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# Challenges and Opportunities In Mainstreaming Madrasas Education in Pakistan

## Outline

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### ① Introduction

### ② Challenges in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education:

- (i) Religious right-wing seems unwilling to move the needle.
- (ii) Social structure of the country, particularly tribal belts, remain defiant to adopt mainstream education
- (iii) The evident crumbling of Education Sector in Pakistan also presents a critical challenge.
- (iv) Penetration of militant ideologies within seminaries is a monumental challenge.
- (v) Intangible political will is a challenge of epic proportion.
- (vi) Centre-province tensions limit avenues for cooperation

### ③ Opportunities for Pakistan in Mainstreaming Madrasa Education

- (i) Ideological component of terrorism could be diluted, helping the cause of national security.
- (ii) Human development indicators can be markedly improved.
- (iii) Economy of the nation is likely to find firm footing
- (iv) Glaring core-periphery development gaps can be bridged



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(v) Pakistan's image could be redefined.

(vi) The picturesque landscape of the country can be branded for international tourism.

## ④ Conclusion



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In his seminal work, Inside Modern Insurgencies and Terrorism, Bard O'Neil notes that education remains a key component of addressing the resurgent tide of terrorist and military offensives. A vast body of literature available on the subject, indeed, lends credence to his approach. To this end, the notion of mainstreaming madrasah education in Pakistan remains a recurrent theme, stirring debates involving all segments of religious and political divide. This presents a landscape replete with challenges and opportunities for Pakistan in pursuing its stated goal of mainstreaming the education system of religious seminaries having presence across Pakistan - though much of them are concentrated along Punjab line. However, the reformation is a hard nut to crack in post-colonial societies, particularly the subjects deemed domain of religion. Thus, it is hardly a news that Pakistan's religious right is intransigent to keep the business as usual in what they call their religious and political base. However, they are not the only source of resistance; the failure of mainstream education system, coupled with political conflicts within the country fuelling polarization, remains a crucial hurdle to navigate. On the flip side, a successful attempt at the mainstream process could unlock

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opportunities denied long to marginalised communities, enabling the country to address its growing exerts of national security besides uplifting masses out of deprivation and poverty to sketch a healthy, secure and sustainable future. The piece of writing, in this regard, explores the challenges and opportunities for Pakistan in mainstreaming the education of seminaries.

The adamant religious - rigid in the country presents a critical impediment in the mainstreaming of education system ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> religious seminaries. It bears mentioning that such religious circles view seminaries as their political base, launchpads to take off for bargains from political and military class. In, No Win War, Zahid Hussain, an academic on the subject of militancy, notes that the religious class would find it inconvenient to trade-off a key component of their leverage. Thus, resistance from the clergy is natural, and policy makers will have to start from this stated position of religious elites. Moreover,



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Moreover, the recent fustel over the enacted piece of legislation transferring the mandate of seminaries to Federal Government invited a scathing response underscoring the gravity of crisis. Therefore, the resistance of religious class is a documented challenges in mainstreaming education of seminaries.

Another challenge includes the social structure of Pakistan, particularly in the regions dominated by tribal codes. The regions straddling along Durand line have developed strong penchant for seminaries, deeming it vital for the advancement of religious traction. They think opting out of the system aligned closely with their religious architecture would work to the harm of their religious obligations.

Dr. Taimur Rahman, in Class Structure of Pakistan, places considerable emphasis on the bond of seminaries and tribal belts of Pakistan along durand line, arguing that the narrative runs much contrary to the worldview of mainland education system,



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thus making it a vital challenge. Tax authorities of Pakistan looking to bring reforms in madressah system education.

The detaxiation of mainstream education system is another challenge facing Pakistan in mainstreaming madressah education. After all, it reinforces the claims of detractors who view seminaries their fiefdoms to advance the narrow interests of their own political ambitions. The figures of various institutions only aid their cause.

*the* UNICEF reports that more than 22 million children of Pakistan remain out of school noting that the collapse of education is evident in an impoverished country. This makes it harder for Pakistan to press ahead. Even if the country moves forward, the burden of narrative would hurt the process of implementation in the country. Thus, the crumbling education system is crisis of its own, throwing spanners in works in mainstreaming seminary education.

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Then there remains the penetration of militant ideologue in the seminaries of Pakistan, making it harder for Pakistan to make reformation a palpable reality. These ideologues share affinities with militants bent on redrawing boundaries of Pakistan and vast region under their obscurantist interpretation of religious injunction. They remain a crucial hurdle in overhauling the religious curricula of 18th century. Leading academic Veli Nasr - in a monograph for Centre of Foreign Relations - notes that ideologues are penetrated in religious seminaries across the world, but a vast majority of them remains tied to South Asian theatre. Such an observation reveals the sensitivity of the task ahead.

A shakeable political will serves no cause of Pakistan in advancing its reformation campaign, adding layers of complexities to the process of reforms at religious institutions.



