

Barelvi religious groups have only recently come to prominence due to their emotion- and violence-emphasizing activism in defense of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. However, proliferating Barelvi activist groups have been trying since the 1980s to mobilize the broader Barelvi community, a social milieu sustained by widespread but dispersed networks around shrines, Sufi orders, seminaries, and families. Barelvi activists call for publicly restoring values of honor and respect for authoritative symbols, figures, and institutions in line with Sufi notions of devotion, prestige, family, and manhood. Appealing to the force of "authentic passions" and the legitimacy of "native customs," these activists claim to speak on behalf of the true Islam of "the people," which, they believe, Pakistan's "elites" have routinely belittled and insulted. This study of Pakistan's Barelvi resurgence will interrogate how Islam's relationship with communal life, popular legitimacy, and national belonging is being contested and negotiated in new ways. Through nine months of ethnographic research, I will study how Barelvi religious activists and charismatic leaders construct, mobilize, and compete for public sentiments and attachments around Islamic symbols and figures in a semi-urban Punjabi town. This study will thus explore the social dynamics, discursive practices, grievances, and emotions underlying Barelvi activists' attempts to mobilize a community in the name of a putative majority's customs and passions. In doing so, it seeks to bring the study of religious revival into conversation with debates around the rise of nationalist populism across the globe.