

The Rise of Extremism in Pakistan: A Consequence of Foreign Interventions or Domestic Failures?

* Outline

1) Introduction

2) The current state of extremism in Pakistan

3) Domestic failures ^{IS} are the primary cause of the rise of extremism in Pakistan

(Thesis)

3a) Weak state governance and policy inconsistency.

- (i - Shifting alliance with militant groups
- ii - Out of 70,000 hate speeches, 50% result

In conviction - Punjab CTD data, 2022)

Well Organised and Quite
Relevant

3b) Politicization and mainstreaming of extremism.

(TLP secured 2.9 million votes (25%, 4th

largest party) in 2024 national elections - The

New International, Dec 2024)

3c) Failure to reform the Education system

(out of 3500 madrasas, only 1800 are registered
- Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023)

3d) Socio-Economic inequality and youth unemployment

("Youth unemployment rate in Pak 9%, highest in Balochistan (34%) and KP (29%)

- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023 Census)

3e) Lack of Counter-Narrative and Civil Society engagement

("Pakistan lacks a structural approach to counter-radical narratives" - National

Internal Security Policy, 2018-23)

4) Foreign Intervention as catalyst for rise of extremism in Pakistan

(Anti-thesis)

4a) US involvement in Afghanistan turned Pakistan a launchpad for jihad

(During Soviet-Afghan war, The US and Saudi Arabia funneled \$3 billion in Western funds to Afghan mujahiddin in Pakistan)

- Steve Coll - "Ghost wars")

4b) Radical groups gained popularity by exploiting anti-Western narratives

("Anti-western sentiment is instrumental in jihadist group survival and growth in Pak and Afghanistan" - RND, 2021)

4c) Foreign funding of Extremist Madrassas

(Report by ICG, Pakistan: Madrassa, Extremism and Militancy, 2021)

4d) Indian influence in Balochistan and KP
(2016, Kulbhushan Jagatav case)

4e) Influence of foreign media on
Pakistani society.

(Foreign media portray Pakistan in an
unfairly negative light, leading to higher
sympathy for groups resisting 'western
aggression' — Gallup Pakistan (2018))

5) Domestic failures as the Primary cause of Extremism Despite Foreign Intervention

(Synthesis)

5a) Pakistan allowed foreign-supported
terrorists grow unchecked after war

(TTP attacks rose by 60% after Taliban
takeover in Afghanistan (Aug 2021 – PIA, 22))

5b) Radical groups rose on Foreign narrative,
thrived through local legitimacy

(Laskar-e-Taiba and Jamiat-ul-Dawa rose on

Kashmir narrative, later legitimised

via open charities & rallies)

Try to Shorten sentences and phrases
plz

5c) Pakistan's failure to regulate
madrasas, allowed foreign funded
extremist teachings flourish.

(TTP and Afghan Taliban actively recruit

from madrasa network in SEP, Balochistan

and South Punjab — UNSC Monitoring Team, 2023)

5d) ~~Lack of opportunities~~
~~Opportunities pushed Youth to militancy.~~

(Areas with highest militant activity have Pakistan's lowest HDI - South Waziristan (0.449), Dera Ismail Khan (0.285))

Non professional

5e) ~~Unfulfilled needs of Pakistani Media in Countering Extremism~~

("Less than 10% of national media coverage focuses on Balochistan, South Waziristan and Gilgit Baltistan")

(Media Matters for Democracy, Report 2021)

6) Conclusion

Over 40% of Pakistan's population lives in poverty and nearly 27 million children are out of school. In this vacuum of opportunity, extremism has not just survived - it has thrived.

When the state fails to educate, employ and engage its youth, someone else will - and in Pak. that someone was extremist. The rise of

extremism in Pakistan is primarily the result of domestic failure - namely poor governance, a broken education system and deep-rooted social inequalities - while foreign interventions have acted as contributing

And in Pakistan

factors. Weak State governance and policy inconsistency, politicization of extremism and lack of counter-narrative and civil society engagement – are the factors that paved the way for the rise of extremism in Pakistan. Although,

foreign interventions, such as US involvement in Afghanistan, foreign funding of extremist madrassas and foreign media influence, played the role of catalyst for the rise of extremism in Pakistan.

but ~~is~~ a domestic feature that sustained the rise of extremism when Pakistan allows foreign supported terrorists to grow unchecked and gives legitimacy to radical groups, and is not providing youth with desired opportunities – extremism will be the result.

