



Radicalism Among Youth In Pakistan:

Human Development Gone Wrong?

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November 2014

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Disclaimer

This paper has been developed by the external Contributing Author, Dr. Moeed Yusuf. The opinions, statements and advice contained within this paper do not necessarily represent those of the UN, UNDP nor NHDR.

Introduction

Serious worries about radicalism among Pakistan’s youth emanated in the backdrop of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. Given that much debated link between youth bulges and radicalization, the onset of jihadist violence within Pakistan raised immediate concerns about the human development experience of Pakistan’s upcoming generation.

Despite the importance of the issue however, literature examining the youth’s development in the context of radicalism in Pakistan remains relatively scant. Moreover, it is amorphous and not always rigorous in its attempts to trace the effects of various drivers of radicalism on youth preferences, views, and actions. The think-piece examines this space and argues that a prototypical analysis of the subject that examines lagging human development indicators to understand the state of radicalism among youth will be unable to fully explain the situation in Pakistan. Crucial in Pakistan’s case has been the role of state policy in creating a politico-ideological environment that has impacted the outlook of the younger generation in troubling ways.

What Are We Talking about?

Radicalization is an amorphous concept. Its measurement has remained a challenge no matter where it is studied around the world. Literature set in the Pakistani context is no exception. The term is often used liberally and casually – meaning different things to different authors and thereby making cross-study comparisons difficult.

By far the most common usage of the term implicitly equates it with violence; many end up using the two interchangeably. The tendency speaks to attempts by authors to induce an element of measurability to their analysis: actual violence is the most, and often the only, tangible manifestation of radicalism in an individual. Such efforts however are unable to unpack the *process* of radicalization of an individual and the various stages he or she may go through before turning violent. Policies tailored to particular stages in

the radicalization process are difficult to devise when the phenomenon is seen in such restrictive terms. Moreover, authors tend to be reductionist in depicting what characteristics may ultimately lure individuals towards violence; preferences such as conservatism, opposition of liberal ideals, support for Sharia, and the like are often presented as indicators of potentially violent mindsets. Such lax metrics tend to make radicalism an over-determined outcome of any investigation on the subject. Siddiqa (2010: 25) takes a somewhat more nuanced approach where she defines ‘latent radicalism’ as the “the tendency to be exclusive rather than inclusive vis-à-vis other communities on the basis of religious belief.” However, even this casts the net too wide and ends up conflating radicalism with other distinctly less regressive concepts such as intolerance.

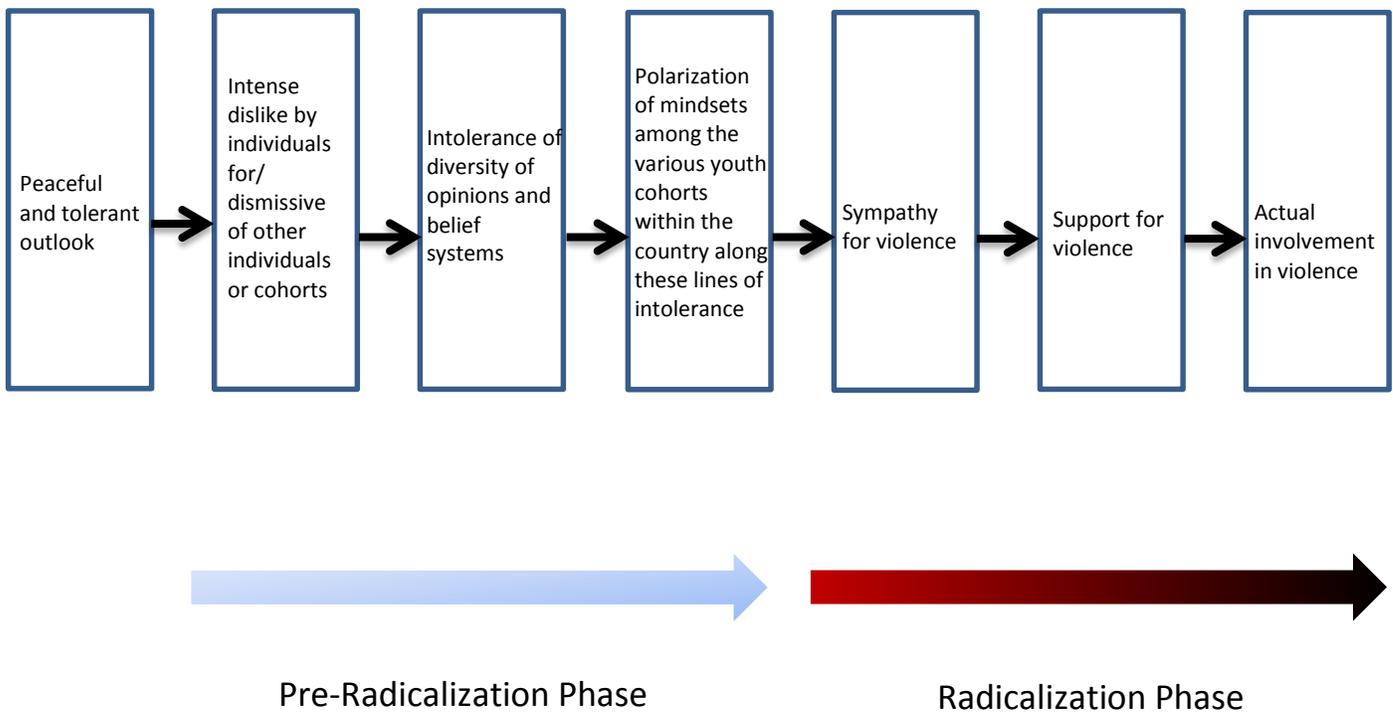
Part of the problem is that these efforts approach radicalism in rather static terms and try to peg it to a particular type of characteristic/behavior rather than examining it as a dynamic concept whose various degrees of intensity imply different behavioral traits/mindsets. Perhaps a more accurate way of conceptualizing the phenomenon is to see it as a *process* that moves along a continuum starting from an individual’s peaceful outlook and ending at outright violence (see figure 1). Building on thematic literature on the subject, the continuum explains the potential psychological, sociological, and behavioral changes that may take place as the individual regresses from a peaceful outlook. (Box 1 lists some of the traits/characteristics that individuals *may* exhibit at each stage of the continuum). To be sure, not all stages on the continuum qualify as radicalism in and of themselves: it would be inappropriate to label any of the stages before “sympathy for violence” as radicalism. Nonetheless, the continuum explains how an individual may move from these earlier pre-radicalization stages to actual radicalization. Of course, in real life, the different stages are not as neatly distinct; individuals may skip stages; they could move back and forth between them; and they may never progress beyond a particular stage.

