



**Party Institutionalization and Political Influence in Pakistan:
A Case Study of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F)**

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Abstract:

Religious political parties hold a notable place in Pakistan's political landscape, but most have failed to achieve significant electoral strength. One of the longest surviving and most powerful religious political parties of Pakistan is Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal (JUI-F). Using qualitative research and a case study method based on secondary sources, this study investigates the key aspects of party institutionalization founded upon its organization, link to society, leadership, and political performance. The study uses the theoretical lens of party institutionalization, where organization, autonomy, roots in society, and coherence constitute four key dimensions. The results imply that, despite the centralization of power under one leader, JUI-F is more institutionalized than most other religious political parties in Pakistan. The party has been able to survive electorally, obtain seats in parliament, and exercise influence beyond its size because of this extensive madrassa and religious institutions network, organizational resilience, internal cohesion, and ability to engage effectively in coalition politics. The study concludes that strong organizational capacity, deep societal embeddedness, and relative internal stability have been the principal factors contributing to JUI-F's political durability and continued significance in Pakistan's political system.

Keywords: Pakistan, JUI-F, religious political parties, electoral politics, institutionalization, madrassah, party organization.

INTRODUCTION

Political parties are the basic institutions of the democratic process in the Muslim world (Mahmood, 2005). There are various types of political parties in the Muslim world, and religious political parties (RPPs) form a part of them. RPPs advocate diverse and at times contradictory ideological orientations and responses to major concerns in the Islamic world. As most RPPs are based on their own schools of thought, they have varied responses over key matters such as jihad, extremism, political Islam, etc. For more detail (Nazar 2016: 237-65). Yet amid the diversity and contradictions, RPPs, like all other political parties, are also in pursuit of power by trying to capture control over state resources and political offices and governments to implement their political programs and ideological visions (Salih & El Tom, 2009). For the last more than a century, the RPPs have become a constant feature of the political landscape of the Muslim world (Haqqani, 2013). Their diverse

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strategies of mobilization have enabled them to persist even in hostile regimes. Recent events, such as their rise to power through democratic elections in Turkey, Palestine, Egypt and Indonesia, have enhanced their significance as a subject of interest in scholarly circles (Ullah, 2014).

In the case of Pakistan, statistics show that the traditional political parties such as Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) have frequently gained numerical strength in legislative assemblies' elections and have a relatively strong presence in the political climate of the state. Except for 2002, where the Muttahida Majlis-e Aamal (MMA) was the third majority group in the Parliament, the RPPs have hardly performed well in any of the elections held in Pakistan. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal ur Rehman (JUI-F) is not like any of the other RPPs in Pakistan. Unlike multiple RPPs that have stayed electorally marginal, JUI-F has a long history of participation in parliamentary politics, coalition forming, and bestowing instrumental power, and it possesses an organizational network across the country. This article seeks to address the questions: To what extent has JUI-F become an institutionalized political party, and how has institutionalization contributed to its political influence in Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent decades, scholars have shown interest in the role of RPPs in the Muslim world. The varying Islamist organizations and their ideologies — from political parties that are reformist in nature to traditional networks of religious scholars — have attracted John O. Voll and John L. Esposito to discuss their strength; Similarly, Vali Nasr contends that Islamic parties often adapt pragmatically to democratic institutions while their central source of political authority relies on maintaining religious legitimacy (Esposito & Voll, 1996; Nasr, 2001).

In Pakistan, scholars have emphasized the role of religious institutions in political mobilization. Muhammad Qasim Zaman demonstrates how the ulema entered electoral politics while retaining influence through madrassa and mosque networks (Zaman, 2000). Tariq Rahman further argues that madrassas function not only as educational institutions but also as important centers of political socialization and ideological formation (Rehman, 2004). Likewise, the International Crisis Group (2002) identifies madrassas as significant organizational and mobilizational resources for religious-political movements, particularly within the Deobandi tradition.

