Helpdesk Research Report: Under-development and Radicalisation in Pakistan
11.01.08

Query: What are the links between underdevelopment and radicalisation in Pakistan? Is there any evidence that investments in development and poverty reduction have had an impact on radicalisation?

Enquirer: DFID South Asia Division

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1. Overview

The results of this query have been fairly mixed. It is widely speculated that in Pakistan, widespread poverty, failed expectations and the prevalence of militant Islamic religious schools have contributed to growth of radicalisation and extremism. However, most in-depth analysis takes as a starting point the extensive work undertaken by economists such as Krueger, Maleckova and Sageman, which has found little evidence of a direct link between poverty and terrorism. Finding that Islamist militants often come from economically advantaged backgrounds, they argue that terrorism should instead be seen as a response to political conditions and long-standing feelings of indignity, and frustration at lack of opportunity. Others argue however, that while this may explain the motivations of the Islamist leadership or elite, poverty and illiteracy may still be important motivating factors for recruits at the lower levels of radical organisations. In Pakistan, these factors are often used as part of the political rhetoric employed by Islamists to garner recruits and sympathy.

In addition, it is argued that the situation is likely to vary greatly between countries and these hypotheses should be tested at the country and, furthermore, at the sub-national level. Some analysts argue that there is an important distinction to be made between religious conservatism, which is prevalent across Pakistan, and political Islam and violent militancy. That the two converge in some areas, such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) for example, is instructive. The tribal areas have historically suffered from important development gaps, some of the poorest social and economic conditions in the country and weak government institutions. Even here, however, there does not appear to be a linear link between poverty and radicalisation. Other contributing factors are likely to include limited or predominantly religious education, grievances with the Frontier Crimes Regulations legal system, frustration at the lack of economic opportunities, and lack of political participation. Research rooted in local, historical, economic and anthropological analysis which looks at poverty, social exclusion, and religion alongside other variables, would allow a much more nuanced picture of these complex interactions to emerge. Very little such work has been done so far.
The one area that has received considerable attention is the under-development of education and the role of madaris (religious schools) in Pakistan. In the aftermath of 9/11 it was widely assumed that these schools were largely responsible for encouraging hatred of the West, inciting youth to violence and providing militant training. Subsequent research has shown that the role of madaris has been much exaggerated, and they may account for less that 1% of all student enrolment in Pakistan. The vast majority of students are educated in the dysfunctional state-run public education system. Further, while there is some evidence that madrasah students are less tolerant than those of public or private schools, public school students also show high levels of support for violence. Therefore, commentators argue that Pakistan’s entire education system needs reform in order to address increasing class inequalities, the polarisation of society, and divisions along sectarian and ethnic lines.

The research for this query uncovered no evidence on the impact of international aid programmes on radicalisation. Instead, this report includes material on several (mainly American) development initiatives aimed at addressing radicalisation in Pakistan which include security and law enforcement training, development and economic growth initiatives, and on-going infrastructure projects in FATA. More general material on how international development initiatives may be calibrated to address radicalisation has also been included.

Note: Islamic religious schools are variously referred to as ‘madrassas’, ‘madrassahs’ and ‘madaris’ in the literature and comments below. This helpdesk report uses the terms ‘madrasah’ to denote a school (in the singular) and ‘madaris’ to denote schools (plural). References to the ‘public education system’ refer to mainstream state-run schools.

2. Key documents

General

  This article is available for purchase from Caliber: http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/as.2004.44.6.771