The move along the continuum is enabled by forces typically referred to as ‘drivers’ or ‘enablers’ in thematic literature on radicalization. The most commonly cited ones for Pakistani include: (i) education; (ii) socio-economic deprivation; and (iii) misgovernance and corruption. These are fairly prevalent in literature set in other contexts as well. One that is often seen as a background condition that affects these enablers but must, in my view, be added to the list of actual drivers for any case study on Pakistan is the overall politico-ideological environment. As I will argue, this is by far the most important factor at play in terms of increasing the susceptibility of Pakistani youth to radicalization, and in some cases actually radicalizing them.

The continuum allows us to unpack of the effects of the various drivers/enablers of radicalization and link them to specific stages along the continuum. We should therefore be able to say more than simply

drawing a link between the identified enablers and the aggregated concept of “radicalization” through this approach.

Figure 1: The Radicalization Continuum



BOX 1: Traits of Individuals at Various Stages along the Radicalization Continuum

Pre-Radicalization Phase

Stage 1: Peaceful and tolerant outlook

- Anti-violence and pro-coexistence views and demeanor

Stage 2: Intense dislike for/dismissive of other individuals or groups

- Personal views disagree with those of other individuals or groups
- Exclusionary mindset when it comes to these individuals and groups
- No actions or support to actions that seek exclusion of these individuals or groups

Stage 3: Intolerance

- Conviction that the target individuals or groups are not worthy of inclusion in the mainstream
- Potential disengagement from target individuals or groups
- Peaceful but potentially open expression of views that reflect intolerance towards the target individuals or groups
- No action to exclude or harm target individuals or groups

Stage 4: Polarization among groups

- Association with a group that holds exclusionary views towards other groups
- The group’s disengagement and opposition of other groups and expressions that highlight dislike and intolerance towards other groups
- The group’s peaceful but potentially open expression of views that reflect intolerance towards the target groups
- No direct action by one’s group to harm or exclude the target groups

Radicalization Phase

Stage 5: Sympathy for violence

- No opposition by an individual to violence against a target group or individual
- Propensity of the individual or one’s group to justify the notion of, or actual violence against, target groups or individuals
- Wishing for further violence against target groups or individuals
- No direct involvement in supporting violence against the target groups or individuals

Stage 6: Support for violence

- Individual’s or one’s group’s direct support in terms of expression of opinion in favor of a particular violent ideology, individual, or movement
- Individual’s or one’s group’s intellectual or material support to a particular violent ideology, individual, or movement
- Individual’s or one’s group’s opposition to counter-radicalization/counter-terrorism actions against violent individuals or groups one is supporting because of a belief that these groups are justified in their actions
- Individual’s active involvement in a militant group

Phase 8: Actual involvement in violence

- Involvement in perpetration of violence as a tool to further one’s individual or group objectives

What We Know about Youth Radicalization in Pakistan?

The short answer is “not enough.” Apart from the definitional issues, there is an absence of any systematic panel data investigating questions relevant to radicalism, of large enough de-radicalization programs that would allow research on a representative sample of individuals believed to be radicalized, and of rigorous profiling of terrorists that could lead to generalizable conclusions about the processes of radicalization. Much of what we know is through polls and youth perception surveys that capture views and outlooks of the upcoming generation and attempt to infer the state of radicalization among them from these.

The most obvious trends in youth preferences that can be ascertained from poll/survey-based data from the past few years are listed below.¹

In terms of ideology/views on terrorism: (i) religiosity is prevalent. Youth report that religion plays an important role in their lives. There is also strong support for imposition of Sharia in the country; (ii) there are signs of increasingly exclusionary and intolerant belief systems; (iii) there is a propensity to accept the ‘us versus them’ worldview against whomever a particular individual holds intolerant views; (iv) at the same time, virtually all surveys report that majority of respondents oppose violence by non-state actors within Pakistan and consider groups like the Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda as terrorists. That said, there are inevitably sizeable minorities in most survey findings who do not seem categorically opposed to violence. In a survey-based study, Shapiro and Fair (2009) explain that Pakistani youth tend to differentiate between militant groups rather than having a blanket view about Islamist violence; and (v) radicalization/terrorism are increasingly seen as a major threat to Pakistan.

