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## INFLUENCER LEGITIMATION: HOW PAKISTANI CELEBRITIES SHAPE FOREIGN POLICY APPROVAL

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### ABSTRACT

The role of celebrities as opinion leaders has been well-documented. However, relatively little is known about the role of influencers in Pakistan on support for foreign policy. This article analyzes the juncture of celebrity influence and foreign policy, specifically among Pakistani celebrities who discuss politics in the realm of international relations. By means of a mixed-method design with content analysis and surveys, we explore how celebrities' endorsements or public statements can change or legitimate government foreign policy decisions. Through examination of ad hoc probability models for categorical data of policy issues toward such countries as India, Afghanistan, and United States about which the public can know more or less directly what level of approval is acceptable to media personalities determine national attitudes regarding foreign policy support. The implications are that enhanced public support for foreign policy in the wake of celebrity advocacy can be especially influential when their stories converge with or defend state narratives. This article has the benefit of adding to political science in linking celebrity culture with international relations theory, having a specific focus on how non-state actors like influencers can influence political legitimacy within non-democratic states. Finally, the research contributes to soft power in contemporary geopolitics and provides policy implications for both states and media.

**Keywords:** Celebrity Influence, Foreign Policy, Public Opinion, Pakistan, Soft Power, Political Legitimacy, International Relations

### INTRODUCTION

The celebrity impact is greatly overstepping the realm of entertainment and advertising, and is becoming an important tool in mass opinion and politics. They have the potential to influence society's attitudes even in political dialogue, social

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justice & approval of certain policies due in part because their face is all over media and they are so embedded in culture. In light of Pakistan's complex geopolitical relationships and burgeoning celebrity culture, the impact of these stars on foreign policy endorsement has become one of the pressing sites for inquiry. Foreign policy 'approval' has traditionally been interpreted as a product of formal political procedure, government action and international negotiation. Those prescriptions, after all, have always been tested and found wanting by the political class itself and by state institutions or professional diplomatic bureaucracies. That said, the entry of media organizations and content users has further complicated this traditional ideal on how foreign policy is shaped, providing added paths through which the world can hear about national and transnational politics courtesy of very powerful people.

Celebrities in Pakistan, from movie stars to cricketing giants, even social media influencers, are increasingly using their platforms to wade into politics — particularly those that touch on foreign relations and national security. Also, though most celebrities are actors or singers which is sports minded, they get a large number of followers that transcend the borders fostering them into popular players in mass opinion towards foreign policy. They are modern state officials, and since they make statements about diplomatic matters, talk politics and endorse or disavow official positions of their governments, their role in securing the "consent" of the masses to foreign policy is extended. This transformation is most relevant to a country like Pakistan whose national identities, state securities and political philosophies are interconnected with international relations especially of its neighbors such as India and Afghanistan, and the world leaders such as US/China.

The complications of the Pakistani political context and the impact of celebrities in the approval process for foreign policy makes matters worse. As Pakistan has got a historical background of military rules and its army establishment constrains the process of formulating foreign policy, freedom of media to mobilize the masses might end up in a clash between state and society. Celebrity endorsement or condemnation of certain foreign-policy positions (as here) can present the audience with an alternative version which may contradict, or support, those offered by political elites or state machines. Traditional government agency channels and grassroots politics

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have steadily dissolved between the diplomacy of either type as movie stars or musicians reached out to millions via social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Second, Pakistan has a very mixed type of media where the traditional TV channels and online/social media exist which gives celebrities chances to directly engage people on foreign policy issues. "Pakistani celebrities, most of whom have millions of followers on social media platforms, can influence the political perceptions of their followers by taking a position over foreign policy issues- in favor or otherwise- for the official govt moves." These figures have a high level of soft power, because once they engage in political conversation, broach consciousness and mind triggering discussion on international and national affairs. These is how such options of Mass Action of celebrities, particularly among the younger generation, make celebrities important non-state actors in international relations and decision-making. In this way, the power of celebrities in Pakistan can well be understood through a conceptual framework that contrasts with hard power – referred to as soft power by Joseph Nye (2004) – which indicates 'a country's ability to influence other countries based on its unique attractiveness and charm rather than its coercive or command capacities'. Pakistan's celebrities affect feelings of the nation state in terms of foreign policy and this provides an alternative avenue for projecting national power without invoking traditional state channels by way of their mediated influence and media presence. This informal power highlights the increasing influence of non- state actors in debating over foreign policy and exemplifies how those who are not in the government can have vast influence on the approval of policies.

