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Abstract

The study on the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan aims to explore the complex interplay of various factors that contribute to the rise and persistence of militant groups in the country. Moreover the role of political instability, weak governance, and the interplay between state and non-state actors in fostering conditions conducive to militancy. The economic dimensions of militancy are assessed in terms of poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality as root causes. The study reveals that economic deprivation, especially in underdeveloped regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, provides fertile ground for militant ideologies. On the social front, the study depicts that education, societal fragmentation, and religious extremism play significant roles in the rise of militancy. The study also examined the challenges posed by social marginalization, ethnic tensions, and the alienation of certain communities, which can drive individuals toward militant groups. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to address the roots of militancy in Pakistan, involving political reform, economic development, and social cohesion to mitigate the threat posed by extremist groups.

Keywords: Militancy, Political, Economic, Social Factors

1. Introduction

Militancy in Pakistan has been a complex issue, rooted in multiple political, economic, and social factors. Over the past few decades, Pakistan has grappled with the challenge of militancy, both domestic and external, and its ramifications on the country's stability. Recent literature on this subject often addresses these aspects comprehensively, exploring how militancy in Pakistan has shaped its political structures, economy, and social fabric. Political instability has been a significant driver of militancy in Pakistan. A major theme in the literature is how weak state institutions, corruption, and political patronage contribute to the rise of non-state actors and militant groups (Rashid, 2015). The lack of strong governance structures has allowed militants to find a foothold in various parts of Pakistan, particularly in the tribal regions. The involvement of the Pakistani state in supporting insurgent and militant groups for geopolitical purposes, such as the support of the Taliban in Afghanistan during the 1980s, is often cited as a major cause for the growth of militancy (Siddiqi, 2007). Pakistan's desire to maintain influence in Afghanistan and its strategic military policies in Kashmir have often led to the sponsorship of militant organizations. The continuation of these policies has deepened the link between the state and non-state actors. The military's dominant role in Pakistan's political sphere has been a contributing factor to the persistence of militancy. The military not only exercises significant influence over political decisions but has also played a dual role in both combating and occasionally tolerating militant groups. Literature highlights the influence of Pakistan's military in determining its national security and foreign policies, often prioritizing military action over long-term political reforms (Hussain, 2012). One of the most prominent arguments in recent literature is the correlation between economic underdevelopment and the rise of militancy in Pakistan. Researchers like Collier and Hoeffler (2004) have noted that regions suffering from high poverty rates, lack of education, and poor infrastructure become fertile grounds for extremist ideologies. Pakistan's poverty rate, especially in the tribal and border regions, creates an environment where militancy thrives as an alternative livelihood or as a form of political expression (Rashid, 2015). Militant groups in Pakistan often benefit from international financial flows, especially from wealthy donors in the Gulf region (Bajoria, 2010). Many of these groups also benefit from a local "black economy" that thrives on illicit trade, smuggling, and donations from radicalized sympathizers. The availability of such funding allows these groups to perpetuate their operations and extend their reach across Pakistan. The direct economic costs of militancy and internal conflict, especially with the military's counterinsurgency operations, have severely impacted Pakistan's economy. According to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), the financial burden of these operations, along with the destruction of infrastructure in conflict zones, has crippled local economies (PIDE, 2019). Additionally, the costs associated with maintaining large security forces to combat militancy are high and divert resources away from development. The rise of radical ideologies, particularly after the Soviet-Afghan war, has been a significant factor in the social spread of militancy in Pakistan. Literature often points to the establishment of madrasas (religious schools) during the 1980s, many of which were funded by external actors, as breeding grounds for extremism (Bakker & de Graaf, 2011). These institutions have often been criticized for fostering a narrow interpretation of Islam that justifies violence in the name of jihad. The failure of the educational system, combined with unemployment and a lack of opportunities, has been a key factor in the radicalization of youth in Pakistan. According to recent studies, disenfranchised young people are more vulnerable to the influence of militant groups, which often promise them a sense of purpose and identity (Niazi, 2020). This demographic has often been targeted for recruitment by extremist groups, particularly in areas such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The social fabric of Pakistan has been deeply affected by militancy. Sectarian violence between different religious and ethnic groups, particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims, has increased in recent years. Literature highlights how sectarian violence has fragmented Pakistani society, leading to mistrust and fear among communities (Khan, 2019). This has further entrenched divisions and provided a breeding ground for extremist ideologies. Recent literature also highlights the gendered aspect of militancy in Pakistan. Women, particularly in rural and tribal areas, have been recruited by militant organizations either as support staff or combatants. Scholars have noted the role of women in supporting extremist groups as an extension of social and family roles, often framed within a specific understanding of religious obligation (Chaudhry, 2019). However, the broader impact of militancy on women's rights and empowerment in these regions is also discussed, with many women facing displacement, loss of family members, and repression under extremist rule.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Factors