¹ Some of the prominent surveys/polls include:

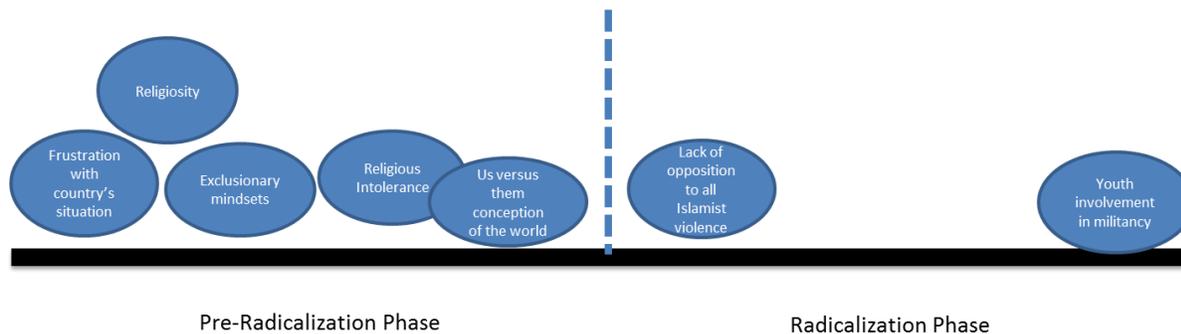
British Council Pakistan “Pakistan the Next Generation”(2009); British Council Pakistan “Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box”(2013); British Council Pakistan “Next Generation: Insecure Lives, Untold Stories”(2014); BARGAD “Youth and Extremism” (2009); Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies “Radicalization: Perceptions of Educated Youth in Pakistan”(2010); Herald “Youth Speak”(2010); Center for Civic Education Pakistan “Civic Health of Pakistani Youth: Study of Voice, Volunteering, and Voting Among Young People”(2009); Herald “Picture Imperfect: Who’s Winning, Who’s Losing and Who Wants to Spoil the Game”(2013); Pew Research Center “A Less Gloomy Mood in Pakistan: Sharif Gets High Marks, While Khan’s Ratings Drop”(2014); Pew Research Center “Muslim Publics Share Concerns about Extremist Groups: Much Diminished Support for Suicide Bombing”(2013); Pew Research Center “On the Eve of Elections, A Dismal Public Mood in Pakistan: Rising Concerns About the Taliban”(2013); Pew Research Center “Most Muslims Want Democracy, Personal Freedoms, and Islam in Political Life: Few Believe U.S Backs Democracy”(2012); Pew Research Center “Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S: 74% Call America an Enemy”(2012); Gallup International Association “American Action Against Osama Bin Laden: What Does the World Think?”(2011); Gallup International Association “What do Young Voters Think in Pakistan?”(2012).

As for the youth’s outlook towards their country: (i) religion comes before allegiance to Pakistan but these are not mutually exclusive traits; (ii) over time, there has been a marked increase in the sense of despondence and frustration with the state and future of the country; (iii) the major problems confronting Pakistan – presumably these underlie youth frustrations – are linked to socio-economic deprivation, poor governance, and lack of writ of the state in one way or another; (iv) philosophical commitment to democracy is lacking among the youth. The military remains the most popular institution for the most part; (v) yet, there is overwhelming support for the mainstream political parties in comparison to religious ones (who incidentally demand imposition of Sharia that is seemingly popular among the youth); and (vi) overall, their faith in religious institutions including *madaris* is mixed. Some surveys show the mainstream institutions of the state being far more respected. Others however have reported high respect for religious scholars and clerics.

Finally, Pakistani youth are prone to the state’s version of history and depiction of Pakistan as a victim of negative externalities. For instance, youth across the board seem anti-U.S. – a strong conviction in the ‘us versus them’ dichotomy when it comes to the U.S./Western world stands out. Yet, trends are also improving in some important respects: on India, there is support for improved ties and for normalizing people-to-people contact.

In terms of radicalism, studies point to youth perceptions/responses on religiosity, their exclusionary thinking, religious intolerance, a level of sympathy for – or at least lack of active opposition to – Islamist violence among pockets, an ‘us versus them’ conception of the world, and frustration with the conditions in the country as worrisome. In fact, most simply imply a linear correlation between these and radicalism. Not surprisingly then, much of the literature paints a fairly bleak picture as far as the severity of the problem among Pakistani youth is concerned. In reality however, an accurate representation of these perceptions would place most of them in the pre-radicalization phase on our continuum, with only some spilling over into the radicalization phase (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Youth Preferences mapped on the Radicalization Continuum



Enablers of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan

There are two prominent strands of literature examining enablers of radicalization among Pakistani youth: studies that focus on education; and those that explore the role of socio-economic deprivation. There are also analyses that talk of the role of the state as a driver of militancy. However, these efforts can most accurately be placed in the world of international relations as they are interested in the realpolitik dimension of state policy – not youth radicalization per se. Their unit of analysis is the state; they tend to focus on the state’s use of radicalized individuals rather than on how state policies affected the radicalization continuum for individual citizens. I will introduce the role of the state, but as the principal agency shaping the politico-ideological environment that has facilitated movement of Pakistani youth along the continuum. Other than that, while factors like misgovernance, corruption, and the like are frequently mentioned as ‘causes’ of radicalization in perception surveys, there is little work on these – and no evidence that backs their direct link to radicalism.

Education as an Enabler?

Education is an obvious candidate for this discussion given the Islamization process Pakistani textbooks underwent in the 1980s and the conscious effort to promote religion as the nation’s principal identity through these materials. Moreover, Pakistan’s educational system has evolved into a fairly rigidly stratified one: the three school systems – elite private schools, public schools and non-elite private schools, and the *deeni madaris* provide distinct type of environments, teaching experience, and exposure, potentially creating fresh fault lines among the youth.

Academic textbooks used in Pakistani public schools – this school system caters to three-fourths of Pakistan’s school-going children – have been a matter of intense controversy for years. Critics argue that subjects like *Pakistan Studies* and *Islamiyat* deliberately try to impose Islam as *the* national ideology, eulogize the concept of violent jihad, create exclusionary mindsets by presenting Hindus and India as evil, and present a biased view of colonial and post-independence history. Some even argue that the curriculum contains direct “incitement to religious and sectarian violence” (Candland, 2014) and that it ends up

creating individual identities that “dehumanize[ing] certain segments of society” (Winthrop and Graff, 2010: 29).²

This strand of literature asserts a direct link between curriculum and youth perceptions, and in turn, their ‘radicalized’ mindsets. Studies like Afzal’s (2015) argue that textbooks seem to have a significant influence on attitudes irrespective of teacher training, teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, and students’ socio-economic backgrounds. A host of other studies have reached similar conclusions.