This article addresses the questions of whether the increase in domestic terrorism and widespread sympathy for terrorist groups in Pakistan is related to past patterns of economic growth and development; and if so, whether international donors can simultaneously tackle the problems of escalating terrorism and poor economic growth. The author argues that Krueger and Maleckova’s hypothesis can be applied to Pakistan in that large segments of the population have become weary and frustrated with the country’s lack of economic progress. The article also refers to the 2002 Bremer and Kasarda model of ‘The New Second World’ and argues that Pakistan is in the first stage of this model which typically begins when a low-income country starts to industrialise rapidly, with accompanying transformations such as urbanisation, income growth, economic diversification, etc. Economic take-off occurs if growth continues for a decade or more but Pakistan has failed to move forward to the middle stage because of growth-limiting policies and institutional rigidities. The author cites Bremer and Kasarda: "History suggests that failure to make steady progress through the New Second World transition's early phase to the middle period is extremely dangerous. If the transition stalls here - as it did in post-World War I Russia, and as it has now in much of the Middle East - failure can lead to revolution and Al Qaeda-style international violence." The author argues that while poverty and militant Islam are also contributing factors to the rise extremism in Pakistan, it is unlikely that an exclusive focus on them will significantly reduce the attractiveness of terrorism. Instead, assistance needs to focus on policy changes and institution building needed to navigate Pakistan out of the first development stage that it is currently trapped in.
This article is available for purchase from Cat.Inist: [http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=18041927](http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=18041927)
This article argues that the selective distribution of modernisation, i.e. the material transformation of society, in Pakistan, however, deepened social and economic disparities among its provinces, and pitted minority provinces against the majority province of Punjab. To overcome such inter-provincial animosities, the Pakistani state turned to Islam for its supposed cross-cutting appeal to all Pakistanis, especially in order to neutralise nationalist movements in the Baluchistan and Pakhtunkhaw (NWFP) provinces. The consequences of this were equally divisive. The selective distribution of modernisation reinforced conservatism in the minority provinces, and fuelled the rise of Islamists in Pakistan, especially in Baluchistan and NWFP. At the same time repeated calls to Islam pushed Islamists to the forefront of Pakistani politics. The author argues that the Islamists’ recent rise to power cannot be understood in isolation from the prolonged history of the traditionalist and nationalist struggle for the cultural, economic, political, and social autonomy of Baluchistan and NWFP.

This article makes the important point that analysis of the situation in Pakistan often conflates religious conservatism with militant extremism. While the two may link up in certain areas of Pakistan, i.e. the tribal areas, they remain distinct and different in the rest of Pakistani society. For the author, socio-economic polarisation within Pakistani society presents the greatest threat to Pakistan’s stability. While the urban elite has modernised at an astonishing rate over the past two decades, the poorer classes have been left greatly marginalised. The author also notes a growing correlation between poverty and radicalisation of the younger generation. The dysfunctional public education system has been abandoned by the elite and serves only students from the lower socio-economic classes. Recent surveys have revealed that students at these schools show greater admiration for figures like Osama Bin Laden and express extreme hatred towards the West. Poor educational standards in these schools also means that students are ill-prepared for the job market. If this situation persists, the author argues, Pakistan’s large population of underprivileged youth could, potentially, begin to support a narrow radical vision of the state as an alternative to the failed experiment with secular regimes: “If this segment of the population turns to extremism, then there will be a structural shift in Pakistan polity, for at the end of the day the military and civil service cadres are reflective of the society at large. This is a much larger threat than that posed by the extreme minority of madrassah cadres that can perpetrate violence, but have no potential to permeate the society.”

Educational Development

This article is available for purchase from Informaworld: [http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a713993528~tab=content](http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a713993528~tab=content)
This Research Note surveys the major types of schools in Pakistan. These are Urdu language-medium schools, madaris and elite English language-medium schools. These schools are divided by the medium of instruction and curriculum, as well as on the basis of socio-economic class. While the English language-medium schools cater for the middle, upper-middle and upper classes, the Urdu language-medium schools are aimed at the lower-middle and working classes, and the madaris provide education for poor, marginalized or
very religious people. The expenditure by society and the state on these institutions perpetuates class divisions in Pakistan. The worldview of the students in these schools is so different from each other that they seem to live in different worlds. The most acute polarisation is between the madrassah students and those at elite English-medium schools. “The former are deprived, but they express their anger—the rage of the dispossessed—via the idiom of religion. This brings them in conflict with the Westernized elite, which looks down upon them in contempt.”