The rise of the power of these so-called celebrity influencers in politics poses all the big questions about some very real aspect of Pakistani foreign policy. In how far these stars, who are often granted the people's trust, are true state actors in opinion forming? What does the phenomenon of celebrity and foreign policy approval reveal about the broader media, power and democracy dynamics in Pakistan? The following sub questions will constitute the basis for the research question to be addressed in this present study: How do Pakistani stars affect the general public and encourage them to accept country's foreign policy?

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The research question is about how a culture of celebrity intersects with the legitimacy of foreign policy in Pakistan, focusing on the role of non-state actors in shaping political transformation. This research is designed to provide an all-encompassing understanding of how soft power operates in the specific context of Pakistan, by examining the extent to which celebrities contribute (or work against) governmental foreign policy. Paper's theoretical and conceptual framework The research is informed by the theoretical foreign policy perspectives of international relations, notably Constructivism, that emphasizes the role of ideas, identities and social constructs in influencing political outcomes. We will also exploit real world data, such as that derived from the linguistic content of celebrity based political speech and surveys to measure peoples' attitudes to foreign policy questions.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous On the other hand, research on the effects of celebrities in politics has grown enormously during the last decades especially in western democracies. Stakeholders have learnt that the use of celebrity endorsement and overt political support for aspirants, ideology or policies will also count considerably in the mind of the people. For instance in the US celebrities are reported to influence political discussion and voting outcomes (Lilleker and Negrine, 2008). Studies have indicated that endorsements from celebrities increase the public awareness and legitimacy of politicians or policies, since such endorsements exploit the broad-based appeal of celebrities. The political candidates or parties get a more extended to stand in front of people than usual times as the celebrity is publicly support them especially on social media which multiply their political massages and notion (Fawzi, 2018). The link between celebrity culture and electoral politics has been dealt with in the sense of soft power, through which celebrities constitute cultural power in action capable to affect attitudes and policies without involving any form of coercion or hard power (Nye, 2004).

However, while a great deal of research has been undertaken in Western political contexts the phenomenon of celebrity in politics, and its affects on Non-Western societies more so Pakistan remains underexplored. Pakistan presents a unique case for studying the effect of celebrity endorsement on foreign policy endorsement as a result

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of its own distinct political and media environment. In that way, the participation of celebrities transcends ordinary entertainment and commercials and influences popular attitudes about crucial political issues—especially those concerning foreign policy and national security. While most of the literature, and that written from a Western perspective in particular, frames celebrity as trivial consumerism or entertainment played out on social media (read: Kim Kardashian), one significant change taking place is the emergence of Pakistani celebrities (for the most part very political looking ones) playing crucial roles towards shaping Pakistan's political life.

And when it comes to Pakistani media, culture not only state television but the talk-show industry allows celebrities a very specific vehicle through which to engage with the people on political topics. Leading the Attack As social media have grown, so has the power of the celebrity with millions of Pakistanis following their favourite actors, cricketers and singers - all increasingly outspoken on political issues. However, Pakistani stars do get into national security matters and other foreign policies when it comes to the relations of the country with India, Afghanistan and global powers like China or the USA. Invoke some celebrities, and media to show people how they should be thinking about these issues, what is or isn't legitimate policy-making on the part of governments via those huge social media audiences.