The ~~current situation~~ in Pakistan is severe and worsening.

Pakistan is ranked 2nd on the Global

Terrorism Index 2024. Terrorism

related activities. Pakistan rose by 45% with 108,000 deaths in 2024 up from 74,000 in 2023. Tehrik-e-Taliban

Pakistan (TTP) remains Pakistan's deadliest terrorist faction. In 2024, this

group carried out 482 attacks, resulting in 558 deaths. Baloch Insurgents (BLA, BLF etc) have sharply intensified. The Jaffar Express hijacking in March 2025 killed 64 people. Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISKP) carried out a suicide bombing in February at Darul Uloom Haqqania seminary in KP, killing 8 people. Groups like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) have fostered this violent mob activity especially toward minority groups. April 2025, an Ahmadi man was beaten to death & a person closest linked to TLP (Dawn, P) was belatedly countering Violent Extremism Act step of June 29, 2025. Along with this, some proxy groups are also operating. The Resistance Front (TRF) - previously as a rebrand of Al-Qaeda continues its ongoing operations in Jammu and Kashmir, coordinated from Pakistani territory. Hence, terrorism in Pakistan is not just continuing - it is evolving and spreading with deadliest attacks.

The primary cause of the rise of extremism is Pakistan's domestic failure. Weak state governance

and policy inconsistency played the role in this regard. Shifting alliances with militant groups, resulted in festering resentment and revenge driven radicalization (e.g. TTP). Pakistan's weak governance system also helped such groups to grow. National Action Plan 2014, was framed after APS Peshawar attack. Many of its clauses (such as: curb hate speech, regulating madrassas) are still not completed. Out of 70,000+ hate speech, fewer than 500 resulted in conviction.

(Punjab CTD data, 2022). Hence, domestic far-right can be seen to be fine in Pakistan.

Politicization and main streaming of extremism also promotes intolerance in society. Incidents like Jaranwala, Punjab (2023), where mobs burned churches and homes of Christians after a false blasphemy corner, are the result of intolerant feelings in the society towards minorities. Groups like Threck-e-Labail Pakistan (TLPI) entered mainstream politics through popular religious slogans. Electoral legitimacy of extremist voices provides public credibility.

TLP secured nearly 2.9 million votes (25.1%) in 2024 national elections, became the 4th largest party in the National Assembly (The News International, Dec 2024). So, it is a moderate party, but its policies are completely harmful to each other.

The failure of Pakistan to reform the education system is also one of the reasons for the rise of extremism in Pakistan. During the Afghan war, madrassas were founded by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait to propagate jihadist ideology. Pakistan has over 35000 madrassas, only 18000 are registered (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023). The unregulated madrassas are promoting extremist ideologies in Pakistan.

Socio-economic inequalities and youth unemployment inculcate frustration in youth. This frustration, exploited by many extremist groups, of Pakistanis population is under 30 (UNDP, 2021). Youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate in Pakistan is 29%, highest in Balochistan (34.9%) and KP (29.1%) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023 Censu).

DLA, JKP are the groups with highest extremist activities.

Lack of counter-narrative and civil society engagement make extremist narrative flourish in Pakistani society. Violent extremist narratives go uncontested in public and media spaces. "Pakistan lacks a structural approach to counter-radical narratives" (National Internal Security Policy, 2018-23). Over 80% of radicalized youth in recent CTD cases were influenced via social media or YouTube channels.

Foreign intervention also played the role of catalyst for rise of extremism in Pakistan. US involvement in Afghan war turned Pakistan as launchpad for jihad. During Soviet-Afghan war, the US and Saudi Arabia funneled \$3 billion in weapons and funds to Afghan mujahiddin in Pakistan. (Steve Coll, "Ghost Wars"). This led to the militarization of Pakistani society and the proliferation of jihadi madrassas near Afghan border.

Many radical groups gained

popularity by exploiting anti-West narratives. Most of Pakistanis viewed the US unfavourably post drone strikes — this helped extremists appear as 'defenders' — 'Anti-western narrative sentiment is instrumental in jihadist group survival and growth in Pakistan and Afghanistan' (RAND, 2021). This shows that groups in Pakistan exploit anti-US sentiment in propaganda.