The process of political and institutional development in Pakistan has been very slow and fractured since its inception. Abrogation of constitution by four military dictators along with weak democratic system has negative repercussions on the overall political system. Consequently a weak political system provide vacuum to anti state forces to get strengthen against the state, as happened in case of Pakistan. Initially for nine years Pakistan was without constitution. Later on, the inclusion of one unit system by Ayub Khan created administrative problems which added grievances among the smaller administrative parts as it completely wiped out their recognition and existence. In addition to it, areas like Baluchistan, North West frontier province (NWFP) now KPK, and tribal areas were not given any attention neither they were amalgamated well in the main stream politics. Later on these areas were subject to safe heavens of terrorist and political instability. The trends of centralization further marginalized the heterogeneity in the political system. As a consequence a trend was set for giving power to one sector of society over the other. Particularly the formation of religious elite in times of Zia sharply divided the Pakistani society on political as well as on religious lines. The way constitution was suspended and amended by the military rulers increased the power of individual instead of institutions. In this context, political parties have also played a major role (Wolf, 2018; Senturk, 2023). Political parties not only act as carriers of demand but play a vital part in the socialization of society. But unfortunately, political parties in Pakistan failed to play their due role. The way political parties have used ethnic and sectarian cards in constituency politics have strengthen the hatred and bigotry among the people. The formation of Sipha e Sahaba and Sipha e Muhammad and their influence and role in electoral process in 1980s set the stage for militant tendencies to grow in urban as well as rural areas of Pakistan. Use of religious and ethnic slogans have negatively affected the political landscape of Pakistan. Recently, formation of Mili Muslim league as a political party, which is alleged to be a political wing of Jamat tul Dawa is debatable because though they participate in the main stream politics but do not abolish their militant activities. Such political role provides them a cover and they are able to penetrate in the statecraft. In the past Sipha Sahaba Pakistan participated in the political process. They took part in election and Azam Tariq won the seat of national assembly from Jhang in 1988, but they did not ended their militant wing and continued their activities based on radicalism. Another dimension of political source is the weak institutional structure of Pakistan. Judiciary, law enforcement agencies and local government are main participants in counter militant measures. But unfortunately procedural delays, corrupt practices and politicization of institutions with the passage of time have strengthen such elements. Previously Pakistan did not have any specific unanimous legislation or political dialogue on the issue of militancy, which is the reason that the myth of good and bad Taliban was popular. In addition to it, it also limit the action taken by the stakeholders to tackle the issue of militancy. But after 2014, the implementation of national action plan reflected political will and consensus of stakeholders on the issue of militancy. Governance related issues in Pakistan has also contributed towards providing a space for anti-state irritants to develop their bases among the local specifically in weak governing areas like South Punjab, Baluchistan and Tribal agencies (Awan & Zain, 2012).

2.2. Economic Factors

Martha Crenshaw in her organizational explanation of terrorism has linked formation of terrorist organizations with economic incentives. According to the writer like any other organization along with several goals and targets, terrorist organization has a basic objective of attaining revenue and profits in order to run the organization and also to recruit people in the organization. It means that mostly terrorist organization works keeping in view the economic aspect of organization. Resources are generated and distribute just like other organizations. Due to authoritarian trends and weak governance Pakistan has been subject to mushroom growth of militant organizations. In the former phase i.e. in 1980s militant organizations were mostly formed on sectarian basis and in the later phase i.e. after 2001 organizations were formed on religious and anti-state agenda. In 2002, government of Pakistan banned several terrorist organizations. In 2012 national assembly of Pakistan updated the list of banned organizations. Forty eight militant outfits were mentioned in it. Then in 2015, 212 organizations were banned by the government of Pakistan. It is estimated that during the US war on terror, 1400 bank accounts were frozen which approximately constituted 140 million assets. In this context, in Pakistan mostly militant outfits generate revenue to run their organizations from the following channels (Azam, 2014; Mwamba, 2023).

