



## Understanding Factors of Rising Militancy in Pakistan

Muhammad Idrees<sup>1</sup>, Shahida Rasool<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Munir Ahmad<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Militancy in Pakistan is growing rapidly. Militant organizations are become challenge to encounter terrorism in the country. Mosques, educational institutes, religious seminaries, markets, public points, armed forces, police, frontier crops, judiciary and politicians are targeted by the militants across Pakistan. The resultant political and economic instability reflects their radical agenda. Government of Pakistan along with its armed forces are fighting back this wave of militancy for more than a decade now. In this context, it is significant to investigate the cradles of militancy in Pakistan. This paper aims to explicate the main factors which contributes towards militancy in Pakistan. Political, economic, religious and societal sources are the focal areas of discussion.

**Keywords:** Militancy, political, economic, religious and societal factors

### 1. Introduction

In recent times Pakistan has witnessed ample acts of militancy which has directly put Pakistan's security doctrine under threat. Roots of militancy in Pakistan have a long history of external and internal sources. Militancy is defined as a condition where mostly non-state actors use force against the state and masses at large. Moreover, psychologically there are enriched with radical, extremist and violent beliefs. Their activities are aimed at challenging the writ of the government. Pakistan has been a victim of militant activities for years. Sources of militancy depicts that problem of militancy is grave and deep rooted in Pakistan. Militant activities in Pakistan is also complex due to the fact that it is somehow linked with the element of religiosity no matter it has political, economic, ethnic or societal causes. There nexus with religion makes the whole explanation of militancy more intricate. The multi-dimensional sources can be classified into the following categories (Ahmar, 2007).

#### 1.1. Political Factors

The process of political and institutional development in Pakistan has been very slow and fractured since its inspection. 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).

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).

#### 1.2. 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 distributed

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Department of Pakistan Studies Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan, [khanidrees385@gmail.com](mailto:khanidrees385@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Pakistan Studies Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan, [shahidashahida038@gmail.com](mailto:shahidashahida038@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Pakistan Studies Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, Pakistan, [munirsandhu79@gmail.com](mailto:munirsandhu79@gmail.com)

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).

### **1.3. Charities**

Charity related funding has been said to be the most common source of funding for militant outfits particularly in Muslim societies. Pakistan is one such example in which terrorist organization's funds also rely on the charity collected by the masses at large. Hasan Akbar of Jinnah Institute revealed that, „Challenges still remain in sectarian and jihadi groups where they get individual donations from traders and merchants in urban and rural areas,” he said. “How do you stop that? That base of support is still there. This is hard to document. It is also seen that those organizations which are on the watch list of government operate in terms of charity collection in natural disasters, relief operations and they are also involved in the collection of zakat in the month of Ramadan. For example, in 2005 and 2015 earth quake, many banned organizations were reported to be involved charity raising and relief efforts. FIF (Falah e Insaniyat) foundation which was on the watch list of government since 2012 were actively involved in relief efforts and charity collection in Chitral, Dir and Bajaur.

### **1.4. External funding**

Militant outfits also outsource its organization like any other entrepreneur. In case of Pakistan there are two major sources of external funding. On one hand, states and individuals are supporting and funding madras and other organizations and on the other hand foreign agencies financing the terrorist to destabilize Pakistan for their own set agenda is also a main source of foreign funding. Foreign funding from Middle Eastern and Gulf countries is a major source of cash for the outfits in the form of private government and even by the state channels. In the past, the Saudi- Iranian proxy war has been a main source of increased foreign funding in Pakistan. On religious grounds both the states provided funds and facilitated the development of madras along with Sunni and Shia based organizations. In 2015, Interior minister of Pakistan in written reply to senate admitted that madras are getting funds from „Muslim states. It is significant to mention that foreign funds to a madrassa or any charity related organization is not illegal, but the main problem is that there is no authentic record and evidence that where that fund is invested and what is the exact source of funding. The purpose and source of fundraising, transaction and transfer of funds and utilization of funds is not transparent and accessible which consequently strengthens the narrative that these funds are used for some hidden purpose. In this respect after the enactment of NAP (National action plan), government of Pakistan has established NTFIC in 2015. The main purpose of setting up the cell was to track the flow of funds between national and international banks. In 2016, government tracked over 8,400 individuals that were apparently involved in financing the terrorist. Amount of worth 1.2 billion funds were frozen in this monitory crackdown. Frozen account included the bank accounts of members of prominent banned outfits like Al Qaeda - Pakistan, Tehreek-e- Taliban, Lashkar-e- Jhangvi (LeJ), Tehreek-i-Jafari and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jammāt (ASWJ) Tehreek-i- Jafaria Pakistan and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ). Though this step has been a major bench mark in the national action plan but firstly it was too late and secondly by only cracking the bank accounts would not facilitate the cause because most of the terrorist outfits use the medium of hawala and hundi for the transfer of cash because these sources are mostly non-documented. Moreover, a recent report by department of state have pointed out the discrepancies in the judicial and investigative bodies, due to which not much prosecutions have been taken place related to terrorist financing.

