (Awan & Kokab, 2016; Afridi et al., 2016).

In October 1999 the political scene was once again changed with the coup by General Pervez Musharraf. The relations between JI and the military regime had gone into an adversarial path as Musharraf took up the executive authority and following the events of 9/11, had taken sides with the United States in the war in Afghanistan. The rhetoric of Qazi on sovereignty, constitutionalism, Afghanistan and Muslim causes came to be a fundamental mobilization element although the party did not open up the total institutional withdrawal. It is through the MMA that it was involved in the 2002 electoral and parliamentary order and at the same time protested against key aspects of the regime. This resistance and an institutional application is one of the most explicit instances of conditional engagement in the Qazi era. In 2002, the MMA changed the way religious-parties were represented. It opened 45 vacancies in the National Assembly, becoming the third largest bloc in the National Assembly, and the provincial government in the NWFP (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002; Khan, 2011; National Assembly of Pakistan, 2002-2007). The outcome was organizational cohesion and also a unique opportunity structure: limitations to mainstream executives, post 9/11 outrage, the war in Afghanistan, regional anti-Americanism and less division of the religious citizenry (International Crisis Group, 2003). Managing internal differences that have been made publicly. The cadres structure used JI was not similar to the clerical structure, seminary and region structures used by some of the partners. Issues of relations with Musharraf, rule of governance, future electoral policy as well as acceptable limits of accommodation and opposition arose (International Crisis Group, 2011). As of 2008, these strains have helped in creating a divisive reaction to the election. JI refused to take part with the bigger All Parties Democratic Movement, and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl joined. The ruling was principled but it deprived JI of engaging in elections in the transition to democracy. A more publicly visible, socially networked, and experienced party in coalition politics at the time of Qazi Hussain Ahmad shedding the office of Ameer in 2009 than on the first day of his office, but with an uneven independent electoral record nonetheless, the party left behind. Modern evaluations of his demise focused on his national exposure and resistance politics, furthering how his personal one surpassed the autonomy of the party to reach out to electorate by itself (Dawn, 2013).

5. Findings

5.1 Institutionalized charisma: leadership without personalization

The interview details reveal that Qazi Hussain Ahmad was indeed a very visible and charismatic leader; however, it does not show him as a leader who leadership-transformed JI into an individual party. The public authority of the respondents was many times differentiated between his own power and the personal ownership. R1, who made considerable use of experience at the top of the organization, explained major decisions as inherent in the shura and group processes even in situations where Qazi had quite clear preferences, summarizing the difference as follows: "Qazi Sahib was very strong in personality, but he had not made Jamaat-e-Islami a personal organization: The respondent did not focus on how consultation eliminated hierarchy and disagreement, but the necessity of authority took its course through the existing institutional avenues. This case of the Qazi is opposing such a pattern: charisma may be institutionalized. The speeches and rallies of Qazi, his visits to the district and personal contact with workers resulted in the growth of his symbolic power, however, the inner organization also guaranteed training, reporting, the phase of membership, and consultative organs.

His people-power was a boost to morale without report having to take the place of the organization process. This coalition has assisted JI to stand out of parties that had a family succession basis; and those that were based on the personal ownership of a dominant leader.

Accessibility was an important aspect to respondents. R2 remembered that visits to the districts and the communication with the average workers helped to give the impression that local organizational workforce was linked with a national political agenda. This was important to a cadres-based movement where volunteers could have spent a lot of time undergoing training, welfare or campaigning without having access to state patronage. The central leader recognition was a reward in the organization. The style used by Qazi made the local activists and the center therefore closer to each other symbolically. The boundaries of charisma are also key ones. Respondents who had the experience of elections cautioned that there should not be a link between crowds and constituency wins. R3 emphasized that speeches would revive the workers, find followers but voters tended to vote based on the basis of biradari, the strength of the candidate, the presence he had within the electoral districts, the resources had, and the perception of electability. Charisma was thus best in motivating workers and being visible nationally and agenda-setting. It was not so dependable as a way of transferring national popularities into local electoral majorities.