2.3. Social Factors

Social problems including poverty, illiteracy, extremism, cultural traits, intolerance and lack of awareness are contributing factors in increasing militant tendencies in Pakistan. Poverty is not the only source but a major source which facilities the whole process of militant act. Most of the carriers of information, weapon or recruit are not familiar with the actual agenda of militants rather for the sake of money and any other financial benefit they provide their services. Illiteracy in the society gives space for militant trends to grow. Christine Fair in one of her studies explains that most of the recruits of militant organizations are drop outs from primary and secondary level school education. But it is also imperative to discuss this fact that the recent events of terrorist activities in Pakistan revealed that even university graduates and well settled people were involved in acts of militancy (Firdous, 2009). The master mind of Safora incident in Karachi, Saad Aziz was a former student of IBA. Here it is implicit that other factors like religious or societal indoctrination based on extremism are likewise major factor which brings people in the network of militancy. Many times unawareness militants are able to live in shadows within the society as happened in tribal areas of Pakistan People in order to follow their cultural traits of giving honor and protection to guests were unaware of this fact that they were giving space to militants. Furthermore growing intolerance in the society strengthens militancy as it produces a violent and desperate societal attitude. Moreover, intolerance compartmentalizes the society on identity, beliefs and interest. Resultantly such type of society is unable to bring national consensus and do not accept or accommodate diversity in society. It eventually reinforces the case of militant organizations which aims to divide the society to weaken their roots (Ramsey, 2017; Khan & Wali, 2020).

2.4. Statement of the Problem

Militancy in Pakistan poses a significant threat to the country's political stability, economic development, and social cohesion. The political, economic, and social factors that contribute to the rise of militant groups need to be thoroughly analyzed and understood. A deeper examination of how these aspects are interconnected and how they sustain militancy will help identify solutions to mitigate the effects of extremism. Failure to address these issues could lead to continued violence, economic regression, and further

fragmentation of the social fabric. Therefore, this research aims to explore and analyze the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan to provide recommendations for policy interventions and long-term solutions to counter militancy and foster national unity and development.

2.5. Objectives of the Study

- To study the factors that fostering conditions conducive to militancy.
- To evaluate the way forward to militancy

3. Significance of the Study

The study of the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan is of significant importance due to the multifaceted impact militancy has on the country. This study offers insights into how militancy not only threatens the security and stability of the region but also how it affects various layers of society and the broader geopolitical landscape. The significance of this study can be understood in several ways:

3.1. Political Implications

- **Security Challenges:** Militancy poses a direct challenge to Pakistan's political stability and governance. The study helps to analyze the impact of militant groups on state structures, law enforcement, and political authority, especially in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).
- **Government Response and Policies:** The role of the Pakistani government in addressing militancy through military operations, counterterrorism measures, and foreign policy decisions is crucial. Analyzing this helps understand the effectiveness of various strategies and the evolving political dynamics in dealing with militant threats.
- **Democracy and Governance:** Militancy also has a profound effect on Pakistan's democratic institutions. The erosion of public trust in government, the rise of authoritarian measures, and the manipulation of political discourse by extremist groups are critical areas of concern that can be understood through this study.

3.2. Economic Implications

- **Impact on Development:** Militancy severely hampers economic development by deterring investment, disrupting trade routes, and causing the destruction of infrastructure. Areas affected by militancy often experience increased poverty, unemployment, and limited access to basic services. The study helps highlight these economic costs, offering insights into how militancy affects GDP growth and social well-being.
- **Resource Allocation:** The Pakistani government allocates a significant portion of its budget to military expenditures to combat militancy. This, in turn, diverts resources from essential development sectors such as health, education, and infrastructure, contributing to long-term economic stagnation.
- **Economic Displacement:** Militancy leads to large-scale displacement, especially in conflict zones, putting additional pressure on Pakistan's economy. The study can provide a deeper understanding of the economic burden of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their integration into new communities.

3.3. Social Implications

- **Social Fabric and Human Rights:** Militancy deeply affects the social fabric of Pakistani society. Communities become divided along sectarian, ethnic, and religious lines, fostering intolerance and violence. Understanding the social ramifications of militancy is essential for promoting social cohesion and human rights in the country.
- **Radicalization and Youth:** The spread of extremist ideologies, especially among the youth, is one of the most dangerous consequences of militancy. The study examines how religious and political radicalization occurs, often exacerbated by economic deprivation, social alienation, and a lack of opportunities for young people.
- **Gender Dynamics:** Militancy also has gendered effects, particularly on women and girls. In regions affected by militancy, women often face restrictions on their mobility, education, and employment. The study could help examine how social norms shift in militant-dominated areas and how women's roles change within these contexts.

