

# IMPACTS OF TERRORISM-RELATED VIOLENCE ON PAKISTAN AND ITS YOUTH

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## Abstract

Since its independence from the British in 1947, Pakistan has been facing several internal and external security challenges, for example the conflict with India, insurgency in East Pakistan etc. A combination of such challenges led to its disintegration in 1971 when Pakistan's eastern part became Bangladesh. The country's direct involvement in the Afghan-Soviet War is a major reason of contemporary security troubles, such as terrorism and religious extremism. Nonetheless, a major wave of terrorism surfaced after 2002. Since then, terrorist attacks have indiscriminately targeted places like market places, hotels, religious and social gatherings, schools, religious places (mosques, churches, temples), public venues etc. This wave of terrorism has also directly affected the lives of religious minorities in Pakistan. As this trend has continued for well over a decade, it is timely to assess the impacts of terrorism on the country and the future generation – youth. This paper explores impacts of terrorism on Pakistan and its youth.

***Keywords: Terrorism, Youth, religious minorities, trauma, Brain drain***

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## Context

Pakistan faces multiple local and foreign challenges. Internally, there are violent security problems in the form of religious extremism, terrorism, political violence, and sectarianism. With regard to external factors, there has been an ongoing rivalry with India, which has led to three major wars between the two countries. Since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the situation in the country has produced fresh security challenges for Pakistan, for example in the form of roughly three million (1.6 million officially registered and the remaining are unregistered) Afghan refugees (Qureshi 2015). The so-called ‘war on terror’ has added another internal dimension through Pakistani security operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and US drone strikes. In 2013, Pakistan Army launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb causing displacement of around 614934 families (GoP 2015). Youth, the most vulnerable group is directly and indirectly affected by terrorism. There is a dire need to understand impacts of terrorism on Pakistan and its people, especially youth, for finding meaningful solutions of ending this menace.

## Impacts of Terrorism

Terrorism has direct links with other challenges in Pakistan. *Global Terrorism Index of 2014* ranked Pakistan at number three, after Iraq and Afghanistan (IEP 2014: 18). This report points to the severity of the problem in Pakistan. More than a decade ago, Islamabad joined hands with Washington and other international partners to eradicate terrorism, but there are no evidences available suggesting Pakistan’s achievements in this struggle (Javaid 2011: 235). Tactical mistakes have led to human suffering in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and many other places around the world where the so-called ‘war on terror’ has been targeted. Nonetheless, the country continues to face serious impacts of terrorism. With the US invasion in Afghanistan, Taliban slipped into the Pak-Afghan border region – FATA that provided strategically vital location for covert attacks on the US and its allies in Afghanistan. To prevent cross border infiltration, Pakistan deployed its troops into the border region for the first time and launched military operations against the Taliban (Burki 2010: 189).

In terms of the background of conflict-induced displacement, it is important to underscore that it has been ongoing for the past eight years. Displacement that started in 2008 has continued in many phases and since June 2014, after the launched of the Zarb-e-Azb, 102049 families are still displaced (GoP 2015). According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Pakistan, ‘the speed and size of displacement stretched government’s humanitarian capacities to the limit’ (UNICEF 2009:2). People from all regions of FATA have been affected by terrorism (See table 1). The unending cycle of violence and conflicts in Pakistan has increased security challenges for the nascent democratic state.

**Table-1**  
**Data of IDPs (February 2015)**

Agency	Total Registered Families	Registered Return	Total Balance
<b>Bajaur</b>	86407	72895	0
<b>FR-Tank</b>	2256	1852	376
<b>Khyber</b>	176396	11260	86107
<b>Kurram</b>	56122	21937	25865
<b>Mohmand</b>	48954	36759	0
<b>North Waziristan</b>	102047	0	100527
<b>Orakzai</b>	48656	8660	29615
<b>South Waziristan</b>	94096	4443	66681
<b>Grand Total</b>	614934	157806	<b>309171</b>

Source: (GoP 2015)

### **Developmental and policy issues**

Current demographics of Pakistan demand policymakers to pay more attention to youth development. The country is home to an estimated 103 million people under the age of 25 years, including 36 million within the age group of 15-24 (PIPS 2010: 1; Yusuf 2008: 2). Youth from different socio-economic backgrounds has been seen involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan. Young people between the ages of twelve to thirty do most of the terror acts (Khan 2011: 1). According to Shelley (2008: 34), unemployed youth with little prospect of future are engaged in terrorism and suicide bombing. As reported, around 5,000 youth received militant training, including 350-400 as suicide bombers in FATA. Some 300 potential suicide bombers were arrested in Malakand division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Yusufzai 2011). Terrorists find justifications for their acts in conditions of deprivation, corruption and relating issues (Blair et al. 2012). Terrorism and militancy have shattered all aspect of secured human dwelling in the country. Terrorists have not spared police stations, military convoys, judicial centres, mosques, churches, *hujras*, public gathering, schools and health centres and polio vaccinations teams (USSD 2014: 8). The state institutions and agencies have failed to respond to the crises. The disengaged and disconnected youth needs to be brought into mainstream through constructive activities.