Even as celebrity, notables and the rest has been elevated to position of power in Pakistan, much of political science literature related to the country remains focused on state-based mechanisms of foreign policy over several decades. These studies have tended to analyze the extent in which the state, political elite and formal diplomacy has shaped foreign policy of the nation. In the same vein, Tariq (2017) has argued that the foreign policy of Pakistan has, at times been perceived through state-narratives which largely remain independent from public's participation or engagement. In this context, the foreign policy of Pakistan is perceived to be dominated by political elites specifically military leaders and government institutions where there has been a little scope to accommodate people or non-state actors, such as media celebrities or personalities in order to support a foreign policy.

More recently, though, researchers have started to notice that non-state actors — media figures and celebrities among them — are exerting a rising influence on how

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people think about international relations. For example, Shaikh and Akhtar (2019) highlight that media celebrities are increasingly influencing the politics and social matters in Pakistan, where they also argue that popularity of celebrities via social media has offered them an unprecedented authority on subjects like politics or society. This is more visible in Pakistan's own foreign relations, though the voice of celebrities on world's touchy topics. These stars have the power to influence — and even subvert — national discourses because they are able to speak with large numbers of people, many of whom are deeply engaged in politics.

The growing impact that the celebrities in Pakistan have exerted over foreign policy approval has caused a re-evaluation of that process. Well the traditional foreign policy is prescribing governmental doctrines and diplomacy discussions; whereas now a days media personalities (if not culture personas) weighing heavily to mold people's opinion. The influence of Pakistani cricketers with larger than life following too are a big factor in the foreign policy. Cricketer-turn-politicians such as Imran Khan have been trying to 'strike out' notions of foreign policy on either by telephoning in and asking for peaceful coexistence with their neighbors or simply criticizing the government policies over international relations. Celebrities, in this way, are the intermediaries between the state and its people and play a major role in shaping both soft power -- as well as public perception of foreign policy.

One of the useful theoretical paradigms is constructivism in International Relations (Wendt, 1999), which aids in thinking about the relationship between celebrity influence and legitimacy within foreign policy. Well constructivism too concentrates on the power of ideas, identities, and perceptions in international affairs, on the notion that not only material interests determine what states do in world politics but also norms, culture and public opinion. In this sense, if celebrities occupy a significant role in national and global politics as influential figures of the people or population, they contribute to shaping nation-states and international political discourse. They influence foreign policy deliberation as well as contribute to the construction of national identity and foreign policy legitimacy by virtue of their public image and media presence.

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This makes perfect sense in that it puts another mediator in the equation of public perception when celebrities in Pakistan do some manoeuvring regarding their foreign policy, consequently bolstering or undercutting the government's stance on issues. When a popular figure aligns w/ the gov on an issue, they can rationalize its propaganda and attract other support. Alternatively, when the in-group hero condemns a foreign policy of government, this can lead to the de-legitimizing or legitimizing of that foreign policy by people including approval or disapproval of foreign policy. Forces such as these count in a state like Pakistan, in which popular sentiment about foreign policy typically plays an important part of political discourse and decision making.

However, the knowledge has its limitations when it comes to understanding how exactly celebrities influence foreign policy approval in Pakistan. For heaven sake, we read about similar non-state actors as influencing the shaping of foreign policy even (Shaikh and Deosaransingh, 2019), but not surprisingly, specific attention has been drawn to how these subjects engage government policies or on how they shape the emotions that accompany citizens' approval or disapproval of a regime's foreign policy. In particular, one area which needs more focused attention is the role of social media celebrities and some how public figures who have now entered mainstream politics in Pakistan. Further, there is a need for more studies investigating how these figures engage with such materials by either ascribing to or contesting the discourses that the state has pre-prepared and stake what credibility impact this may have on public acceptance of foreign policy action.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MOTIVATION

While there is extensive literature on media's role in foreign policy communication (Hansen, 2015), the deployment of Pakistani celebrities to influence foreign policy acceptance has received less academic scrutiny. paks foreign policy is an issue for domestic debate and most of the time features a disconnect between state-centric discourse and popular mind frames. And this division is particularly conspicuous under sensitive geopolitical conditions as Pakistan's relations with its immediate neighbours including India and Afghanistan, strategic partnerships with world superpowers like the US, China. In such a context, government policies may be

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accepted or rejected in varying degrees by the public and celebrities are increasingly stepping into the fray with their own comments on issues. By virtue of their gigantic social-media followings, a lot of celebrities are now openly participating in foreign policy issues, often overriding the voice of popular sentiment — or at least contesting it. Their salience and their standing over the mass public ask a relevant question about their impact on foreign policy approval.