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Since 1960s, Islamabad has made numerous attempts to mainstream the education of seminaries. This government<sup>is</sup> hardly a new customer, for the PM and his brother, then PM, made attempts in the past aimed at an inclusive process, but all went in vain. Ayesha Jalal, in her work, Partisans of Allah and Jihad in South Asia, documents that almost all such attempts failed to see the light of day as convenience prevailed to force political class to reevaluate their policy. The elusive political will is a tough challenge for Pakistan to navigate.

Fragging centre-province relations also make the reformation of seminaries a distant dream. Pakistan is a diverse society, and the constitutional scheme entails a federalism framework, requiring cooperation and collaboration to advance the shared goals. However, the relations



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between federation and constituent units have remained rooted in animosity. The history of Pakistan, as evident in Political Conflict in Pakistan, reveals how federation and units have failed to evolve a mechanism anchored in cooperation. Today, such an interplay is evident, as the differences between Islamabad and KP are glaringly obvious, making reforms in seminaries a pipe dream.

The piece has woven a complex tapestry of challenges confronting Pakistan in mainstreaming seminary education system. It is time one explore the flip side: the opportunities Pakistan can unlock by undergoing some crucial reforms in the religious education sector.

By undertaking successful reforms in seminary education, Pakistan can secure the interests of its national security, undermining the ideological component of terrorist breeding grounds. Pakistan is placed at a critical geostrategic location, having direct



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Access to South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East. If it allows Pakistan to become a geoeconomic hub; it also entails rapid influx of terrorist of multiple shades who find seminaries a safe haven. Muhammad Amir Rana, President of Pakistan Institute for  Peace Studies (PIPS), notes that the issue of seminaries is tied to addressing the concerns of national security and terrorism. This offers a key opportunity for the country to seize, helping its cause for a safe and secure environment.

Pakistan could improve the human development indicators of regions pushed below the poverty line by bringing reforms in education system of minors seminaries. The regions in Balochistan and KP are embroiled in a massive turmoil, which is further fuelled by socioeconomic disparities evident on a huge scale. By integrating these deprived societies into mainstream education, the country could change its fortunes. UNDP notes, in Review



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2023-2024 of Pakistan, that the vast tract of KP and Balouchistan hardly get any modern education. If Pakistan integrates these marginalised communities to digital education, much could change, and Pakistan could find a firm footing. Such an opportunity is a blessing for a country steeped in crisis.

The reforms in seminary education could also open vast opportunities for Pakistan's flagging economy, allowing it to mark a sustainable revival. The students of seminaries could be a source of national growth after they are equipped with modern tools of education and digital economy. Given the presence of youth bulge, Pakistan could cash in on the opportunity on offer, particularly at a time when developed economies are aging. Dr Adil Najam writes in Pakistan: Search for stability that investing youth could help Pakistan economy to surge beyond estimates. A sustainable growth rate of 6-8pc is achievable by mainstreaming modern education.



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The development deficits in the core-periphery dynamics could be bridged by mainstreaming the education of seminaries following outdated education system. It is not a coincidence that areas hosting concentrated seminaries lack development, which is then utilized or exploited to shape narrative against Pakistan. It is a social construct serving very few at the expense of million.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain writes, in *Governing the Ungovernable*, that core-periphery dynamics hurt national security more than anything. Thus, the mainstream process of education, along modern education curricula, could help Pakistan in variety of ways, offering opportunities to be seized.

Such an exercise could also help Pakistan to revamp its distorted and dented image in the Western world. Talk to Western citizens and listen their absurd imaginations of Pakistan hosting only terrorist outfits. The education



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Mainstream process in KP and Balouchistan could defuse such a distorted perception regarding Pakistan. In a marked Essay contributed to Atlantic Council, Shuja Nawaz expresses concern regarding the worsening image of the country. The madrasah education reforms could help Pakistan reverse the tide, establishing itself a vibrant and egalitarian society.

Finally, the process also presents an opportunity to brand Pakistan as a tourism hub in the world, enabling local communities to grow and economy to attract Foreign Direct Investment. Recently, CNN mentions Pakistan among its 25 dream destinations of 2025. It is, undoubtedly, a recognition of Pakistan's breathtaking landscape. The reforms in seminaries could enable local communities to look outside a narrow view of religion, concentrating instead on trade and commercial opportunities on offer. This will bring Pakistan vital resource and help the communities to grow and serve their cause. One wishes this opportunity is realised.



In Conclusion, the mainstreaming process of religious communities and seminaries presents a complex web of challenges and opportunities. The challenges are hard but doable. It is not an exhaustive list to put Pakistan on backfoot. Pakistan has the wherewithal to manage and capitalized on opportunities articulated in the essay. Pakistan can secure a hastening future for its marginalised communities steeped in toxic religio-cultural traditions. It could also help secure its borders, forcing terrorism to beat a hasty retreat. The development indicators will surge to make a case for sustainable economy, vibrant tourism and a society brimming with the promise and potential. The opportunities on offer means Pakistan should move the needle forward. One hopes the opportunities will be ~~seized~~ seized to sketch a future for a prosperity of Pakistan.