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**A Generally Bellicose Society's  
Antisocial Media:  
Reporting Murder & Debating God  
in a Nation at War**

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Joan Shorenstein Center  
**PRESS • POLITICS**



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Harvard University  
John F. Kennedy School of Government

## 1. The Murder Of Salmaan Taseer

### *A Liberal Governor And His Popular Assassin*

*“Mera azm itna buland hai ke paraye shaulon ka dar nahin*

*Mujhe khauf aatish-e-gul se hai, ye kaheen chaman ko jala ne de”*

*[My resolve is so strong that I do not fear the flames from without*

*I fear only the radiance of the flowers that it might burn my garden down]*

– Shakeel Badayuni couplet referenced by Salmaan<sup>1</sup> Taseer on Twitter,  
8 hours before his assassination

### **Introduction: A Big Man Dies in a Big Way**

Salmaan Taseer was a big man. He was famous for having more than three meals a day, punctuating them with breaks enjoying Cuban cigars and even grabbing the odd drink during working hours. He was fond of women, and had a reputation of enjoying the company of young fashion models who could be found on his arm at Lahore’s finest soirees. To protect his hard-partying eyes, he wore dark wraparound shades all day, even indoors, and was rarely seen in a tie or the traditional Pakistani political garb of *shalwar kameez*, almost always sporting a turtleneck to complete his “man in black” look. He collected art, as well as enemies.

For a Pakistani politician, this sort of indulgence was not unheard of. But the edge Taseer had over his contemporaries was that he did it all with extra panache. His quips against the conformist establishment, his off-hand jokes about the sexual misgivings of mullahs along with his other detractors on the right and most importantly, his self-styled guardianship of Pakistani liberalism, only added to his aura of brash invincibility.

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<sup>1</sup> The official spelling of Taseer’s first name is Salmaan, as confirmed by his family via Facebook and as provided on his [official memorial website](#). However, throughout this paper, his name is intermittently spelt as *Salman* - the usual Pakistani way to spell that name – in different citations. I hope that doesn’t confuse my readers.

For millions of young Pakistanis, Taseer was, simply, cool. A self-made man, who earned his billions with brilliant entrepreneurship before entering politics (a feat which was a reversal of the revenue-generation trends of other local politicians), made him a better-than-the-rest role model. His Tweets, his girlfriends, his refusal to obey a rule banning kite-flying which was implemented by the conservative administration of Punjab, the province he was given the gubernatorial powers to oversee, made him a bad boy who you wanted to be on the good side of.

On January 4, 2011, the governor of Pakistan's most populous province finished a late lunch with a friend at an outdoor café in Islamabad's Kausar Market. It had been a dry affair, as the restaurant, *Table Talk*, though famous for its fusion cuisine, is also known for being frequented by local and international spies who blend in well with the regular society elites, polo players and even high-end prostitutes. Thus, even Taseer had been careful to make it a discrete and quick meeting, convincing his friend to accompany him back to the provincial capital of Lahore on a road trip later that day. It would be more fun than flying, the governor had insisted. Plus, they could do justice to a bottle of single-malt whiskey that was waiting in the car, and catch up like old friends like to<sup>1</sup>.

As they neared their parked vehicle (a Honda Civic that was to shuttle the governor to his official, bullet-resistant SUV) and Taseer approached the rear-left door, one of the last sounds he heard was the clipped double-click of the bolt of a Type-56 Chinese submachine gun being locked behind him. Perhaps thoughts of the relaxing journey that lay ahead occupied him, for a more cautious observer would have known that the troop of black-fatigued Elite Force police guards that were his security detail for that day in Islamabad would not "lock and load" their firearms unless there was an immediate threat in the vicinity.

"Teflon" Taseer, as I had once called him in an interview, never bothered to look back and check for any signs of a danger or disturbance. Not even when he heard Malik Mumtaz Qadri, one of the constables recently attached to the "VVIP" contingent, recite

the Muslim *Kalima*: “*La Ilaha Illulallah, Mohammad-ur-Rusool Allah*” (There is only one Allah, and Mohammad is his Prophet).

Qadri’s “SMG” (as it is referred to by the Pakistanis) poured out 27 rounds of locally manufactured 7.62 caliber into Taseer’s back and neck. Made in China for a fraction of the cost of the original AK-47, on which it is modeled as a variant, and sold to Pakistan for paramilitary and special operations service in the ‘90s (when the Islamic Republic, besieged by American sanctions, was desperately seeking arms from whoever was willing to sell them), the Type-56 — even the low-tech Pakistani version — is a rather fail-safe weapon that can fire bursts at 400 rounds per minute. That means 27 rounds would have taken a bit over four seconds to discharge. In effect, Qadri’s recitation of Islam’s most sacred verse — his declaration of faith — probably matched the time his firearm’s magazine was emptied into Taseer’s body. Sixteen of the rounds would leave gaping exit wounds. As he was rushed to an emergency room, face down and in the back of a police pickup truck, his legs dangling over the tailgate, Taseer’s Italian moccasins flopped like a pair of flimsy rudders as they left a thin trail of red in the wake of the speeding Toyota Hilux that cruised over a sea of asphalt, not fast enough. His assassin would miss his heart, but it was one of the neck wounds that would hemorrhage Taseer to his death.

This paper is a story about the story that was Salmaan Taseer’s murder. It will be told from several perspectives: those of Pakistani as well as international journalists and op-ed writers, bloggers and social networkers, the governor’s friends and his critics — even the governor and myself. The crux of this piece will be dedicated to charting the course of the follow-up reporting, analysis and campaigning on Pakistani media — old and new — in the wake of what has gone on to become one of the most important acts of religious and political violence in the country’s bloody history. And I will premise my analysis on a large question: In a generally bellicose society, which has been at war with

itself and others since it was conceived, can religion — in its harshest, most institutionalized sense — leave any space for rational discourse on modern media?

### **Holy Warriors, Holy Laws**

Islamabad's Elite Force is a recently trained and deployed police unit<sup>2</sup>, that was raised as the incremental demand for the safety of the Pakistan's top leadership — combined with an ever expanding theater of operations in the country's restive northwest badlands — stretched the preferred and purpose-trained Army Special Service Group thin. In the post-9/11 "u-turn" conducted against the Taliban by then president Pervez Musharraf, as the Pakistani military struggled with the challenge of training its largely conventional forces to tackle the urgent requirements of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, it was also forced to raise and equip the country's battered, underperforming and relatively more undisciplined police service as well.

That's where the Elite Force came in.<sup>3</sup> [Trained by Pakistan's special forces](#) to better tackle the terrorist and 'close-quarter combat' threats that now engulfed the country's urban heartland, the police branch quickly gained the reputation of being Pakistan's toughest cops.

Their uniforms proudly pronounced them to be a "*Mujahid*," or Holy Warrior, accompanied by their motto, "No Fear." However, although they inherited the Pakistani military's comparably superior weaponry and tactics, the Elite Force couldn't quite replicate the army's rigid chain-of-command and regulation. But some of Elite Force — as Qadri would prove — may have also shared the passionate *raison d'état* that stemmed from the official slogan of Pakistan's armed forces: "*Imaan, Taqwa, Jihad, Feesabillillah*" (Faith, Piety, Jihad and to Strive in the Name of Allah).

Though it is not clear whether Qadri was "radicalized" in his training and interaction with the Pakistani military — and the portions of his subsequent [statements](#) to prosecutors that were released<sup>4</sup> have not made that connection explicitly either — he

most certainly believed he was fulfilling his religious duty as a “good” Muslim by killing Salmaan Taseer. The assassin’s own professional role of being the governor’s legally appointed protector stood superseded by a higher calling, as was recorded in his informal<sup>5</sup> [confession](#) that was leaked on YouTube, along with his [official testimony](#).<sup>6</sup>

After all, Qadri believed, Taseer was the worst offender of all: a blasphemer. And according<sup>7</sup> to what the bodyguard had [recently learned](#) about Islamic Shariah law, committing that crime put Governor Taseer in the untenable category of being “*Wajib-ul-Qatal*” which, directly from the Arabic, translates to “Must be murdered”<sup>2</sup>.

In retrospect, however, Taseer’s death was not just a result of Qadri’s indoctrination, but also a product of publicity. In a country that is obsessed with the news media, Salmaan Taseer had managed to make the headlines for the last few weeks even before his murder. The issue was the hanging fate of Asia Bibi (the surname is actually “Madam” in Urdu, used interchangeably as a title and/or a name), a Christian villager from rural Punjab who had been [accused of blaspheming](#) and subsequently sentenced to death by a local court<sup>8</sup>. Punjab’s “Lion of Liberalism”, as Taseer’s Facebook fans would eventually call him after his killing, had made Asia’s case his own. He had spoken to whoever would put him on air, from the [BBC](#) to the [raucous local media](#) to further her case for innocence. In what would eventually become the buildup to his own assassination, the governor had [battled conservative talk show anchors](#), primetime after primetime, to

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<sup>2</sup> *The New York Times* would [profile](#) Qadri, while assessing the possible security lapse that led to his access to Taseer<sup>2</sup>: “A follower of Dawat-e-Islami, a religious party based in Karachi, Mr. Qadri had joined the Special Forces branch of the Punjab police in 2002. At that time, he was declared a security risk because of his extreme religious views and sectarian activities during a routine check by his superior...“In 2008, Mr. Qadri nonetheless managed to join the Elite Force of Punjab police, and had been assigned to guard the governor, raising alarming questions about the vetting and screening of security personnel, former police officials and associates of the former governor said.”

vociferously criticize the holy grail of Pakistani jurisprudence: the “*Namoos-e-Risalat*” or [Blasphemy Laws](#).<sup>3</sup>

If Qadri hadn’t directly seen or heard Taseer call the laws “man made,” (which they are) most of Pakistan’s television audiences had. The governor’s PR campaign for saving Asia was thus a primer for the media battle between liberal and conservative Pakistanis that would ensure his death.

### **A Defiant Killer and the Battle for Pakistan’s Soul**

The first images of Taseer’s assassin, which were captured from the site of the murder, showed a smiling young man in his late twenties, with a baby-face sticking out from the back of a police van, not entirely suitable for the tough beard and commando ski-cap that framed it. A highly trained warrior, with the chubbiness of an Islamist cherub and the scruples of a freelance hit man, Qadri would thus come to personify Pakistan’s deepest divide: The question of its identity.

Is the country a fundamentally theocratic Islamic republic where all law — including that against the murder of an elected public official — is superseded by the personal interpretation of one’s own religious obligations? Or is Pakistan truly a modern functional state that, besides having constitutional rights guaranteeing the practice of Islam, also guards the rights of religious minorities and holds the rule of civil law as supreme? Does the *Law of the Land*, as prescribed by the country’s legally enshrined edicts and legislative bodies in the shape of the [1973 Constitution](#) of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan<sup>9</sup>, overrule Shariah or Quranic prescriptions, or any other interpretations (like

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<sup>3</sup> A series of legal statutes introduced in the 1980s under the dictatorial regime of General Zia-ul-Haq<sup>3</sup>, in spirit, the Blasphemy Laws are meant to protect the sanctity and dignity of the Prophet Muhammad, but have actually been used within the larger framework of politicized Islamization in Pakistan by successive governments, both civilian and military. Analysts contend that the laws are geared to appease and recruit the conservative right, both for proxy-war in Afghanistan and Kashmir as well as to bludgeon a liberal and civil society into compromise, fear or exile.

the Blasphemy Laws themselves) of the *Law of God*? Are all Pakistanis bound to be personally Muslim, or is it just the state that is officially Islamic? Is the modern Pakistani nation-state meant to be secular and practical, or theocratic and literalist? Basically, is the contemporary Islamic Republic of Pakistan revisionist, reductionist or revivalist in its religious outlook?

Pakistan's complicated and fissured polity has struggled to answer the "identity question" for decades. Military coups have been mounted on that premise. Generations of leaders have been assassinated, executed or exiled in search of that answer. And scores of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, have been killed or compromised in various, interconnected conflicts — ethnic, sectarian, religious, class-based, nationalist, and even military — that are all hinged to the fulcrum issue: the secular versus Islamic battle for Pakistan's "soul."

Minutes after killing Taseer, Qadri would stir the pot on that debate in a way unmatched in Pakistan's history. And he would get help from some unlikely quarters.

### **Debates about Death: The Murder of the Murder**

The debate about Malik Mumtaz Qadri's actions would become a well-documented litmus test of where the country stood on the identity question. Subsequently, Qadri would become a celebrity in Pakistan. His confidence about what he saw as the corrective nature of his actions, enhanced by an exuberance to serve Allah, would inspire several schools of followers, some old, but several new.

