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Political Education and Legal Pragmatism of Muslim Organizations in India

A Study of the Changing Nature of Muslim Minority Politics

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the involvement of Muslim organizations in disseminating political education and legal pragmatism in India. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork between 2011 and 2015, this study contributes to a better theoretical understanding of how Muslim organizations engage in democratic processes, rather than being perceived as opposed to notions of democratic participation, by examining the Popular Front of India's promotion of rights consciousness among its followers.

KEYWORDS: Muslims in India, Sachar Report, democratic participation, legal pragmatism, Popular Front of India, 2009 Mysore riot

INTRODUCTION

A growing Muslim minority organization, the Popular Front of India (PFI), was recently involved in a court case in which one of its members in Kerala State was accused of having forcefully converted a Hindu woman to Islam. Hindu nationalists used the situation to mobilize against the PFI and other Muslim organizations, accusing them of following a hidden agenda of running "conversion factories" to Islamize the country. At the same time, PFI cadres quickly mobilized local support and collected over 10 million rupees (US$ 150,000) through mosques and neighborhood networks to hire a law firm that legally contested the accusations. Eventually, in March 2018, India's Supreme Court ruled in favor of the PFI, and the woman's right to embrace Islam.

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The woman said in a press conference, "It was only the PFI that supported us all through our troubled times and what's more surprising is that two Muslim organizations whom we approached refused to help us."[1] The PFI celebrated the favorable judgment by the court as an organizational milestone, and an exemplar of the group's legal pragmatism.

This paper analyzes an emerging trend in Muslim minority politics over the last 10 years. That is a fundamental shift by Islamic authorities and Muslim politicians from an identity-dominated, self-serving, and inward-looking approach, seeking to protect the Muslim personal law and Islamic culture, toward an inclusive and confident debate centered on minority empowerment through political education and legal activism.[2] Drawing on three rounds of ethnographic fieldwork in the Indian states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and New Delhi between 2011 and 2015 (a total of 11 months), this article is predominantly concerned with leaders and members of the PFI.[3] The distinctive feature of the PFI is that unlike the often-studied apolitical and reformist Salafi, Deobandi, and Sufi groups, it is partially led by a politically conscious lay middle-class leadership from South India that promotes civil rights, constitutional awareness, and a practically oriented work ethic, to advance the political representation of the minority Muslim population. I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the changing nature of contemporary Muslim organizations in India, which have previously been perceived as apolitical and detrimental to the socioeconomic development of Indian Muslims.

I begin with a brief review of the academic debate around the growing involvement of Muslim organizations in democratic processes and the persistent assumption that religious groups do not constructively participate in the public discourse. I then consider the political context for Muslim minorities in India and how the policies of the Indian National Congress government between 2004 and 2014 contributed to the political participation of the Muslim community, before I introduce the case study of the PFI. In the empirical

1. "All This Happened Because I Embraced Islam: Hadiya," *Times of India*, March 10, 2018; "Operation Conversion Mafia: Kerala's Conversion Factories Unmasked," *India Today*, October 31, 2017; "Hadiya's Father Joins BJP, Pledges Support for Sabarimala Stir," *Hindustani Times*, December 18, 2018.

2. Javeed Alam, "The Contemporary Muslim Situation in India: A Long-Term View," *Economic and Political Weekly* 54:2 (January 2008): 45–53.

3. To protect my research participants and ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names of interviewees and some research locations have been changed or omitted.

analysis, I outline the PFI's approach of legal pragmatism after the 2009 Mysore riot, and the organization's promotion of political and constitutional education in recruitment and cadre training. Lastly, I will use a brief portrait of a current PFI activist who became attracted to and later involved in the PFI's assertive agenda, to show the appeal of legal pragmatism to Muslim youth. In the conclusion, I summarize the main findings and discuss their implications in the context of India's growing and frustrated Muslim youth population, and how organizations such as the PFI could be included in policy debates.

ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

Islamic authorities, mosque associations, and Muslim organizations have often been described as ideological projects that are averse to political pluralism, democracy, and secularism, while discriminating against women and sexual and religious minorities.[4] In particular, since the emergence of al-Qaeda and the September 11, 2001 attacks, Islamic movements and Muslim organizations around the world have been disparaged as unwilling to integrate into democratic regimes and reluctant to accept the separation of religion and politics, and therefore as posing an existential threat to the social order.[5] Contemporary research, still building on such assumptions, frequently maintains that Muslim groups are profoundly anti-democratic and incompatible with secular nation-states.[6] The paradigm that successful development and integration can only occur with the decline of religion persists in governance and policy circles. Therefore, in liberal political theory, the discussion of religious organizations as a resource for collective action, political and legal education, and democratic engagement is still largely absent or superficial, and religious actors

4. Asef Bayat, "The Coming of the Post-Islamist Society," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 5:9 (Fall 1996): 43–52; Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (London: Virago, 1992); Tahera Aftab, *Inscribing South Asian Muslim Women: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Guide* (Leiden: Brill 2007).

5. Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992); John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1992); Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

6. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992); Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Giles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

are often treated as anomalies in electoral party politics, civil society, and the humanitarian and development sectors.[7]

However, a growing number of studies comprehend Muslim organizations as compatible with democracy, and as capable of promoting democratic values, social change, and legal reform.[8] In this context, researchers have examined the social and political trajectories and temporal changes in the modus operandi of Muslim organizations, their leadership, and their cadre base in different national settings.[9] Such studies indicate that religious authorities and faith-based movements frequently advocate political and rights-based education via dense associational networks such as student and youth groups, women's associations, and humanitarian, human rights, and legal aid organizations.[10] Often their aim is to develop a political rights consciousness among their members and supporters, which in Michael McCann's words entails "a dynamic process of constituting one's understanding of and relationship to the social world through the use of legal conventions and discourses."[11]

7. Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and Recovery of Religious Tolerance," in Veena Das (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Christopher Candland, "Faith as Social Capital: Religion and Community Development in Southern Asia," *Policy Sciences* 33:1 (2001): 355–74; Neera Chandhoke, *The Conceits of Civil Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Steven Kettell, "Has Political Science Ignored Religion?" *Political Science and Politics* 45:1 (2012): 93–100; Alastair Ager and Joey Ager, "Faith and the Discourse of Secular Humanitarianism," *Journal of Refugees Studies* 23:3 (August 2011): 456–72; Joe Devine, Graham Brown, and Séverine Deneulin, "Contesting the Boundaries of Religion in Social Mobilization," *Journal of South Asian Development* 10:1 (April 2015): 22–47.

