

GPP

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Define, explain and contrast the politics of interest and politics of conscience and how they influence policy making in Pakistan, including their relationship to the application of ethics. Be sure to include examples in your response and discuss the difficulty in identification and application of these influences within and between political parties?

### Introduction:

The politics of interest and the politics of conscience are pivotal forces influencing policy making. Interest groups, as analysed by eminent scholars like **Robert A. Dahl**, wield significant influence by advocating for specific goals and engaging in strategic activities. Dahl's work, particularly in "**Who Governs?**" illuminates the power dynamics among these groups in shaping policy outcomes. In contrast, the politics of conscience, explored by scholars like **Hannah Arendt** in "**The Human Condition**" underscores the ethical dimensions of policy decisions driven by individual values and principles. The interplay between these forces creates a dynamic policy



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landscape, where the pursuit of self-interest, as exemplified in the politics of interest, intersects with the moral compass of policymakers as highlighted by the politics of conscience, ultimately shaping the policies that impact society. Understanding this interplay is essential for comprehending the intricate processes of policy making in democratic societies.

## Politics of Interest and Politics of Conscience

The terms "Politics of interest" and "Politics of conscience" refer to two different approaches to political decision making and policy formulation.

### Politics of Interest:

The politics of interest is characterized by decision making driven primarily by self-interest, economic gain, power and maintaining or advancing one's personal or group interests. In this approach political actors focus on strategies that will benefit them or their constituencies, often without strong consideration for broader ethical principles.



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or the long term consequences for the society as a whole. **James Buchanan** explains in his book **The Calculus of Consent** that individuals self interests and incentives affect their behavior in political settings. He argued that politicians and bureaucrats, like individuals in private or public sector are guided by self interest and this can lead to policies that prioritise personal or group gains over broader societal interests.

### **Example: Energy policies Favouring Elites**

The construction of large scale energy projects, such as power plants and dams, has often been criticized for favoring the interest of influential elites and corporations while neglecting the welfare of local communities and the environment.

### **Kalabagh Dam: The divisive debate (Al-Jazeera)**

The controversy surrounding the Kalabagh dam project, which was promoted by some political and business interests but faced opposition due to concerns about its impact on local communities and the environment.



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## Pharmaceutical Lobbying and Pharmaceutical Industry in the United States:

(Center for Responsive Politics)

The pharmaceutical industry in the United States wields significant influence over policy making due to its substantial financial resources and lobbying efforts. Critics argue that the industry interests often take precedence over public health considerations, leading to policies that prioritize profits over affordable access to healthcare.

## Politics of Conscience:

The politics of conscience involves decision making guided by a strong moral compass and ethical principles. Politicians who adhere to this approach prioritize the well-being of society, justice, human rights, and the common good. They make decisions based on what they believe is right, regardless of personal gain or political expediency. The politics of conscience often involves taking unpopular stances in favor of ethical values and long-term societal benefits.

Justice: What's the Right Thing to do?

by Michael J. Sandel emphasizes the



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importance of ethical reasoning and moral values in policy making. He believes that political decisions should be guided by a consideration of what is right and just, rather than solely by economic or self interested motivations.

**Example:**

### Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act 2013

The KPK province passed the Right to Information Act in 2013, which allowed citizens to request and receive information from government agencies. The policy aimed to enhance government transparency, combat corruption, and empower citizens to hold public officials accountable.

### Paris Agreement on climate change

(United Nations climate change)

The Paris Agreement, adopted during the 21<sup>st</sup> conference of the parties (COP21) to the UNFCCC brought together countries from around the world to commit to limiting global temperature rise and mitigating the effects of climate



change

## Influence on Policy Making in Pakistan:

The interplay between politics of interest and politics of conscience significantly influences the formulation of policies. The politics of interest has often prevailed due to factors such as corruption, clientelism, and the influence of powerful elites. Human Right Commission of Pakistan report "The State of Human Rights 2020" highlight how vested interests and corruption can divert resources away from essential services, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations and perpetuating inequality. For instance policies favoring powerful landowners or industries may disregard environmental concerns, thereby exacerbating ecological challenges.

Conversely, the politics of conscience in Pakistan emerges as a counterbalance, advocating for ethical and justice centered policies that prioritize human rights and social equality. Amartya Sen outlines in his book "Development as Freedom" how a politics of conscience can



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motivate policies that empower individuals and promote inclusive development. For instance

### The Benazir Income Support program

demonstrate the impact of conscience driven policy making by providing financial assistance to vulnerable households, aiming to uplift marginalised communities and alleviate poverty.

### Relationship with Ethics:

The politics of interest often involves ethical compromises, as decisions are made based on personal or group gains rather than overarching moral principles. This approach can lead to policies that perpetuate inequality, corruption, and disregard for human rights. In contrast, the politics of conscience aligns more closely with ethical considerations, as decisions are guided by principle of justice, equality, and the greater good.

### Challenges: Identification and Application

Distinguishing between the politics of interest and the politics of conscience presents a complex task due to the intricate nature



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of political motivations and the potential for rhetoric to obscure true intentions. In Pakistan's political landscape, as in various global contexts the presence of diverse membership within political parties furthermore complicates clear classification of their overarching approach. **For instance**

**The Guardian 2019** report, that the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) has faced criticism for instances where policies seemed to prioritize business interests over broader social welfare, raising questions about the party's adherence to a politics of conscience. The multiplicity of motivations, ranging from personal gain to altruistic concerns, underscores the difficulty in unequivocally labelling a party's stance.

**The New York Times 2021** report United States policy on climate change. Biden's administration has demonstrated a politics of conscience by rejoining the Paris Agreement and committing to environmental sustainability. It also faces domestic pressures that sometimes lead to policies influenced by politics of interest, such as supporting certain industries.

**Failed States: The Abuse of power and**



the *Assault on Democracy* by Noam Chomsky highlight that the United States decision to engage in the Iraq war in 2003 was framed as a pursuit of national security and democratization, but critics argue that geopolitical interests and control over oil resources were central drivers.

The complexities inherent in political motivations in Pakistan emphasize the arduous tasks of differentiating the politics of interest from the politics of conscience. The amalgam of motivations within parties and the malleability in the application of these influences exemplify the multidimensional character of political decision making, reflecting the intricate interplay between ethical considerations, pragmatic maneuvers and strategic calculations.

## Conclusion:

The intricate dance between the politics of interest and the politics of conscience significantly shapes the trajectory of policy making, both in Pakistan and beyond. This delicate interplay underscores the challenges



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and ethical considerations inherent in governance.

The policies molded by self interest can hinder equitable progress, while those propelled by ethical considerations stand as beacon of hope for a more just society.