The usual suspects, or fans, would be the traditional pillars of organized religiosity that take to the streets every Friday after prayers in all major cities of the country: theocratic political parties and their militant student wings. These throngs would include the *Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat* (The Party of the Followers of the Prophet), the *Jamaat-e-Islami* (The Party of Islam), the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam* (The Party of the Clerics of Islam), the *Shabab-i-Islami* Pakistan (Lovers of Islam), the *Sunni Ittehad Council* (Sunni Alliance Council), the



*Tehrik Fidayan-i-Khatm-i-Nabuwwat* (The Movement for the Believers in the Finality of the Prophecy), the *Tehrik Tahaffuz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat* (The Movement for the Protection of the Blasphemy Law), the *Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Pakistan* (The Party of Religious Clerics of Pakistan), the *Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith* (The Party of the Collective of the Followers of Hadith) and even the *Jamaat-ud-Dawa* (The Party of Belief), which is the public/political arm of the terrorist group, *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (The Army of the Pure).<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's conventional Quran-thumpers, the show of force that would be displayed in massive marches organized by these core religious groups and their appendages in favor of Qadri's actions, even demanding his release, would not surprise the casual observer of Pakistani politics. However, a few days into the pro-Qadri demonstrations, [Time](#) magazine would make a note on how the Taseer assassination had provided a common platform for this notoriously divided assemblage of Islamist politicians, clerics and students:

Taseer's assassination certainly presented a formidable challenge, by bringing together erstwhile enemies in the religious camp in a rare show of unity. The crowd of 40,000 on the streets of Karachi last weekend celebrating Taseer's murder included such sects as the typically moderate Barelvis, their more hard-line rival Deobandis, the even more extreme Wahhabis, and even the Shi'ites so often targeted by the more extreme Sunni sects. Groups that are more inclined to fight one another than to pray together have found common cause on blasphemy.<sup>11</sup>

Despite *Time's* analysis, there would be little cause for concern. After all, the "Mullahs" — the politicized ones, if not the militants — are to Pakistan what environmental activists are to many developed countries: loud and brash, with a high-profile "street cred" that is compounded by their media savvy, but without enough political muscle or agenda mobilization to majorly influence the country's legislature, at least not through an electoral process that hasn't been manipulated to [help them into power](#) by the security establishment<sup>12</sup> — the broad, even safe, camouflage term popularly used to describe the country's praetorian military-intelligence apparatus.

But in the post-assassination discourse in Pakistan, where many conservatives would slam Taseer as a heretic and laud Qadri as a hero, the surprise-entrance was made by a group of influential actors who were widely considered to be liberal saviors; those who had actually taken on and confronted the conservative, military-dominated security regime in the last decade and contributed to the era that has been widely referred to as the Pakistani *glasnost*.

Lawyers, recently hailed as the democratic and constitutional vanguard that had toppled the unpopular Musharraf regime in what was aptly referred to as the Lawyers Movement of 2007–8, would once again take to the streets in their black jackets and ties, only this time they would *block* the due passage of law and not allow prosecutors and judges from entering the court that was to try Qadri; they would also rally nationwide in his support (though not in the numbers seen in their anti-Musharraf heyday), offering to [defend him pro bono](#), even intercepting Qadri's motorcade of armored personnel carriers<sup>13</sup> and [showering him with rose petals](#)<sup>14</sup>.

More tacit in their approval of Qadri's actions would be Pakistan's privately owned television media, spearheaded by dynamic anchors and presenters who, in sync with the Lawyers Movement, had played a heroic Brutus to Musharraf's diabolical Caesar (after all, cable news networks were deregulated around 9/11 by Musharraf's regime in an effort to bolster itself). This newly empowered pressure group had provided the [mass impetus](#)<sup>15</sup> to shift [national opinion](#) that would allow the dethroning of Musharraf's "King's Party"<sup>16</sup> — the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q), while helping pave the way for the populist Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of Benazir Bhutto's widower, Asif Zardari, to assume power through [one of the fairest](#) rounds of elections the country had seen in decades<sup>17</sup>.

However, even though Taseer was a far-shot from the detached dictator who had outstayed his welcome, rather a man who the media had essentially helped elect into public office — and who, due to his ownership of one of Pakistan's many bustling news networks and two daily newspapers<sup>18</sup> as well his political enthusiasm for the cause of a

free press, was considered one of their own — the slain governor of Punjab found few friends on news television.

### **Killed, Or Martyred?**

The day after the assassination, I recorded a show with the country's up and coming "third force": Imran Khan, the Oxford-educated cricketer-playboy turned philanthropist-politician who has been angling himself for more than a decade to become a viable alternative to Pakistan's dynastic two-party system that is dominated by the Bhutto-Zardari led Pakistan People's Party and Mian Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N). Khan's agenda is both complex as well as ambitious: a version of Pakistani nationalism that is both modern but also Islamic, where the state rests on the cusp of tradition and modernity but constitution reigns supreme. Thus, for my hard-talking, one-on-one primetime program ("[Ikhtilaf](#)", or "Opposition") which I was conducting since 2010 for [Aaj TV](#), Khan was the perfect guest to interview in the post-Taseer Pakistan. I was hoping he might answer the "identity question" in a way that would help settle the Taseer debate: was he a hero, or a heretic — a villain, or a victim?

My producer had already communicated that seeking a direct verdict from Khan would be trouble. Every anchor across all the major networks had been walking the same razor's edge since the killing the day before, desisting from outright making Taseer a hero by granting him Islam's most respectful epitaph: "*Shaheed*," or martyr. Urdu equivalents of "killed" and "murdered" were used across Pakistani television, but that ultimate obituary of post-mortem respect was not.

Editorially, I considered this directive as self-censorship. Pakistani media, like the rest of that country, uses "*Shaheed*" as a sign of respect for anyone who has been killed wrongly, unjustly or tragically. It's a broad, even loose term of deference and respect that is not entirely religious in its application, but also cultured. Shoppers [bombed in a bazaar](#) are *Shaheed*. Soldiers [blown up by an IED](#) are *Shaheed*. Three year olds who are [kidnapped and raped to death](#) are *Shaheed*. Teenagers abducted and killed for their

kidneys, which are then [sold in the black-market](#) transplant trade, are *Shaheed*. All the passengers of a [bus that plunges](#) over a cliff, almost on a monthly basis, while navigating the world's highest Karakoram Highway, are *Shaheed*. Benazir Bhutto, [assassinated by bullets and a suicide bomber](#), is referred to as a *Shaheed*. Her father, Zulfiqar, who was [hung in the gallows](#) by a court's order, is a *Shaheed*. So what had Salmaan Taseer done wrong that the country's best journalists were denying him that respect? In my program with Khan, I would broach that question.

I went in first by camouflaging the magic word, framing it in the context of Khan's increasingly powerful campaign against American military presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. To paraphrase, I asked whether people like Qadri who had *martyred* Taseer would stop doing what they were doing if Khan's single-point agenda — that the Americans pullout from Af-Pak — was fulfilled. Wasn't it naïve of him to suggest that everybody would go back to their own business if the Americans went back home? After all, I pushed on, Qadri was not a Taliban or Al Qaeda operative fighting America in the mountains; rather, he was a paid civil servant, stationed in an elite police unit in Islamabad, who had committed what amounted to treason by killing an elected representative of the Pakistani state just because he didn't see eye to eye with him in his personal interpretation of a religiously politicized and man-made law.

As expected, Khan took the bait and never challenged my assumption about Taseer's martyrdom. His responses were irrelevant to my Taseer-centric goal, which was achieved: throughout the rest of our conversation, most of our references to the slain governor would establish him a *Shaheed*. It was a first for Pakistani television that day, and felt like a small victory in a big war.

I should have expected what was coming. Later that week, Aaj TV's Censor Department (all major Pakistani networks have one, but many channels also insipidly refer to this as the "Quality Control" department and/or division) called me hours before the airing of my recorded show with Khan and said that they were pulling out all the *Shaheed* references. For good measure, they were also cutting out all the parts where I had

countered Khan about his support for negotiating with terrorists and extremists. I immediately considered resignation, but then stopped. The censor-producer's blunt appraisal about the possible aftermath of running the unedited show put it all into perspective: *"Log Pagal Ho Jain Gay"* — The people will go mad.

## 2. The People Go Mad

### *How Pakistan's Media — Liberal & Conservative — Responded*

*"Societies that tolerate such actions, end up being consumed by those actions."*<sup>19</sup>

– U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, talking to reporters in Islamabad on Jan 12, 2011, about Taseer's assassination

### **The English-Urdu Controversy**

By one standard, there only two types of Pakistanis: those who understand English, and those who don't. In effect, the biggest divide that sets that complicated, semi-failed state apart from most others is the notoriously post-colonial English-Urdu divide.

In Pakistan, most Urdu news outlets are relatively more conservative and less secular as compared to their English counterparts. Considering that the English-Urdu divide in Pakistan is actually a manifestation of the haves versus the have-nots (a classic socio-economic problem that persists in most former British colonies as the elite are in a position to commodify a Western education), the media in Pakistan effectively tends to merge linguistics and politics by serving Urdu news to the "teeming masses" compared to the English carriers that cater to the "ruling elite." Thus, different information goes to different people, channeled through the interface of the language divide in the media.

The [BBC's appraisal](#)<sup>20</sup> of how major national newspapers responded to the Taseer killing is a fair summary of Pakistan's political "language split":

There has been mixed reaction in Pakistan's press to the assassination of Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer... While English-language newspapers mostly

condemned the killing, Urdu papers have focused on Mr. Taseer's "controversial" utterances.

If newspaper editorials and leaders are a yardstick of national opinion, then the BBC makes a critical point about how divided the nation was over Taseer's murder. The tone set by the newspapers — with Urdu publications being more conservative, even unsympathetic towards Taseer's death, and the English publications clearly leaning towards classic tenets of liberalism and criticizing his assassination — would make a massive impact on the national discourse. Still, it is worth looking up close at what exactly went to the press the day after Taseer's death.

"In a sign of mainstream media opposition, Pakistan's leading Urdu-language newspaper *Jang* [War]", [noted an AFP dispatch](#)<sup>21</sup> regarding the country's most circulated daily (which twice outnumbers its closest competitor with almost a million print subscriptions<sup>22</sup> and is owned by a [media group with a history of opposition](#) against the governor and his party, the PPP)<sup>23</sup>, "ran a front-page story declaring: "There should be no funeral for Salmaan Taseer and no condemnation for his death."

"A supporter of a blasphemer is also a blasphemer," said a sub-heading, reporting that 500 religious scholars and clerics had paid tribute to Qadri."

Some Urdu newspapers, like the *Ummat* ("Nation of Islam") had a clear 'he-was-asking-for-it' and 'more-to-come' stance for the January 5<sup>th</sup> editorial:

It is a fact that Salmaan Taseer made a controversial statement on a religious issue. He brought a blasphemy convict — Asia Bibi — out from jail, arranged a press conference for her and termed her innocent. Thus, the governor, who was holding a very important official seat, with his attitude not only committed contempt of court, but also harmed the religious sentiments of the people."<sup>24</sup>

Another Urdu newspaper — the famously anti-American and pro-military *Nawa-i-Waqt* ("A New Time") — was more somber in its appraisal of Taseer's murder, but didn't desist from criticizing him for his actions:

The governor had become controversial after terming the blasphemy law a black law... In the prevailing circumstances, the killing of Salmaan Taseer can be termed a great tragedy.<sup>25</sup>

The English press had other ideas. *The News* (which is owned by same group that owns the militant *Jang* quoted above) slammed Taseer for being “bombastic” and living “controversially,” but stopped short of saying that the governor deserved to die:

The governor of Punjab died as he had lived: controversially. In the hours after his death, police officials continued to insist that the possible motives needed to be assessed. But most people had already reached what was the only obvious conclusion — the remarks Salman Taseer had made a few weeks ago on the blasphemy laws and on the need to amend them were enough for someone to kill him. While Taseer may have angered or annoyed people, while his sometimes bombastic manner may have been irritable, there can be no doubt that he was a courageous man, willing to speak out on issues that few choose to address due to the growing fear forced on us by religious extremists...<sup>26</sup>

Others, like the *Dawn* — perhaps Pakistan’s most respected and most widely circulated English daily — clearly [set the bar](#) for liberalism by calling the governor’s murder a “crime of hate”, but toned down its praise for the person of Taseer:

The assassination of Salman Taseer by an armed guard reportedly deputed for his security raises the fundamental issue once again: that religious indoctrination is feeding the fires of hatred and intolerance. Although details as to the motive of the crime have yet to emerge, by the very trappings it seems little else but a crime of hate. Mr Taseer had few friends left in his last days. His outspoken defence of the Christian woman, Asia Bibi...made him a hate figure for extremist and Islamist outfits and parties. Major religious parties called out nationwide strikes on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve to demand Asia Bibi’s execution under the controversial blasphemy law, and to condemn her sympathisers, Mr Taseer being one of the foremost public figures amongst the latter group and thus the object of hate.<sup>27</sup>

The newly established *Express Tribune*, which is a local affiliate of the *International Herald Tribune*, went a step further. Lionizing Taseer, the *Tribune* featured an op-ed that

[recommended repealing](#) the *Namoos-e-Risalat* law, an act criticized by readers as blasphemous itself - the only major newspaper to do so the day after the murder:

This is no country for brave men. Words alone are enough to get you killed. Just testifying to the horrors perpetrated on the country is akin to signing one's death warrant. Salman Taseer, unlike so many lily-livered politicians, never equivocated in denouncing those who are terrorising this country. He brushed off the threats to his life with grace and humour. Let us begin that by honouring Salman Taseer...the party he served so faithfully... should pass legislation to ensure his death was not in vain. Too many people have already been killed by the hideous misuse of the blasphemy laws. Salman Taseer should be the last. His fight against the blasphemy laws was his last crusade. Repealing it now would be the greatest rebuke to his murderers.<sup>28</sup>

Though differing in their levels of passion versus objectivity, between *The News*, *Dawn* and *Express Tribune* — the three major powerhouses of daily English print in Pakistan — there was one common theme: Extremism and terrorism were threatening the sanctity of the Pakistani state. This was the expected line that the liberal elite-dominated English press would take, as compared to the ambivalence or even opposition towards Taseer that came from the dominant and popular Urdu press.