This report argues that even those madaris in Karachi without direct links to violence promote an ideology that provides religious justification for such attacks. Further, the madrassah sector has grown at an explosive rate over the past two decades as a result of Karachi’s rapid, unplanned and unregulated urbanisation and its huge population of young, disaffected and impoverished citizens. The report stresses that to understand their role, the madaris, which are for the poorest segments of society, must be seen in the context of Pakistan’s hierarchical education system which is divided by language and class. This divide produces three different types of literate classes with widely different job opportunities. While elite schools in Karachi often offer state-of-the-art facilities, the city’s state-run system suffers from poorly-trained teachers and inadequate infrastructure. The same can be said of the facilities of most madaris – however, their main attractions are free tuition, accommodation and food. The report argues that many madrassah students are “rejectees” of the system, “abandoned” by the state. Not only does this have social costs in the form of exposure to abuse and diminished educational opportunities, it can also lead to increased intolerance and militancy. The authors cite a 2002 comparative survey which showed that of the three categories of students, those from the madaris were the least tolerant. Specifically, madrassah students are taught to view Western ideas as harmful and threatening.

A further ICG report is also available:


This paper uses published data sources and a census of schooling choice to show that existing estimates of madrassah enrolment are inflated. The madaris account for less than 1 percent of all enrollment in the country and there is no evidence of a dramatic increase in recent years. The authors argue that while the educational landscape in Pakistan has changed substantially in the last decade, this is due to an explosion of private schools, an important fact that has been left out of the debate on Pakistani education. The authors also find that, looking at school choice, no one explanation that fits the data can be found. Most existing theories of madrassah enrollment are based on household attributes (for instance, a preference for religious schooling or the household’s access to other schooling options). However, the data shows that among households with at least one child enrolled in a madrassah, 75 percent send their second (and/or third) child to a public or private school or both. Therefore, these widely promoted theories do not explain this substantial variation within households.

This paper argues that contrary to popular belief, madrassah students are not all poor and madaris are not categorically tied to militancy. Madaris are however “gathering” places where militant groups and potential recruits can interact. Religious leaders of some madaris issue edicts (fatwas) that justify the use of violence, and a small number of madaris are used for militant training. There is limited evidence which also suggests that madrassah students more strongly support jihad than those of public or private schools. However, public school students, who comprise 70% of Pakistan’s enrolled students, also have high levels of support for violence. The authors identify several policy implications for US policy towards Pakistan:

- Pakistan’s entire education system requires comprehensive reform. This may be beyond Pakistan’s capability and there may be only limited scope for US involvement. Increased participation by multinational organisations is required.
- Because efforts to restrict the supply of terrorism have rapidly diminishing margins of return, interventions to reduce demand for terrorism are needed.
- Madaris must be monitored continually as they may contribute both to the demand for terrorism and to the limited supply of militants. For the same reasons, Pakistan’s public school sector deserves much more attention than it currently enjoys.


This report offers a background on Pakistani madaris and their students, discusses specific views expressed by the various stakeholders interviewed, and concludes with some preliminary policy implications. These last include:

- Current and previous research shows that earlier assertions about the pervasiveness of madaris appear to be baseless. It is suggested that less than 1 percent of all full-time enrolled students attend madaris.
- There is little evidence that madaris contribute substantially to the recruitment of militants. Similarly, most observers believe that only a very small number of madaris are involved in the actual training of militants.
- It is likely that madaris may contribute to conditions that are conducive to supporting terrorism and militancy. In addition, there is evidence that density of madaris contribute to sectarian violence. This is probably due in part to the fact that each school teaches the superiority of its own tradition.
- The current madrassah system is likely producing ulema (religious scholars) that are irrelevant and ill-prepared to contribute to the needs of a modern Muslim state.
- Given that the vast majority of students attend public schools, it seems that disproportionate attention has been spent on the madaris. Greater attention should be given to public schools and possibly to encouraging greater access to private schools. Studies have shown that private school students and teachers were more likely to support equal rights for Pakistan’s minorities and women; as well as peaceful means of conflict resolution.
- More attention needs to be spent understanding the determinants of parental choice in educating their children.
- Finally, many Pakistanis believe that education reform in Pakistan is driven by external actors (e.g. the United States and Britain) and is trying to de-Islamise education in Pakistan. This has contributed to a general dissatisfaction with the school system and the desire to find other alternatives.