If public schooling is a cause of worry, the *deeni madaris* in the country only accentuate concerns. Works by Fair (2006; 2007; 2008), among others report that *madaris* produce relatively narrow-minded graduates with a world view that is inherently conservative and more prone to conspiracy theories that present Islam as besieged from within and without. They are seen as cultivating minds more inclined towards violence. Indeed, certain *madaris* are notorious for having their graduates end up in the militant enclave – they are even alleged to be operating as de facto recruiting grounds for militant outfits.

Elite private schools are the only ones that have traditionally provided room for some comfort. Indeed, Rehman (2003) finds that children in these schools are relatively more tolerant and attuned to western life styles. Siddiqa (2010) however argues that while children from these backgrounds may be more liberal in their views on some issues and less likely to turn to militancy, they are nonetheless ideologically conservative and also beholden to the ‘us versus them’ conception of the outside world. That said, the self-image of elite private school students is far most progressive than their non-elite counterparts.

These diverse mindsets among students of the respective school systems imply the potential for polarization among them. Not only ideologically distinct, but so physically and psychologically isolated from each other are these systems that their graduates literally have no opportunity to interact, let alone understand and appreciate each other’s backgrounds and viewpoints (Khan and Yusuf, 2011). A jaundiced view of the ‘other’ is therefore a likely outcome in a class-conscious society like Pakistan’s. Indeed, Rehman (2003) reports presence of a polarized mindset: children of the elite remain dismissive of their Urdu medium counterparts. Moreover, they tend to simplistically equate poor backgrounds with radicalism without realizing their own biases (Siddiqa, 2010). Non-elite youth on the other hand tend to see the elite as liberal and western-oriented – a negative attribute not attuned to Pakistani culture and values as far as they are concerned.

² Winthrop and Graff say this while referring to other countries but the conclusion of their report suggests that it applies to Pakistan as well.

This stand of literature undoubtedly points to a problem. But authors end up going too far when they seek to link the identified concerns with radicalization/violence. A number of potent counter-arguments to the education-radicalism thesis need consideration. For one, a more linear correlation between educational content and youth preferences should lead to far fewer Pakistani youngsters opposing the jihadi violence textbooks eulogize; one would expect greater support for religious political parties that stand for further ‘Islamization’ of Pakistan; something other than educational experience must also explain the increasingly liberal views on India – at least more liberal than their parents’ generation who had the luxury of going through the school system prior to its Islamization ; and youth should be more critical of their ex-colonial masters, Britain, who are depicted far more negatively in textbooks than the U.S., etc. Moreover, even if Pakistani education has contributed to higher levels of religiosity, studies show that “religiosity is a poor predictor of support for militant organizations” (Shapiro and Fair, 2009: 39).

Even for *madaris*, whose link to violence is most clearly established, we need to dig deeper to determine whether the type of education they impart organically leads their students to turn to violence or whether this is only applicable to a small number of *madaris* working closely with the militant enclave. The latter would point to something far more deliberate and artificial than the *madrassah*-militancy thesis implies. Indeed, there is evidence to support this. Studies (Fair, 2008) maintain that even if *madaris* may increase susceptibility to radicalization, this is not directly correlated with a propensity among youth to join militant groups or be violent.

Socio-economic Deprivation as an Enabler?

The most prominent argument in terms of the socio-economic deprivation thesis is that *poverty* drives radicalism. This belief is also what underpins the conventional wisdom that development is key to undercutting militancy in infested areas.

In my experience, Pakistani practitioners tend to believe the radicalism-poverty link. For instance, police officers and other officials involved in counterterrorism in Pakistan agree that poverty drives young men to militancy (which they often equate with radicalism). They inevitably recall case after case where familial poverty seemed to have pushed a young man they interrogated, apprehended, or profiled to join militant ranks. It is also true that in places like Swat and FATA, a number of young men apprehended by security forces had joined the Pakistani Taliban seeking monetary gains. In addition, association with the

Taliban allowed some to ascend socially in their societies; their elevation was otherwise restricted due to their socio-economic backgrounds (Yusuf, 2011).

The poverty connection is also believed to operate through *madaris* in the Pakistani context. Most of the students who enroll in these institutions are from poor families. Many are allegedly attracted due to the cost-free schooling they provide. Studies that stress this and also make the case that *madaris* contribute disproportionately to radicalization/militancy essentially accept this one-step-removed link between poverty and radicalism.

A slightly different strand within this literature emphasizes relative (as opposed to absolute) deprivation as the cause of radicalization. It is not as much about absolute poverty as it is about high levels of inequality – where the poor can see a select few enjoying all the privileges. Also, if relative deprivation is prevalent in a society infested with radicalization/militancy, even the ‘non-deprived’ can develop empathy and a feeling of resentment and alienation on behalf of the marginalized, in turn radicalizing themselves.

Relative deprivation is very much a reality for Pakistan’s underprivileged. Earlier-cited studies on education present evidence of *madrassah* students seeing their elite, private school counterparts as “having robbed them of necessary resources and causing hardship for the rest of society” (Khan and Yusuf, 2011). Public school children also share this sense of alienation – more so because their education may have raised expectations of commensurate employment but its low quality has meant that they have seldom found these constructive outlets. An awfully large number of non-elite youth end up being underemployed. Their extreme frustration is readily evident from nationally representative surveys that reflect despondence about their current and future state.