It was Taseer's own newspaper, the *Daily Times*, that pushed the envelope of liberalism by citing the murder not just as an act of unbridled "barbarism," but calling the blasphemy laws "man-made" — the same words used by the governor that had eventually led to his death — while also politicizing the issue by criticizing Taseer's rivals, the incumbent Punjab government, for the "weakness" in their obligation to protect him:

If the religious extremists who consider themselves the guardians of the Prophet's honour can go so far as to take the life of someone who opposed man-made laws, then society is heading for anarchy and barbarism. This means that there is no space for a rational discourse and even a person of such high profile as the Governor of Punjab cannot escape their wrath. It also speaks of the weakness in the security regime of the Punjab government.<sup>29</sup>



Thus, the expected happened — at least in Pakistan’s dailies. The “for” and “against” battle-lines were primarily drawn on the basis of language, which in turn is the yardstick of income, which actually reflects the level of “Western-education” of both the staff as well as the readership of those publications. For many, however, the hardcore conservatism of the Urdu press would not merely be a notable social phenomenon — it would also be clear [incitement](#) to murder.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately for Taseer and his sympathizers, most Pakistani readers prefer the *Nawa-e-Waqt*s of the world, and not the *Express Tribune* or, despite of his political popularity, even his family’s own *Daily Times* — simply because of the English-Urdu divide. Moreover, many of that burdened minority - the failing middle-class of a faltering political economy - which can actually read that language cannot afford liberal English newspapers. Thus, in absolute terms, Taseer found few sympathizers in and through the dailies the morning after his murder. Not that it would have mattered: Most of the damage done to his early grave — even before he was in it — was conducted by the so-called independent television media of Pakistan the night before.

### **Digital Demagogy (and other Perils of Primetime)**

While many Pakistanis cannot access, or even read, newspapers, almost half of the country’s population is hooked on television.<sup>31</sup> And with little entertainment and sport programming, where (overwhelmingly Urdu) news and current affairs shows rule primetime, the broad verdict on Taseer was out on cable TV within hours of his murder: the governor’s death was understandable.

In its summary of Pakistan’s cable news networks’ coverage of Taseer, Britain’s *Guardian* [featured](#) a bleak leader<sup>32</sup>: “Many in Pakistan felt that the governor’s critique of blasphemy laws made his death, if not justifiable, understandable — and others went even further.”

The writer, Mohammad Hanif, tells the story of that night of televised drama in the first person, a disturbing narrative of where Pakistan's "liberal" television media stood on the subject:

Minutes after the murder of the governor of Pakistan's Punjab province Salmaan Taseer I saw a veteran Urdu columnist on a news channel. He was being what, in breaking news jargon, is called a "presenter's friend." "It is sad of course that this has happened but . . ."

I watched in the desperate hope that he wouldn't go into the ifs and buts of a brutal murder in the middle of Pakistan's capital... It seemed too early for analysis, but the presenter's friend looked mildly smug, as if he had been mulling over arguments in his head long before the governor was shot. Although it wasn't required, the presenter egged him on. "But you see these are sensitive matters. He should have watched his words. He shouldn't have spoken so carelessly...yes, he did call our blasphemy law a black law." Thoughtfully, the presenter's friend nodded his head in agreement...

Finally, Hanif manages to nail the reasoning of the conservatives down to nothing but self-defense in a country scared of its own religiosity:

And then it occurred to me that they were actually sending secret signals to any would be killers that said, "Look we speak the same language, we are not blasphemers like that governor guy. We watch our words. We know about the sensitivities of our Muslim brothers. In fact we are as sensitive as you are."

Hanif's analysis about the "secret signals" that the pundits and anchors on cable news were sending to "would be killers" was not unfounded. On January 5, the day before Hanif's piece, the *Wall Street Journal*<sup>33</sup> had [managed](#) to get the charged pulse of the country's clerical establishment about the murder, and had assessed that it wasn't just the mullahs of the margin who were angry. In fact, the anti-Taseer/pro-Qadri lobby of religious hardliners extended all the way up to the powerful political apparatus of the country, and even included popular TV anchors:

“Many religious leaders, even those from so-called moderate groups, were angered by Mr. Taseer’s support in recent months of a 45-year-old Christian farm worker...

“The Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat, another religious group, said in a statement signed by more than 500 clerics that Mr. Qadri was a ‘true soldier of Islam’ and warned Muslims not to mourn his death.

“Other segments of society, including talk-show hosts, have also justified Mr. Taseer’s murder...

“The governor’s remarks had hurt the sentiments of Muslims and Qadri could not control his sentiments,” said one top TV anchor on a prime-time show.”

However, this unexpected editorial “u-turn” of an allegedly liberal — or scared — television media did not go unnoticed by local actors, regulators and pressure groups. Not being sympathetic towards Taseer was one thing — lionizing Qadri was another issue, and that didn’t work out too well for some television networks.

Less than a week after the murder, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) fined Samaa TV and Waqt TV channels a critically symbolic, if token, one million rupees (\$11,000) for repeatedly airing an [interview](#) of the assassin that had allegedly been recorded on a mobile device by a police official and then leaked. A new centrist daily (without any television holdings), Pakistan Today, [exclusively](#) reported<sup>34</sup> that “several TV channels had recorded the interview of Qadri, but only the said TV channels aired it, while others exhibited ‘responsibility.’”

The penalty was widely lauded<sup>35</sup> and seen as a surprisingly appropriate response from the generally unpopular and politicized PEMRA; for Qadri’s interview had featured the killer, reiterating in a chilling loop, how proud he felt about the killing. It was television worth cracking down on.

## The Bloggers Strikes Back

But PEMRA was a late entrant to the media watchdog party. Pakistan's liberal bloggers were actually the first local actors to notice and protest television media's less than objective treatment of the murder, and it was their commentary and oversight — at times informal, but very perpetual — that would eventually be picked up by other local liberals, particularly by print-based op-ed writers and editors, as well as international media. Within hours of the assassination, Pakistan's blogosphere would provide the most vociferous as well as the most timely criticism of how an allegedly liberal — or reputedly liberating — television media had “failed” Pakistan.

Pakistan's premier media watcher, [Café Pyala](#), targeted the “hypocrisy” of television anchors who were “buckling”<sup>36</sup>:

Many in the media seem also to be hemming and hawing, refusing even to attach the word “shaheed” [martyr] to Taseer (whereas they think nothing of attaching it to people dying in accidents and even the Lal Masjid [Red Mosque] terrorists), apparently buckling to open threats hurled at media houses and anchors by extremists. The height of hypocrisy has come from anchors and talk-show participants, pretending to treat the issue “objectively” by debating the straw-man polarization of the country into “left” and “right” extremists.

The newsy [5 Rupees](#) upped the ante, bunching television media along with the radical right wing, accusing the former of having “contributed” equally to the murder<sup>37</sup>:

...plenty of media personnel and right-wing politicians in this country contributed to this [murder] with their constant “wajib-ul-qatl” refrain, not to mention equating support for blasphemy laws to support for Islam. All of them could technically be dealt with as inciters to violence (illegal in our country, and basically every other one out there) but they won't. You get to say and do whatever you want, act with as much impunity as you want — as long as you have God on your side.

But no blogger was more cited on that first day than [Kala Kawa](#), (*The Black Crow*, which in Pakistan is a cultural reference to a bearer of bad news), whose powerful, if angry,

criticism of mainstream Pakistani media would eventually also be featured in the *Guardian* and *Time* magazine. Kala Kawa would highlight several discrepancies in the television media's handling of the Taseer affair, even before the governor was murdered<sup>38</sup>:

Hours can be spent dissecting what led to the Governor's murder. Religious parties exploiting the religious sentiment of people, the media giving outsize coverage to religious parties and organizations, the political abandonment of the Governor, and large sections of the media out and out supporting the stance of the religious parties, have all contributed to the murder.

Also slammed was the media's sensationalism about the blasphemy issue, as well as the less than credible reporting that preceded the killing:

Not only did these [TV anchors] sections disagree with the Governor's stance on a need for amending the blasphemy laws, they went so far as to lie about what he had said. Misconstrue, misinterpret, mislabel, these are weasel words that do not accurately state what actually happened. These people LIED. They said that the Governor said things he never did, they said he himself had committed blasphemy, and the media allowed for this to be aired all over.

Finally, television media's editorial tap-dance on Taseer's grave - that would be premised on conservative anchor-coined catchphrases like "Western-liberal extremists" (e.g. Taseer) being as radicalized as "religious extremists" (e.g. Qadri) and thus being equally responsible for violence in Pakistan – would be berated with a passionate defense of liberal values:

Since the assassination, the media has been at pains to try and appear "objective" regarding this sordid episode. In doing so, they have trotted out one of the oldest, and most pernicious lies that pervades our society. That there are two extremes in Pakistan, the religious extremist and the liberal extremist. That these two powers at odds with one another are causing such deep polarization that our society may not be able to survive...

On top of this fallacious dichotomy being trotted out by the media and politicians, many are going to lengths to somehow prove that the Governor brought his death upon himself.

Compared to some of their circumspect counterparts in the English dailies, Pakistan's bloggers would thus raise the bar for the liberal response to Taseer's death, as well as function as a vanguard that would question the powerful establishment of mainstream media. In the days to follow, their efforts to highlight and even internationalize the shortcomings of Pakistan's television anchors would dent at least one celebrity career: Meher Bukhari, one of Pakistan's youngest primetime divas, a graduate of the University of Waterloo who is nicknamed the "Screaming Sensation" in the blogosphere, would get the sack for taking the Qadri debate to a new, questionable level by repeatedly taking live call-ins – many of them in favor of the killer - on the subject of her show, *Newsbeat*: "[Is Mumtaz Qadri a Hero or a Villain?](#)"<sup>39</sup>.

Bukhari's punishment would be short-lived. Within a month, she would be picked up by another network desperate to succeed in the ever-escalating ratings war that is Pakistan's primetime. Still, her temporary departure would be lauded as the first major setback suffered by a conservative and popular mainstream television journalist, much thanks to liberal protest about her ethical standards — or lack thereof.

### **Introspecting the *Vox Populi* (from deep inside Pakistan's Fear Factory)**

A week into the murder, the rationality of Pakistani media was a subject of international scrutiny. What had happened, almost overnight, to Pakistan's mainstream journalists — the very people who had helped topple Musharraf's military regime and come to define Pakistan's liberal values in the last decade since deregulation? How had the Taseer assassination become a tipping point for media to clearly align with the country's conservative and violent elements? What had unleashed the 'closet mullahs' of primetime? Was it fear of reprisal from militant groups that had forced them to come

out, or worse: that they had practically ‘converted’ due to even harsher realities? The debate was raging - even within the media.

What is even more fascinating is that this fight is now being played out in the full glare of the media, which itself has become swept up in it. There has been plenty of internal debate and finger-pointing within the media about how this issue has been handled or mishandled... There have been some rather bold op-eds recently by people who have stood up to be counted.<sup>40</sup>

Thus blogged [Café Pyala](#), the vigilant media critic in what is possibly the only positive appraisal in Pakistan’s blogosphere of mainstream media in the aftermath of the Taseer murder. The “people who have stood up to be counted” was a direct reference to an old guard of liberal journalism, Abbas Athar, whose columns have for decades defied the wave of conservatism that dominates the Urdu press.

The BBC’s Aamer Ahmed Khan<sup>41</sup>, in a probing phone interview with Athar (who, at the time was serving as an editor at that rarest of Pakistani publications — the centrist Urdu daily, *Express*) attempted to dismantle the structural and systemic factors that had led to the sudden meltdown of liberal thought.

Translated from the Urdu, the interview is not only a rare look inside the complicated trappings of contemporary Pakistani journalism but, especially when both read and [heard](#), hints at Athar’s apprehensions — amidst fears of a death threat — about directly naming the “groups” that are behind Pakistan’s fear factory, while reflecting his frustrations about the failings of the media establishment:

**Athar:** ...The thing is that one minority group — some call them “Maulvis” [the official term for clerics but also generally used for radicals] — are holding this country hostage. Just yesterday they met [leading political leaders] Fazal-ur-Rahman and Munawwar Hassan. Everybody [in the media] is under their pressure. Except me, and some of my colleagues, who are still facing them, despite threats.

**Khan:** Did you get a threat?

**Athar:** Yes, I just got an SMS. It said: “you must be murdered.” What else are they going to say?

**Khan:** So this is regarding your column, *Kalam Kar* [Pen Man]?

**Athar:** Yes, the one I’m currently writing... The big papers dare not publish in favor of Taseer. Nobody is willing to publish in favor of his martyrdom. Many major columnists have been refused publication if they write in his favor...

**Khan:** You’re one of Pakistan’s most senior journalists. You’ve seen a lot happen over the years. Have you ever seen anything like this?

**Athar:** No. This [murder] has made things worse. The Prime Minister yesterday simply used the term “assassination” [instead of martyrdom, for Taseer]. Everyone is so scared of these people. Just the day after the assassination, the semi-state owned Arab News of Saudi Arabia published an editorial that claimed that Taseer was standing tall against extremists and those who killed him or support his killing are worthy of being called Satan! And that’s the Saudis talking! But here, in our country, everybody is scared of them [extremists], including the media. They’ve spread the fear that they will kill everyone! Simply put, our media is scared of them...