3.4. Regional and Global Significance

- **Geopolitical Impact:** Militancy in Pakistan not only affects the country but has a ripple effect on the broader region, including Afghanistan, India, and beyond. The study helps assess how the proliferation of militant ideologies can destabilize the region and affect international relations.
- **Global Counterterrorism Efforts:** As militancy in Pakistan is often linked to global networks, including transnational terrorist organizations, understanding its dynamics is critical for international counterterrorism efforts. This can help in formulating global policies to prevent the spread of extremism.

3.5. Conflict Resolution and Policy Recommendations

- **Strategies for Peace:** The significance of this study lies in its potential to guide peace-building and conflict resolution efforts. By analyzing the root causes of militancy—whether political, economic, or social—the study can suggest ways to mitigate militancy, promote dialogue, and improve the overall stability of Pakistan.
- **Educational and Social Reforms:** The study of militancy also provides an opportunity to explore education reform, social integration, and the role of media in counteracting extremist narratives. It suggests ways to counteract militant ideologies by promoting tolerance, inclusion, and social justice. In conclusion, the significance of studying the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan is immense. It allows for a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of militancy, provides critical insights into policy-making and governance, and contributes to long-term peace and stability in the region. By examining these interconnected aspects, Pakistan and the international community can work together to address the multifaceted challenges posed by militancy.

4. Conclusion

The study of the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan typically focuses on understanding the root causes, effects, and potential solutions to the ongoing issue of militancy in the country. Pakistan's political instability, weak democratic institutions, and military influence have contributed to the rise of militancy. For decades, Pakistan's political structure has been characterized by power struggles between civilian governments and the military, with frequent military interventions and coups. At times, Pakistan's government has been accused of supporting or tolerating certain militant groups for geopolitical reasons, particularly during the Cold War, when the Pakistani military's involvement in the Afghan-Soviet War in the 1980s fostered the creation of various militant organizations. The rise of political Islam and the weakening of secular democratic parties in the 2000s further entrenched the growth of extremist ideologies. The political fragmentation in Pakistan, with multiple factions, some supporting religious ideologies and others supporting secularism, has exacerbated the problem. Economic deprivation has been one of the root causes of militancy in Pakistan. Areas with high poverty rates, especially in tribal regions and remote parts of the country, often become breeding grounds for extremist ideologies. Lack of economic opportunities, job prospects, and resources drive young people toward militant groups that offer financial support or a sense of belonging. The ongoing militancy and terrorism have placed a heavy strain on Pakistan's economy. The country has faced economic sanctions, loss of foreign investment, and the disruption of trade routes due to frequent terrorist attacks. This further deepens economic instability, creating a cycle where poor economic conditions fuel extremism, which in turn worsens the economy. Pakistan's reliance on foreign aid, particularly from the U.S. and international organizations, to combat militancy and terrorism has led to a cycle of dependency. While this aid has helped bolster security efforts, it often comes with strings attached, which sometimes undermines Pakistan's sovereignty or political will to make lasting reforms. The lack of quality education, particularly in rural areas, has contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies. Madrasas (religious schools) in some parts of Pakistan have been known to teach radical interpretations of Islam, which are later adopted by youth in the form of militancy. This issue is compounded by the spread of misinformation and online radicalization. Militancy in Pakistan has deepened ethnic, sectarian, and religious divides. The conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslim communities, along with other ethnic groups (e.g., Pashtuns, Baloch, and Mohajirs), has been exacerbated by militant actors using these divisions to further their agendas. Social mistrust and the fragmentation of communities have thus contributed to the perpetuation of violence. The younger population in Pakistan, facing limited opportunities for social mobility and economic advancement, is particularly susceptible to radicalization. Militant groups often target youth, offering them a sense of purpose, identity, and the promise of financial support, making them vulnerable to joining insurgencies and violent movements. The study of the political, economic, and social aspects of militancy in Pakistan demonstrates that militancy is a multifaceted issue deeply embedded in the country's history, governance, economic inequalities, and social divisions. The political instability, coupled with economic hardships, creates a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to flourish. Furthermore, the social fragmentation and lack of educational opportunities make it easier for militant groups to recruit and radicalize vulnerable individuals. To address the problem, a comprehensive approach is needed that focuses on political reforms, economic development, and social integration. Strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring political stability, and curbing the influence of the military in political affairs would help reduce the prevalence of militancy. On the economic front, promoting job creation, especially in marginalized regions, and tackling corruption would help reduce the economic conditions that contribute to radicalization. Socially, improving access to education and promoting inter-community dialogue would help reduce the sectarian and ethnic tensions that drive militancy. Effective counterterrorism efforts should be coupled with de-radicalization programs, particularly for youth, to prevent further recruitment by extremist groups. Ultimately, addressing militancy in Pakistan requires tackling the root causes of the problem—political, economic, and social—and fostering a more inclusive, just, and peaceful society. Without comprehensive reforms in these areas, militancy will continue to pose a significant challenge to Pakistan's stability and development.