In the landscape of religious parties, JUI-F is considered to be one of the most enduring and politically viable Islamic parties. Muhammad Waseem said that JUI-F is a politically flexible party that has been able to combine ideological principles along with a tactical role in coalition politics (Waseem, 2006). A previous study has also pointed to the importance of Maulana Fazlur Rehman's leadership, the party's organizational ties with Deobandi madrassas, and its ability to convert religious impacts into electoral success and political power.

While a good deal of research has been done on Islamic political movements, very little of it has examined party institutionalization as an explanation for the persistence or failure of religious parties in Pakistan and elsewhere. While there is a more extensive literature on ideology, electoral performance, and coalition politics among parties internationally, less has been written about organizational development, internal coherence, autonomy, and roots in society. This paper attempts to fill this gap by employing a party institutionalization framework to JUI-F's development

and its influence in the political realm. By doing so, it contributes to wider debates on party construction, religious politics and democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative case study to investigate the integration of JUI-F into Pakistani politics. A historical perspective is employed to trace the party's evolution across different political periods, including democratic and military regimes. The analysis is based on the party institutionalization framework of Huntington (1968), Mainwaring and Scully (1995), Randall and Svasand (2002), Kuenzi and Lambright (2001), and Basedau (2007). Four variables, including autonomy, organization, intra-party cohesion, and party roots in society, are used as dimensions of understanding for party institutionalization. The research utilizes secondary sources from academic publications, Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) records, JUI-F party material, policy documents, and newspaper archives. Data were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis, and evidence was classified based on the four dimensions of institutionalization.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JUI-F

JUI-F has its origins in the Deobandi political tradition in British India. Formed in 1919, the original Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind backed anti-colonial politics. Subsequently, after India was partitioned, Deobandi scholars in Pakistan founded Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) with political goals relating to Islamized objectives within the new state.

The party divided on several occasions due to internal rifts in the 1980s, resulting in different factions. The largest group became JUI-F led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman. Under his leadership, the party transformed from a predominantly religious organization into a parliamentary political party capable of participating in electoral competition and coalition politics. The academic consensus agrees that the role of political parties in democratic states (Clapham, 1993) argues that only institutionalized parties are sustained and can exercise influence in any democratic system (Randall, 2006). Huntington defines institutionalization as “the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability” (Huntington, 1968). In light of the stated definition of institutionalization, party institutionalization can be defined as a process in which individual political parties participating in elections experience an increase in organizational stability and value.

A few of the standard measurements of party institutionalization are listed in table-1;

Table 1: Dimensions of Party Institutionalization

	Stability*	Value-Infusion**	Value-Infusion
External	Roots in society	Autonomy (From external influence)	
Internal	Level of organization	Coherence	Autonomy (From internal influence)

(Source: author's own compilation based on the studies of Mainwaring 1998, Kuenzi and Lambright 2001, Randall and Svasand 2002, Basedau 2007, Bendel and Grotz 2001, Huntington 1968 and Dix 1992)

This study aims to investigate through this research question: How institutionalized has become JUI-F and how much institutionally affect its political power in Pakistan? The study applies the theory of party institutionalization, examining JUI-F's organizational development, autonomy and internal coherence, and societal roots to determine how well it may be able to remain a politically significant and active force in Pakistan's political system.

The rest of the paper is structured in the following way. Section Two describes the theoretical framework, through definitions of the dimensions of Party institutionalization, criteria, and indicators. Section Three deals with the three dimensions of JUI-F's— autonomy, organization, coherence, and roots in society. The last section concludes with the summary of the major findings and conclusions of our study.

Party Institutionalization and Its Impacts on JUI-F's Politics

Before discussing JUI-F's institutionalization as a political party, it is deemed necessary to give dimensions, criteria, and indicators of party institutionalization.