**Khan:** So is it fair to say that most of the media in Pakistan is taking a line that is against Salmaan Taseer? And that they are actually for Taseer’s assassination?

**Athar:** This is the media that misconstrued his [Taseer’s] statements [about the blasphemy laws] and made them inflammatory. This is the media that published *fatwas* asking for his murder. This is the media that printed that there was a price on his head of five hundred thousand rupees [announced by an extremist cleric]. If the media business is dirty, generally, then this is the dirtiest of media...

Though incriminating radicals, militants and even the media establishment itself, neither Athar nor Khan could get around to engaging the critical, if not core, issue of the Taseer-media debate: that of the audience.

What did “regular” Pakistanis think of the murder? How had they received the news? Thoroughly disempowered, mostly uneducated and largely poor, what was the tone of the *vox populi* of the Islamic Republic, which Pervez Musharraf has [repeatedly](#) referred



to as “the silent majority of moderates”?<sup>42</sup> Were the views of the old liberal war-horse, Athar, and his new-age digitized allies, the blogging media watchdogs, in sync with the general and genuine talk of the nation?

Not according to Mohammad Hanif, whose account in his [op-ed](#) for the *Guardian* recalls the disturbing “man-on-the-street” reactions that were aired on national television the night of the Taseer murder<sup>43</sup>:

Taseer’s body was still in the morgue when I started to find out more about the sensitivities of our people. Whereas most people rushed home and sat glued to their TVs, probably agreeing or disagreeing with those TV presenters, many of those interviewed at random seemed to approve. “Well, murder is wrong, but he did say bad things about our Prophet,” one man said. Another claimed that if he had got a chance he would do the same thing. When asked how they knew that Taseer had committed blasphemy, they just shrugged as if saying they just knew. As if they had decided that he just seemed like the kind of guy who would do something like this.

Soon after Hanif’s piece, the famous author, Ahmad Rashid, in classic, Pak neo-liberal speak, would declare that “Taseer’s death has unleashed the mad dogs of hell, inspiring the minority of fanatics to go to any lengths to destroy the democratic, secular and moderate Islamic Republic of Pakistan.” This narrative of a radicalized core threatening the “sane majority” of that country would only reiterate what Athar and the bloggers were saying. But Omar Warraich of *Time* magazine, in an [article](#) titled “Pakistan Pols Paralyzed by Religious Extremism,”<sup>44</sup> would make the link that most simply didn’t see in a bipolar, post-Taseer Pakistan that had pitted the Mullahs versus the Moderates:

Pakistani tensions over religion don’t exist independently of the tensions of social class in this grotesquely unequal society. After Taseer’s assassination, many liberals discovered to their horror that their domestic staff didn’t share their grief; some smiled at the news. Even though the governor had come from a modest background, many Pakistanis saw him as epitomizing a wealthy, English-speaking, liberal elite.

In effect, for the “masses”, Taseer’s death was warranted not just by his ultra-liberalism, but also his uber-wealth. In the end, the acceptability of his death - and the popularity of his assassin - was not just a God thing. It was also a Class thing. But *Time’s* analysis had a twist:

“If you’re from the Urdu-schooled mainstream of the country, the assertiveness of the class rubs you the wrong way,” says [Pakistani development analyst Mosharraf] Zaidi. “And it’s easy to depict someone who’s outwardly Westernized as being distant from religion.” Taseer’s status as a high-profile politician also diluted any sympathy for him from those sections of the population resentful of a political class they perceive as being inept, distant and venal.

If this reasoning is to be believed — that the non-elite, Urdu-centric “sections of the population” or the general audience of Pakistani television, had suffered from the “assertiveness of class” and been rubbed the wrong way by an “outwardly Westernized” Taseer and his sympathizers, how was the Urdu-centric mainstream media not expected to reflect those biases?

Moreover, if education — in its modern, Western and secular sense — or the lack thereof, along with the Urdu-English “language split”, was already an accepted arbiter of conservative versus liberal opinion — as was proven in Pakistani newspapers — why was mainstream/Urdu television media expected to stand up and deliver in favor of liberalism? Wouldn’t it be almost natural for Urdu-centric television anchors to share the conservatism of their newspaper counterparts?

At the end of the day, Pakistan’s political currency is traded at two competing stock exchanges of opinion that speak two different languages and come from two different worldviews; and frankly, those views pre-date modern militant Islam. Thus, why debate about a radicalized media, when it is constituted of and dominated by Urdu-centric — and thus largely conservative, even radical — thinkers to begin with? Wasn’t this all an over-complicated armchair argument, an editorial version of debating the position of deck chairs, without realizing that the deck belongs to the *Titanic*?

But this larger class-based argument about society (as well as the journalists that inform it) — that English-speaking Pakistanis were inherently liberal, and Urdu speakers were innately conservative — would fail as well. And that failure would be documented on the world’s largest social media platform: Facebook.

### 3. The Facebook Wars

#### *An Antisocial Social Media?*

*“We have 50% comments coming in praising the guard... busy deleting them.. I feel sick”*

– [Tweet](#) from Jahanzeb Haque, Web Editor of the *Express Tribune*, minutes after news of Taseer’s death was posted on Facebook

#### **First Blood — Brought to You by Facebook**

“You’re a #\$\$%\*@ ambulance chaser, not a journalist.” That remark, with all its brash Americanisms, was posted on my Facebook Wall the night of the Taseer killing. In a way, compounded by similar reactions about the murder on Facebook, it would become the trigger for the subject this section tackles with. But more on that, in just a bit. First, to the afternoon of January 4, 2011...

The murder scene was near my house in Islamabad, and I had been one of the first to confirm and [tweet the news](#), before taking off to report on the assassination. My tweet would, in turn, be “retweeted” and soon “go viral.” Encouraged by the outreach — which could be tracked and responded to while reporting — I would break more news from the scene of the crime. Among other snippets of information, I would record — thanks to the camera in my mobile phone — [exclusive footage](#) of the Taseer murder weapon being stripped and handed over by one of Qadri’s Elite Force colleagues to plainclothes intelligence agents. This footage would also go viral via Facebook and Twitter within minutes. The complete lack of CSI-esque forensic caution (no gloves on the handlers, etc.), as witnessed in the video, would prompt many users of those social networks to comment on the evident mishandling of the weapon.

By the time most of the country would return back from their jobs to turn on their television sets and catch the news about the murder, hundreds of people in my social network, and thousands of people in their social networks, besides deconstructing the scene of the crime, would have even written and shared eulogies — my [draft](#) among several [others](#) — about Taseer on Facebook. Such is the beauty of social media.

But the caustic remark would stick with me. Later on that night, I would try to go and see the profile of the user — a failed attempt as all I saw was his name and the image of the American rocker Jim Morrison on his Profile page. Facebook told me that the person only “shares his information with some people,” a limited access message from a network that is built on pushing the concept of unlimited access. Feeling disappointed by the detachment of the firewall and the impunity of his observation, I deleted the comment. Simply, I thought such behavior was a little anti-social, especially for social media.

But my sensitivities — selfish as they were, hinging on what I thought was undeserved criticism of my work and person — would amount to little when compared to what Taseer’s family, friends and sympathizers felt that night.

Similar insults targeting Taseer and praising his assassin were hurled on Facebook — Pakistan’s leading platform of choice for social networking<sup>4</sup> — within minutes of his

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<sup>4</sup> Harvard Medical School research fellow Haider Warraich has assessed the landscape of Pakistan’s social media in a [recent piece](#) for *Foreign Policy Magazine*: While the country is [estimated](#) to have a population of 177 million of whom 18.5 million (10.4 percent) are connected to the Internet, though government officials [quote](#) a slightly higher figure of 20 million. These penetration percentages are less than those in [Tunisia](#) (33.4 percent) and [Egypt](#) (21.1 percent). However, Internet use in Pakistan is growing at a rapid rate, particularly in urban centers, which are also home to populations who often form the backbone of mass-scale uprisings. Mobile Internet use [shot up](#) 161 percent in 2010 alone. While it is hard to objectively judge just what role the Internet plays in the fabric of Pakistani society, a recent survey by the BBC of 27,000 Pakistanis concluded that the Internet has [yet to mature](#) as a powerful tool for social change, with four out of five users believing the Internet to not be at all essential to such transformation...This is not to say that the Internet is irrelevant. On the contrary, websites such as Facebook have become increasingly prominent tools for social communication. In the last six months, the

death. Facebook, not only a space globally associated with the young and the hip but — contemporaneous to Taseer’s death — also widely hailed as a tool for galvanizing democracy in other Muslim countries not too far away in the Middle East, would thus become a new, immediate front in Pakistan’s ideological battle space.

Almost as fast as it would unravel, this new digital putsch would be noted and reported. Within hours of the murder, the *Express Tribune* would be the first major Pakistani publication to record the nascent digital insurgency, posting a story titled [“New Media: Online Support for Killer Sparks Controversy”](#). The anguish of the writer over the murder would betray his objectivity about this new Pakistani phenomenon — an anti-social social media — but the reporting would still give a broad perspective on what had started to happen on Facebook that night<sup>45</sup>:

No sooner had the identity of Salmaan Taseer’s killer been revealed, and his smug grin flashed across all TV channels, a Facebook fan page was set up in support of the man who had murdered the governor of Punjab.

Up until the writing of this piece, there were over 2,000 “likes” for the page that paints this assassin as a hero, a holy warrior and a champion of Islam. The profile text on the page reads as follows: “We support the action of Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri and want the Supreme Court of Pakistan to take immediate action against his arrest and order to free him.”

However, by midnight, the page had been struck down by Facebook but six other groups had sprung up. A message on a page called Ghazi [Holy Warrior] Malik Mumtaz Hussain Qadri urged people to make groups as many times as others reported it. By the filing of this report, 135 people had already joined the group while 392 people had joined another group.

Up for grabs between Pakistan’s conservative, extremist and even fascist right wing and its loose coalition of liberals, the world’s [“third largest virtual country”](#)<sup>46</sup> would thus

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number of Facebook users in Pakistan has [doubled](#) from 1.8 to 3.6 million, of whom 52 percent are between 18 and 24 years old

become the battleground for the struggle to dominate Pakistan's cyberturf. And like all intense conflicts, this new form of cyberwarfare would be a dirty fight.

### **Rush Week @ Facebook's Fanatic Frat House**

As the liberals would play whack-a-mole on Facebook, working with the system administrators of the global social network to ["put down"](#) incendiary pages, many more pro-Qadri Facebook groups would continue to pop up. Eventually, the pro-Qadri pages would be countered by a liberal wave of pro-Taseer pages, but the initiative would go to the haters: A critical and timely win on a viral medium.

This was something new. Though Islamists and their sympathizers have been around on Pakistan's favored social networks (primarily Facebook, as Twitter and other networks have not caught on in comparable [popularity](#) among the country's right wing militant and/or political groups<sup>47</sup>) for almost as long as anyone else — supporting jihad and even [posting videos of executions](#) that eventually go viral thanks to the gawk factor<sup>48</sup>, if not the power of the Islamists' message — the Taseer phenomenon was different.

Remarkably, the assassination unleashed a liberal versus conservative clash of *freelance fanatics* facing off against the tragically hip moderates. Across Pakistan, *individual* Facebook users went to war, launching their own campaigns for or against Taseer, based upon personal interpretations of the many factors that had led to his assassination. That night of the murder - the Blasphemy Laws, Asia Bibi's guilt, Qadri's heroism versus his villainy, Taseer's political affiliations, his extravagant lifestyle, the Western style of dress of his wife and daughters and even his son's alcohol consumption and sexual gossip — everything became fair game for critiquing, sharing, insulting and as Facebook prefers to put it, "liking" the governor's assassination.

Within that platform, such initiatives would eventually take several forms and be based on different methods — beyond the mere groups or fan pages that the *Tribune* had initially reported on the night of the murder. One common occurrence would be the

“Profile Picture appeal,” where conservative Facebook users would urge others in their networks to make Qadri’s image their own, virtual avatar. The *Guardian*, awestruck by this new form of viral glorification, would make the scathing assessment: “Even before Taseer was given a burial, his killer had become a hero of sorts...By the evening, Qadri’s picture had replaced a thousand profile pictures on Facebook. He was a mujahid, a lion, a true hero of Islam.”<sup>49</sup>

Other, more dedicated Qadri supporters would work a little harder than the profile-pic campaigners, and write entire “articles” praising the actions of the assassin. Almost like film or restaurant reviews, these part-theological, part-political tirades would carry come-hither copy like “Highly Recommended” and encourage other users to “Invite your friends,” while claiming “Exclusive Access” to the latest video footage of Qadri that they had grabbed from television and uploaded either directly to Facebook or embedded through the video-centric social network, YouTube. Particularly popular was a clip of Qadri, in full commando uniform and equipped with an automatic weapon, [reciting a naat](#)<sup>50</sup> (the Islamic version of a hymn, only *naats* are always Muhammad-centric) at a religious rally days before he killed Taseer. The [comments](#) that such videos garnered as feedback were overwhelmingly Islamist, unabashedly approving of the murder, and unreservedly hateful of Taseer<sup>51</sup>.