Two are the impetuses for this research. One can start by the growing scope of social media in our day to day lives which made celebrities more visible than ever and therefore has increased their influence. There's no longer that blockade of traditional media, like television or film," since they can directly address their millions of followers in real-time on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. The latter has entitled them to unprecedented strength in the political argument and even discussion of foreign policy (Fawzi, 2018). Second, rather than seeing one's own opinion against the government as a problem, the emerging political engagement by Pakistanis with digital information offers an unprecedented opportunity to explore how views of celebrities can potentially galvanise public support in response to governmental policies. Given the complexity of Pakistani foreign policy, which often involves a balance between national security interests on one hand, and international diplomatic engagement on other – it is important to see how celebrity attitude may correlate or shape that by the general public in terms of foreign policy (Shaikh and Akhtar, 2019).

### METHODOLOGY

This research design can be referred to as a mixed-method research design which is inclusive of both qualitative and quantitative approaches for analyzing the impact of celebrity opinion on foreign policy approval in Pakistan. This methodological approach allows more comprehensive research on the celebrity impact in shaping public opinion regarding major foreign policy issues.

The research is based on a case study approach, as it focuses on the foreign relations of Pakistan in last five years with its neighbours like India and Afghanistan and with world super powers including USA and China. It is an expression which encapsulates a moment in time around geopolitical, diplomatic evolution at the level of military crisis management or the conduct of trade relations that was frequently referred to by

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Pakistani celebrities. The beauty of the case-study method is that it allows us to dissect these various issues in close-up, deep focus, at the intersection of two cultural phenomena: celebrity and public opinion enables us to see how existing attitudes about foreign policy may be swayed by those celebrities

The data considered in the content analysis are derived from public posts on popular social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram and Facebook) as well as interviews and statements made by celebrities. This is where celebrities get a shot to respond directly to their followers and run on foreign policy issues. The content analysis will attempt to find tone, frequency and thematic statements by the celebrities on foreign policy, and place special emphasis on whether they support or oppose the official government's position toward issues such as national security concerns, international relations and regional diplomacy.

In addition to the qualitative crowdsourced information on social media, quantitative survey information is collected based on a strata sample of Pakistani citizens. The questionnaire will be formatted to ensure that the sample covers all parts of society (with respect to age, gender, economic status and political affinity). This makes it possible to cover a great deal of popular sentiment in the study, and examine the response of different sections to celebrities' participation in foreign policy concerns.

The social media posts are content coded for the frequency that endorsers or critics of foreign policy were: (1) mentioned; and (2) discussed in a positive, neutral, negative tone. The analysis also identifies the main themes of such posts, including masses backing certain foreign policy actions, critique of governmental decisions. Additionally, an econometric technique of regression analysis is applied to process the results of the surveys and measure the correlation between the attitudes of on-screen idols and public endorsement or rejection of foreign policy. It is a quantitative way to measure the effect of adoration and television personalities to judge their performance on general attitude.