Table 3: Dimensions, criteria and indicators of party institutionalization

Dimensions of party institutionalization	Criteria	Indicators
Autonomy	Independent of too much influence of groups or individuals within and groups or individuals outside	Frequency of change in party leadership Decision-making autonomy from particular groups or individuals (within and outside party)
Coherence	Encourages intra-party debate to resolve differences Respects freedom of opinion Presents itself as a unified organization in public	Unity in party's parliamentary group Relations between strong intra-party groups inside party No factionalism
Organization	An organizational apparatus active enough for the interests of the party must be obvious at all levels	Party office, manifesto, capacity for solving problems, nationwide organizational presence, party conferences, personnel and material resources, Strong members
Roots in society	Deeply rooted in society	Party age in multi-party system Stable electoral support Links with civil society

(Source: author's own compilation based on the studies of Mainwaring 1998, Kuenzi and Lambright 2001, Randall and Svasand 2002, Basedau 2007, Bendel and Grotz 2001, Huntington 1968 and Dix 1992).

Party Institutionalization and Political Influence of JUI-F

This section explores the organizational structure of JUI-F and studies its development as an institution that can provide significant political leverage for the party in Pakistan. This section assesses the party across four domains of party institutionalization—autonomy, organization, coherence, and roots in society—and thus examines its organizational capacity, internal cohesion,

social embeddedness, and agency over political outcomes. The analysis delves deeper into these institutional characteristics that have allowed JUI-F to not only remain electorally relevant and gain representation in parliament but also be able to play a role in coalition politics and exert influence despite its nominal numbers at the polls.

Autonomy

Autonomy is a relative degree to which a political party can make decisions on its own without being unduly subject to the overbearing influence of internal factions, individual leaders, or outside actors. As stated by Randall and Svasand, "the institutionalized party is capable of making individual decisions that are then implemented through regular organization rather than at the same time by a decision by one leader (Randall and Svasand, 2002). In Huntington's framework, autonomy is an essential dimension of institutionalization because it determines whether a party acts as an independent political institution or merely as an instrument of powerful individuals and external interests (Huntington, 1968).

JUI-F presents a mixed picture regarding party autonomy. On one hand, the party shows a higher degree of organizational continuity and state institutional independence compared to many other RPPs in Pakistan. On the other hand, decision-making is still at the mercy of Maulana Fazlur Rehman and this does raise questions regarding the extent of autonomy within party leadership.

For more than 30 years now, Maulana Fazlur Rehman has been undoubtedly the leader of JUI-F after he took control of it with its breakaway faction soon after the party splintered itself in the late 1980s. Unlike institutionalized democratic parties where leadership transitions occur regularly, JUI-F has experienced remarkable leadership continuity. Fazlur Rehman has remained continuously as party chief since 1988, making him one of the longest-serving political party leaders in Pakistan (Waseem, 2012). Over the last two decades, his dominance has dictated nearly all major strategic decisions, from electoral alliances to coalition participation, opposition movements to parliament negotiations.

This is evidenced by Fazlur Rehman, who was instrumental in JUI-F joining the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) in the early 1990s and then shaping both the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) alliance in 2002 and later bringing together the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) against Imran Khan in 2020. They tended to be driven by his political calculations and desires for leadership, rather than general internal party referendums (Mufti et. al., 2023). The pooling of power around an individual indicates some level of personalization, which constrains the full independence of an institution.

The party's electoral strategies also illustrate leadership centralization. During the 2002 elections, JUI-F became the dominant component of MMA in the National Assembly and formed the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Analysts have noted that Fazlur Rehman's negotiations with other religious parties and his acceptance of electoral participation under General Pervez Musharraf's regime were instrumental in shaping the alliance's success. Similarly, the decision to join the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) against the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government was strongly influenced by Fazlur Rehman's leadership and personal political strategy (Zafar et. al., 2023).

However, it would be wrong to characterize JUI-F as merely a personal vehicle. In contrast to some smaller-scale religious parties which depend solely on charismatic authority, JUI-F had the institutional mechanisms that add organizational autonomy (see next section) to provide avenues for consultation and group-level decision-making. It is argued these channels do not impose limits on the power of the leader of the party.