This is as far as one can go with certainty. Whether any of this actually translates into radicalized mindsets is difficult to ascertain. Indeed, critics point out that ultimately only an infinitely small proportion of poor Pakistani youth have radicalized or joined militant movements while the overwhelming majority, whether alienated or not, have stayed away. Others like Fair (2008) have stressed that an emphasis on poverty may detract from the fact that a number of high profile terrorists have been from relatively affluent backgrounds. NGOs with experience of working with youth movements on the ground have also pointed to the presence of well-to-do members within militant ranks (Bargad, 2009). Shapiro and Fair (2009: 39) argue that there is “no clear connection between subjective or objective measures of economic strength and lower levels of support for the Taliban and al- Qa’ida.” Moreover, respondents from economically successful areas are still likely to support certain militant groups. Drawing on a survey of elite university students, Siddiqi (2010: 13) debunks the argument “of

radicalism being a natural by-product of poverty and/or lack of education.” Instead, these studies tend to argue that political ideology is a far more important factor in determining youth perceptions.

Overarching Politico-Ideological Environment as the Principal Enabler

The State Mobilizes Resources

Works that imply a linear correlation between education and socio-economic deprivation and “radicalization” go too far. There is little in the evidence they produce that signals to either of these enablers as being sufficient to push individuals to the radicalization phase of our continuum. Indeed, something else – something far more lethal but far less frequently noted as a cause of radicalization in global literature on the subject – has overshadowed all else in Pakistan’s case: the overarching politico-ideological environment under which Pakistan’s current under-30 population has grown up. The agency at play here is none other than the Pakistani state that is supposedly responsible for human development of its young citizens. Virtually all of the Pakistani youths’ preferences today can be explained by this enabler.

The Pakistani state acted as a “resource mobilizer,”³ hoping to create a market with a limited capacity to absorb radicalized talent. Well known today, between 1980 and the 9/11 attacks of 2001, the state contributed moral, political, intellectual, financial, and human resources to support militants to further its self-defined strategic interests in the region. The post-9/11 period, on the other hand, represents the state’s inability to demobilize its resources and plug alternative avenues for resource generation for the militants.

The state’s strategic interests are not relevant to our discussion here. Rather, we are interested in the downstream effects of the state’s pro-militancy policy that facilitated the youth’s movement along the radicalization continuum. A number of specific effects deserve mention.

To begin with, the state helped create physical spaces where individuals could develop militant skills and provide services, for a fee or voluntarily. In other words, there were now accessible militant outlets for

³ On resource mobilizing theory, see Tilley, 1978; Freeman, 1979; Jerkins, 1983; Gamson, 1975; and McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996.

those interested. Moreover, the state facilitated recruitment drives and setting up of a limited number of breeding grounds to swell its proxies’ ranks. One of these breeding grounds were the radical *madaris* that remain the bedrock of the *madrassah*-militancy thesis. The geographical areas targeted for these drives are also ones considered to be most infested today – FATA and southern Punjab being the most obvious ones. Professional recruiters operated in these areas and used their social networks to tap individuals and motivate them ideologically. They also linked up with imams and mosques or often set up new ones to increase their reach into society. This, would, over time, lead to social elevation of radical imams and clerics and an astronomical increase in their visibility and clout within local communities.

Key in this mix was the role of narratives – both specific narratives being promoted by recruiters as well as the meta-narrative making its way into the state’s rhetoric. Recruiters and their aides eulogized jihad and presented religious justifications for discriminating against enemies, be they the Soviets in Afghanistan or India in Kashmir. The tenor and substance of their rhetoric was precisely what we hear from militant outfits today, except that it is now promoted far more openly and boldly; during the 1980s and 1990s, the state kept enough checks to keep these narratives from penetrating the society writ large.

The meta-narrative being pushed by the state was even more influential given its national outreach. The state distanced itself from any direct involvement in militancy but still continued to provide implicit support to the idea of militant jihad: jihad was permissible, but only in the chosen regional theaters outside Pakistan. The “Islam in danger” slogan was very much on display; so was the portrayal of the Pakistani state as a victim of India’s hegemonic designs. An emotional appeal for the Muslim brethren in Kashmir, Palestine and elsewhere was a daily occurrence on state run TV, radio, and in the press.

Underpinning these downstream effects was a transnational aspect to the entire effort. FATA remained a freely accessible hub for jihadis of all nationalities and genres. The foreign elements brought their own religio-cultural biases. During the 1990s, the Afghan Taliban also retained deep reverence among Deobandi groups, with huge support pockets in major Pakistani cities. This transnational flavor may have opened up a greater market of potential recruits but it also created fresh challenges for the Pakistani state as it attempted to keep everyone on message. For one, while the state remained opposed to sectarianism, its policy was biased in favor of Sunni Deobandi religious parties and foreign partners like Saudi Arabia over Barelvi Sunnis and Shias (backed by Iran). Downstream, this meant that a parallel narrative and recruitment message began to promote sectarian agendas.

Finally, the militant enclave found opportunities to create excitement about their endeavors in young minds. The state’s proxies conducted fundraising drives and used them to glorify their achievements. Moreover, militants taking part in jihad would return to their villages and act as de facto recruits. Their stories of bravado accompanied by the rationalization of their involvement in jihad would make for an extremely attractive pitch for fellow youngsters in their communities.

All said and done however, if one were to have presented this argument on the eve of 9/11, it would have been dismissed as alarmist. Indeed, there were few signs that the downstream effects I have recounted would quickly eat away at the Pakistani nation’s traditional values of moderate Islam. The proxies seemed in control, the above-mentioned strategies were geographically targeted in a few regions and even this was done quietly, and domestic violence levels remained minimal. The average young person was still sheltered from the hardcore jihadi propaganda even as he/she was absorbing the meta-narrative. This was to change post 9/11, with disastrous consequences.

The State Fails to Demobilize Resources and Plug Alternatives

The post-9/11 period is a tale of the state’s failure to pull back the resources it had mobilized in support of its strategic policies. The state has gradually lost control of each of the discussed downstream effects. The numbers that make up the militant space are still miniscule as a proportion of the population but the reach of the radical industry is truly national now. It has therefore managed to exert disproportionate influence on the politico-ideological space.