### **1.5. Illegal activities**

The nexus between terrorism and illegal activities has been debatable since long. Drug trafficking, smuggling, extortion, kidnapping are been used as means of terrorist financing. Financial Monitoring Unit in Pakistan (FMU) in their report titled "National Risk Assessment on Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing 2017," identifies that "Main sources of income of terrorists in Pakistan include foreign funding, drug trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, extortion from business and vehicle snatching ." Similarly, Former chief of Army staff of Pakistan General Raheel Sharif and interior minister Nisar Khan had also highlighted this connection. Drug trade has been used as a source of funding by militants across Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is been reported that TTP receives two billion dollars from the narcotics mafia and terrorist from Afghanistan. Predominantly, Pakistan –Afghan border is vulnerable towards drug trade as Afghanistan is the largest producer of illicit opium.

### **1.6. Kidnapping and Ransom**

Kidnapping has been used as a tool by militant organizations to generate money for their working. Since the formation of Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) incidents of kidnapping were considerably increased in major cities like Karachi and Lahore. In addition to it, Taliban were also involved in the kidnapping of Shahbaz Taseer in august 2011 and Ali Haider Gillani in 2013, son of former governor of Punjab and former prime minister respectively. These high profile kidnapping put serious questions on the weakness of law enforcement agencies and the capability of militants to kidnap such targets from the main city centers. Shahbaz Taseer was released after four years. While giving an interview to BBC, he revealed that initially he was abducted by Uzbek militants and later on was handed to Afghan Taliban, who later on let him go and then he was rescued by Pakistani Army from Baluchistan. Ali Haider Gillani was released on 11th May 2016, after three years from Afghanistan, reportedly from an Al Qaeda affiliated group. TTP also has been reportedly to be involved in various kidnapping incidents. Lahore based business men was also kidnapped from the city for ransom and later on Taliban sent a video of his killing despite taking the amount of ransom. From the past few years Chinese workers have been targeted by the militants. Recently two Chinese teachers who were running a language center were kidnapped from Baluchistan in May 2017 and were later on reportedly killed by the militants. Islamic State (IS) took the responsibility of the incident. Such acts of militants give them international coverage and it also negatively affects the developmental projects and foreign investment (Azam, 2019).

## 2. Ethnic Factors

Ethnic issues in Pakistan have been one of the core factors in creating polarization in the society. Ethnic nationalism is mainly derived by political and economic injustice among the ethnic population. Predominantly, provincial marginalization has increased ethnic division in Pakistan. Consequently, ethnicity has been used as a tool by the militant outfits not only for their recruitment but also to manipulate the ethnic aspirations among the masses. Ethnic based killing specifically in Karachi and Hazara division explains the context of ethnic militancy in Pakistan. In case of Karachi, political deprivation is closely associated with ethnic militancy. Being a metropolitan city approximately fifty percent of the nation's revenue is generated by Karachi (Azam, 2019).

The composition of Karachi is highly multicultural including Sindhis, Mohajir, Pashtuns, and Balochi's and even a small proportion of Punjabis. On the other hand, with the passage of time sectarian division has also become sharp in the city. Moreover militant wings of political parties also nourished on the basis of ethnic affiliation. Resultantly, the ethnic-religious nexus has further complicated the problem of Karachi and militancy as well. In 2016, Pakistan's former chief justice of Pakistan in a hearing identified the nexus between political and religious parties and terrorist. He said that, "Our society is divided on the basis of ethnicity, caste and social stratum. Religious divide is the most harmful as it leads to terrorism". Thus ethnicity has been used as a source of militancy in which economic and political disparities, alienation of ethnic group and their social vulnerability contributes in generating hatred and violence against the other ethnic group (Siddiq, 2013).