But as the liberals struck back, both with their own pro-Taseer pages along with coordinated appeals to Facebook’s central administrators to shut down the conservative competition, they had to face the grim challenge of digital freedom allowed by that network (“...as one shuts down, another five crop up,” a liberal [tweet](#) would lament). Also, some quick learners in the pro-Qadri camp sharpened up and adopted a new technique: Making “closed” Facebook groups — private cyber-rooms that allowed unadulterated virtual virtue, while requiring a clearance for membership, and allowing the page manager/s to scour, sort and select recruits. It was a process that can only be described as a digital version of rush week for Facebook’s fanatical fraternity, and the qualifying test was raking up enough hateful content against Taseer.

But in what fast escalated into an ideologically driven competition of cyber brinksmanship on the world's most connected social media platform, perhaps the most interesting development in the Taseer versus Qadri Facebook War was that it quickly evolved into a cross-border cyber-insurgency. Enter MillatFacebook.

*Millat* is the Urdu and Arabic word for “Nation of Islam,” and MillatFacebook is Pakistan's Islamist answer to Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard-born phenomenon. Launched in 2010 after a Lahore High Court blanket ban on (the real) Facebook across all Pakistani cyberspace — [a reprisal against the network giant](#) from a local court<sup>52</sup> in reaction to the former's refusal to [shut down the page/s](#) that were campaigning for 2010's so-called “Draw Muhammad Day”, MillatFacebook [claims](#) to “connect users to 1.57 billion Muslims” as well as to what it describes as “nice, decent, sweet people from other religions”<sup>53</sup>. Nowhere close to its Silicon Valley counterpart in terms of [functionality or outreach](#) — even in Pakistan<sup>54</sup>, where it makes the unverified claim of having over 300,000 members — MillatFacebook [lauds](#) itself to be the “Muslim Ummah's [Nation's] first ever social networking site” and the “only rival to Facebook”.<sup>55</sup>

As Facebook, spurred on by Pakistan's online liberals, cracked down on one pro-Qadri page after another, MillatFacebook stepped in to fill the vacuum. With unmitigated space for all the Qadri-praising/Taseer-bashing that its users could muster, MillatFacebook — in those hours and days after the Taseer assassination — became Pakistani cyberturf's coziest, if not most popular, space for hate-related online content sharing. Encouraged by the increased interest in its laissez-faire atmosphere for anti-Taseer/Islamist thought, it even decided to feature banner ads for its officially administered pro-Qadri page across its site space (and still features a [Qadri profile page](#)).

### **Facebook is Qadri Country, but Twitter...**

“If you go through the profiles of Qadri supporters on Facebook, you'd think Justin Bieber was the cause of extremism in Pakistan.”



So tweeted<sup>5</sup> Pakistan's famous social observer, the blogger who simply goes by the pseudonym [Kala Kawa](#). Hours after the murder, the tweet would be retweeted by other users, and as thousands would read this drab, 131 characters-worth appraisal of Qadri's supporters - perhaps Pakistan's first corps of conservative Facebook Warriors - both American teen-pop sensation Justin Bieber and Mumtaz Qadri would start to "trend" i.e. feature prominently as a subject, simultaneously on Pakistan's Twitter-feed — a day worth noting!

It would be a strange digital dichotomy. While Facebook would become the battleground that Qadri's supporters would overrun through hit-and-run cyber-guerilla tactics, Twitter would serve as the vantage point that Pakistan's liberals would huddle to as they tried to regroup and reassess what had just happened on Facebook — digital turf that had been relegated to the assumption of [being dominated by the liberal-elite](#)<sup>56</sup>. There would be little, if any hate communicated on Twitter, but Facebook would capitulate to the anti-Taseer camp.

On the night of January 4, the tweet-lament of [Jahanzeb Haque](#), Web Editor of the *Express Tribune*, would show how liberal, English-centric print and online journalists were reacting to the Taseer-specific activity that was dominating Pakistani networks on Facebook. Haque's bosses had told him that any comments that were directly inciting violence or approving of the murder, especially those featuring the nihilistic declaration in Arabic, "Wajib-ul-Qatal" — Qadri's theological reasoning for why Taseer "must be murdered" for the latter's alleged act of blasphemy — would have to be deleted from the *Tribune's* popular Facebook page. As he monitored and removed hateful feedback about Taseer late into the night, Haque also continued tweeting about this new operational responsibility:

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<sup>5</sup> Kala Kawa has now deleted this tweet, along with several others that were Taseer-related, from his account, not responding to inquiries about his decision. This tweet was thoroughly retweeted, but the original is lost.

“The horror of our society being deleted - string of comments calling @SalmaanTaseer wajibul qatal - very sad”.

Within seconds, his colleague, freelance writer [Rahma Mian](#) would tweet back from New York:

“@jhaque\_ how many will you delete. lets face it. we are surrounded by bigots. i have them in my family. i have no hope for Pakistan”

Both Haque and Mian’s exchange would be widely shared and re-tweeted. After all, Mian had a point: With the sheer volume of incendiary commentary being posted, Haque had a tall task ahead of him. Even till the time of this publication, the *Express Tribune* hadn’t managed to remove all hateful comments from its Facebook site, though it is unclear whether this is an oversight or a deliberate action to display diversity of opinion on the part of the *Tribune*’s editorial staff (or perhaps even a way to keep the page popular by allowing radicalized and intolerant postings).

Compared to Facebook, however, Twitter would become Taseer-turf — space still dominated by Pakistan’s liberals. The night of the assassination, the [New York Times](#) [would feature an analysis](#) of Taseer’s [recent tweets](#), redrawing the timeline of the slain governor’s thoughts about the plight of minorities versus the religious right<sup>57</sup>. One particular message highlighted by the *Times*, sent by Taseer on Christmas Eve, 2010 – the day thousands of conservatives protested across the country, demanding the death of Asia Bibi - would resonate (along with the NYT analysis) on Pakistan’s Twitter-feed and find new life after the assassination: “My observation on minorities: A man/nation is judged by how they support those weaker than them not how they lean on those stronger.”<sup>58</sup>

But while Twitter — perhaps due to its relative novelty, or maybe even because of its more “technical” interface that is dominated by “hashtags”, “@” pings, limited-character messaging and (compared to Facebook) multimedia limitations e.g no video playback — remained the turf of the liberals, who were the haters that had commandeered

Facebook? And how had Taseer's assassination triggered this corps of digital mercenaries to emerge in such numbers that their anti-Taseer/Islamist views — till now limited to select, even relatively unpopular if not marginalized Facebook pages<sup>6</sup> — had not only been upended the connected and activist liberals in Pakistan, but even become a phenomenon that merited international reporting? How had the leading platform of choice for Pakistan's social networking, Internet-savvy elite capitulated to the Quran-thumping right? The following day, many a dispatch would not only try to analyze what had happened to Pakistan's social media, but also attempt to profile the country's Facebook Warriors.

An AFP story that enjoyed a massive footprint in international publications on January 5th would make the basic connection — that Pakistan's elites were now extremist: “Analysts say the assassination underscores how deeply religious extremism has penetrated Pakistan's conservative society, with even the Internet-literate elite resorting to Facebook to rally support for the killer.”

*Foreign Policy's* David Kenner would draw an [analysis](#) that was both charged as well as meant to stir Pakistani authorities into action. He would even highlight the link and geographical location of a particular Facebook “lunatic,” hoping that local security would apprehend him:<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pakistan-centric Pro-Terror/Islamist Groups On Facebook (many of pro-Qadri individual users were members of these groups): [Eqaz: Where the Legacy of the Salaf Meets Tomorrow](#), [Is Pakistani Army Zionist?](#), [Pakistan Student Shriyat Movement](#), [RISING FROM FATA](#), [Lashkar E Jhangvi Zindaabad](#), [Sunni Tehreek](#), [Islamic Video and Speeches](#), [Jihad](#), [WE WANT TO FREE KASHMIR FROM INDIA](#), [Jihad is only solution of Kashmir](#), [Support Hizbut Tahrir](#), [Khilafah Movement Pakistan](#), [Raymond Davis's release will bring Revolution in Pakistan](#), [Tablighi Jamaat](#), [Jamaat e Islami Pakistan](#), [Syed Munawar Hasan](#), [Save Pakistan through Islamic revolution](#), [Inqalab Ae Ga](#), [Islamic Revolution Inqalab Pakistan Coming Soon](#)

Nevertheless, you'd think that those who supported Taseer's assassination would be relegated to the lunatic fringe — or at least be reticent about shouting their praise for the act from the rooftops. Not so... "May Allah protect Malik Mumtaz; he has indeed made us very proud as Muslims," reads one representative post written by [Kamran Qureshi](#) who, if his Facebook information is to be believed, resides in Lahore. Sounds like the Pakistani security services just got the names of a number of individuals with whom they might want to have a conversation.

But the *Guardian* [didn't agree](#) with the *Foreign Policy* analysis at all. The Facebook Warriors were not lunatics, nor were they on the fringe of anything<sup>60</sup>:

So who are these people who lionise the cold-blooded murderer? Your regular kids, really... Those who have trawled the profiles of these supporters have said that they have MBA degrees, they follow Premier League football, they love the Pirates of the Caribbean films. Miley Cyrus figures on lots of these pages.

In the context of appraising the anti-Taseer Facebook Warriors and their warped worldview, it is critical to understand both *Foreign Policy's* analysis as well as the *Guardian's* inadvertent rebuttal of it. While the [Twitter Revolutions](#) were rocking the capitals of Egypt and Tunisia and dismantling the old guard security regimes of those countries<sup>61</sup>, Pakistan's [Facebook Generation](#) was at war with itself. In the Middle East, those digital activists were bunched together and considered unanimously young, aware, modern and democratic — all in a hip, '[Revolution 2.0](#)' way. But Pakistan's social networkers couldn't enjoy such a glorious generalization, and their activism was hardly revolutionary; rather it had the trappings of a cyber civil war. Perhaps, much like the polity of that country, they were inherently more complicated as well as divided.

### **The Facebook Warriors: An Anatomy of Religiosity**

"Articulating love for the Prophet is a way people purge their guilt. They see blasphemy as a red line, and if it's seen to be crossed, they say they're on board." Development analyst Mosharraf Zaidi, speaking to *Time* magazine, premised the popularity of the assassin Qadri in the Taseer-Qadri Facebook War on a context of religious "guilt." This

section will try to complicate that argument along the lines of both violent as well as compassionate - if institutionalized - religiosity.

Unlike the country's larger Urdu versus English divide — reflective of class, education and religious fissures — Pakistan's Facebookers have a lot in common. First and foremost, they are all [Internet-savvy](#). In a place like Pakistan, that is a sign of education — some sort of education — as well as access, and puts them on the same turf as their Middle East counterparts<sup>62</sup>. Secondly, they are politicized (for or against the status quo represented by the incumbent government/state) and/or internationalized, though overwhelmingly male — another common trait they share with the cadres of Revolution 2.0 that overwhelmed Cairo and Tunis.<sup>63</sup> But the similarities end there.

A possible difference between Pakistan's Facebook Warriors and the Middle East's Twitter Revolutionaries is that of content-specificity in terms of violent religiosity. An appraisal of assassination-centric Facebook pages indicates that many Pakistani Facebookers were more fickle, even frivolous, about their outlook towards political violence compared to their tolerance, even admiration for religious violence or retribution.<sup>64</sup> In effect, the murder of an elected state official was not perceived as wrong or unacceptable, primarily because it was processed and perceived to be religiously motivated.

A sampling of such Facebook comments revealed a range of opinions<sup>65</sup>: Some extremist, some compassionate, some humane, some facetious and some politicized. Many Facebookers were distraught about the killing. Many others rejoiced. Many quoted the Quran in Arabic. Many couldn't write in English, so they typed in phonetic Urdu to get their point across.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As *Time* magazine would [profile](#) them: "They were not fundamentalists, nor were they averse to Western culture." But, *Time* would go on to qualify, "The spread of religiosity has created a sense of religious guilt and shame in much of mainstream Pakistan...pulling the consensus in a more conservative direction."

But religiosity did continuously play a critical role in blurring the acceptability line. Naturally, while one group celebrated the murder, others abhorred it, but many of those pacifists still criticized Taseer for being 'blasphemous' (and thus became advertent or inadvertent apologists for Qadri's actions).

The Pakistanis were also prone to widely cite Quranic/Hadithic verses, as well as to link Taseer's murder not just to his opposition to the Blasphemy Laws, but also to his family's "Western" lifestyle, his alleged political corruption, even his wealth and sexual appetite. In effect, some conservative Facebook Warriors, simply, seem more "religious" than others; but not just in the reductionist, anti-Western, hateful sense of the term. Several others emerge as political, cultural and even class-based haters, but personal religiosity is invoked by user after user to explain, if not defend, Taseer's murder. To reiterate, anti-Taseer as it was, there was crucial diversity in the hateful Facebook discourse, but much of it driven by various interpretations of Islam.

For Pakistan, the Taseer-Qadri Facebook War would thus become a strange new front in the ideological struggle for Pakistan's soul. And theological digitization, maybe even digitized theology - or as I like to call it: Cyberhate - would thus evolve as the preferred tactic for establishing medium superiority.