Another hallmark of institutional strength is how well the party endures times of political instability. Since the restoration of electoral politics in 1988, Pakistan has witnessed multiple regime changes, military interventions, constitutional crises, and shifting electoral landscapes. However, with each transition, JUI-F has managed to withstand without losing its organized character. The party partook in parliamentary politics under the democratic governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, thrived under General Pervez Musharraf's military regime, remained political as ever during the PPP government (2008-2013), provided parliamentary opposition to the PML-N government (2013-2018), and later became a leading element of the anti-PTI opposition coalition (Waseem, 2006). As of 2025, JUI-F has a status that cannot be restored to an active coalition government, nor does it belong to a formal or even stable opposition alliance; and its position is best described as independent opposition politics rather than coalition-based opposition. It continues to favour organizational independence and issue-owned cooperation over collective alliance politics.

From a practical perspective, JUI-F today will be working on an independent opposition basis with other parties. This continuity indicates that the survival of the party does not hinge entirely on gaining access to the reins of state power.

Since their founding, those representing JUI-F have forged alliances with ideologically different parties from conservative religious factions to secular and nationalist groups. This coalition-building shows political sophistication and strengthens the party's power to affect policymaking.

Despite its heavy reliance on Fazlur Rehman, it has shown a greater organizational independence than many other RPPs whose activities are completely personality-driven.

Organizational Development

Organization is believed to be one of the most consequential dimensions of party institutionalization because it represents various ways by which a political party is able to cultivate a stable and systemic structure that can operate effectively in fulfilling its political functions. According to Huntington, highly institutionalized organizations possess complexity, adaptability, and organizational depth that allow them to survive leadership changes and changing political environments (Huntington, 1968). One of the main institutional advantages of JUI-F is its organizational strength, which also sets it apart from many other RPPs in Pakistan.

Unlike many RPPs which remain only in urban areas or operate only during elections, JUI-F has a wide organizational structure from central leadership to provincial, district, tehsil and even union council levels. The constitution of the party envisages a central Majlis-e-Shura (Consultative Council), provincial executive committees, district organizations and local units that carry out functions such as member recruitment, political mobilization for elections, election campaigns and

implementation of policies. These institutional mechanisms support them to persist at all moments and levels beyond electoral cycles.

JUI-F's main strength is its madrassa network. Their religious institutions contributed a lot in political mobilization even in the times when JUI-F lacked power. Deobandi religious institutions were traditionally a resource that allowed political mobilization even in the absence of electoral power (Zaman, 2000). The organizational linkages of JUI-F have helped the party to sustain relevance in Pakistani politics despite fluctuations in electoral performance. It is a fact that the party often shows its strength as a strong mobilizing power with strong organizational capability. One of the most important examples of the power shown by JUI-F was the Azadi March of October–November 2019, where tens of thousands of JUI-F supporters and workers marched to Islamabad from various parts of Pakistan. Some of the observers believed that the scale and discipline of the mobilization showed a perfect blend of an extensive grassroots network and organizational sophistication within the party. This was only matched by the scale of the organizational capacity displayed in terms of communication, accommodation, ability to coordinate transportation, and maintaining security (Shah & Qazi, 2023).

JUI-F's geographical reach also depicts its organizational capacity. The party's consistent performance in elections in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa shows its strong organization in those areas. The party also has a credible hold in pockets of interior Sindh and southern Punjab. Despite competition from the mainstream political parties, including PML-N, PPP and PTI, JUI-F contested elections in all provinces for National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies seats and won 12 seats in the National Assembly (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2019).

With an eye on its social penetration, JUI-F has opened up auxiliary organizations. These consist of student and youth platforms, ulema councils, domestic spiritual committees, and activist networks from mosques. In the past, bodies such as Jamiat Tulaba-e-Islam (JTI) acted as student arms of Deobandi parties, playing a significant role in recruitment and political socialization of youth (Waseem, 2006). These auxiliary groups extend the party's appeal beyond electoral politics and help in developing leaders over longer time periods.

In reference to finances, JUI-F garners decentralized sources of financial support from running religious networks, donations, madrassa contributions, and community fundraising. The party lacks the financial resources of larger mainstream parties, but is highly reliant on volunteer activists and religious institutions, which dramatically cuts campaign costs. This allows the party to carry on running activities without being reliant on funding (Mufti, et. al., 2020).