8. John Esposito and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996); Jose Casanova, "Civil Society and Religion: Retrospective Reflections on Catholicism and Prospective Reflections on Islam," *Social Research* 68:4 (2001): 1041–80; Abou El Fadl, *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

9. Fred Lawson, "Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain," in Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism, A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Maidul Islam, *Limits of Islamism: Jamaat-e-Islami in Contemporary India and Bangladesh* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jillian Schwedler, "Can Islamists Become Moderates? Rethinking the Inclusion-Moderation Hypothesis," *World Politics* 63:2 (April 2011): 347–76.

10. Masooda Bano, "Welfare Work and Politics of Jama'at-i-Islami in Pakistan and Bangladesh," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47:1 (January 2012): 86–93; Nancy Rosenblum, "Religious Parties, Religious Political Identity, and the Cold Shoulder of Liberal Democratic Thought," *Ethical Theory and Practice* 6:1 (March 2003): 23–53; Wendy Cadge and Elaine Howard Ecklund, "Immigration and Religion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:1 (December 2007): 359–79.

11. Michael McCann, "An Anthropology of the State," in Michael McCann (ed.), *Rights at Work: Pay Equity Reform and the Politics of Legal Mobilization* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 7.

There is a growing body of literature suggesting that Muslim organizations, through political and legal education, can constructively engage in democratic processes within India's democratic experience, in which Muslim minority politics has become successively more inclusive.

MUSLIM ACTIVISM IN INDIA

Democracy has been integral to the daily lives of India's 172 million Muslims since the country's independence in 1947.[12] However, contemporary Muslim organizations and their supporters are widely perceived as anti-democratic and detrimental to India's national security, and they are closely scrutinized by intelligence and police forces for their suspected involvement in inciting political violence and terrorism.[13] A more nuanced understanding of Muslim activism in India considers the less highlighted dimension of political participation and legal pragmatism of emerging Muslim groups in the public domain. Previous research on popular Muslim movements and scholarly platforms such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Society), Deobandi,[14] and Ahl-i Hadith (People of Hadith) movements has examined their apolitical and inward-looking leadership style, which prioritizes Islamic identity and the spiritual education of their constituencies over economic and developmental concerns.[15]

Although the authority of this conservative class of clergy persists in contemporary India, I question the assumption that Muslim organizations remain static, narrowly sectarian, and unconcerned with democratic engagement. Over

12. Census of 2011.

13. "Zakir Naik's IRF Banned for Five Years under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act," *Indian Express,* November 16, 2016; "Intelligence Agencies Pick up Chatter about New Radical Group," *New Indian Express,* January 5, 2017; "Here Come the Pious," *Tehelka,* October 9, 2010; "A Professor Praises Terrorism," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2007.

14. The influential Deobandi movement was founded in 1867 in India. Deobandi scholars spawned a vast network of madrasahs working to revitalize Islamic traditions. The orthodox movement with its various offspring, including the Tablighi Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami, shaped the standards of doctrinal purity concerning Islamic practices, beliefs, and piety of common Muslims, by proclaiming an inward-looking *jihad* (inner struggle). Thus, Deobandi leaders ensured that they alone could preserve the Islamic tradition under British rule. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Francis Robinson, *Islam, South Asia and the West* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

15. Yoginder Sikand, *Struggling to be Heard: South Asian Muslim Voices* (Delhi: Global Media, 2004); Barbara Metcalf, *Islam in South Asia in Practice* (New Jersey: Oxford University Press, 2009); Zoya Hasan, *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities, and Affirmative Action* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the last two decades, India has seen the emergence of various Muslim welfare organizations, political parties, and assertive social movements, even within the *ulama*,[16] with their own publications, educational initiatives, youth and women's associations, and development projects. These new stakeholders are competing with traditional Muslim elites and ulama-led organizations. They try to influence governance and policymaking by bringing more Muslims into India's bureaucracy, legal system, regional municipalities, and police forces through a politics of empowerment similar to that used by lower-caste Hindu movements in the 1980s.[17] Some scholars have already noted the trend of Indian Muslims increasingly focusing on the politics of inclusion and civil rights.[18] However, detailed ethnographic research on the impact and direction of legal activism and political education by Muslim organizations in India is still in its infancy. Using the example of the PFI, this paper will illustrate how Muslim organizations that promote political education and spread constitutional literacy are trying to generate an alternative understanding of India's democracy and legal apparatus, in an attempt to hold the state and police forces legally accountable in an environment of increasing social disparity and political violence against religious minorities.

THE SACHAR REPORT AND THE DISCOURSE OF MUSLIM MARGINALIZATION IN INDIA

In the wake of an assertive Hindu-nationalist movement with an anti-Muslim ideology, which gained momentum in the late 1980s, the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992,[19] and the nationwide intensification of

16. Traditionally educated Muslim scholars, who see themselves as the custodians of tradition.

17. Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery, and Roger Jeffery, "Dalit Revolution? New Politicians in Uttar Pradesh, India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 67:4 (November 2008): 1365–96.