Unregulated madrasas, backed with foreign funding is another factor that fueled the rise of extremism in Pakistan. During Afghan war, madrasas were funded by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait to propagate jihadist ideology. 10-15% of madrasas promote jihadist or extremist ideologies, and many of these are directly or indirectly funded by foreign donors, especially Saudi Arabia and the Gulf (Pakistan).

Madrasas: The Need for Reform, Brookings Institute Report (2016) Hence foreign intervention is playing a vital role in eradicating terrorism in Pakistan.

Armed forces have eliminated Balochistan, which will be the

Indian involvement in the region. Groups like BLA and BLF have claimed external help in ~~the 2008~~ ~~the~~ attack on Karachi Stock Exchange (2008). In 2016, **Kulbhushan Jadhav**, an Indian national was arrested in Balochistan. He confessed to support Baloch insurgents financially in order to destabilize Pakistan via terrorism and threaten CPEC.

Foreign media has always portrayed Pakistan negatively by linking terrorism with Pakistan. This has evoked anti-west sentiments in am. ~~the~~ ~~and~~ ~~sentiments~~ of respondents social + said foreign media portrays Pakistan in an unduly negative light leading to most as in agout and higher sympathy for groups resulting "western aggression". (Gallup Pakistan, 2018). Foreign media unfair depiction of Pakistan, increased support for anti-west extremist groups in Pakistan.

Despite foreign interventions, it is Pakistan domestic failures that caused extremism to evolve, escalate and spread in country. Pakistan allowed foreign supported terrorists grow unchecked after war, TTP attacks

rose by 60% after Taliban take over
in Afghanistan in August, 2021.
(PIPS, 2021) * Afghan Taliban and TTP
have safe heavens in Afghanistan and
border impurities are easy to
cross access ↓

It is true that many extremist narratives rose on foreign narratives, but they thrived through local legitimacy. Selective crackdowns and renaming of banned groups are loopholes in the system. Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jamat-ud-Dawa rose on Kashmir narrative, later legitimized via open charities and rallies. Such acts question the credibility of Pakistan efforts to counter-extremism.

Although foreign powers funded madrasas to promote their ideologies, but it is Pakistan's duty to properly regulate madrasa system. Implementation of Madrasa Registration Ordinance repeatedly failed due to political appeasement.

"TTP and Afghan Taliban actively recruit from madrassa network in KP, Balochistan and South Punjab"

(UNSC Monitoring Team, 2023). Many

of arrested militants have madrasa background. Over 30% of militants arrested (2011-2015) had madrasa background, mainly from Punjab and KP Seminaries, (Pakistan Interior Ministry). Hence, regulation of madrasa is unavoidable in order to counter-extremism in Pakistan and can only be done by the collective will of the state.

Substantive language cast long lasting Poor oppression and social inequalities pushed youth to militancy. When young people feel disconnected from political system, militancy offers a sense of power or revenge for state neglect. Pakistan ranks 168th out of 193 countries in Human Development Index (HDI Report 2025). Areas with highest militancy have Pakistan's lowest HDI - South Waziristan with 0.441 and literacy rate 32%, Dera Bugti with 0.285 HDI and literacy rate 34%, and Bajour with 0.449 and literacy rate 36%. Alienation due to poverty and lack of development contributed to youth recruitment in extremist groups.

Media plays an important role in countering extremist narratives and helps people to understand what is right and what is wrong. Unfortunately, Pakistan media fails to play its role in countering extremism. Less than 10% of national media coverage focuses on Balochistan, Sindh, NWFP and Gilgit Baltistan (Media Matters for Democracy, Report 2011). Poor representation of marginalized regions created a vacuum that allows foreign outlets (like BBC, Al-Arabiya) to dominate narratives in these regions.

In conclusion, it can be clearly claimed that the rise of extremism in Pakistan is primarily due to domestic failures. Policy inconsistency, unregulated education system and social inequalities are some of the ills that contributed to the rise of extremism in Pakistan. However, foreign intervention is acted as catalyst to intensify extremism in Pakistan, but it is country's domestic failures that lie at the core of the problem.

When ideology is married
to economic desperation, militancy
becomes an attractive career option.

— Moinuddin Haif
(Journalist and author)