### **Pakistan's Antisocial Social Media: Finally, Some Structure**

Social media can easily be characterized as the digital Che Guevera of our generation — sexy, brash, complex, change making and even dangerous. Since the early 1990s, the global social media network has grown from just millions to a few billion today.<sup>66</sup> And in recent years, the debate surrounding the surge in social media has become roughly divided between "cyber utopians" and "Internet pessimists." But the dynamics of Pakistan's social media movement, especially in context of the Taseer assassination, put it somewhere in between those two competing schools of thought.

Cyber utopian Clay Shirky [argues](#) that the rise of social media has numerous positive implications for our increasingly interdependent and information technology-driven world<sup>67</sup>. He claims that social media is a critical means for users to enjoy more access to information, increased incentives to engage in collective action, and greater freedom to express and share opinions. Shirky says that social media especially benefits conventionally “undisciplined groups” i.e. civil society actors. These, he maintains, include the youth, the middle-class, and members of small-town elite. Traditionally, well-disciplined groups such as businesses and governments have been more successful than uncoordinated groups at engaging in collective action and implementing social change. By introducing easier access to information and reducing coordination costs, Shirky argues, social media is gradually changing the trend in favor of the “uncoordinated” groups.

Agreed. It’s a very egalitarian picture. But while Shirky insightfully praises the positive implications of social media that translate into greater information flow and political freedom, he doesn’t quite contemplate the convoluted dynamics of a place like Pakistan.

Rather, Evgeny Morozov’s [skeptical take](#) seems to apply aptly to the Islamic Republic: “Increasingly, the Internet looks like a hypercharged version of the real world, with all of its promises and perils, while the cyber utopia that the early Web enthusiasts predicted seems ever more illusory.”<sup>68</sup> As social media has significantly increased global access to the information network, he argues, that enhanced contact has not translated into greater social liberty or justice. There are several reasons why this is so.

The first is an issue of quality versus quantity. Social media has indeed increased the number of people who are ‘connected’; however, it has had the reverse effect on the quality of information that is being communicated. Internet pessimists refer to this phenomenon as “slacktivism,” or in the words of Morozov, “bumper-sticker sentiment.”<sup>69</sup> While social media has created new avenues of information exchange and civic engagement, these interactions are often peripheral and unsustainable. It takes very little effort to click a “like” button on a Facebook page. Thus, there is virtually no cost

attached to joining a “Qadri is a Hero” Facebook group or even its competitive “Taseer is a Martyr” counterpart. Oftentimes, however, these actions do not necessarily translate into real and useful change, and depending on the cause célèbre of the campaign, may even occur at the expense of more effective “real-world activism” e.g. those defending Qadri (including himself) would have been much better off by providing him with a good legal team than thousands of hateful “fans” who created such a cascade of controversy that his trial has since been tainted by local and international liberal pressure! The conservative Facebook Warriors, passionate as they were, also proved to be counter-productive for their cause.

Secondly, social media is accessible to all types of people who can use it to do all types of things. This obviously includes “good” people using it for “good” things, like the democracy and freedom protests we saw in the Arab Spring. However, terrorist groups like al-Qaeda have also used it to [recruit new members](#),<sup>70</sup> communicate more easily and discreetly, and create a transnational network of followers and fans. In addition, social media can be adversely utilized for sexual harassment, illicit trade, cyberwarfare and cybercrime or simply — as we saw in the Taseer versus Qadri Facebook war — hate. The analyzed sampling (above and in the Notes Section) of Pakistan’s Facebook Warriors underscores a basic yet critical development in that country’s social media space: *Islamist and other right-wing actors can move swiftly from fringe status in “the real world” to dominating mainstream discourse* on networks like Facebook, depending on the event that triggers social media users into viral action. That convenience - of anyone being able to exchange information from the comfort and safety of their Web browser - poses a severe challenge to reason and accountability, which, in Taseer’s case, had grim consequences for rationality in the national discourse.

Finally, the assumption that a rise in social media opens up opportunities for freedom and democracy is one that does not universally hold. U.S. [Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s famous 2010 speech](#) on the direct correlation between Internet freedom and



human rights delivered an important message, especially in the context of American values of freedom of expression<sup>71</sup>. But how applicable is that link for generally bellicose societies like Pakistan, where the charged and violent political and religious atmosphere may not allow freedom of expression to be the first priority...Perhaps, in the extreme case of a Taseer-type national emergency, not even a feasible priority?

To quote Shirky himself: "Political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public."<sup>72</sup> Thus, social media is *not by any means the starting point for a "positive change."* Simply, connectivity alone will not change society; in effect, Facebook will never be the nucleus for reform.

Rather, the positive consequences of social media, such as the democratic reforms that were rated so highly in the Middle East — perhaps even a little overrated — can only occur when there are: 1) *strong civil society structures in place* that can create room for the media interactions to translate into real-world action and 2) *a deep level of social and political discipline* that can absorb and direct social media interactivity into positive actions and institutions. Pakistan's cyberspace, as well as its political and mainstream media space, largely fail on both those crucial premises.

### **Why the Twitter Revolutions Will Not Come to Pakistan**

The Arab Spring was widely hailed as an almost perfect storm partly created by a "good" social media revolution. These movements would exemplify how ordinary citizens and activists utilized Facebook and Twitter to mobilize for social change and to communicate information at the grassroots level.<sup>73</sup> "Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have combined together with standard media [such as TV network Al Jazeera] and cross-border crowd dynamics to create a perfect feedback loop."<sup>74</sup> In Pakistan, however, even though we saw the same feedback loop in action, it reflected deep political schisms as well as a vicious and violent religiosity, not "perfect" liberal ideals. Why?

First, to Tunisia, where social media played a significant role in publicizing the events that unfolded during late 2010 and early 2011. Despite President Ben Ali's attempts to control official forms of media, "Tunisians got an alternative picture from Facebook, which remained uncensored through the protests, and they communicated events to the rest of the world by posting videos to YouTube and Dailymotion."<sup>75</sup>

A key incident that highlights the "positive" insurgent power of social media is that of the Tunisian vegetable-cart vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, to protest seizure of his property. "Gruesome images of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's police attacking Tunisian protesters were uploaded to Flickr and Twitter while videos of the protests were released on YouTube and Facebook."<sup>76</sup> Through these social media instruments, ideas and information spread like wildfire, particularly among the restive youth. The death of Bouazizi spurred demonstrations involving hundreds of Tunisians organized in mass protests and rallies, via Facebook and Twitter, which enabled them to spread information about their struggle to the rest of the world and eventually oust their president. As Bouazizi's family told Al Jazeera, local citizens protested in the street with "a rock in one hand, a cell phone in the other." The name of Bouazizi, and the name of his small city, became global hashtags on Twitter. Soon people around the world were tweeting #Tunisia, as anti-government protests rocked the small nation<sup>77</sup>. Little wonder that Tunisia's is called mother of the Twitter Revolutions.

Ethan Zuckerman's important January 2011 [article](#) in *Foreign Policy* was one of the first to track the dissemination of news about the demonstrations as the Tunisians would go on to document newer events after Bouazizi, like the shift of the unrest from Sidi Bouzid to Sfax and from Hammamet to Tunis via social media, and how that greatly cascaded the street protests that ensued. As for the internationalization aspect, "the videos and accounts published to social media sites offered an ongoing picture of the protests to those around the world savvy enough to be paying attention."<sup>78</sup> Within that context,

similar attention was also paid to Qadri's Facebook fan club as it emerged in Pakistani cyberspace, but with little optimism and grave concern about the future of that country.

Notably, Qadri's phenomenon was both similar and different. Similar, because several images of him — praying, confessing, and defending his actions — also went viral, much like the Bouazizi video. But they didn't inspire protest. The correlation between the medium (an insurgent tool like Facebook) and the concept (an social cause, Qadri) were present, but there wasn't much to protest about. What was the difference? A "popular" action — the murder of a Western-liberal governor — had already happened! Thus, no one would protest! Rather, Pakistan's Facebook Warriors celebrated the murder and incited even more violence.

To reiterate, on a larger and more popular level, a reprehensible action — indeed, a crime — was actually perpetuated to go viral and in turn spread more hate in Pakistan. The conservative Facebook Warriors shared — invective, congratulatory notes, religious edicts and, of course, clips and pictures of Qadri — much like Bouazizi's supporters had shared his data, but with one difference: Pakistan's Facebook Warriors shared what they *wanted*, not what they *hated*. That example of social media becoming a tool for an insurgency — driven by intolerant values attacking tolerant values — is a very dangerous precedent.

As for Egypt versus Pakistan, the Arab Spring saw social media in that Middle Eastern country culminate as a substitute for mainstream/state-controlled media that was obviously pro-regime and not "free". But as mainstream media in Pakistan is privately-owned and deregulated (though it has been [accepted at the highest editorial levels](#) that there is interference by the security and intelligence apparatus in editorial decision-making), social media wasn't widely perceived as a viable platform for alternative or "free" opinion in the country because the dominant mainstream was reputedly "free" too. Thus, there was no influential "shift" during the Taseer crisis from mainstream to social media; although the former was conservative and even pro-Qadri, it remained popular.

Egypt also had clear structural and hierarchical differences when compared to a [poorly connected Pakistan](#): “Egypt hosts an active and politically minded blogging community, and approximately 79% of the citizenry — over 60 million people — own a mobile phone.”<sup>79</sup> Summing up his political enterprise, 30-year-old Google executive Wael Ghonim, a leader of Egypt’s Twitter Revolution, was famously quoted by the Wall Street Journal: “This is an Internet revolution. I’ll call it Revolution 2.0.”<sup>80</sup> But Pakistan’s cyber-social infrastructure was too nascent for creating the critical mass of liberal social upheaval combining with social media connectivity that Ghonim claimed was changing his country.

As for insurgent leadership, Ghonim would be detained by Egyptian authorities for creating the Facebook page [“We Are All Khaled Said”](#), dedicated to the suppressed story of a young businessman beaten to death by police in Alexandria. Similar to the case of Bouazizi in Tunisia, this incident was used (along with Ghonim’s detention) to further propel mass protests via Facebook and Twitter, organized by and amongst Egyptians themselves. But in Pakistan’s relatively “free” mainstream media, with the *overwhelming, accepted and popular discourse aired and published in favor* of Qadri, there was no room for any Ghonims to emerge in the “parallel world” of social media, as was the case in Egypt. Naturally, no unofficial “leader” of the social media upheaval – either liberal or conservative – rose up; just several hate-driven or peacenik “slacktivists” who ranted on about revolution, but didn’t bring it.

As for the authorities, both in the Middle East as well as Pakistan, theirs was a tall task, but with different goals. Due to the viral pace and scale of social media, authoritarian leaders who try to exert control over information sharing via the Web will probably not be easily successful. “Time and technology are not on their side.”<sup>81</sup> As Alexander Klimburg, a fellow at the Austrian Institute of International Affairs who advises governments on cyberwarfare, emphasizes: achieving control over social media networks involves “highly complex operations that take a lot of resources to accomplish, and also have a small danger. There is a possibility of a ‘reverse infection’, that the

security services themselves are undermined in the process and [come to] support the revolution.”<sup>82</sup>

Klimburg’s theory is applicable to the Middle East, where the old guard regimes were ill prepared and unequipped to control the cyber-insurgency, probably because they were tied up with an actual one on the streets. But his argument can be turned on its head in Pakistan’s case. Perhaps there was never a chance of “reverse infection” in that country as its security services — widely assumed to be explicitly or tacitly approving of Qadri’s actions<sup>83</sup> — never wanted to crack down on the social media inspired anti-Taseer/Islamist wave in the first place.

Shirky complicates this point, claiming that due to the high resilience of social media, attempts by authoritarian governments to shut it down create the risk of alienating pro-government supporters as well as neutral observers<sup>84</sup>. This is exemplified in the [widely](#) reported developments in [Egypt](#), where as and when local and [international](#) journalists were cracked down upon, everyday people filled the vacuum and tweeted “live reports” of those atrocities straight to others in their networks – and eventually, global mainstream media - further pressuring and isolating the Mubarak regime. To reiterate, with the rise of easy-to-use and accessible forms of social media, ordinary citizens and civil society actors no longer have to depend on traditional mainstream media to express dissent and organize campaigns.

But what happens when the dissent that is disseminated via social media is actually Islamist and/or extremist (pro-Qadri), targeting a weak but elected and secular government (Islamabad’s) versus being secular and/or democratic and popular (Tahrir Square’s), fighting a strong and authoritarian regime (Cairo’s) *along* with mainstream media? Simply, a perfect storm of hate-based content sweeping across the nation, as happened after Taseer’s murder.

How concerned should we be about the conservative and connected digital insurgents of Pakistan? The country is estimated to have 18.5 million (a little over 10 percent of the

total population) of its citizens connected to the Internet.<sup>85</sup> Although this percentage is lower than that of Tunisia (33.4 percent) and Egypt (21.1 percent), Internet connectivity is growing at a tremendous rate among Pakistanis. Nevertheless, “a recent [survey by the BBC](#) of 27,000 Pakistanis concluded that the Internet has yet to mature as a powerful tool for social change, with four out of five users believing the Internet to not be at all essential to such transformation.”<sup>86</sup> This is surprising, given that Pakistanis share many of the factors and problems that characterize pre-Arab Spring Egypt and Tunisia, such as high inflation, rising unemployment, lack of trust in the government, and an incrementally growing and disenfranchised youth. But there is no “youth bulge” busting the seams of a praetorian Pakistani system through online connectivity. Not yet.