18. Alam, "Contemporary Muslim Situation"; Anwar Alam, "Political Management of Islamic Fundamentalism: A View from India," *Ethnics* 7:1 (March 2007): 30–60; Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India: The Transformation of the Jamaat-e-Islami* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

19. Since the early 1980s, Hindu-nationalist organizations have built a political movement around a united Hindu identity known as Hindutva and cross-caste solidarity through the "liberation" of Hindu temples and holy sites, such as in Ayodhya, where the Babri mosque was located. The mosque was destroyed on December 6, 1992, by Hindu-nationalist supporters, triggering nationwide riots that killed at least 2,000 people. Nikita Sud, *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism, and the State: A Biography of Gujarat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Stuart Corbridge and John Harris, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford Blackwell, 2001).

communal riots, with over 10,000 mainly Muslim victims,[20] most Indian Muslims have become disenchanted with their political and religious representatives, and increasingly alienated from the country's democratic framework and legal system.[21] Few studies have explored the wider implications of the perceived and experienced secular crisis of the Muslim minority, which, according to Javeed Alam, "brought about a radical change in the orientations and dispositions in Muslims towards the Indian nation and the politics within it."[22] Between 2004 and 2014, the Indian National Congress–led government addressed the problems faced by Muslim citizens, thanks to enhanced understanding and public pressure regarding the alienation of Indian Muslims and the party's need to regain the electoral support of religious minorities. One of the essential governmental steps to alleviate the challenges faced by the Muslim community was the creation of the Prime Minister's Committee on the Social, Economic, and Educational Status of Muslims in India. The committee published what became known as the Sachar Report in 2006, after an official government investigation initiated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh together with Judge Rajindar Sachar, to address the precarious conditions of the Indian Muslim population. The report and related studies helped improve understanding of the socioeconomic realities confronting India's Muslim minority, who are more likely to be illiterate, with lower incomes and living standards and higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination than other low-caste groups.[23]

The language in the report was celebrated by scholars for analyzing Muslims not through the lens of religion and cultural identity but as a neutral socioeconomic population group. Partha Chatterjee has succinctly described such population groups as "empirical categories of people with specific social or economic attributes that are relevant for the administration of developmental

20. Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

21. In *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Rajeev Bhargava speaks of the majority-minority syndrome in contemporary India, where minorities feel insecure and alienated.

22. Alam, "Contemporary Muslim Situation": 46.

23. Justice Rajindar Sachar, *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslims in India* (Delhi: Prime Minister's High Level Committee Cabinet Secretariat, 2006). For a detailed discussion of the findings, see Rakesh Basant and Abusaleh Shariff, *Handbook of Muslims in India: Empirical and Policy Perspectives* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

or welfare policies."[24] The new discourse initiated by the publication of the report has enabled Muslim leaders to engage and negotiate with the state and legally demand policies that focus on equal representation, economic inclusion, and development. Muslim groups in the post-Sachar era have started to use secular and legal discourses of marginalization and socioeconomic interests, in combination with their electoral strength, to pressure the state for affirmative action and socioeconomic empowerment.[25]

The Sachar Report has therefore become a legitimate reference point among Muslim community leaders for collective action in the context of articulating political demands, in cases where the state has neglected its roles as patron of minority rights and protector against communal violence.[26] These developments were accompanied by the formation of political outfits, including the All India United Democratic Front in Assam, the Peace Party of India and Rashtriya Ulama Council in Uttar Pradesh, the Social Democratic Party of India, the People's Democratic Party in Kerala, and the Welfare Party of India, as well as Muslim movements such as the PFI, Pasmanda Muslim Mahaz (a Muslim lower-caste movement) in Bihar, the Solidarity Youth Movement in Kerala, and the Women's Personal Law Board. These new groups, as well as established Muslim parties (including the All India Council of the Union of Muslims, the Indian Union Muslim League, Muslim elites in the Congress, and established Islamic platforms such as Darul Uloom Deoband [House of Knowledge or Islamic Seminary of Deoband], Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, and Tablighi Jamaat [Society of Spreading Faith, an Islamic missionary movement]), have adopted some secular language, started to promote inclusive socioeconomic development, and called for Indian Muslim unity in national politics. The next section introduces the PFI, which can be seen as one manifestation of the new kind of Muslim minority participation that tries to enhance legal awareness and rights consciousness among its followers.

24. Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004): 136.

25. Muslims constitute 14.2% of the Indian population, according to the last census (2011), and are a significant religious minority in various Indian states, including 17% in Bihar, 19% in Uttar Pradesh, 34% in Assam, 27% in West Bengal, 12% in Maharashtra, 27% in Kerala, and 13% in Karnataka.

26. Javeed Alam, "A Turning Point: The Sachar Report Has the Potential to Affect All Facets of Indian Politics as the Mandal and Masjid Issues Did," *Frontline,* December 5, 2006; "Demise of Justice Sachar: Nation Lost a Great Champion of People's Rights," Popular Front of India, March 21, 2018.

THE POPULAR FRONT OF INDIA

The PFI is a Muslim organization formed in the early 1990s in Kerala and now active in more than 22 Indian states, with headquarters in New Delhi. Its stated objectives are the political empowerment of Indian Muslims and the exposure of Hindu nationalism. The PFI was partly a response to the political grievances of Indian Muslims following the political failure of Muslim and secular elites to protect religious minorities from attacks by Hindu nationalists. The increasing political violence, and riots in Kerala, coastal Karnataka, and eventually all over South India, since the late 1980s, contributed to the growth of the PFI, which slowly established itself as a custodian of Muslim security and minority rights.[27]

The PFI is closely connected with several civil society, human rights, and development organizations, including the All Indian Imams Council, the National Confederation of Human Rights Organizations, the Campus Front of India, the National Women's Front, the Rehab India Foundation, and the PFI's political wing, the Social Democratic Party of India. Together with its associational connections, the PFI has approximately 300,000 members, including 30,000 student members, and over a million supporters.[28] Its leaders and a few in its cadre base hold university degrees and are employed in the formal sector. They include estate agents, software engineers, lawyers, journalists, teachers, medical doctors, and business owners. Many have lived and worked abroad, mainly in the Middle East. Among the leaders are also imams, teachers of Urdu and Arabic, and student activists. Some of the senior leaders belonged to the now-proscribed Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in the late 1970s.