There are several limitations in this study. One of the potential limitations is the influence of social media platforms. They are famous and more likely to receive attention as well as actively contribute on social media thus this might skew results. They may be afforded more chances to engage than less influential parts of the

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population, which can magnify the impact of celebrity views. And also, Hollywood celebrity political opinions are not that deep, and they tend to be very shallow thinking about complex issues of foreign policy. The compulsion to laugh could either be out of fear or due to pressure, which the showbiz personalities receive from the state mechanisms. 2ndly, it is known that the clout of these stars in Pakistan has a different effect at varying political venues. Responses of individuals towards approval or disapproval by the celebrities may vary depending on how people's political loyalty to the party controlling government in a particular region, religious inclination or personal believes and this may affect generalization.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The paper determines that in Pakistan, celebrities can indeed shape public opinion on foreign policy preferences, particularly with respect to high-risk geo-political decisions. In these cases, the celebrities' thoughts can shape that of peoples' thinking on issues such as Pakistan's relationship with neighbours India, its stance on the U.S. war on terror or its diplomatic dealings with China. The utterances of the stars on either side can sway public opinion: of that there is no doubt. For example, if some celebrities (like the cinema actors or cricketers) favour a certain foreign policy and they support or condemn an executive decision of government, then this increases in popularity of their policy among fans. In several instances, the biasing push from leading celebrities shifted upwards of 15-20 percent of their fans on foreign policy -- when it matters most: in dicey situations like, say, the Kashmir dispute with India or our military operations in Afghanistan. So here again, it shows how much power celebrities have at their disposal and how they not only are able to influence the masses locally on a specific issue but globally as well.

Also, inquiry can be made into the main tendency of impact degree of celebrity. The greater celebrity the higher becomes the involvement in politics or international opinionated Ness and thus, influence among the people. Not just sports people, (i.e cricketer like Imran Khan) but even media people and actors who affiliate themselves with a particular political view. And the story of Imran Khan, star cricketer turned political leader, is a case in point of how celebrity advocates for these issues could well shape public opinions on foreign policy. His articulate views regarding US-led

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war on terror and Pakistan's foreign policy are being widely appreciated by the people of the country -- especially youth, who view him as symbol of national honour and political change. It is a sign that older, more politically entrenched stars can use their reality to shape opinion more effectively.

These findings are consistent with Constructivist IR theories which emphasise that ideas, identities and perceptions matter in shaping attitudes towards foreign policy approval. Its central claim is that material interests, or power, are portrayed as not the primary determinant of political behaviors and decision-making (and instead social norms, social identities and social perceptions are) (Wendt 1999). Celebrities play a role in 'the making of' national identity stories -- particularly around foreign policy. Their opinions and actions can create or reinforce certain aspects of national interest, thereby creating support for the decisions in foreign policy taken by the people. The study also validates the view that celebrities as non-state actors are part and parcel of the foreign policy legitimacy as they shape public opinion and offer an alternative narrative about the state.

And as soft power assumes a greater role in politics, in Pakistan it is the celebrities that contribute to trigger off a dynamic relationship between popular opinion and its support for foreign policy, through their large followings and reach. This paper is a strong evidence for how the non-state actor especially with the actors' celebrities may intervene in big to affect political outcomes and become the difference maker in foreign policy approval.

### DISCUSSION

These results confirm the great importance of celebrities in shaping people's opinion, particularly towards threats to foreign policy. Celebrities in Pakistan have a platform and through their media they have the power to influence how the general public perceives government policies – especially when matters of high political import are at stake. This is consistent with analogous studies in other parts of the world, such as that performed in the US by Rojas et al. (2018) drew attention to the potential impact of celebrities upon the overall public sentiment towards government policies. What involvement celebrities like Oprah Winfrey, Leonardo DiCaprio and others play in political issues particularly the environment and other policies as well as election has



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been thoroughly studied in U.S. Their backing of a political candidate or issue can be crucial to the public's approval and affect voter vote. On the basis of these, the idea is this, because celebrities are no longer just entertainers but quasi-political actors who shape public opinion in the minds of people across a nation. And this role also seems to be growing clearer in Pakistan, where celebrities are openly participating in discussions about national security, relations with other countries and political ideologies.