Militants have controlled pockets of physical territory in Pakistan ever since 9/11. Access to the militant enclave is unlimited; militants impose virtually no barriers to entry or quality control for willing recruits. The deterrence effect naturally created by the lack of ready outlets for those being attracted to radical ideologies in any normal context was watered down pre-9/11 but it would have completely disappeared over the last decade. The number of militant outfits has exploded. The transnational orientation of the industry has also accentuated further, with FATA literally operating as the supermart of global terrorism. An assortment of Pakistani and foreign groups are now fighting the Pakistani state directly or indirectly.

As the radical industry has bloated, recruitment and fund raising drives have expanded commensurately. Recruitment drives are now country-wide; the recruiters’ social networks built up in the pre-9/11 era are being put to use more openly and aggressively; there is investment in sophisticated ICT tools including multimedia and social media that helps spread the word far and wide and to diverse sets of audiences, and

there is now also an element of intimidation in these recruitment campaigns. Crucial from the radicalization perspective, entire regions where these efforts take place have become saturated by the ideological message. Local communities have ended up being exposed and linked to the radicals’ presence in one way or another; in some cases, their social networks and welfare schemes also play a major role in local economies. The bottom line: post-9/11, their effect is not limited to pockets of targeted areas; they are now truly affecting the overall politico-ideological environment.

Next, militant targets have diversified as various militant outfits have chosen their niche objectives within the market. This has meant a higher quantum of violence and a greater success rate – and in turn, a far more palatable demonstration effect for those attracted to radicalism. Militant success has also meant a more lucrative political economy, which has in turn attracted a much larger number of religious organizations, traditionally non-radical *madaris*, and individuals to this industry. In fact, such has been their ascendance and legitimization that a number of militant outfits have found space within the mainstream political spectrum. In addition to the established religious parties, Pakistani politics is now also lined by political wings of some of the militant organizations. Haque (2014) argues that violent radicalization now operates as a pyramid with active terrorists at the top, religious-political organizations forming the middle and missionary Islamic organizations (and movements) – these have also been able to expand their work courtesy of the space provided by the state since the 1980s – at the bottom.

The factor that has done the most damage in terms of influencing youth perceptions is the militant and state narrative in the post-9/11 period. Militant outfits (often through respected and seemingly knowledgeable religious clerics and sympathetic religious institutions) essentially used the very narrative promoted by the Pakistani state in the 1980s and 1990s and extended the logic to paint it as the new villain. But now, no young Pakistani man or woman, school going or not, socio-economically deprived or affluent, can escape exposure to this: the narratives are public, they are loud, and they are bold. Key features of the message: Islam is in danger due to the invasion of infidel forces in Afghanistan (and elsewhere, i.e. Iraq); jihad is a legitimate tool in this situation; we can authorize it as the Pakistani state has lost its legitimacy by supporting the infidels; and we are not against the Pakistani state or its people but are forced to fight the Army given that it is acting as a proxy to U.S. interests. Meanwhile, the Sunni Deobandi milieu has retained the upper hand and promoted a particular type of orthodoxy that accentuates sectarian divides. The fact that this is taking place against the backdrop of a world where the clash of civilizations slogan has gained popularity as one after another Muslim country has fallen into chaos and conspiracy theorists have seen a deliberate Western agenda behind it has not helped.

This militant narrative may not have managed to get Pakistani youth to support violence (apart from the individuals who have been successfully recruited) by itself but it has managed to conflate a specific interpretation of religious orthodoxy and feed on anti-Americanism and governance failures in Pakistan (and in Muslim countries in general) in a way that resonates with Pakistani minds. By emphasizing “the ‘Islam in danger’ slogan and a religious duty to support the fight against the ‘infidels’” the militants have propagated “a message that kept much of Pakistan ambivalent” and unable to create a strong counter-narrative (Yusuf, 2010).

Ironically, the Pakistani state, rather than promoting a counter-narrative has actually ended up providing greater credence to the militant rhetoric. For starters, it has seemed unable to completely disassociate itself from its own erstwhile pro-jihad narrative. Either to keep some of its strategic proxies alive or because it is overwhelmed by the challenge they pose, it has also continued to draw distinctions in how it portrays various militant groups: jihad as a concept is not delegitimized even if some groups are. Meanwhile, it has used the ‘Islam in danger’ slogan even in the post-9/11 period to oppose U.S ingress in the region and to keep the Kashmir issue alive from time to time. The state’s propensity to paint itself and the Muslim world as a victim of the U.S.’s post-9/11 policies has played right into the hands of the militants. On the other hand, countries like Saudi Arabia who are believed to have bankrolled the Deobandi (more accurately Salafi) milieu are still projected in an entirely positive light. Overall, except for the Pakistani state’s opposition to violence within, the country’s youth must have found it hard to distinguish between the message from their state and the militants.

The little that has been attempted in terms of a counter-narrative has come from civil society but it has failed because militants have regularly and successfully used intimidation and direct targeting to silence critics, especially moderate religious scholars and media pundits who have, respectively, the knowledge and reach to undercut the militant narratives with great effectiveness. The state has seemed indifferent to the plight of these moderate voices; fresh ones have therefore not been forthcoming.

To be sure, this swift deterioration would not have occurred had the state managed to maintain its writ, demobilize its ‘resources’ quickly after 9/11, simultaneously block all avenues for alternate resource generation, and present a clear counter-narrative that manifested its seriousness in making a clean break from the past. Instead, the state has struggled to confront the menace, losing both physical and ideological space. The end result is that Pakistani youth have experienced endless violence, relentless justification for it through religious idioms and edicts, they have been exposed to the broader ideological narrative that is derived from an extremely narrow, ultra-orthodox interpretation of religion, and they have heard constant reiteration of the ‘us versus them’ conception of the world. While the numbers of those directly exposed

to militant breeding grounds and their recruitment efforts may still be negligible as a proportion of the total youth population – even though they are much higher than in the pre-9/11 period –, every Pakistani young man and woman has had to bear the influence of a fast deteriorating politico-ideological environment.