Even the formation of political parties, mainly Pakistan People Party (PPP), Mohajir Qoumi Movement (MQM) and their bifurcated groups, Awami National Party (ANP) are subject to ethnic association. Their alleged militant wings are reportedly involved in targeted killings of each other on the basis of ethnic identity. In 1990s military operation in Karachi by the state against criminals and terrorist was mostly targeted towards MQM, which used mohajir sentiments to incite the population in Karachi. Though since 1984, MQM was in a strong position on the political landscape of Karachi, but it generated sharp ethnic fault line between the Sindi and mohajir population. The military operation „Clean-up“, which was started in 1992, faced strong resistance by the militant wing of MQM, reflecting their anti-state activities. As a result, Altaf Hussain went into exile and later on Mohajir Qoumi movement was renamed into Mutehida Qoumi movement (Yacoobali). It was an attempt to dislodge the ethnic identity from the party. But still mohajir identity continued to be the main driving force of the party for local support and party manifesto (Azam, 2019).

Use of force and violence, hate speech and manipulation of ethnic identity clearly reflected the militant posture of MQM. It was again in post 2001 period that militant tendencies in Karachi started to accelerate mainly due to three factors. At first place, rivalry between sindi and mohajir became more intense, particularly their political role and place in government provided them power and authority. Pakistan people's party and Mutehida Quomi movement remained in government benches and used ethnic card in local politics. Secondly, increased influx of Pashtun and Baloch population changed the traditional demography of Karachi and thirdly after 2001 the presence of militant outfits like Laskar e Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipha e Muhammad (SPM) and Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) not only increased sectarianism but also contributed in creating a ethno-religious nexus of militancy in Karachi. No-go areas, targeted killings, kidnapping and illegal activities were the main problems faced by the people and administration. In 2013, government of Pakistan started rangers operation in Karachi to counter the ongoing deteriorating situation. Another illustration of ethnic militancy can be traced in Baluchistan (Quetta), where Shia Hazara community is specifically targeted in the recent times. Hazara community in Quetta constitutes approximately fifty to sixty lakh population (Yusuf, 2011). Post 2001 militancy has drastically affected the hazara community (Azam, 2019).

Ethno-religious nexus is also very visible in this case, as mostly Shia Hazaras are been targeted by the militant groups. Mostly Laskar e Jhangvi, Sipha e Sahaba and Tehrik Taliban Pakistan took the responsibility of attacks. Since due to their facial difference they are easily identified, they are killed by the terrorist on the basis of their ethnic and religious identity. In September 2011, it was reported that ethnic hazara, who were going to Iran to visit the holy sites via Mustung were targeted by LeJ. They were separated by the militants from Sunni and non hazara pilgrimage and were brutally killed. Forty people were reportedly killed in this attack (we are the walking dead, Killings of Shia hazara in Balochistan, Pakistan, 2014). Area of Mastung was repeatedly attacked by the militants, as it is the passing way of hazara pilgrimage to Iran. International and national media and human rights organizations have termed such ethnic based killings as genocide against the hazara population which has forced them to migrate from their indigenous areas. Human rights commission of Pakistan figured out that more than two lakh people of hazara ethnic group were relocated in the main centers of Pakistan due to their mass killings. Ethnic affinity has also been used by TTP in tribal areas to reach out the local sympathy and support. Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan tried to manipulate the cultural code of conduct of Pashtun identity to create a strong base for themselves in tribal agencies. Moreover, Pashtu language facilitated them to reach out the masses more easily. Though in the later stage, TTP embattled certain cultural traits of Pashtuns like folk music, Jirga system etc. In addition to it, militants which came from Afghanistan also took benefit of Pashtun identity and they were able to disguise themselves among the local population. It is significant to highlight the fact that though militancy in southern Punjab relatively has sectarian posture but still ethnic identity is a vital factor in South Punjab. Seraiki movement of making a new province has been reportedly supported by MQM as it strengthens their demand and argument of creating Karachi a separate province. Most of the recruits of sectarian based militant outfits are from south Punjab and they are frequently labelled as Punjabi Taliban. Again this ethno religious nexus is been used as a source to create sharp divisions (Azam, 2019).