### **Brain drain**

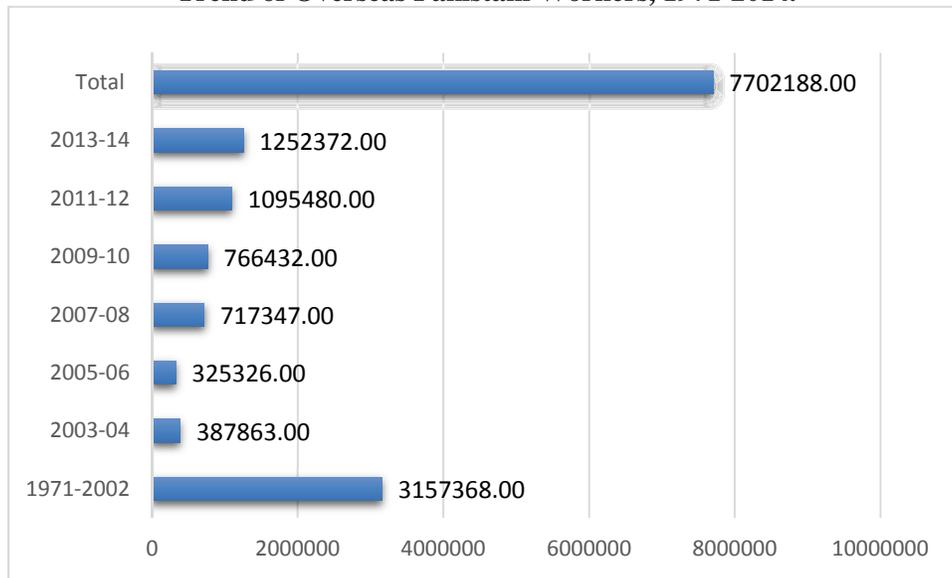
A widespread fear of violence is a major outcome of terrorism. Terrorists have been successful in spreading the terror, which is a major source of increase in the number of emigrants from Pakistan.

Whoever can afford is migrating to countries, such as the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand and many other European destinations. Parents, especially from FATA, are sending their children to the Middle East to escape from violence at home. There is a severe drought of policies aiming at retaining Pakistani talent within the country. According to a *Daily Times* (5 July 2009), nearly 3500 Pakistan's medical graduates were found jobless and most of such talented youngsters moved abroad. Since 2005 the number of migrants reached at 4156957, including 29377 engineers, 9040 doctors, 5795 teacher (GoP 2014b: 2).

Terrorism has been negatively affecting Pakistan's economy for a number of reasons, such as lack of FDI and failure of local industry etc. This has a direct affect on youth due to rising unemployment rate. Unemployment in the Pakistan and even in other South Asian countries is due to lack of absorption capacity (Maqbool et al. 2013: 194). This critical economic situation demands increase in employment opportunities by using all factors of production. *Economic Survey of Pakistan* (2014) reveals an increase in unemployment from 5.1% in 2007-08 to 6.2% in 2012-13. Unemployment is not the only reason of pushing doctors and other professionals outside Pakistan. A report published in *Daily Nation* (9 October 2008), suggested that terrorism and attacks on doctors are also major sources of brain drain in Pakistan. The data of the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Pakistan shows that, since 2002, there has been threefold increase in migration to foreign countries, for example Saudi Arab, the UAE etc. (GoP 2014a). It is important to mention that this trend has been going on ever since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947 (See figure 1), but has significantly increased after 2001-02.

This brain drain is also happening due to the country's present image at international levels and the dismal state of economic development. According to Javaid (2011: 235), 'Due to terrorism, polarization and lawlessness no one is ready to invest in the country'. According to Pakistan's Board of Investment, FDI declined from US\$5,409.90 million in 2007-08 to US\$1447.3 million in 2012-13 (GoP 2013). This proves that the country having such a huge market is no more a favourite destination for foreign investors. Consequently, unemployment levels have increased – a phenomenon that affects youth (See figure 2). Facts relating to youth unemployment are alarming in Pakistan. According to a newspaper report (Khan 2013), roughly 60 percent of Pakistan's youth is unemployed. The same report also suggested that the youth unemployment rate is seven percent – comparing to the overall unemployment rate of five percent in the country. In addition, if we agree with the point of view of Irshad (2011: 231) that unemployment is a major cause of militancy and brain drain then the above facts deserve a greater attention from policymakers.