This book tests the hypothesis that the growth of the madaris is a result of deeply embedded poverty in Pakistani society and a breakdown of state services in rural areas. In order to test this hypothesis, it offers a specific analysis of the madaris in Pakistan’s capital Islamabad in comparison to data from Ahmedpur. Unlike Ahmedpur, Islamabad is an urban centre and
relatively prosperous and rich in terms of economic opportunities and social services like health, education and employment. Yet, madaris are also found in Islamabad and are flourishing. The author makes the point that while education helps to sustain economic development, the linkage between education and a reduction in extremism and conflict is much more tenuous. What is clear is that incendiary information whether through educational channels at modern schools, madaris, or at home can play a significant role in conflict development. Also, the cultural environment in certain institutions may lead to an uncritical absorption of this material more so than others. So, any conflict reduction strategy must focus on knowledge-based sources of conflict as well as institutions - many of which will be educational in nature.

The Evidence Base

  This book explores the personal and organisational aspects of Islamist organisations in Pakistan and is based on five months fieldwork amongst 125 groups in 47 cities, and interviews with over 150 recruits about their motivations for joining. The book also offers an insight into the goals, strategies, training and recruitment methods, and affiliations of these organisations, as well as their involvement in running madaris.

  This article is available for purchase from Informaworld:
  http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a789726843~db=all~jumptype=rss
  This article presents results of a survey of 141 Pakistani families of slain militants. This survey collected unprecedented data about the militants and their households. The data offers a glimpse into the backgrounds of militants and the families who (mostly) supported their decision to join the jihad. Most militants served and died in Kashmir and seem to be “high quality” militants in that they, like their heads of household, are well educated and not predominantly coming from madaris, as is often claimed. This analysis suggests that while the militants merit attention, so do the families that produce militants.

  This book is available for purchase from Amazon.co.uk:
  http://www.amazon.co.uk/Language-Ideology-Power-Learning-Pakistan/dp/0195796446/ref=sr_1_6?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=119997384&sr=8-6
  This book includes information on a comparative survey on worldview among students in Pakistan. It shows that of the three categories of students, those from madrasas "for reasons which they consider justified according to their interpretation of religion, are the least tolerant". When asked to list the priorities for Pakistan, the top answers given by madrassah students included: conquering Kashmir (99.2 per cent of students); implementation of Shari’a law (97.7 per cent), developing nuclear weapons (96.1 per cent), and strengthening the army (87.7 per cent). Over 73 per cent of madrassah students opposed equal rights for women, 81.6 per cent opposed equal rights for Ahmединis, and 71.7 per cent were against Christians and Hindus. Nearly half said democracy was not a priority, and more than 76 per cent were against freedoms for the electronic media. For further information, please see appendices 14.4, 14.6 and 14.7, pp. 583-591.

  This article is available for purchase from Informaworld:
  http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a725841463~db=all;
A version of this article also appears in Victoroff, J. (ed.), 2006, ‘Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism’, IOS Press, and a preview is available at the web address below. Please note that some pages are excluded from the preview:

http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=olWnkkm4SPoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA162&dq=Who+Supports+Terrorism%3F+Evidence+from+Fourteen+Muslim+Countries+pakistan&ots=Th7iScmW7&sig=EzVmKJ7kt9-dr8CrpmXnvXlc#PPA162,M1

This research note explores aspects of the demand for terrorism using data from the Pew Research Center. With data from 7,849 adult respondents from 14 Muslim countries, this article explores who supports terrorism. It shows that in Pakistan, women, those below the age of 40, and unmarried people are more likely to support terrorism. The study also found that very poor respondents and those who believe that religious leaders should play a larger role in politics are less likely to support terrorism than others. As these results vary throughout the countries studies, the authors argue that interventions must be highly tailored, using detailed demographic and psychographic data.

**International Responses and Impact – Pakistan and Elsewhere**


  The key objective of this Plan (SDP) is to foster social and economic development in the tribal areas. The SDP therefore outlines measures to improve services, upgrade infrastructure, promote the sustainable use of natural resources, and encourage activity in the trade, commerce and industrial sectors. It explores options to improve institutional and financial capacities, and to expand and diversify available economic opportunities. It also provides a monitoring and evaluation framework to support, assess and strengthen development initiatives.