27. One of the PFI's strongest support bases is coastal Karnataka, in particular Mangalore, where I conducted three rounds of fieldwork between 2011 and 2015. The area has experienced numerous riots and violent clashes since the mid-1990s. It became notorious for various attacks on churches and mosques, aggressive campaigns of moral policing, and political murders. Coastal Karnataka was also described as the gateway to South India for the Hindu nationalists in the mid-1990s and has been informally labeled the "RSS headquarters of South India" (Rashtriya Seva Sangh [National Volunteers Organization] is the largest Hindu-nationalist organization, with close ties to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]). "On Shaky Ground," *Frontline*, May 16, 2014; "A Chronicle of Communal Incidents in Mangalore (1998–2007)," People's Union for Civil Liberties, January 24, 2010; Muzaffar Assadi, "Communal Violence in Coastal Belt," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34:8 (February 1999): 446–48; Muzaffar Assadi, "Hindutva Policies in the Coastal Region: Towards a Social Coalition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37:23 (June 2002): 2211–14.

28. Author interview with PFI chairman, February 1, 2015, Mangalore.

SIMI activists were eager to assert their democratic rights and religious identity in India's public domain. They directly challenged the established Islamic authorities, who focused on rituals and theological debates, leaving politics to the self-interested Muslim elites. SIMI pioneered a novel culture of resistance, including strikes, marches, and boycotts, as well as seminars and literature highlighting the caste system, attacks against Muslims and Islam, and the dangers of capitalism.[29] However, PFI leaders have also criticized SIMI for its sometimes unconstitutional and exclusive approach to social change by promoting an Islamic state in India. In contrast to its leadership profile, PFI's base of popular support is predominately in the informal sector, among semi-literate youths and working classes, who support the PFI for protection from Hindu nationalists and police discrimination. Cadres are predominately Sunni Muslims from Deobandi, Salafi, Barelvi, and other Sufi backgrounds. The organization is financially sustained by monthly contributions, including remittances, from members and supporters, as well as annual donations during Ramadan, the month that sees the highest rates of Islamic philanthropy.[30]

Police officials have described the PFI as one of the "fastest-growing cadre organizations" in India, while intelligence agencies have monitored its activities with grave concern.[31] PFI members have been arrested for their alleged involvement in political violence, assassinations of opponents, foreign-funded terrorism, and youth radicalization.[32] The PFI was banned in Jharkhand for "spreading anarchy in the state" and for organizational ties with the Islamic State (ISIS).[33] In response to the frequent accusations, the PFI has softened its religious identity and emphasized democratic values and civil

29. Yoginder Sikand, "Islamist Assertion in Contemporary India: The Case of the Students Islamic Movement of India," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23:2 (October 2003): 335–45; Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India.*

30. "Constitution, Rules and Regulations," Popular Front of India, February 2014.

31. Author interview with police inspector and assistant to the police commissioner of Mysore, August 27, 2011, Mysore; author interview with assistant police commissioner, Law and Order Division, August 23, 2011, Bangalore.

32. "Will Solve River Rows in a Day: B S Yeddyurappa," *Indian Express*, November 28, 2016; "Isubbu Accuses PFI, KFD of Using Him," *Mangalore Today*, January 31, 2006.

33. "Jharkhand Bans Popular Front of India for Spreading Anarchy in State," *New Indian Express*, February 2, 2018. The ban was struck down six months later by the High Court, but the Jharkhand government reinstated it in February 2019. "Jharkhand HC Decision To Revoke PFI ban Welcomed," *Times of India*, August 29, 2018; "Jharkhand Reinstates Ban on Popular Front of India for Anti-National Activities," *New India Express*, February 12, 2019.

rights in its communications and engagement with state agencies, to avoid being branded anti-national and Islamist. The leadership has invested substantial strategic effort and financial resources to mimic the conduct and appearance of secular organizations, think tanks, and government administrations. The PFI's chairman clarified that the aim is to generate awareness of the counter-terrorism laws that affect the daily lives of ordinary Muslims.[34] An undated pamphlet, "UAPA [Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act], Terror Law in Disguise," which the chairman handed to me in the coastal city of Mangalore, Karnataka, in 2012, said:

> When the law enforcement agencies started implementing the laws, it became a story of misuse and extreme prejudice. Nepotism, corruption, communalism, racism and religious leanings of the investigation agencies played a pivotal role in putting innocent youths in prison without bail or timely trial. . . . After 9/11, POTA [Prevention of Terrorism Act] became the major tool in the hands of the rightists and communal BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party, the dominant Hindu nationalist party] to terrorize and demonize the minorities, poor and marginalized.

The PFI has produced various such pamphlets and reports, and conducted surveys and fact-finding missions. Its publications quote studies by global consultancies on bribery and corruption, reputable research institutes on police violence, and government statistics on poverty and discrimination. The 2014 annual report began by stressing, "We are duty bound to study and analyze the socio political and economic conditions in India and overseas."[35] Monthly bulletins, weekly newspapers, and e-newsletters are also published, while organizational websites, as well as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram accounts, are updated on a regular basis. National and regional headquarters resemble corporate offices, with cubicle computer desks, reception areas with televisions, newspaper tables and small libraries, and local staff offering tea and business cards.[36] These office spaces house documentation, media, public relations, and fund-raising departments, and are near printing houses and other organizational wings, such as the women's,

34. Author interview with PFI chairman, November 29, 2012, Mangalore.

35. "Discussion Paper on Socio-Political Situations, Presented at National General Assembly, Malappuram," Popular Front of India, December 27–29, 2014.