Coherence

Coherence is the ability of a political party to stay united internally, resolve any internal problems through institutional means, and project itself as an organization unified in purpose with an identity into public view. A common explanation in the literature on party institutionalization is that coherence is measured by the extent to which parties exercise discipline, have factions or do not, and whether they address their internal disputes within an organizational framework without collapsing, and also compared with respect to electoral (competitive) behaviour as well as parliamentary procedure. Randall and Svåsand distinguish coherent parties as those with stable internal relations, a shared understanding of the identity of the party, and a collective belief in its

purpose (Randall & Svasand, 2002). Likewise, Huntington says that institutionalized organizations have procedures and norms allowing them to manage internal tensions without collapse. (Huntington, 1968).

When it comes to mobilizing Pakistan's religious politics, coherence has been a critical hurdle faced by several RPPs. Over the years, several religious parties have faced frequent intra-party splits triggered by leadership rivalries, ideological differences and struggles over control of their organizational base. Contrary to other RPPs in Pakistan like JUP, which lost its electoral relevance in mainstream politics due to splintering into many factions, JUI-F maintains internal stability and coherence as there are hardly any damaging rifts or competition in the political field.

In sharp contrast, JUI-F enjoys a relative degree of cohesion and internal stability due to lower levels of competition in the political field.

In fact, the JUI movement also split into factions in the late 1980s due to controversies over political issues, such as relations with the military establishment during the Afghan war, and leadership disputes. The party was divided into two main factions JUI-S, led by Maulana Sami ul Haq and JUI-F, led by Maulana Fazlur Rehman (Mufti et. al., 2021). This rift marked a serious blow to organizational coherence; however, JUI-F managed to retain its stability and avoided repeated fragmentation cycles, unlike other RPPs of Pakistan.

Maulana Fazlur Rehman's leadership is widely accepted within the party ranks, and it is one of the major factors in the party's coherence. He has always been a central figure in the party's organizational and political activities since assuming leadership in 1988. His long tenure has helped the party to avoid disputes over succession and provided continuity in strategic direction. Some critics believed that dominance of a few leaders in party decision-making is against the essence of democracy, but it has provided the party with long-term stability in organization and prevented splits.

JUI-F's common ideological outlook has contributed a lot in party's coherence. Proponents of JUI-F, Party supporters, madrassa students and scholars have a shared religious identity through the Deobandi school to which they belong. They also have aligned political interests. They are well connected through madaris, and have been enjoying good personal contacts spanning decades.

This ideological unity minimizes the chances of the party's internal splits. Solidarity lowers the chances of internal splits from rival doctrinal analysis. Muhammad Qasim Zaman also viewed Deobandi religious institutions' structure that has maintained coherence by building collective identity (Zaman, 2000). As a result, party members typically frame political differences in light of their common religious commitments rather than as grounds for parties splitting or coalition breaking.

The JUI-F is a unified party because the parliamentary behaviour of JUI-F also shows coherence. Their members follow party leadership's directions and cast votes as per party directions in the legislative assemblies. Their low-level party officials followed directions of the party leadership over all matters, including opposition to General Pervez Musharraf's constitutional reforms, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) formation, and becoming an active part of Pakistan Democratic

Movement (PDM) (Waseem, 2006). The reasoning for this stability is a powerful grip over the process of “we” as a group and a serious commitment to following through with party decisions.

Such networks provide incentives for cooperation and collective action. According to some research, the party's ulema see JUI-F not just through a political prism but also as a form of organizational power to defend Deobandi prescriptive religious institutions like madrassas and mosque networks. That internal interest makes it more difficult to strike a blow at the institution itself, even if there are disagreements about tactics (Shah & Qazi, 2023).