A Critical Look at Youth Perceptions and Their Drivers

We have identified two principal outcomes as far as radicalism among Pakistani youth is concerned: (i) applicable to an infinitely small minority (whose absolute number is considerably higher in the post-9/11 phase), certain youth have moved to the final stage of the radicalization continuum and embraced militant violence; and (ii) applicable to the majority, young minds have been exposed to a politico-ideological environment, an educational system, and socio-economic deprivation, all of which have likely made them more susceptible to radicalization. Among the three enablers, we have argued that the politico-ideological environment triggered by the downstream effects of the state’s pro-militancy policies and its inability to demobilize the resources it provided for this cause is by far the most important factor at play.

We now turn to linking these downstream effects with each of the youth preferences seen as causes for concern in terms of radicalization (based on the perceptions data quoted earlier). This includes the hints at intolerance and polarization (pre-radicalization phase) and the ambivalence, lack of opposition, and some sympathy for violence (radicalization phase). We also rationalize the role of the education and socio-economic enablers as reinforcing the influence of our principal enabler for the most part. At times however, on their own, they would have led to different outcomes in terms of youth preferences but were overshadowed by the effect of the principal enabler.

Table 1 lists the worrisome preferences of the Pakistani youth and identifies which aspects of the politico-ideological environment enabler would have contributed to each. We also highlight the relevance of the education and socio-economic enablers in each case. Table 2 summarizes these linkages.

Table 1: Linking Youth Preferences to the Politico-Ideological Environment Enabler

Reported youth preference	Role of politico-ideological environment enabler	Relevance of education or socio-economic deprivation enablers
Religiosity/ support for Sharia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Importance of Islam as national identity central to state’s messaging ➤ Downstream effect of increase in number of and space for religious institutions and clerics – radical and mainstream – promoting this view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks reinforce this message ➤ The ideology being promoted, even by mainstream <i>madaris</i> would have reinforced these views ➤ One-step-removed poverty-<i>madrasah</i> link also relevant here
Intolerance/ Exclusionary belief systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Very message justifying jihad had an inbuilt us versus them dichotomy ➤ Seeping in of sectarian messages and agendas courtesy of state’s preference for certain actors over others and ideological biases of foreign militants and patrons ➤ Post-9/11 competition among certain militant outfits meant that they tried to distinguish themselves and in the process accentuated fault lines within ➤ Role of <i>madaris</i> (even non-radical ones) in promoting certain ideological biases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Polarization potential of the educational system would have reinforced this problem ➤ Textbooks also contain subtle sectarian biases ➤ One-step-removed poverty-<i>madrasah</i> link relevant here
Elite youth also hold conservative political ideologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ They were not shielded from the post-9/11 narrative promoting us versus them; justified versus unjustified violence ➤ An important study argues that the Pakistani context has made these ideologies fashionable (Siddiqi, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Elite schooling may be relevant to their liberal views on other issues. The conservative bias however cannot be attributed to it.
Opposition to militant violence within Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pakistani state and its proxies continued to discredit internal violence till 9/11. State has done so thereafter as well. ➤ While militants have challenged this since 9/11, opposition to internal violence has grown as direct losses to the Pakistani citizenry have increased. More recent surveys also show higher numbers reporting terrorism/extremism as a threat. 	
Sizeable minority does not oppose all violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The state’s and militants’ messages have emphasized justified versus unjustified violence ➤ Militant message post-9/11 has created ambivalence regarding violence and its justification in the minds of Pakistani youth ➤ Access to breeding grounds and militant outfits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks reinforce this message ➤ Locations of most of these are in relatively poor areas even though the principal reasons for their choice were geographical proximity to theater of jihad, the area’s historical experience with ideological wars, the local population’s general views about India and Afghanistan, origins of

		<p>militant commanders, etc. Nonetheless, it is possible that socio-economic deprivation of the regions were also considered when the state/militants chose where to set up their camps/radical <i>madaris</i>, etc.</p>
Differentiation among types of militant violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The state’s and radicals’ messages have emphasized justified versus unjustified violence ➤ State’s narrative presents some militant outfits as more threatening than others ➤ Some groups (e.g. Lashkar-e-Taiba) are believed not to be targeting the Pakistani state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks reinforce this message
A miniscule minority involved in militancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Direct outcome of state’s policy in 1980s and 1990s and its continuation by the militants post-9/11 ➤ Pre-9/11, recruitment was carefully controlled ➤ Post-9/11, the militant outreach has expanded multifold but direct recruitment efforts still target infinitely small number as a proportion of the total youth population ➤ Religiosity or lack of opposition to violence does not automatically translate into support for or participation in militancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Socio-economic deprivation-radicalization thesis would have predicted the opposite outcome (involvement of far larger numbers) ➤ <i>Madrasah</i>-militancy thesis would have predicted the opposite here
Religion before nationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Importance of Islam as national identity central to state’s messaging ➤ Muslim Ummah as a supra-national concept stressed in state and militant messaging ➤ Downstream effect of increase in number of and space for religious institutions and clerics – radical and mainstream – promoting this view 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks reinforce this message ➤ Textbooks reinforce this message ➤ The ideology being promoted, even by mainstream <i>madaris</i>, would have reinforced these views ➤ One-step-removed poverty-<i>madrasah</i> link also relevant here
Despondence and frustration with situation in Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not caused by the politico-ideological environment enabler but message of the religious political parties and militants stresses that the solution lies in religiosity and Sharia ➤ Post-9/11 militant narrative uses misgovernance as one of its pillars; it seeks to discredit the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Socio-economic deprivation-radicalization thesis would predict a move towards radicalism based on the frustration
Religious institutions get mixed rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respect for religious institutions (except political parties) has grown over time courtesy of one of the downstream effects of this enabler 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Madaris</i> promote the need for this respect as well
Religious political parties not popular	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interestingly, state used religious parties as a tool to further its strategy but has never promoted them as viable governors for the country. Again, state’s strategy was strategic, not ideological. ➤ Militant narrative never really promotes the mainstream religious parties (it increasingly opposes them) even if some outfits have been linked to them, both because they are more interested in discrediting democracy per se and also because some of them now have their own political wings represented in the political mainstream 	
Us versus them world view with U.S. at the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ State’s narrative on the U.S. mirrors that of the radicals. Both are acutely negative and promote the us versus them framework, implicitly and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks would have suggested much greater antipathy towards