36. Field observations were conducted at the PFI's headquarters in Delhi, as well as their state offices in Bangalore, Mangalore, Mysore, Calicut, and Cochin, between 2011 and 2015.

student, religious, and educational branches. The PFI has also included specifically non-Islamic signifiers in its programs, such as yoga exercise, ayurveda, Hindi and Sanskrit slogans, the national flag, an organizational anthem, and other popular songs, including the poet Muhammad Iqbal's 1904 anthem *Sare Jahan se Accha, Hindositan Hamara* (Better than the Entire World is our India [Hindustan]), all designed to indicate constitutional commitment. On India's Republic Day in January 2017, PFI activists displayed a 150-foot-long national flag in the small town of Punganuru in Andhra Pradesh, appealing to "the youth to inculcate the habit of patriotism and render services to the nation with dedication."[37] Through these symbolic campaigns, the PFI challenges the prominent Hindu-nationalist narrative that only Hindus can be true patriots.[38] Having introduced the PFI and the political context in which Muslim organizations in India operate, in the following sections I will illustrate how the PFI has adjusted and expanded its strategies from formerly religious discourses toward a rights-based agenda.

THE 2009 MYSORE RIOT

During my fieldwork, the PFI negotiated with police commissioners about the legality of political rallies, and pressed legal charges against police inspectors and politicians for violent conduct and hate speech. The organization has also provided legal aid, through lawyers and human rights advocates, to victims of riots and discrimination.[39] This section will give an example of the PFI's legal pragmatism during and after the 2009 riot in Mysore, Karnataka and how its leaders demonstrated expertise in legal and human rights discourses to appeal to members and Muslim constituencies. The Mysore riot started after the desecration of a mosque in the Udayagiri neighborhood, when a carcass of a piglet was thrown into the compound on July 2, 2009. The subsequent violence killed three people, including a 14-year-old allegedly hit by police fire.

37. "150-foot Flag Displayed," *Hans India*, January 27, 2017.

38. The claim is that since Muslims and Christians have their holy or religious land (*punyabhumi*) abroad, they may harbor treason and disloyalty. Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva," in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

39. "Responding to Muzaffernagar: A Brief Report of Relief Activities," Popular Front of India, Delhi: 2014.

On the morning of our appointment, Iqbal, a senior PFI leader in Mysore, sent me a text message, apologizing for his delay: "Brother, as it happens, I am still in court. As soon as I am done here, I will pick you up." To learn more about the PFI's management of legal cases, I met Iqbal in 2011 and 2012.[40] He was 42, had worked in the Middle East for several years, and held an MBA degree. In our interviews, Iqbal recounted discussions with the police commissioner of Mysore. Because of Iqbal's social standing as a community leader, the police called him on the morning of the riot to appease an angry group of young Muslim men. "A huge crowd was gathering to relieve their anger, but it didn't turn into violence, because I managed to contain and manipulate the mob. Only later did the mob become uncontrollable and violent as the police failed to remove the swine carcass from the mosque." Iqbal's use of the word "mob," implying potentially violent misconduct by a large crowd, underlined a degree of paternalism among PFI leaders, suggesting that ordinary Muslims are unprepared for democratic participation and assertions of civil rights.

In the aftermath, Iqbal and other PFI leaders were taken into police custody on charges of having instigated the riot. Four days later, despite a curfew, the PFI organized a civic protest of around 200 PFI members and adherents, including activists of the National Women's Front. They gathered around the Fountain Circle in Mysore and demanded the release of the prisoners. Police forces charged with batons and tear gas against the protestors, which led to a mass panic and left many people injured.[41] Media and police sources singled out the PFI as the main instigator and claimed that PFI members were armed and that they had escalated the confrontation by throwing stones at the police. At first, the police commissioner promised to hold Iqbal in custody for only two days, until public attention decreased. But due to political pressure from the BJP, he remained in jail for more than three months, during which his family suffered other repercussions. A senior PFI member told me, "After our district president [Iqbal] was put in jail, they took his mother, who was a heart patient, and sister to the police station for inquiry. Then, without escorting them back to their house at night, they let them walk home alone. Soon after, their landlord had also

40. Author interviews, August 28, 2011, and November 17 and 24, 2012, in Mysore.

41. "Violence Breaks Out in Mysore," *The Hindu*, July 10, 2009; "Mysore Police Attack on Peaceful PFI Demonstrators, Scores Injured, Hundreds Arrested," *TwoCircles*, July 11, 2009.

kicked them out of the house as a result of the investigation."[42] A police official in charge during the riot told me that until the incident in July 2009 he thought the PFI "had good intentions," but after the Mysore riot, he changed his mind: "I hammered them in Mysore, and many of their leaders were thrown in jail."[43]

Despite his hardships, Iqbal spoke kindly of the police during our conversations, apart from his critical remark that the police commissioner was under the sway of the BJP and eager to prove his loyalty to the newly elected state government. At that time, the chief minister of Karnataka, B. S. Yeddyurappa, charged that "the Mysore incident was a conspiracy by the PFI to tarnish the image of the 'pro-development' government."[44] With a sense of deeper understanding, Iqbal noted that the police treated him with decency while in prison, because of the PFI's legal assistance. He added, "We didn't compromise and went all the way to the High Court. Our lawyers booked several cases against the police commissioner, other police inspectors, and against the home minister. The court gave us a favorable decision, and the police had to pay 45,000 rupees (US$ 650) compensation to each of the victims."