5.2 Ideological continuity and contextual reinterpretation

The most unanimous field of expert testimony by documentary and interview has to do with ideological continuity. The respondents did not mention Qazi Hussain Ahmad as the writer of a new doctrine who replaced Maududi. They instead portrayed him as a political decoder of a given inherited system. R1 was to the point as he stated that Qazi Sahib did not work out an ideology not dependent on Maulana Maududi and in the account of the respondent the same ideals were given in a new political context. The party still preserved Islam as a complete moral and political order, the normative value of the Quran and Sunnah as the sources of authority, the struggle in the constitution as the main method of acquiring power and had internal training and consultative structure. The only difference was the language, using which the pledges were related to the modern politics. It was more the corruption, accountability, poverty, education, welfare, social justice, and elite domination, sovereignty and rights of ordinary citizens that made the Islamic politics to be more constantly described by Qazi. R5, experience of organizational and welfare of women, narrated the way that religious responsibility was conveyed using practical issues that families were concerned with. Islamic reform was shown not just in the form of a constitutional theory of sovereignty; it was also related to the honest government, social service, educational opportunity and economic equity.

It is also the same trend with the party in terms of democracy. The elections were perceived as a system of political transformation based on the mechanism of elective, peaceful and legitimate elections, but an absolute idea of popular sovereignty was not embraced by the party. Respondents referred to representative politics as an entity that is legitimate under an Islamic normative framework. This enabled JI to get involved in elections, parliament, constitutional politics, alliances, and even, negotiations and yet remained a critic of political anatomies that they found to be unethical or morally inconstitutable. This mix of a democratic procedure with religiously limited political power is further conceptualized by Esposito and Voll (1996). However reinterpretation was not able to transform completely the perception that JI was imposing ideologically and organizationally. The party maintained formal party divisions in its membership, workforce, supporters and sympathizers and never transformed into a wanton electoral tool. This was maintenance of integrity but restrained the convenience of extending sympathy through to organizational inculcation. Adaptation ideologically to a greater extent then made people resonate faster than it made them member or vote.

5.3 Controlled organizational expansion and the mobilization-conversion gap

The organizational strategy of Qazi can be termed as the controlled expansion. JI broadened the circles, within which citizens could engage without doing away with the model of disciplined cadres. The

respondents indicated that people could simply attend open programs, participate in campaigns or join welfare activity, gather youth platforms, or labour via women networks but not necessarily turn into a formal member. This formation of the layered social ecosystem resulted in the organization, instead of the member/non-member dichotomy. The focus of this model continued to be Tarbiyah. Meetings, moral expectations, ideological education and study circles resulted in creating workers who could maintain life past elections campaigns. These practices enhanced institutional memory and strength. This political blow did not necessarily mean that the organization would be disbanded as they were a part of a wider moral and social agenda. This is one of the primary reasons as to why JI has survived. Meanwhile, as indicated in the interview evidence, the issue of discipline might prove to be a hindrance to the growth of mass-parties. A citizen would happily contribute to a campaign or adore working on the welfare of the party but another may not want to be part of a strict organizational culture. Through a powerful ideological environment, activists might also be socialized to ideological assumptions not held by the average voter whose interests might be more stringently informulated by local economic or kinship, patronage or ethnicity, reputation of the candidate or access to government. The networks and welfare activity of women carried the organization down into the households and neighborhoods. Education, family contact, relief work and frequent contact with the community were mentioned by R5 as respecting and building trust, but he warned that this did not mean that all the families were in complete support of the party during an election. Such channels tend to be overlooked in traditional histories which focus on elections and elite negotiations, which is essential to grasping the social one in the continuity of the party. The involvement of women became more evident as well through campaigning and, in the MMA time, through the representation in the legislature. These networks had both a direct vote mobilization and a political value, which in addition involved communication, service delivery and reproduction of organizations.