This is not to say that the Internet has had no influence in Pakistan. Following the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, local authorities should have begun anticipating protests in Pakistan, especially among the youth, all because of one, startling statistic: Within a six-month time frame from late 2010 to May 2011 (the peak period of the Arab Spring as well as the Taseer/Qadri Facebook War), *the number of Facebook users in Pakistan more than doubled from 1.8 million to 4.2 million, of whom 50 percent are between 18 and 24-years-old!*<sup>87</sup> But Pakistan’s ‘Revolution 2.0’, so far, seems stuck in the pipeline. The huge increase in users has translated to nothing like the “positive” aspects of change that can stir a liberal upheaval. At best, the assassination of Punjab’s governor showed the negative as well as the positive potential of social media in Pakistan. At worst — thanks largely to its peculiar religious and political fault-lines — the Taseer-Qadri Facebook War just made a very social media, very, very anti-social.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> March 2011 interviews conducted with family friend/s of Taseer in Lahore and Islamabad by author in who have asked to remain unnamed due to the sensitivity of the subject. Also, much of this reconstruction was gleaned from the author's own reporting from the murder scene on the night of January 4, 2011 while reporting live for Aaj TV.

<sup>2</sup> Ayesha Nasir, "Pakistan's Police and Army: How Many Enemies Within?" *Time* January 8, 2011  
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2041406,00.html>

<sup>3</sup> Arif Jamal, "Sufi Militants Struggle with Deobandi Jihadists in Pakistan," *Terrorism Monitor*, Volume: 9 Issue: 8 - February 24, 2011.  
<[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=37562](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37562)>

<sup>4</sup> "Pakistan assassin says he acted alone: Police," (AFP) – January 10, 2011.  
<<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gCPxUpaXPSgv0vjCeRnMXYss6lg?docId=CNG.00286e018674d4de5e3f29aee4d7d695.8b1>>.

<sup>5</sup> Qadri Confession Video YouTube Upload– allegedly leaked by unknown police official/s.  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sNfQaVZInc>>

<sup>6</sup> "Mumtaz Qadri appears in court for trial hearing," (AFP) - January 24, 2011.  
<<http://www.dawn.com/2011/01/24/mumtaz-qadri-appears-in-court-for-trial-hearing.html>>

<sup>7</sup> "Sermons motivated killer of Governor Taseer," (AP), January 10, 2011.  
<http://www.dawn.com/2011/01/10/sermons-motivated-killer-of-governor-taseer.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Orla Guerin, "Pakistani Christian Asia Bibi 'has price on her head,'" BBC News - December 6, 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11930849>

<sup>9</sup> “The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan” – Official Page.  
<<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution/>>

<sup>10</sup> “Religious parties rally in support of Qadri,” *Dawn* - January 8, 2011.  
<http://www.dawn.com/2011/01/08/religious-parties-rally-in-support-of-qadri.html>

<sup>11</sup> Omar Warraich, “Pakistan's Pols Paralyzed by Religious Extremism,” *Time* - January 13, 2011.  
<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html#ixzz1MZNie82X><http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html>>

<sup>12</sup> David Montero, “Rape law reform roils Pakistan's Islamists,” *The Christian Science Monitor* - November 17, 2006. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/1117/p07s02-wosc.html>>

<sup>13</sup> “Lawyers Shower Roses for Governor’s Killer,” *Dawn* – January 5, 2011.  
<<http://www.dawn.com/2011/01/05/lawyers-shower-roses-for-governors-killer.html>>

<sup>14</sup> Freelance Camera/Viral video from YouTube – Uploaded on January 6, 2011.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAc0uyRkK94>

<sup>15</sup> Griff Witte, “Pakistan Moves Against Opposition - Politicians and Activists Arrested, News Media Silenced; U.S. to Review Aid,” *Washington Post* Foreign Service - November 5, 2007.  
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/04/AR2007110400581.html>>

<sup>16</sup> David Nakamura, “Pakistan's media piling on president,” *Washington Post* - October 22, 2010.  
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/21/AR2010102106159.html>>

<sup>17</sup> “Elections in Pakistan in 2008”: *UK’s Department of International Development Appraisal Report*.  
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/elections/elections-pk-2008.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Taseer’s family owns the undefined/major shares of newspapers *Daily Times*, *Aaj Kal* and Business-Plus TV, according to the website of his broadband Internet/cable service provider, WorldCall. <<http://www.worldcall.com.pk/>>

<sup>19</sup> Omar Warraich, “Pakistan's Pols Paralyzed by Religious Extremism,” *Time* - January 13, 2011.  
<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html#ixzz1MZNie82X><http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html>>

<sup>20</sup> “Pakistan media condemns Salman Taseer's assassination” BBC News – January 5, 2011.  
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12118439>>

<sup>21</sup> “Taseer killer turns hero on Facebook,” AFP dispatch reproduced in *Hindustan Times* on January 5, 2011. <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/Taseer-killer-turns-hero-on-Facebook/Article1-646647.aspx>>

<sup>22</sup> *Jang* is the top daily newspaper with a circulation of 850,000. *Nawa-e-Waqt* holds second place with 500,000, followed by *Pakistan* (279,000), *Khabrain* (232,000), *The News* (120,000),



*Dawn* (109,000), and *Business Recorder* (22,000) – All Pakistan Newspapers Association (APNS) estimate in 1997 (last available online). No new numbers have been officially released on the APNS website, though some new actors, like the *Express Tribune* and the *Daily Times*, have overtaken older papers like the *Business Recorder*, but English print circulation is still dwarfed by Urdu.

<sup>23</sup> “Two Pakistani TV channels say shut over anti-Zardari reports,” *Jang/Geo* – August 10, 2010. <<http://www.geo.tv/8-10-2010/69772.htm>>

<sup>24</sup> “Pakistan media condemns Salman Taseer’s assassination,” BBC News – January 5, 2011. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12118439>>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> “The Murder of Salman Taseer,” *The News* Editorial - January 5, 2011. <<http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=23878&Cat=8&dt=1/5/2011>>

<sup>27</sup> “The cancer within,” *Dawn* Editorial - January 5, 2011. <<http://www.dawn.com/2011/01/05/the-cancer-within-2.html>>

<sup>28</sup> Nadir Hassan, “No Country for Brave Men,” *Express Tribune* – January 5, 2011. <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/99051/no-country-for-brave-men/>>

<sup>29</sup> “Pakistan media condemns Salman Taseer’s assassination” BBC News – January 5, 2011. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12118439>>

<sup>30</sup> “The Moral Collapse of a Nation,” *Guardian* Editorial – January 8, 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jan/08/pakistan-moral-collapse-nation-pakistan>>

<sup>31</sup> Gallup Pakistan Media Report (print), requested from: <[http://www.gallup.com.pk/gallup\\_media\\_report.html](http://www.gallup.com.pk/gallup_media_report.html)>

<sup>32</sup> Mohammad Hanif, “How Pakistan Responded to Salman Taseer’s Assassination,” *Guardian* – January 6, 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/06/pakistan-salman-taseer-assassination>>

<sup>33</sup> Zahid Hussain and Tom Wright, "Pakistan Killer Had Revealed Plans," *Wall Street Journal* - January 5, 2011. <[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703675904576063581434623072.html?mod=google\\_news\\_wsj](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703675904576063581434623072.html?mod=google_news_wsj)>

<sup>34</sup> "Samaa, Waqt TV fined for airing Qadri's interview," *Pakistan Today* – January 10, 2011. <<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/01/samaa-waqt-tv-fined-for-airing-qadris-interview/>>

<sup>35</sup> [The Fight To Define the Debate](#)," Café Piyala Blog – January 11, 2011. <[http://cafepiyala.blogspot.com/search/label/Malik Mumtaz Haider Qadri](http://cafepiyala.blogspot.com/search/label/Malik%20Mumtaz%20Haider%20Qadri)>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ahsan Butt, "Governor Salman Taseer, 1944-2011," 5 Rupees Blog – January 4, 2011. <<http://asiancorrespondent.com/45345/governor-taseer-1946-2011/>>

<sup>38</sup> "Ghuttan," Kala Kawa Blog – January 4, 2011. <<http://kalakawa.wordpress.com/2011/01/06/ghuttan/>>

<sup>39</sup> Viral Upload on YouTube: News Beat – January 5, 2011. <<http://youtu.be/Z2bwSz6Ompw>>

<sup>40</sup> "The Fight To Define the Debate," Café Piyala Blog – January 11, 2011. [http://cafepiyala.blogspot.com/search/label/Malik Mumtaz Haider Qadri](http://cafepiyala.blogspot.com/search/label/Malik%20Mumtaz%20Haider%20Qadri)

<sup>41</sup> Aamed Ahmed Khan, "This is a Murderer Media," BBC Urdu – January 11, 2011 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/multimedia/2011/01/110110\\_abbas\\_athar\\_media\\_taseer\\_uk.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/multimedia/2011/01/110110_abbas_athar_media_taseer_uk.shtml)

<sup>42</sup> Musharraf has maintained this line for several years: His latest reiteration, through an IPNS dispatch can be found at: <[http://twocircles.net/2011may07/yes\\_i\\_was\\_embarrassed\\_musharraf\\_osama\\_pakistan.html](http://twocircles.net/2011may07/yes_i_was_embarrassed_musharraf_osama_pakistan.html)>

<sup>43</sup> Mohammad Hanif, "How Pakistan Responded to Salman Taseer's Assassination," *Guardian* – January 6, 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/06/pakistan-salman-taseer-assassination>>

<sup>44</sup> Omar Warraich, "Pakistan's Pols Paralyzed by Religious Extremism," *Time* - January 13, 2011. <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html#ixzz1MZNie82X><http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2042522,00.html>>

<sup>45</sup> Zarrar Khuhro, "New Media: Online Popularity for Killer Sparks Controversy," *Express Tribune* – January 4, 2011. <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/99270/new-media-online-popularity-for-killer-sparks-controversy/>>

<sup>46</sup> *Charlie Rose Show*, Social Media Web Special. <<http://www.charlierose.com/view/clip/11647>>

- <sup>47</sup> "Pakistan Turns to Twitter," Huffington Post - August 18, 2009.  
<[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/18/pakistan-turns-to-twitter\\_n\\_261916.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/18/pakistan-turns-to-twitter_n_261916.html)>
- <sup>48</sup> Independent User Facebook Video Upload of ISI Official Execution by Taliban leader Hakimullah Mehsud that went 'viral'.  
<<https://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=10150107381159725&comments>>
- <sup>49</sup> Mohammad Hanif, "How Pakistan Responded to Salman Taseer's Assassination," *Guardian* – January 6, 2011.  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/06/pakistan-salman-taseer-assassination>>
- <sup>50</sup> Independent User YouTube Video Upload of Qadri's Naat Recitation that went 'viral'.  
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ko1P64bhW0?>>
- <sup>51</sup> Independent User YouTube Video Upload of Qadri's Naat Recitation Comments List (many original comments have been deleted since video was uploaded).  
<[http://www.youtube.com/all\\_comments?v=-ko1P64bhW0](http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=-ko1P64bhW0)>
- <sup>52</sup> Kamila Shamsi, "Pakistan's Antisocial Networking," *Guardian* – May 26, 2010.  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/may/26/pakistan-facebook-ban-street-politics>>
- <sup>53</sup> MillatFacebook Official Page. <<http://www.millatfacebook.com/>>
- <sup>54</sup> "MillatFacebook Review: Thumbs Down," *Express Tribune*  
<<http://tribune.com.pk/story/16614/millat-facebook-review-thumbs-down/>>
- <sup>55</sup> MillatFacebook Official Page. <<http://www.millatfacebook.com/>>
- <sup>56</sup> Haider Warraich, "Pakistan's Social Media Landscape," *Foreign Policy* – March 18 2011.  
<[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans\\_social\\_media\\_landscape](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans_social_media_landscape)>
- <sup>57</sup> Robert Mackey, "On Twitter, Pakistan's Governor's War on Religious Fanatics," *The New York Times*' 'The Lede' Blog – January 4, 2011. <<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/04/on-twitter-glimpses-of-a-slain-pakistani-governors-war-on-religious-fanatics/#>>
- <sup>58</sup> Taseer Twitter Page. <<https://twitter.com/#!/SalmaanTaseer>>
- <sup>59</sup> David Kenner, "Pakistani Gunman Becomes Facebook Hero," *Foreign Policy* - January 4, 2011  
<[http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/04/pakistani\\_gunman\\_becomes\\_facebook\\_folk\\_hero](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/04/pakistani_gunman_becomes_facebook_folk_hero)>
- <sup>60</sup> Mohammad Hanif, "How Pakistan Responded to Salman Taseer's Assassination," *Guardian* – January 6, 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/06/pakistan-salman-taseer-assassination>>

<sup>61</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, “The First Twitter Revolution?” *Foreign Policy* – January 14, 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/14/the\\_first\\_twitter\\_revolution](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/14/the_first_twitter_revolution)

<sup>62</sup> Haider Warraich, “Pakistan’s Social Media Landscape,” *Foreign Policy* – March 18 2011. <[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans\\_social\\_media\\_landscape](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans_social_media_landscape)>

<sup>63</sup> Zarrar Khuhro, “New Media: Online Popularity for Killer Sparks Controversy,” *Express Tribune* – January 4, 2011. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/99270/new-media-online-popularity-for-killer-sparks-controversy/>

<sup>64</sup> As can be seen in the following timeline-analysis of a “neutral” Facebook Page that announced Taseer’s death

<sup>65</sup> The format of the original Facebook page that belongs to the popular *Express Tribune* newspaper has been modified for the purposes of fitting this paper. No original content has been deleted, though the *Tribune* deleted several (“[at least fifty percent](#)”) of comments that incited hate. All links, in [blue](#), were functional till May 15, 2011 (when this paper was written), and lead to the Facebook profiles of active users as well as to the original postings. Translations from the Urdu and/or Arabic and/or Persian are in [red](#), as are any contextual notes.