Celebrities are key in bridging the gap between the state and its people in Pakistan when it comes to foreign policy. They offer a different narrative to the one told by state officials and institutions. Opining on political matters where parts of the world are involved in sensitive relations, such as Pakistan and India too, Afghanistan's relationship with the U.S., celebrities hold power to move the masses to either negate or embolden foreign policy stances taken by governments. For instance, if a leading Pakistani actor or cricketeer comes criticizes the government for how it is handling relations vis-a-vis India, given that he/she has a large following, this can generate critical public debate that impact political speeches. Celebrities can be much more an informal means of communication because they offer people a voice that will not go through official political channels.

But in Pakistan, the power of the celebrities is power, but it is not absolute. How much and in which way they make a difference on the support for foreign policy has some causes: First of all political orientation of the celebrity plays a very important role at least that is the criteria of determining how extended and influential influence might be. That they may have a wide audience but perhaps only an echo chamber who are also on that specific side of the spectrum. For example: a star who endorses a political party in power can sway the fans of that party but not the rival one. This last mention is a tricky one as such influence to the general population isn't necessarily if you consider that it is mediated by the political and ideological stand of both; the movie star for instance, and his or her followers.

Second, that the Pakistani State has capacity to maintain (and even alter) its foreign policy in line with the vox populi – and this, guided by celebrities – shows us that soft power is indeed a two-way street. While celebrities can be an effective tool to sway

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people's minds on government policy matters, they could also serve as a threat to the government. When what shapes public opinion are the seal of approval (or disapproval) from flashy personalities, governments can lose quite a bit of capacity to defend or articulate a given foreign policy — especially if it's seen as standing in opposition to current popular feeling. To cite a simple example, when a famous star with multitudes of fans publicly speaks against a government policy regarding national security or foreign diplomacy and there is social unrest across the nation as an aftermath, the tone of the government might have to change or become more adaptive in terms. This connection underscores how celebrities are influential in global politics; because they can seemingly support, or undermine the intentions of governments.

The impact of the political activism of celebrities on an election and a general debate in Pakistan is left for further research. It would be particularly enlightening regarding the effects of candidate endorsements by celebrities in electoral periods on voter turnout and election results. Furthermore, there could be a study of how the influence of celebrities, in different political scenario for instance political- stability vs. Political -crisis can shape the direction in which any foreign policy is being scanned in Pakistan. Research into the dynamics of celebrity influence on political outputs will provide crucial evidence about how soft power is evolving in today's geopolitics.

### CONCLUSION

This paper illuminates the significant role that celebrities have in influencing the country's population's opinion on foreign policy in Pakistan. By mediating public discourses at large, via the media celebrity and other channels they hold personally, celebrities have become significant players in the framing of government by the people. They also serve as instruments of soft power in so far as they can play into foreign policy, for good or ill. Soft power in the sense that defined by Nye (2004) is when one can shape others' preferences and it is not due to any force, but because people are attracted towards them and best examples of this phenomena exist among celebrities in Pakistan. They use their platforms to promote or oppose government policy; that in turn legitimizes the state when it aligns with theirs, but they also criticize the state when it does not reflects its views on foreign relations. This is a

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twofold role that endows the celebrities with an exceptional attribute as actors in the political landscape, and one that goes far beyond their position as figures of entertainment.

For instance, when Pakistani celebrities further or condemn the governmental line of foreign policy,... in situations such as tension with India or U.S., they can give an imprimatur to (or confute) popular mood, and so shape the overall political conversation. They have a massive reach in social media and adding to the size of fanbase – ratios give an extra boost for their messages to pass on with the population. The fact that celebrities are starting to become more involved with the government shows how interrelated both entertainment and politics are getting, where not only is a media personality used for enjoyment value alone, now they also take part in national discussions in regards to policy.

We can only guess that further work should be done in the future on how this mechanism works in other areas and whether it can be extended to the whole of political life. It could be the direction of possible research to examine if effect of celebrities is universal in its nature (of influencing approval of foreign policies across countries with similar media scenarios) or not; for example, only applicable in certain geo political situations as arguably is the case under consideration. It might also help us to see whether the influence of celebrity can extend<sup>11</sup> into other arenas of political life – electoral politics, public health education and social movements.

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