The greatest discovery is that expansion created a mobilization- conversion gap. JI would be able to organize rallies, relief campaigns, educational, issues campaigns and disciplined volunteer groups. These practices manifested the organizational strength and usually enhanced the mass consciousness. Attendance at a rally however, was no guarantee of a party vote. The welfare was not appreciated, which did not ensure an electoral commission. A citizen was able to protest against any government alongside JI and still cast his/her votes to a bigger party which was perceived to stand a chance of forming government. This was a gap that was highlighted by both R3 and R4. The election decisions were explained by biradari, local candidate networks, resources, strategic voting as well as the perception of the political candidate with winning chances. The ethical character and societal image of the movement were also important, but they were on a par with other forms of reasoning to do with elections. This conclusion confirms the cautionary points of Bano (2012) that welfare should not be regarded as a mere exchange during elections and the findings of Ranjha (2023) that worry about the multi-faceted functions of welfare in an organization.

5.4 Electoral strategy: alliances, autonomy, and the cost of boycott

The IJI provided the possibility to access a large anti-PPP coalition towards the end of the 1980s. In the case of JI the alliance minimized the feeling of isolation and elevation in the number of representatives in one of the electoral blocs. It also linked the party to a national competition which would have been a struggle to dominate by a smaller independent organization. However, the expenses were great. Part of the candidates and message of JI was assimilated into a coalition identity, and the subsequent scandal of establishment influence over the Yen-he-yi-hsian alliance tainted the effectiveness of JI establishing itself as an independent (democratic) opposition. Thanks to alliance politics, there was more access, yet less freedom (Haqqani, 2005; Shah, 2014). An effort to redress the situation was the formation of the Pakistan Islam Front through building a more autonomous and socially broad based arena during the 1993 election. The experiment made Qazi wish to abide by the dark image of a cadres party, and offer a varied speech of social justice and political transformation.

However, the dismal election result also caused a fundamental flaw: national identification, activist fervor, and a new party name was no replacement to viable candidates in a constituency, enduring local coalitions, and the faith that the platform would succeed. The Front secured independence but unveiled the perspectives of autonomy elective competence (Awan & Kokab, 2016; Afridi et al., 2016). A strategic response that was different was the boycott of 1997. Principle wise, the withdrawal aspect may be justified since it was mincing out the authorization of an electoral space that the party considered flawed and was not accountable enough. Such a choice could strengthen moral seriousness among employees that commit themselves to work diligently. To the electoral institutionalization, the price however, was the fetishization of parliament, continuity of constituency, development of candidates, and regular contacts with voters. Whether a party moves out of political space, it is not vacated and is filled by the competition.

The most successful moment of electoral activities of Qazi was the MMA in 2002. It not only resolved the issue of fragmentation, by bringing together six religious parties on the same platform, it concentrated the religious votes in key strategic parts and was able to tap the post-9/11 political climate, to the advantage of its component parts. The coalition received 45 seats in general National Assembly and they made up the government in NWFP (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002; Khan, 2011). Qazi himself went back to the parliament and JI received a better voice on a national level. However interviews had always understood the MMA to be a coalition triumph as opposed to indications of unilateral merging. As R1 stressed how important religious unity and the role of Qazi in the coalition-building process was, she recalled how the MMA had proven that religious parties might no longer rely on symbolic unity when engaging in political processes and instead gain a stronger presence in parliament. R3 emphasized the fact that there was a wide range of voters, who backed MMA identity as opposed to establishment of its independent attachment to JI. This difference manifested itself when the alliance started to weaken. The gains of parliamentary did not stick to JI, as the unification of the coalition collapsed. The external opportunity structure was; moreover, outstanding. Khan (2011) and International Crisis Group (2003) point out such factors as the importance of the war in Afghanistan, the anti-American mood, the limited role of high-profile leaders in the country, and the regional influence. Such circumstances provided a gap through which the unity of religious parties had a higher value in elections than that of the past. It was the unique outcome that was produced not solely through organization. This is important as the strategy that can do well in a rare opportunity structure is not likely to have the same result in standard competition.