No doubt, internal disagreements occasionally emerge regarding electoral alliances, relations with the military establishment, and succession planning. Questions concerning future leadership after Fazlur Rehman remain a potential challenge to party unity. Furthermore, the concentration of authority around a single leader may suppress rather than fully resolve certain internal disagreements. While these tensions have not been unwieldy and have yet to factionalize the organization significantly (Mufti et. al., 2020). However, these tensions have thus far remained manageable and have not resulted in significant organizational fragmentation

Roots in Society

Considering the dimensions of party institutionalization described by Huntington (1968), Mainwaring and Scully (1995) and Randall and Svasand (2002), roots in society is, in the case of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F), actually the strongest dimension of institutionalization. A party's roots in society are the extent to which a political party develops lasting ties with social groups, retains consistent support at elections, and becomes rooted in social institutions beyond just engaging in periodic electoral competition. Parties that possess strong ties to society are more likely to outlast the storms of political crises, electoral defeats, and leadership changes. There are only a few parties that have the ability and capacity, like JUI-F, to sustain such linkages through its religious, educational, and social network among the population of Pakistan.

In contrast to many political parties that rely mostly on electoral campaigns and patronage networks, JUI-F has a deep social base built into the Deobandi religious tradition associated with this Wafaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia, which is Pakistan's largest federation representing over 18,000 affiliated madrassas and hundreds of thousands of students in institutions across the country (Malik, 1996). Even though a majority of these institutions operate independently, there exists an enormous social network through which JUI-F recruit activists, organizers, candidates and supporters (International Crisis Group, 2002). The madrasa sector keeps the supply of ideologically devoted workers that it could ever hope to need, whilst also ensuring continuity of organization between election cycles.

The party enjoys influence all across Pakistan due to its mosque and madrasa networks, as their graduates serve as khateebis, imams and teachers in society. These ulema serve as intermediaries between the party and society through their community activities, religious gatherings and Friday sermons. The influence of these religious scholars goes beyond religious teachings to participation in local politics and voting (Zaman, 2000). Thus, JUI-F has access to a communication network that far more efficiently connects millions of voters at the grassroots level than many secular political parties.

The JUI-F has always been very strong in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern areas of Balochistan. Their strong network plays a vital role at the grassroots level by connecting millions of voters that even secular political parties are unable to do. In these areas, JUI-F leadership maintains a close association with the tribal elders and traditional tribal setup and maintains a strong political base. It can be noted that during election seasons, religious scholars, madrassa graduates and tribal elders showed joint efforts for political mobilization for JUI-F candidates. (Hassan & Taieb, 2021). For this reason, JUI-F is relevant and holds influence even in those areas where state structure is weak.

An Appraisal of JUI-F's Role in the Politics of Pakistan

The JUI-F has always enjoyed a respectable place in the mainstream politics of the state. It has been quite influential in terms of winning seats in the assemblies as compared to other RPPs of Pakistan. The party has been active and has served actively as a ruling party, opposition party and contributed to coalition governments and the parliamentary process. The impact of JUI-F cannot be noticed by their electoral performance. It gets real power from religious authority, madrassa networks and power brokers, contrary to direct local or national politics. However, it has been observed that JUI-F has been an institutionalized political party, although its impact on Pakistan's politics has been limited and substantial.

Influence Beyond Electoral Strength

As a political force, JUI-F is possibly one of the best examples where it's not necessarily the size of an electorate that translates to political power. While it has never won more than 15-20 seats in the National Assembly on its own, the party has always managed to stay relevant in coalition politics. JUI-F has participated in or supported governments of the PPP and PML-N since the restoration of democracy in 1988. The party has served in federal and provincial cabinets, as well as retaining Senate representation.

The power of the party was displayed during the time of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) between 2002 and 2007. The MMA won 53 seats in the National Assembly and took power in K-P (then NWFP). Other Islamist parties were also important elements of the coalition, but JUI-F became one of the main beneficiaries of the alliance's election victories. This era witnessed unprecedented access to state resources, administrative institutions, and policymaking processes for the party. The party has often played the role of a kingmaker in coalition politics on many occasions through parliamentary bargaining for political pulls. As a result, its political significance has tended to outstrip its real mandate at the ballot box.