PFI activists frequently remarked that using public court cases, going through the legal process, and spreading constitution-related education fosters confidence among Muslims and increases the appeal of the organization. A PFI member and legal adviser said, "Since we have lawyers, the police won't dare torture our members anymore."[45] A PFI Campus Front activist added that members support each other in times of crisis: "When one of us gets arrested, we can quickly mobilize 300 or more supporters, who will protest in front of the police station or town hall, which will affect the morale of the police."[46] Thus, the PFI has defended itself both publicly and in court, which was seen as a sign of organizational maturity by a PFI activist:

> If you are a weak group without legal support, you stop working after a while. We saw organizations vanish in so many cases, because of police and state propaganda and RSS intimidation. Muslims think they don't have rights, and

42. Author interview, November 12, 2012, Mangalore.
43. Author interviews, August 25, 2011, and November 16, 2012, Bangalore.
44. "CM Holds KFD, PFI Responsible for Mysore Violence," *Deccan Herald*, July 13, 2009.
45. Author interview, December 9, 2012, Bangalore.
46. Author interview, January 5, 2015, Calicut. "PFI Seeks Release of Man Taken into Custody by CB-CID Sleuths," *The Hindu*, March 22, 2017.

> that nobody supports them. That's why legal education is so important. We are getting very good results from our workshops and seminars, because many Muslims have never heard about these legal issues before.[47]

The PFI's emphasis on legal pragmatism can be regarded as part of a wider trend in Muslim citizenship politics and as an outcome of a long dialectic process, through which Muslim organizations have learned to respond within the norms of civic protest and rightful resistance.[48] In an interview at the Udayagiri Police Station in Mysore, a police inspector, who highlighted his "trustworthy relationship" with local PFI leaders, indirectly confirmed that the PFI's collective action and its legal aid for victims had an impact on the police psyche. Since the Mysore riot, he said, "we are now more proactive in initiating harmony marches and *mohalla* [neighborhood] meetings with *swamijis* [Hindu priests], *sakaris* [government officials], *maulanas* [Islamic scholars], and bishops on a regular basis to ease the tension."[49]

At a political rally in Mysore in 2012, PFI leaders described at length the humiliating process of obtaining legal permission for the organization's collective action campaigns. One speaker recalled that a certain police commissioner in Bangalore had dismissed the PFI delegation, saying, "We will not talk to people like you." The speaker then asked the audience: "Why is there so much disgust and arrogance against us as an organization that is fighting for democratic rights?"[50] In her research on public protests in Jordan, Jillian Schwedler noted that "government officials carefully regulate the spaces in which protests are permitted, so that the contentiousness of events often begins well before the events themselves, when organizers seek to gain permission for the protests they desire."[51] In these cases, when a public campaign is finally granted, the PFI will publicly highlight the legal battles, court cases, and bureaucratic obstacles for its members and celebrate the permission as a symbolic victory and an assertion of Muslim citizenship rights. However, PFI activists have also demonstrated a degree

47. Author interview, August 19, 2011, Bangalore.
48. Alam, "Contemporary Muslim Situation."
49. Author interview, August 27, 2011, Mysore.
50. "Why Popular Front of India," a large-scale public campaign in Mysore, November 17, 2012.
51. Jillian Schwedler, "The Political Geography of Protest in Neoliberal Jordan," *Middle East Critique* 21:3 (September 2012): 267.

of pragmatic flexibility, occasionally warning supporters of the possible repercussions of legal action.[52]

RECRUITMENT THROUGH POLITICAL EDUCATION

Among Indian citizens, trust in the country's legal system and law enforcement is extremely low due to judicial misconduct, corruption, and glaring miscarriages by police and politicians.[53] A 2013 police report, "Strategy for Making Police Forces More Sensitive towards Minority Sections," confirms the problematic relationship between the police apparatus and Muslim citizens, acknowledging that Muslims by and large distrust the police and view them as "communal, biased and insensitive . . . ill-informed, corrupt and lacking professionalism."[54] Disadvantaged groups, including religious minorities in India, often perceive the local state and police forces as intruders and threats to their life and well-being, frequently violating their basic human rights, rather than as a source of protection or social justice.[55]

In this environment of institutional injustice and distrust, PFI's activists try to provide political education to its support base to enhance their constitutional awareness and nurture a positive attitude to India's political and legal institutions. The PFI has organized and used anti-corruption campaigns and seminars on Islamic ethics to prove their ideological adherence to the principle of good governance and to India's legal system. For instance, during

52. In November 2012, I was a participant observer in a discussion between a group of five butchers and a local PFI leader. The butcher delegation asked the PFI activist to settle a financial dispute with the police on their behalf, in which several police inspectors demanded "unreasonable bribes." During the lengthy argument, the PFI activist reluctantly offered to negotiate with the police and to bring the issue to court, if necessary. However, he also warned of possible repercussions, including the harassment of employees and family members, and loss of profit from their businesses.

53. Yogendra Yadav, "India's Third Electoral System," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34:34 (September 1999): 2393–99; Rahul Verma and Pranav Gupta, "Facts and Fiction about How Muslims Vote," *India Economic and Political Weekly* 51:53 (December2016): 110–16; Malte Phel, "From Lawbreakers to Lawmakers: The Subnational Dimension of Political Malfeasance and the Criminalization of Indian Electoral Politics," *German Journal on Contemporary Asia* 137 (October 2015): 13–35.

54. "Muslims Think We Are Communal, Corrupt: Police," *Indian Express*, July 17, 2014; "Levels of Distrust," *Indian Express*, August 23, 2014.

55. Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Jonathan Spencer, *Anthropology, Politics and the State: Democracy and Violence in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

a PFI seminar on social justice in the state's capital, Bangalore, in November 2012, the PFI state president of Karnataka asked the Muslim audience to contemplate a *pariyaya rajikiya* (an alternate system of politics) in relation to the "current distorted and corrupt political system." He then promised that the PFI would "tackle this untidy environment" of Indian politics. In this context, PFI cadres advocated "a return to social democracy," emphasizing that "social democratic values are Islamic values," "democracy is the best system between socialism and capitalism," and "social democracy is most compatible with Islam." In 2014 the PFI's political party, the Social Democratic Party of India, published a small booklet, "Social Democracy and the Welfare State: Conceptual Foundations of Positive Politics in India." It stressed the importance of social democracy, giving historical definitions of the nation-state and the welfare system, and explanations of how India's social democracy is under threat from neoliberal and nationalist developments. The PFI's emphasis on political education about India's democracy and legal system is connected to the leaders' view that most Indian Muslims are not ready for democratic participation and decision-making, which is why Muslim voters are exploited and manipulated during elections.