#### [Express Tribune Facebook Page](#)



#### [Salman Taseer killed in Islamabad](#)

*According to initial [sic] reports, unidentified persons fired upon and wounded Taseer in Kohsar market.*

January 4 at 8:35pm [[This and all subsequent listings feature the original time of posting, Pakistan Standard Time](#)]

[14 people like this](#) [The ‘like’ function on Facebook usually indicates user approval, but also triggers several synapses in the user’s networks where the post becomes visible to his/her ‘friends’. In effect, this is one of several ways Facebook is designed to ‘go viral’]



#### [Aftab Malick](#)

*v sad :(*

January 4 at 8:43pm · Like



[Aamir Ahmed Khan](#)

*Height of intolerance :'(*

January 4 at 8:44pm · Like · 2 people



[Xeeshan Butt](#)

*Inna lillah wa inna alehe rajeon [The Quranic verse that blesses the dead]*

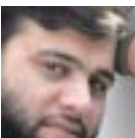
January 4 at 8:44pm · Like



[Ali Bin Arif](#)

*Inna lillah wa inna alehe rajeon [The Quranic verse that blesses the dead]*

January 4 at 8:45pm · Like



[Ahmad Chohaun](#)

*he is killed due to his negative attitude [sic] towards islam.bt indeed its a sad news [sic]. [This is the first apologist comment recorded on the Tribune's Facebook Page]*

January 4 at 8:45pm via Facebook Mobile · Like



[Aamir Ahmed Khan](#)

*5 people like this...*

*Really? Real sad!*

January 4 at 8:46pm · Like



[Irfan Afghan](#)

*Lets not attach this to Islam ... Inna Lil Lahi wa Inna Ilihi rajeeoon [The Quranic verse that blesses the dead]*

January 4 at 8:47pm · Like



[Khawaja Faraz Ahmed](#)

*PPPs political Gift to PML(N)?*

January 4 at 8:47pm · Like



Malak Hasan

RIP, Allah hosla de is k ghar walo ko hosla de aameen [*May Allah grant his family the strength, Amen*]

January 4 at 8:49pm · Like



Zahra Kazmi

Allah mian dheel deta hay deta hay deta hay or phir aik dam say pakar leta hay [*Allah lets you to do all that you will, and then takes it all back, suddenly*]

January 4 at 8:49pm · Like · 3 people



Arsalan Xaheer

Innalillahe wa inna alele rajioon [*The Quranic verse that blesses the dead*]

January 4 at 8:50pm · Like



Sami Ullah Tahir

oh GOD

January 4 at 8:53pm via Facebook Mobile · Like



Mohammed Naeem

*God! Allah ham sab pey Raham karey! [May Allah take pity on everyone]*

January 4 at 8:55pm · Like



Junaid Hussain

*RIP Salman Taseer*

January 4 at 8:55pm · Like



Abdul Rehman

*dont tensed [sic]... uski moot to easy lug rhi hai magr Moat k farishtay ne uski rooh ko bari mushkil se or tarpa tarpa k nikala ho ga...Hum Nabi (S.A.W.W) ki shan main apni janoin ka nazrana paish kar bhi saktay hein or le bhi saktay hein. ALLHUMDULLILAH*

*[His death seems easy but I am sure that the angel of death must have tortured him, slowly, before taking his life. We can all give our lives for the Prophet (Peace be upon him), as well as take someone's life for Muhammad's honour. PRAISE BE TO ALLAH]*

January 4 at 9:02pm · Like





Muhammad Saad Khan

Shukar...Khas Kum Jahan Paak! [*Thankfully...Filt is gone, the world is pure*]

January 4 at 9:07pm · Like · 1 person



Nida Khawaja

*its a man-made law (the blasphemy law) and man has the right to speak abt it [sic]. no one said that huzoor (s.a.w) 's [Propet Mohammad's] dis-respect [sic] should be forgiven, but if one look closely, one can see the law itself is very strict and in the presence of two eye-witnessses [sic], the minorities can be hanged to death. it should, be all means, be changed [sic]. and this is a very very sad event that a person who spoke in the amendment of this law is assassinated today. OUR RELIGION,OUR PROPHET NEVER PREACHED, EXTREMISM AND VIOLENCE. we are brain-dead nation [sic]! read our Quran rather than following a bunch of phonies using our religion for their own benefit.*

January 4 at 9:47pm · Like · 6 people



Arsalan Jamsheed

*I got a forwarded message that new year gift is here. "Gustaakh-e-rasool" [*Offender of the Prophet*] is dead. Someone please explain me if he was gustak-e-rasool who only opposed a man-made law or the person who killed him brutally in public?*

January 4 at 9:55pm · Like · 5 people



Ahmed Talha

*He got killed coz he was not a closeted sexaholic [sic] (read: religious) like the SHARIFS!!!!  
May all the blasphemy Law supporters burn in hell!! "Shitty Black Law"!!!*

January 4 at 9:58pm · Like · 3 people



Habibies Al Zurmat

*Very Good News i am sooooooooooooooooo Happy, m celebrating Eid today ;) [sic] Shaitan margiya Hazaro  
be-gunnah logo ka qatil dafa hogiya is Dunya se Allah kary Qabar se seeda jahannam mai jaye [The Satan  
is dead, the murderer of thousands is gone, may Allah expedite his departure from the grave to hell]*

January 4 at 10:00pm · Like



Faizan Khan

wowwwwwwwww

January 4 at 10:01pm · Like



Danish Rasheed

*RIP Salman Taseer, may god give your family courage to bear the loss*

January 4 at 10:05pm · Like



Danish Rasheed

*The responsibility lies with Punjab Govt and Rana Sanaullah, how come a person in Governor's escort was not security cleared, Normally people with strict religious believes are not deployed on VIP duties...total lapse or may be planning by PML-N Govt in Punjab....*

January 4 at 10:08pm · Like · 1 person



Ishtiyaque Aziz

*@ Neesa i fully agree with your opinion...[Neesa's opinion was removed by Tribune's Administrators for inciting murder through the controversial "Wajib-ul-Qatal/Must be Murdered" theological clause. She is subsequently referred to in several anti-Taseer posts]*

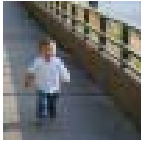
January 4 at 10:27pm · Like



Mohammed Naeem

*Good Bye Taseer sahib... You had already had more than enough of partying, drinking, and stuff like that... Time to see your Creator and meet the Accountability Force of the Almighty!*

January 4 at 10:28pm · Like



[Shaista Mobashir](#)

*political murder in the guise of religion.*

January 4 at 10:28pm · Like · 1 person



[Danish Rasheed](#)

*@ Shaista, Neesa and Aziz.....totally agreed...*

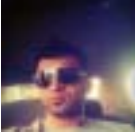
January 4 at 10:31pm · Like



[Mohammed Naeem](#)

*Danish: It's premature to draw a conclusion of the incident right away... The accused cop Qadri has confessed that he killed Taseer in the name of Blasphemy, he might have been used by some political forces but at the moment we only know that he was killed in the name of religion. Let's see.*

January 4 at 10:37pm · Like



Adi TAn

*@ neesa : wat a bag of scum ur[sic] .. Y wouldn't u be bcz u happy to hve worldcall wireless [Taseer's broadband Internet service] n u not sorry for death of a person who was father a son a friend may b something else as well [sic] ..*

*I have no personal admiration with taseer but i felt sorry for his family ..*

January 4 at 10:38pm · Like · 1 person



Danish Rasheed

*@ MN, Whenever someone is deployed on sensitive duties, their security clearance is carried out, people having strict religious/sectarian/ethnic believes are screened in that process and are not deployed on sensitive VIP duties. In case of a cop of Punjab Police, the responsibility falls on Special Br. Punjab directly and PML-N provincial govt indirectly...If it would have been a conspiracy theory, the person would have been dead by now, he handed himself over, it is a religious motivated murder , but the responsibility of security lapse goes to PML-N...and these bast\*\*ds should get it....*

January 4 at 11:08pm · Like · 1 person



Hamid Waseem

*What ever he did or what ever he drinks its his personal matter but killing someone in Islam is a biggest sin. Some called him Gustak-e- Rasool but killings some one is hell wrong. Please try to understand this. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad S.A.W [peace be upon him] never killed or hurt anyone in his life amid facing countless hurdles n getting hurt by criminals because killing is not the last option. And here I read some comments people celebrating. I don't know why ?? Please share*

January 4 at 11:19pm · Like · 2 people



[Mohammed Naeem](#)

*Danish: This is not the first time that someone has been killed by their security personnel... You cannot always screen people's minds... And according to Qadri's initial comments he said he had been hooked up with late Governor on 4-5 occasions... So he would have among trusted cops for sure... And I think we shouldn't just rely on Qadri's confessions... There had been news circulating last week that the PPP is going to change the Governor in Punjab, PML N was always among those who hated the man most so there could be anything, but as I said earlier, apparently it's a religiously motivated shoot out so far...*

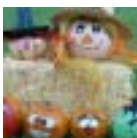
January 4 at 11:32pm · Like



[Danish Rasheed](#)

*@ Mn, Qadri was only attached from Pindi, when Governor use to come to Pindi/Islamabad.....this may be his first time with Taseer after his comments on blasphemy laws.....lets wait and see where the investigations go!!!*

January 4 at 11:39pm · Like



[Aleena Adeel](#)

*how was he killed? full info plz*

January 5 at 00:18am · Like



Beya Mughal

RIP . . .

January 5 at 00:32am · Like



Aleena Adeel

*Rightly said Neesa, the famous Taseer ladies and their pool pics how sizzling [Evidently, Neesa had commented and/or posted pictures of Taseer's daughters swimming. That link was also removed by Tribune's Facebook Administrators]*

January 5 at 11:35pm · Like



Mohammed Naem

*Well put by Neesa.... Is there a LOVE button instead of Like??  
"Ohh! Lord! The guy got killed, now he is a saint sent from Heaven disguised as a womanizer/socialite/alcoholic"*

January 5 at 7:36pm · Like

In the context of the muddled virtual reality that can be glimpsed in the imperfect sample of communication above (to reiterate, the most incendiary comments were removed by the editors of the *Tribune*), there were, in effect, many Facebook Warriors in the post-assassination Pakistan.

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<sup>66</sup> Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change," *Foreign Affairs* - Jan/Feb. 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Evgeny Morozov, "Think Again: The Internet," *Foreign Policy* – May/June 2010  
<[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/26/think\\_again\\_the\\_internet?page=full%3E](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/26/think_again_the_internet?page=full%3E)>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Sabastian Abbaot, "Bin Ladin was logged off, but not Al-Qaeda," *Time* – May 15, 2011,  
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2071656,00.html>

<sup>71</sup> "Hillary Rodham Clinton: Remarks on Internet Freedom" U.S. State Department Web Archives.  
<<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm>>

<sup>72</sup> Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change." *Foreign Affairs* - Jan/Feb 2011. <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media>>

<sup>73</sup> Yasmine Ryan, "How Tunisia's Revolution Began" Al Jazeera English – January 26, 2011.  
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html>>

<sup>74</sup> Mazen Mahdi, "Perfect Storm of Social Media Sweeps Middle East" *Defense News* – February 14, 2011. <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5699567&c=FEA&s=SPE>

<sup>75</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, "The First Twitter Revolution?" *Foreign Policy* – January 14, 2011.  
<[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/14/the\\_first\\_twitter\\_revolution](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/01/14/the_first_twitter_revolution)>.

<sup>76</sup> "Clay Shirky, Social Media and the Arab Spring." Western Independent Blog – March 2, 2011.  
<<http://westernindependent.blogspot.com/2011/03/clay-shirky-social-media-and-arab.html>>

<sup>77</sup> Yasmine Ryan, "How Tunisia's Revolution Began" Al Jazeera English – January 26, 2011.  
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html> >

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Gordon Crovitz, "Egypt's Revolution by Social Media," *Wall Street Journal* – February, 2011. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703786804576137980252177072.html>>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid



<sup>82</sup> Mazen Mahdi, "Perfect Storm of Social Media Sweeps Middle East" *Defense News* – February 14, 2011. <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=5699567&c=FEA&s=SPE>

<sup>83</sup> Ayesha Nasir, "Pakistan's Police and Army: How Many Enemies Within?" *Time* January 8, 2011  
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2041406,00.html>

<sup>84</sup> Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change." *Foreign Affairs* - Jan/Feb 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media>

<sup>85</sup> Haider Warraich, "Pakistan's Social Media Landscape," *Foreign Policy* – March 18 2011.  
<[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans\\_social\\_media\\_landscape](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/18/pakistans_social_media_landscape)>

<sup>86</sup>Ibid

<sup>87</sup>Social Bakers Pakistani Demographics:  
<http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/pakistan>