The boycott of 2008 was a replay of the conflict that was caused by principle and continuity. JI backed off and JUI-F joined, thus debasing the MMA as a party line. Principally, JI would neither acquiesce nor normalize a political order, which it had a problem with. Electorally, it once again relinquished the space on the electoral platform, and delayed building up its own post-MMA vote foundation. There were some differences in the appraisal of respondents as some of them stressed upon moral consistency whereas some stressed upon the cost of absence in the long term. The conflict is analytically valuable in that the parties involved in an organization had varied measures of success. During the time, there was no electoral strategy that has come up with an unbridled solution. Forming alliances augmented representation at the cost of independent identity. Individual participation safeguarded identity and revealed vulnerability with constituency. Boycotts safeguarded principle and gave up institutional space. The flexibility of Qazi made JI to stay relevant nationally amidst the periods of change in other regimes and this increased the shiftability of strategies that made the continuity of electoral performance diminish. The party had learned a lot about the tactical flexible adjustment but had never developed the long-term pattern, a model of independent electoral consolidation.

5.5 Conditional engagement with the state and political actors

The JI relationships with civilian governments, military dictators, mainstream and religion partners can be termed as conditional engagement. Permanent opposition and permanent collaboration cannot

be characterized by a mere factor supported by neither the documentary record nor even the interviews. Negotiated, collaborated, protested, participated, and withdrew: Qazi negotiated, cooperated, protested, participated, and withdrew based on the issue, institutional space available and the perceived ideological cost. Although JI later antagonized both PPP and PML-N during the civilian governments of the late 1980s and 1990s, over governance, corruption and elite domination, and ideology, this did not mean that it did not cooperate and even join larger opposition campaigns based on particular issues. When differences in the constitutional structures or anti-government movements generated overlapping interests, then the party would collaborate with actors with whom it also had an interest to criticize. The result of such cooperation enhanced flexibility, though it had to be explained all the time to the workers, and voters. The organization, who claims to be an alternative, needs to explain why the temporary cooperation does not mean a permanent one.

An even more complex issue was brought about by the military. The formal and informal influence of military dominated the political system of Pakistan at the time and no nationally-relevant party could avoid it (Rizvi, 2000; Shah, 2014). Another way that hindered the opposition to the Zia period by JI was the earlier relationship it had with Zia period. With Musharraf, Qazi was so vocal on authoritarian centralization, constitutional engineering, as well as the after 9/11 alliance with the United States. However with the help of the MMA, JI was able to participate in elections and parliament that were held with the same regime. Straight forward contradiction was not the only thing that respondents understood. They defined participation as an attempt to exercising institutional space, and a challenge to the concentration of power by the regime. Limited constitutional gains could be attained through negotiation, however, it may be seen as a way of justifying the ruler. Complete disengagement would save the head but might cut the power. This was the quandary of conditional engagement how not to be overwhelmed and how to be without being integrated, how to be involved without being assimilated. Conditional engagement was thus more effective as preserving organizational autonomy as compared to it yielding better predictability at the electoral level. JI consistently envied entrenchment into one of the civilian parties, army regimes or religion. Here was this secure institutional identity. However, the constant alternation of alliances, opposition, negotiations and boycotts might result in a more difficult interpretation of the electoral position of party by average electorates. The ability to be strategic enabled the organization to remain relevant as well as making it more difficult to build a strong electoral brand.

5.6 Welfare, social legitimacy, and the limits of conversion

The last section of the explanation consists of welfare, education, participation of youth, women and the community service. They indicate the reasons why their political potential of JI is underestimated through a smaller focus on the election-centered evaluation. The extended movement structure of the party helped it to be socially present in case there was low parliamentary representation. The reproduction of ideology through educational work, community contact through welfare, formation of activists through youth organizations, increasing household reach through women networks and association of the movement with organized societal bodies usefully linked the movement to these societal structures. Respondents portrayed welfare activity as an Islamic responsibility in addition to an aspect of trust. The electoral limit in a summary by R5 was in a nutshell, service made respect, though it failed to convert respect, into a prompt vote to the party. Viable image of service was brought about by relief, education, healthcare, and local volunteering. This might make JI a little more accessible to see as non-doctrinal and show a social component of Islamic politics. It provided sustained organization as well with full time activities of activists in-between elections that enhanced real organizational strength.