- Curtis, L., 2007, ‘US Aid to Pakistan: Countering Extremism Through Education Reform’, Testimony delivered before the US House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, May 9
  http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/hl1029.cfm

  This presentation provides an overview of US aid programmes in Pakistan. These include constructing primary, middle and high schools in FATA; providing training, technical assistance and infrastructure for government officials, citizens and the private sector to deliver high-quality education throughout the country, with special focus on selected districts in FATA, Sindh and Baluchistan; fostering partnerships between parents and teachers that improve accountability for children’s education. Recommendations for further US engagement include:
  - Providing aid for specific development and education projects rather than as direct budget support.
  - Encouraging the government to implement systemic reform of the education system in order to ensure increased literacy and reduce dropout rates.
  - Encouraging the government to crack down on those madaris that promote extremist and sectarian violence.
  - Encourage transparency and efficiency within the education bureaucracy as well as community involvement and accountability.


  This report examines the social and economic development policies in three countries - Israel, the Philippines, and the United Kingdom – designed to prevent a resurgence of terrorist violence territories. These efforts demonstrate the potential benefits and
shortcomings of using social and economic development as a counterterrorism tool. Each case offers its own unique lessons that lead to the following six overall conclusions:

- Social and economic development policies can weaken local support for terrorist activities by expanding the middle classes that have traditionally lent support to terrorist groups. In many cases, this section of the population has recognised the economic benefits of peace and, as a result, has worked to inhibit local support for terrorist activities.
- Social and economic development can discourage terrorist recruits by reducing their perceived grievances and providing their communities with viable alternatives to terrorism.
- If development initiatives are inadequately funded, they can backfire by inflating the hopes and aspirations of local communities. When these expectations are not met, this can trigger resentment and renewed support for terrorist violence.
- The ability of development policies to inhibit terrorism depends on their implementation. The most successful social and economic development policies are those that are developed in consultation with community leaders; based on needs assessments that address the specific requirements of targeted communities; and accompanied by disbursement mechanisms that ensure proper fiscal management.
- Development assistance can be made conditional on the absence of violence, creating a useful “stick” to discourage support for terrorists.
- Although social and economic development - when properly supported and implemented - can inhibit terrorism, development alone cannot eliminate it. Development is most effective when it is incorporated into a multipronged approach that includes wider political, military, and community-relations dimensions.


Based on interviews with representatives of the donor community, counter-terrorist agencies as well as radical groups in Denmark, Eritrea, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Malawi, Pakistan, Sweden, Thailand, UK and the USA, this study aims to explore the causes of extremism and terrorism and the potential role of development cooperation in preventing it. Chapter 3 reviews existing anti-terrorist measures in development cooperation. The study also addresses the development of terrorism and extreme fundamentalism in various regions and Chapter 6 focusses on South Asia. Finally, the Chapter 12 offers conclusions and recommendations for Danish development cooperation:

- Aid can improve the image of the West in the Islamic world, and by reducing the causes of grievances, can also help reduce direct motivation for violence and support for terrorism.
- Development cooperation must address democratisation issues at the sub-national, national contexts, and international system, including the political grievances of diasporas, immigrants and peoples without a state.
- The anti-terrorism agenda requires better understanding between cultures and religions and this must be based on dialogue.
- An emphasis on good governance and human rights in development cooperation should aim at preventing violent counter-terrorism from being used for political and security purposes.
- In the case of fragile states, governments should be supported to fill vacuums of governance.
- Strategies to fight poor governance, conflict and terrorism must be coherent, coordinated, and consistent with human rights norms. Free media are critical in this context and they should be allowed to present different legitimate political views.
- In ‘difficult partnerships’, aid should operate with state- as well as non-state partners.
This article argues that making Western trade policy fairer for majority-Muslim countries could address radicalisation by removing a basic cause of anger and frustration – economic stagnation and unemployment. The combination of shrinking economies and growing populations has resulted in a restless, young citizenry susceptible to exploitation by Islamist radicals. By removing unfair tariffs and encouraging foreign direct investment to Muslim countries, the West could contribute to bringing the Muslim world's people into the global marketplace.

4. Press Articles

  http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=5074&pubType=HI_Opeds


- Bhutto, B., 2004, ‘Without a war on poverty, we will never defeat terror’, The Guardian, August 9
  http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1278931,00.html

4. Additional information

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Websites visited

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