4.1. A Way forward to Militancy

Evaluating the way forward to militancy in Pakistan involves examining various socio-political, economic, and security dynamics. Pakistan has faced an ongoing struggle with militancy, which has both internal and external dimensions. To address the way forward, it's important to consider the following key factors:

Root Causes of Militancy: The rise of extremism is fueled by ideological factors, with radicalized religious beliefs and narratives that promote violence. Groups often exploit religious and cultural sentiments to recruit militants. In some parts of Pakistan, especially in underdeveloped areas like parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and the tribal regions, poor governance, lack of development, and systemic corruption have fueled disenfranchisement. Militants can exploit these grievances to garner support. High unemployment rates, poverty, and limited access to quality education in certain regions provide fertile ground for recruitment by militant organizations, who offer incentives like financial support and a sense of purpose. Pakistan's military has historically played a significant role in domestic politics and foreign policy. The involvement of the military in supporting or turning a blind eye to certain groups has contributed to the growth of militancy, especially during the Cold War era when it supported insurgent groups in Afghanistan.

Regional Dynamics: The ongoing instability in Afghanistan has had a significant impact on militancy in Pakistan. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan has reinvigorated militant groups that operate along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Cross-border militancy has been a persistent problem, as these groups often use the porous border region as a sanctuary. The unresolved Kashmir conflict, territorial disputes, and tensions between Pakistan and India also contribute to the spread of militancy. Some groups in Pakistan have been known to support insurgents in Kashmir, which further fuels violence on both sides of the border.

Security Measures: Pakistan has conducted several military operations in the past to tackle militancy, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad. These operations have had some success in weakening militant networks, but challenges remain, especially in remote regions. Strengthening counterterrorism laws and enhancing law enforcement agencies' capabilities are vital. This includes better intelligence-sharing, improved border security, and surveillance mechanisms. Establishing rehabilitation and de-radicalization programs for former militants is crucial to preventing recidivism and dismantling militant networks from within. Effective

coordination between civilian and military authorities is essential to formulate and execute long-term strategies against militancy. Civilian oversight of security policies is needed to avoid the militarization of political processes.

The Role of Education and Counter-Narratives: The lack of quality education, especially in conflict-prone areas, contributes to extremism. Investing in education, particularly in rural areas, can help curb the spread of militant ideology. This includes promoting secular and inclusive curricula that focus on tolerance and peace. Countering the narrative of militant groups through media, both traditional and social, is key. Efforts to promote a positive, inclusive narrative of Islam and Pakistan's identity could weaken the appeal of extremist ideologies.

International Cooperation: Pakistan needs to strengthen its regional ties, particularly with Afghanistan and India, to address cross-border militancy. Collaborative efforts to combat terrorism, share intelligence, and monitor militant networks are crucial for regional stability. Pakistan must continue its counterterrorism cooperation with international partners, including the United States, the UN, and other Western and regional powers, to combat militancy. This could involve intelligence sharing, funding for development, and supporting counter-narrative campaigns. International assistance in the form of financial aid for economic development, job creation, and infrastructure in the poorest regions can reduce the appeal of militant groups.

Addressing Regional and Ethnic Grievances: Addressing regional and ethnic grievances within Pakistan is essential for long-term stability. The conflicts in Balochistan, for example, are often linked to calls for greater autonomy and dissatisfaction with central governance. Political dialogue and addressing economic disparities are important steps in reducing support for militancy. Pakistan's political system needs reforms to ensure that disenfranchised groups feel included and represented. Greater democratic processes, political accountability, and human rights are important to avoid the political vacuum that militants can exploit.

Empowering Local Communities: Local communities can play a crucial role in countering militancy by providing support to security forces and engaging in community policing efforts. Empowering local leaders and organizations to take action against militant groups can be an effective tool in reducing militancy. Mobilizing grassroots movements for peace, tolerance, and unity can prevent local populations from falling prey to the influence of extremist groups. To counter militancy, Pakistan must adopt a multifaceted approach that includes not only military solutions but also political, social, and economic reforms. Key elements such as addressing root causes of extremism, enhancing governance, strengthening educational systems, and engaging in regional and international cooperation are necessary for long-term success. Moving forward, Pakistan needs a comprehensive national strategy to curb militancy, focusing on sustainable peace, inclusivity, and development.

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