Role in Democratic Politics

JUI-F, unlike some other religious oriented movements, has had a history of operating within the constitutional and parliamentary limits. The party has contested every major electoral cycle since 1988, and continues to promote electoral politics as the dominant vehicle for political change. This sets JUI-F apart from open militant religious groups, and also favors democratic consolidation in Pakistan. With JUI-F, its electoral results are a marker of its strength. In contrast to many other religious parties that have had intermittent electoral successes, JUI-F has been a parliamentary fixture since democratic politics was restored in 1988. In 1988, the party won seven National

Assembly seats; it earned six in 1990, four in 1993 and two in 1997. While those numbers may look low, it keeps being electoral relevant for multiple election cycles. It gained considerable leverage from its alliance in Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a coalition of 6 religious parties that formed the third largest parliamentary bloc after the results of the 2002 General Elections. In the National Assembly, MMA won 53 seats and governed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then NWFP) where one of its largest parties was JUI-F (Waseem, 2006).

After the MMA, JUI-F still used to get representation in Parliament. According to the results of the 2008 General Elections, the party secured seven National Assembly seats. In 2013, its electoral fortunes took a dramatic turn for the better when it won fifteen National Assembly seats, becoming one of the biggest coalition partners in the federal government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). In the 2018 elections, JUI-F faced stiff competition from Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) but was still able to secure twelve National Assembly seats and hundreds of seats in provincial legislatures (Election Commission of Pakistan, 1988-2018). In the Pakistan General Election 2024, the party won just four seats. In spite of those losses, the party received some 2.16 million votes nationally, indicating that its role as a prominent religious-political force in Pakistan remains intact.

JUI-F's participation in coalition governments, in and out of federal cabinets and parliamentary committees show that the party has often become an influential political party in the state's politics. Maulana Fazlur Rehman was elected as a member of the National Assembly several times and is considered a leading opposition or coalition leader. The party became a part of the coalition governments of PPP, PML-N and later with the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) alliance after 2020. That kind of role assumed by JUI-F showed that despite the limited electoral success that is mostly local in nature, the JUI-F transcended into Pakistan's larger body politic.

It should not be ignored that the party's participation has been very active in constitutional hearings and parliamentary negotiations. The party engaged in debate over federal-provincial relations, constitutional amendments, and electoral reform. Maulana Fazlur Rehman has often played a leading role as a conciliator between rival political adversaries.

Despite all the above-mentioned roles, JUI-F has never been committed to democracy based on principles. Some critics believed that the party has worked with civilian and military governments alike, keeping in view their own interests. For example, the party criticized General Pervez Musharraf in public gatherings while in reality participating in elections under his regime. However, one can notice that academia highlights the party's services in real politics.

Institutional Strengths and Limitations

Beyond doubt, JUI-F, as a party, is institutionalized. It has built a nationwide institutional framework, fostered deep ties in civil society, preserved structural integrity, and adapted to varying political contexts. Such characteristics have helped the party to bear electoral defeats and keep changing political affiliations according to their party preferences.

Some weaknesses of the party cannot be ignored. Maulana Fazlur Rehman's dominance over all party matters is questioned by some critics as it minimizes the prospects of internal democracy. This sort of overdependence on one individual also creates organizational hurdles in party matters.

Huntington (1968) also believed that any leadership transition is well organized by highly institutionalized organizations. It is important to note for future studies how JUI-F will be relevant in the post-Fazlur Rehman period.

Moreover, JUI-F is not a nation-wide party like PPP, PML-N and PTI as its support and vote bank is limited to a few areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and southern Punjab. This restricts the party from forming an independent government or acquiring a national political role.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the JUI- F possesses an influential position in Pakistan's political system. The party's influence goes beyond its electoral strength, which is exercised due to coalition politics, organizational capacity, parliamentary engagement and religious legitimacy. The party has consistently participated in democratic processes and has contributed a lot to integrating religious actors into constitutional politics. The party's influence has often been shaped by coalition bargaining, political pragmatism, and the personal leadership of Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

Although some of the structural vulnerabilities related to internal democratization, leadership succession, and policy diversification are highlighted in the research, these can be traced in other political parties of Pakistan. The study concludes that the JUI-F is an institutionalized religious party operating within a hybrid democratic system of Pakistan.

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Date of Publication	May 30, 2026
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