They were remarkable, however, with the interviews that respect must not be mixed up with votes. R5 observed that service need not generate electoral support, but could create a positive impression. R3 focused on the everlasting significance of family and biradari networks, money, local presence,

reputation of a candidate and optimism that a candidate had a chance. These are some of the factors explaining why a party may be the one that is trusted as a welfare organization even though it comes second in the ballot box. Selection of candidates is a component of this issue. An ideological party that is disciplined might favor the candidates with organization commitment, respectable morals and tenure. Constituencies can be a great incentive to those whose local networks are thick, to those who have access to resources, to those whose people can patronize, to those who can inter-group (dressing up). The most qualified cadres might not necessarily be the most electable. Flexibility has been noted to promote competitiveness, but poses the risk of transforming the nature of the organization that grants JI credibility. Nothing could be more evident of the movement-party dilemma than this.

6. Discussion: Movement Strength without Electoral Consolidation

These results facilitate disinterpreting the Qazi Hussain Ahmad period that goes beyond a dichotomous perspective of success or failure. Fraught with limited and ad hoc success, had independence parliamentary seats been the measure of success, JI would appear to have a weak score if organizational constancy and continuity, additional visibility of the people, demonstration capability, accessibility of the leaders and relevance in the coalition had been the evaluation scale, the record would have been significantly better. The main thing to do is to talk about their divergence. The initial one is institutional resilience. Shura, tarbiyah, and membership practices, social networks, welfare activity, a common ideological vocabulary allowed the movement to endure an electoral setback, and regime transitions. The charisma of Qazi did not oppose these institutions, but instead enhanced the morale, exposure, and leadership status with the country, without turning the party into a machine. The second is the adaptive political communication. Qazi expanded the domain of language of Islamic politics to dictate the accountability, social justice, privilege, corruption, sovereignty, and criticism of authoritarianism. It was not ideological identity that transforms to become a strategy and discursive change, but was influenced throughout this adaptation by changing emphasis and presentation, which supports the argument that Islamist engagement can lead to strategic and discursive change (Iqtidar, 2011; Yilmaz and Shukri, 2024).

One is the third mechanism of coalition dependence. The best parliamentary opportunities that JI had throughout the period was when it was integrated in alliances. The IJI boosted accessibility in a dominant anti-PPP bloc and the MMA created the most vital breakthrough in parliament during the tenure of Qazi. Coalitions minimized the division of votes and enhanced representation as well, but have made an independent electoral identity more challenging. It was indeed real in 2002, but it was based on the religious-party unity and rare structure of political opportunity that manifested due to the post-9/11 conflict and limitations of mainstream leadership, along with the anti-American mood in the region and the specifics of the frontier provinces (International Crisis Group, 2003; Khan, 2011). White (2025) also observes that the Islamist parties of Pakistan are able to exert influence beyond their size in terms of electoral representation and the Qazi era demonstrates coalition leverage to be one path to such influence. Leverage is however not the same thing as consolidation. As soon as the cohesiveness of a coalition had declined, organizational resources and votes that had been brought together under the MMA were not necessarily, a long-lasting JI-only constituency.

Interrupted institutionalization of constituency is the fourth mechanism. The process of electoral consolidation entails recurring involvement, building up of candidates, contacting voters, local issue organizing and the progressive building of an anticipation that a party will always be there and can govern. This was interrupted in 1997 and 2008 by the boycotts. The cumulative costs of withdrawal, even when normatively justified, were: taking JI out of parliament, disrupting continuity among candidates, breaking the continuity of constituency work and offering rivals political space. The fifth one is the social-electoral conversion problem. Trust, recognition and capacity to organize growing out of welfare networks, disciplined rallies, activism of students, contacting women and campaigns over issues did not translate directly to the vote. Bano (2012) reminds not to see welfare as the vote-buying