## 3. Religious Factors

Religion plays a vital role in Pakistan's political dynamics and social stratum. Militants exploit the religious narrative to seek support among the masses for their agenda. As people are strongly committed with their religious beliefs, their sentiments are easily manipulated. Religious indoctrination is a vital element on the basis of which militant organizations activate their recruitment cells. Since late 1970s Pakistan witnessed the emergence of acute religious zeal which divided the society on sectarian lines. In Pakistan religion has been used as one of the main source by the militants to execute their activities. The critical role of Zia ul Haq's government in 1980s nourished binary division between Sunni and Shia sect. Later on sectarian split did not remained binary rather

it expanded across Suuni, Shia, Barelvi and Deobandi sect. In this context, the formation of militant organizations like Sipha Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Laskar e Jhangvi (LeJ) and Sipah e Muhammad (SPM) were the product of sectarian militancy in 1970s and 1980s and later on they continued to infuse religious based hatred against each other (Weinbaum, 2014).

Furthermore it also increased the growth of madris in Pakistan based on sectarian identity. Thus it created religious schism in the society which was translated in the form of violence and terrorist activities against each other's sect. It became more complicated because of the external support which they were getting from Saudi Arabia and Iran based on sectarianism. Religious identity, mosque, Imam Bargah and other sectarian symbols were attacked repeatedly. It resulted in the killing of thousands of people across Pakistan. According to Mohnis Ahmer, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta and Jhang were the main flashpoints of sectarian killings. It was again after 2001 that religion was used a source by militants, when United States attacked Afghanistan and Pakistan supported war on terror and started military operations in tribal areas of Pakistan. The formation of TTP in 2007 and their linkage with the sectarian based organizations like LeJ and SSP and international terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda illustrates that they used the tool of religion to assert their agenda. Taliban justified their activities in the name of Islam and Sharia. In addition to it, militants also seek to get sympathy and support in tribal areas on the basis of religion by implementing their own version of sharia and opposing the existing constitutional structure as un-Islamic. Due to weak governmental writ in tribal areas militants were able to operate in tribal agencies and establish their own sharia courts and social code of conduct. Militants have constantly targeted the minorities in Pakistan especially Christian community by labelling them as infidels. Churches and their religious days are repeatedly attacked by the militants. Along with them, Ahmadis have also been targeted by the militants. Since 2007 TTP and LeJ mostly took the responsibility of attacks (Azam & Javaid, 2017).

#### 4. Societal 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 facilitates 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).

#### 5. Conclusion

The identification of the factors of militancy in Pakistan suggests that menace of militancy in Pakistan is multifaceted, complex, and deep rooted which needs multidimensional resolution measures including state and general masses. There is a need of an aware and responsive society to tackle the issue of militancy. In this regard National Action Plan (NAP) promulgated by the government of Pakistan needs to be implemented with full force across Pakistan by all the stakeholders to counter the issue of militancy. Analysis of the factors of militancy depicts that religious based militancy is the main predictor of all forms of militant activities. The nexus of religion, ethnicity, and politics makes a complex jargon on the basis of which militants challenges the writ of the state of Pakistan. As religious aspect becomes indispensable element in people's life and in the life of an ideological state, anti-state irritants manipulate religious, political and ethno- nationalistic tendencies easily, as happened in Pakistan.

#### References

- Ahmar, M. (2007). Sectarian conflicts in Pakistan. *Pakistan Vision*, 9(1), 1-19.
- Awan, S. M., & Zain, O. F. (2012). The upsurge of religious extremism: A challenge to democracy, governance and national unity in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 32(2), 511-520.
- Azam, M. (2014). Genesis of militancy in Pakistan. *Islamabad Policy Research Institute*, 14(1), 102-123.
- Azam, M. (2019). *Genesis and Dimensions of Religious Militancy: Implications on the Internal Security of Pakistan (2001-2015)* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Punjab, Lahore).
- Azam, M., & Javaid, U. (2017). The sources of militancy in Pakistan. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan (JRSP)*, 54(2).
- Firdous, K. (2009). Militancy in Pakistan. *Strategic Studies*, 29(2/3), 107-124.
- Ramsey, S. (2017). *Pakistan and Islamic Militancy in South Asia*. Vij Books India Pvt Ltd.
- Siddiqua, A. (2013). *The New Frontiers: Militancy & Radicalism in Punjab* (pp. 25-33). Centre for International and Strategic Analysis.
- Weinbaum, M. G. (2014). Militancy and Extremism in Pakistan. *Pakistan's Counterterrorism Challenge*, 47-61.
- Wolf, S. O. (2018). South Asia at the crossroads: Connectivity, security and sustainable development. SADF-South Asia Democratic Forum.