center	<p>explicitly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ An important study argues that the Pakistani context has made this framework fashionable (Siddiq, 2010) ➤ Britain hardly ever features in this narrative – thus, its relatively more positive perception. ➤ Counterintuitive fact: China is extremely popular even though it is communist and persecutes Muslims. Explanation lies in the state’s positive portrayal and the militant narrative’s relative neglect of China in favor of the U.S. 	Britain
Softening of views on India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ For much of the past decade, Pakistani state has softened its narrative regarding India. Musharraf’s period gave a new vision on India. ➤ As domestic problems have grown, India is no longer the principal issue that political parties agitate around. Anti-India rhetoric is now largely floated by some of the militant outfits only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Textbooks would have predicted the opposite outcome

Table 2: Relative Importance of the Enablers in Explaining Youth Perceptions

	Religiosity/ support for Sharia	Intolerance/ Exclusionary belief systems	Elite youth also hold conservative political ideologies	Opposition to militant violence within Pakistan	Sizeable minority does not oppose all violence	Differentiation among types of militant violence	A miniscule minority involved in militancy	Religion before nationalism	Despondence and frustration with situation in Pakistan	Religious institutions get mixed rating	Religious political parties not popular	Us versus them world view with U.S. at the center	Softening of views on India
Explained by politico- ideological enabler	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Possibly reinforced by education enabler	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Possibly reinforced by socio- economic deprivation enabler	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

The Way Forward

The following policy prescriptions flow from our analysis:

To Improve Our Understanding of the Problem

- There is a need to clearly and uniformly define the concept of radicalization and study it in a disaggregated manner. Only then can targeted policies addressing its various stages be devised.
- Youth radicalization in Pakistan is an understudied and data starved subject. Policies could benefit tremendously if panel data on youth are collected regularly and if the state allows for thorough profiling of the life trajectories and backgrounds of those involved in militancy (whether captured, killed in action, or de-radicalized).

To Improve the Politico-Ideological Environment

- This should be principal focus of policy interventions. Each of the downstream effects explained earlier need to be tackled through targeted policies. The state must aim to achieve elimination of physical militant infrastructure, recruitment bases and recruiters, the radical *madaris*, and the funding streams that support radical elements and militant violence. Meanwhile, all mosques and religious institutions and clerics must be held to current laws already designed to prevent any narratives or actions that may incite violence. The state’s success in this realm will have a multiplier effect in terms of undermining the broader industry demanding and supplying radicalized minds.
- Simultaneously, the state will have to consider options of mainstreaming some of the radical outfits. Such measures are always risky and will inevitably elicit criticism (consider that presence of political wings of militant outfits within the political mainstream may in fact be a first step towards this end but at the moment seems to be amounting to little more than enhanced legitimacy for the militants). Nonetheless, a concerted policy with clearly defined redlines must be put in place to mainstream the amenable.
- At an individual level, the state needs to institute a coherent de-radicalization policy. Currently, none exists and only a few small de-radicalization programs are running in a rather ad hoc manner. Moreover, there is no strategy of taking advantage of the repatriated individuals from these pilot-scale programs as ambassadors of de-radicalization in their local communities.
- By far the most important issue to tackle is the militant narrative. The state will have to come clean on its own position in terms of jihad; many believe that it has still not made a clean break from the past. Policy makers must understand that a pursuit of strategic interests based on

militancy and youth’s susceptibility to radicalization are directly correlated – they go hand in hand. Specifically, each node of the militant narrative highlighted earlier should be addressed through specific and direct counter-messaging. A concerted national outreach campaign through media, school tours, youth seminars etc. must accompany this. Moderate religious voices will be crucial to demystify the radicals’ misinterpretation of religion. Liberal elements of society who are easily discredited by the militant enclave are unlikely to be effective here.

To Address Educational Flaws and Socio-Economic Deprivation

- Detailed prescriptions on these issues are beyond the scope of this paper. Specifically, three aspects remain most relevant to youth radicalization:
 - Textbooks must reorient the narrative about violence and Pakistan’s position in the world. The biases are well-known and must be eliminated.
 - While efforts to broaden the *madrassah* curricula should continue, another option is to set up parallel state-run *madaris* in areas where private, unregistered *madaris* are prevalent. These *madaris* should be of comparable quality but the state provide monetary incentives for parents to prefer them over traditional ones. This market-based approach is likely to be far more successful than enforcing registration on existing *madaris*.
 - To address the polarizing potential of the education system, the state, donor agencies, and civil society should prioritize initiatives that allow regular interaction and dialogue among students from the three education tracks. Activities could include sports, community service exercises, debating competitions, and the like. Moreover, all elite private schools must be mandated to admit a small proportion of students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds.
- Alleviating socio-economic deprivation is key to undercutting the militants’ narratives that cash in on misgovernance and deprivation as a means of discrediting the Pakistani state. The state also needs to wrest back the social welfare space captured by some of the militant outfits and their associated organizations in their key recruitment bases and strongholds. Pakistan’s latest economic policies are already stressing the need to address absolute and relative deprivation through an inclusionary growth model. In addition, once there is more rigorous data that can shed light on profiles of youth most susceptible to radicalization, targeted support should be considered to these individuals or households as part of state run income/employment support programs.

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