tool and Ranjha (2023) demonstrates its religious, social, and organizational aspects. Service might be respected, a protest might be attended, or a leader admired and still be elected by another party due to biradari or available resources of the candidate or tactical votes or just due to the presence of the party in the constituency or the calculability of a representative. The interviews provide a local explanation. The combination of these mechanisms has identified the strength of movement that is not electoralized. The idea does not render resilience-generative and temperature-generative sources of movement politically immaterial; it determines a trend of resources which could be turned into steady electoral triumphs of an unstable constituency being not necessarily the simplest to turn into a solidly established game-changer. The same drilled style that brought into existence determined activists might inhibit its leniency on the recruitment of individuals into the organization; the same demanding attitude on the organizational independence might hinder long-term alliances; and the same scrupulous avoidance of institutional continuity might conserve moral coherence at the cost of institutional continuity. This leadership by Qazi only mediated these tensions instead of ending the conflicts. He liberalized JI to be more open, public, socially networked, and capable of coalitions bargaining but the influence of the constituency level that can affect who is a biradari, who is a finance, who is a local electable, who is a patron, who is a tactical voter, who has expectations of who is a government could not be overcome by the national leadership alone. Recent analyses of JI and Pakistani religious parties have kept pointing out restricted national elections achievements and internalized organizational and ideological existence (Hussain and Alvi, 2024; Hussain, 2024; Aslam et al., 2026). The Qazi era indicates that one may be able to have a wide lasting and politically significant influence without turning into independent electoral ability.

7. Conclusion

The leadership of Jamaat-e-Islami between 1987 and 2009 by Qazi Hussain Ahmad was one of the durational adaptation whose ideology was long lived. The party kept to Maududian promise of Islamic constitutionalism, moral reform, disciplined party, ideological indoctrination and consult administration, and Qazi brought its politics more outward looking and socially broad based. He linked Islamic politics with social justice, responsibility, welfare, sovereignty, and anti-authoritarianism; increased social networks and mass contact; and employed rallies, alliances, election, involvement in the parliament, negotiation, and protest. There is documentary justification and organizational testament that these changes did not involve an ideological break. They were a creative and communicative redefinition of a prevailing world view to work within a political landscape characterized by precarious civilian regimes, state-military intervention, coalition politics and in the post-9/11 regional crisis.

Adaptations aimed at making JI a stronger movement, at best enabled JI to be a weaker independent electoral party. A victory in the 2002 MMA indicated to the world the worth of religious-party unity and provided JI their best chance as a parliamentary force during that time, but it was a coalition feat worked off under extraordinary party agglomeration circumstances and not indicative of JI only having a consolidated vote bank. Weaknesses on candidate viability together with constituency organization were reflected in independent experiments and the continuity in parliament and constituency was broken by the boycotts in 1997 and 2008. The benefits of welfare and mobilization created trust, mesmeries, commitment to the agenda, and a capacity to set agenda, but the respondents, time and again contrasted these benefits of mobilization with the logic of the ballot box, where biradari, local resource, electability, tactical voting, and expectation about government formation proved strong. Heroic failure of the electoral system, nor political victory, can most plausibly be given as the most tenable judgment of the Qazi period, but a broadening of the distance between the power of a steady institution, the power to move the social life of society, and the failure, demonstrable only through application, to extend the same influence as constituency power.

The deeper insight is practicing the continuity of ideology and its pragmatic adjustment to the changing circumstances as they do not exclude each other in the context of political Islam. The language, leadership practice, alliances, welfare policies and forms of institutional engagement may be altered by Islamist parties, but with a strong organizational identity, the resultant political party may be endurance, agenda-setting, social legitimacy and bargaining power and not electoral domination. This argument should be validated in further studies including more districts and periods of leaders and leaders by conducting comparative interviews with former members, voters and coalition partners, reporters, women and youth activists and political competitors, and the analysis of districts by the presence of welfare, continuity of candidate, either coalition or boycott and vote. This would help shed light on whether the movement-conversion gap that is found under Qazi Hussain Ahmad is mainly a result of the organizational structure that JI has or this is more of a larger aspect of religious-party rivalry in Pakistan.

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