During my fieldwork, youth cadres described PFI's leaders as "modern," "urban," and "politically" and "religiously educated," while they considered themselves "rural," "traditional," and strongly influenced by a spiritual and folk Islam. A journalist and supporter argued in Calicut that the semiliterate PFI cadres will need only a minimum of political "campus education" to make them receptive to ideas of social justice and human rights, and therefore supportive of the PFI's agenda.[56] At the PFI's recruitment events, candidates are required to attend a two-day training camp that involves political and legal awareness classes. The chairman explained, "It's crucial in this early phase to observe the reaction of those who want to join the movement. Only after we have checked their response to our agenda, are we accepting them as members. It's like an examination of character and aptitude."[57] In these training sessions, senior activists deliver speeches, explain the political and legal system, and interpret the history of Indian Muslims. Members are urged to internalize the current and historical state of Muslim marginalization and victimhood through reports on literacy rates and educational status, and

56. Author interview, December 28, 2014, Calicut.
57. Author interview, December 30, 2014, Calicut.

statistics on Muslim representation in the police and the Indian administration. This includes the results of the Sachar Report that Muslims are socioeconomically disadvantaged compared to other religious groups. The PFI has sponsored students of law and journalism, aiming to shift the balance in the media, government, and bureaucratic institutions, in which Muslims are underrepresented.[58] Young PFI cadres also told me of their hopes to receive scholarships from the organization, after having served and proved their commitment. In a conversation in New Delhi, a PFI activist explained that he had only finished twelfth grade, being unable to attend university because of financial and family constraints. He was concerned that he would turn thirty very soon, and regarded the PFI as his last chance to start a degree in journalism, with the organization's financial support.[59] In the last section, I will describe a PFI leader and why he left an apolitical Islamic movement and became attracted to the PFI's promotion of rights consciousness and political education.

PORTRAIT OF A PFI LEADER

Aziz is a well-respected PFI leader, responsible for the organization's public relations. He is 35, married, and works in Bangalore for an IT company that he described as a "big client of Microsoft." He elaborated in our interviews and conversations between 2011 and 2015 how he became attracted to PFI's promotion of rights consciousness and political education.[60] He was born and raised in a Muslim family in South India, and his childhood was defined by "growing up in a religiously mixed neighborhood." Only when he was working toward a business management degree at the prestigious Manipal University in Udupi, Karnataka, between 2000 and 2003, did his sense of security and belonging change, due to the increased Hindu-nationalist activities on campus. Aziz recalled this formative, though highly troublesome and vulnerable experience, at university, far away from his family, when his religious beliefs and culture became a crucial identity marker:

58. "National Media Meet: Quest for an Alternative Media," Popular Front of India, August 14, 2009; "Media Workshop Conducted in Manipur," Popular Front of India, March 7, 2015.

59. Author interview, January 15, 2015, Delhi. See also Ahter Farouqui, *Muslims and Media Images: News versus Views* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

60. Author interviews, August 19, 2011, December 9 and 24, 2012, and January 10, 2015, in Bangalore; August 30 and 31, 2011, and January 2, 2015, in Mangalore; and September 20, 2011, in Delhi.

> For the first time in my life, I felt what it means when others map out your identity because of your religion and for being a Muslim. Before that I was never asked about my religious identity. Only because of that experience, I became interested in the study of politics and started reading [investigative] magazines such as *Dalit Voice* and *Outlook*.

PFI members often traced their current political and group consciousness to an initial phase of autodidactic learning, encounters with discrimination, and outrage over the Muslim suffering in Kashmir, Palestine, and other parts of the world. Aziz further linked the awakening of his political consciousness to the destruction of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in 1992; the 2002 Gujarat carnage and the subsequent riots throughout India; and the September 11 attacks, when Islam and Muslim identity became the center of debates on national security.

Before joining the PFI, Aziz was a member of an Islamic reformist organization, the Student Islamic Organization. In retrospect, he concluded that "these purely religious organizations are doing an excellent job in spreading Islam, but when the police talks to them, they are shivering and don't know how to respond." This experience was echoed by other PFI members, including a 26-year-old student activist in the Campus Front office in Calicut, Kerala. He explained the dilemma for young Muslim students:

> Right-wing campus groups like the ABVP [Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the student wing of the BJP] are very well organized, and are trying to divide the communities. We are nervous about being Muslims, because we are their prime targets. Before I came in touch with the PFI, I had no idea of the legal help and other support we could get. The PFI taught us that we can also organize, file court cases and petitions, or even hire lawyers.[61]

These young PFI respondents specified that PFI's political and legal education reduced their insecurity and raised their confidence in a context of regular intimidation by Hindu-nationalist groups, police harassment, and racial profiling of the Muslim community. Aziz further stressed the need for legal education given the increasing public anxiety around youth radicalization and terrorism in the public domain.

61. Author interview, January 1, 2015, Calicut.

> Most of our members are between 15 and 35 years old [males]. That age group is the most depressed and receptive to radical ideas. After the destruction of the Babri mosque, some young people started to turn to extremist ideas, because they had lost hope in the political system. But when people feel insecure and lose faith in the government and the judicial system, they are easily tempted by radical forces. We are a very big barrier [and] never allow the Muslim youth to speak against the nation. That is why we try to organize and politically educate them. People have to know what they are fighting for and how do to it.

PFI leaders told me that they believed that the movement is able to "absorb" and "channel destructive elements" among anxious and frustrated Muslims and guide them to the "right path" into "the mainstream" by fostering a feeling of agency. In other words, the PFI is able to provide a sense of "system accessibility" by showing disenfranchised Muslim youths that they are not powerless but in fact have a stake in politics, legal procedures, or the job market.[62]

Aziz joined the PFI (then locally known as the Karnataka Forum of Dignity) in 2003, and started working "full-time" in the lower administration after he finished his degree. Since he was a talented speaker, he quickly rose in the organizational hierarchy and soon started to train new recruits. He recalled that members were trained to go to deprived Muslim neighborhoods and rural areas, where cadres directly approached individual households or used public spaces to disseminate the agenda to the wider Muslim population. A 25-year-old student member from Kerala elaborated in Calicut in 2014 how his travel and work experiences with the PFI had shaped his political understanding. He spent three months in Kashmir in the wake of the earthquake in 2013 and two months in Muzaffarnagar after the riot in 2013. He said that he was part of a team that carried out a survey of victims of sexual violence to help them obtain legal assistance and compensation in Muzaffarnagar.[63]

Aziz also reflected on his time as a young PFI member:

> I was mighty impressed by the new language of human rights and the constitutional approach of the PFI. Other organizations were mostly occupied with local grievances and Islam-related issues, but the PFI emphasized the national issues for minorities. Especially the concept of legal and political

62. For discussion of the impact of Muslim organizations regarding the sense of agency and well-being of their constituencies, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Introduction: Islamic and Social Movement Theory," in Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 66–67.

63. Author interview, January 5, 2015, Calicut.

> empowerment and the leaders' sense of professionalism, almost like an international cooperation, were very appealing for young Muslims like me.

He also remembered that "like many Muslim families whose children study technical degrees, my parents wanted me to stay away from these political activities. Working in such a field was seen as dangerous." The PFI's language of legal empowerment, self-respect, and professionalism resonated more strongly with young Muslims than the obedient and inward-looking approach to politics of their parents' generation and the ulama.[64] Hence, through its legal pragmatism and political education, combined with various welfare initiatives, the PFI facilitates meaningful life experiences that are highly responsive to part of its predominately young-adult cadre base. The leaders aim to change the self-perception of the members and the wider Muslim constituency from passive to active citizens, imbued with political agency, legal knowledge, and self-determination. Thus, Muslim organizations can appeal to their young Muslim support base not only "because they offer modes of being and belonging, but also because they construct new imaginations of the community and the individual."[65]

CONCLUSION

The article commenced with a brief review of the literature on the growing involvement of Muslim groups in different national polities. Using the case of Muslim minority politics in India's democracy, the empirical analysis discussed the different strategies by an assertive Muslim organization, the PFI, to appeal to disgruntled and intimidated Muslim constituencies by providing a sense of agency and by aiming for a transformation of values and mindset among its supporters through political education and legal activism. India's Muslim community, and in particular semi-educated Muslim youths, are especially affected by unemployment in the job market, police discrimination, and attacks by Hindu nationalists.[66] In my fieldwork, young PFI cadres talked about corruption in parliament, and described

64. For more on intergenerational dynamics in Muslim organizations, see Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India.*

65. Mamadou Diouf, "Engaging Post-Colonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space," *African Studies Review* 46:1 (2003): 7.

66. Sachar, *Social, Economic and Educational Status.*

feeling frustrated and alienated from the upper-caste structures in the public and private sectors.

We have considered the PFI's organizational approach, which combines political education, legal assistance, court cases, and welfare initiatives. Members were attracted to the PFI by its assertive language of institutional justice and human rights and by its style of professionalism and discipline, which is different from the culture of obedience of their parents' generation and the inward-looking and ritual-focused ulama. My findings indicate that young cadres and supporters had a heightened sense of agency and self-respect after participating in PFI-led programs that taught Muslims about their legal rights, including the results of the Sachar Report, and political awareness, where they learned how to defend each other from police discrimination through court cases, petitions, boycotts, and public protests.

This practical and legal approach, which many Muslim organizations in India have embraced, is also reflected in the PFI's response to the current BJP government. Outside observers expected Muslim minority leaders to be intimidated by the presence of an assertive Hindu-nationalist government backed by a landslide victory in May 2014. However, Muslim organizations have managed to build organizational resilience, political institutions, and a highly disciplined cadre base through the sustained promotion of political and legal education over the last 10 years. Therefore, citizenship claims and legal pragmatism can be seen as symbolic as well as rational attempts to regain political autonomy and confidence for the Muslim population in India. The emerging Muslim lay leaders have rallied against secular elites and Hindu nationalists, who have questioned the loyalty of Indian Muslims in the past. Such civic claims have been accompanied by a public display of patriotic, secular, and Islamic signifiers, questioning the relegation of religion to the private sphere, especially for religious-minority communities in India.

A growing body of literature acknowledges that Muslim organizations can constructively engage in democratic processes and that Muslim minority politics in India has become increasingly accommodating, challenging the widely held perception of Muslim activism as anti-democratic and detrimental to India's national security. Often ignored in national security debates, as well as in academic scholarship, is the promotion of political participation and legal pragmatism by Muslim organizations. However, various Muslim organizations claim to provide the rhetoric and tools that prevent youth from being drawn to violent groups such as ISIS and

al-Qaeda, and to improve the well-being and empowerment of their young and marginalized participants.

Hence, the arrival of the PFI indicates more internal democratization and political fragmentation of Muslim minority politics in India. Like other political stakeholders that emerged in the past, including dalit and lower-caste parties in the 1980s, the new Muslim organizations and their political parties will try to win support by highlighting the difference between them and the established Muslim elite parties. That is why the PFI is more assertive than traditional Muslim elites and Islamic authorities. It still needs to prove its organizational capability, transcend symbolic politics, and gain political leverage in state politics. This new trend and trajectory of Muslim assertions and legal pragmatism in India calls for further empirical and comparative research.