**Figure-1**  
**Trend of Overseas Pakistani Workers, 1971-2014.**



Source: (GoP 2014a)

### Poverty and deprivation

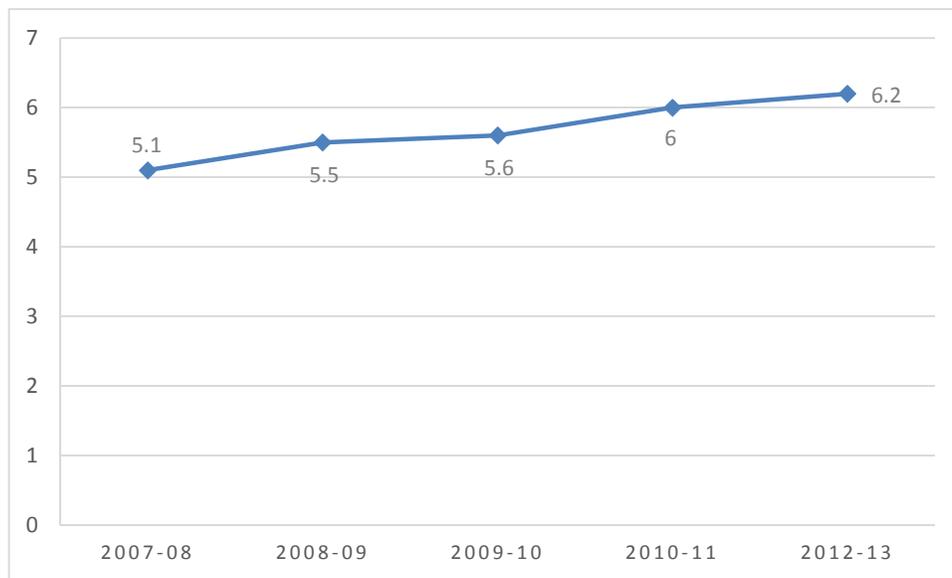
War on terror continues to have adverse affects on Pakistan’s economy. *Economic Survey of Pakistan 2013-14* explains both direct and indirect impacts of terrorism on Pakistan. The survey found that, during ten years between 2001 and 2011, the direct and indirect costs of war on terror amounted to US\$ 67.93 billion (See figure 3). By March 2014, costs of terrorism had reached US\$ 102.51 billion (Rs. 8264.40 billion) (GoP 2014c: 2). The crippling economy is supported by domestic and international debt. Debts reached to US\$ 15534 billion in March 2014 – an increase of eight percent from the last fiscal year (GoP 2014c: 132). These figures reflect a heavy burden on Pakistan’s economy, which is not helpful for countering terrorism in the country.

Marginalisation of certain segments – structural violence – is seen as a major cause of terrorism and extremism. We find the evidence for that if we look at places where terrorists have strong presence, such as FATA. This is a semi-autonomous region of Pakistan and long has been neglected in national developmental projects. Consequently, 45 percent of FATA’s population lives below the poverty line – higher than 40 percent at national level (Irshad 2011). Social deprivation in FATA has pushed many young people into terrorism (Ahmad and Azim 2010: 184). There is an increase in number of youth from FATA launching terrorist attacks across Pakistan. According to a report published in *the News* (15 August 2013), youth from FATA was involved in an Eid Day (9 August 2013) attack on a mosque in Bhara Kahu, Islamabad. According to Joshua (2013), ‘poverty and deprivation’ have driven hundreds of

Pakistani youth towards terrorism. It is often discussed by scholars that poverty is the root cause of terrorism in Pakistan because it forces parents to send their children to madrassas (Islamic seminaries) where free of cost education is provided (Irshad 2011; Michael 2007: 37). As there are hundreds of madrassas in the country that are breeding grounds of terrorists; therefore, there is a causal link between deprivation and terrorism. A renowned Pakistani scholar, Yusuf (2008: 3), explains the links of poverty with terrorism in Pakistan:

Overwhelming majorities of radicalized youth are found to have a strong sense of being discriminated against and are alienated from the larger society. This in turn is believed to be a function of socio-economic deprivation. Poor education standards, lack of economic opportunities, and unequal access to avenues for social and economic mobilization are usually present in countries that undergo radicalization among the young. The problem is often accentuated in societies which exhibit cultural polarization. Unfortunately, Pakistani society displays virtually all these symptoms.

**Figure-2**  
**Unemployment in Pakistan (percentage) 2007-08 to 2012-13**



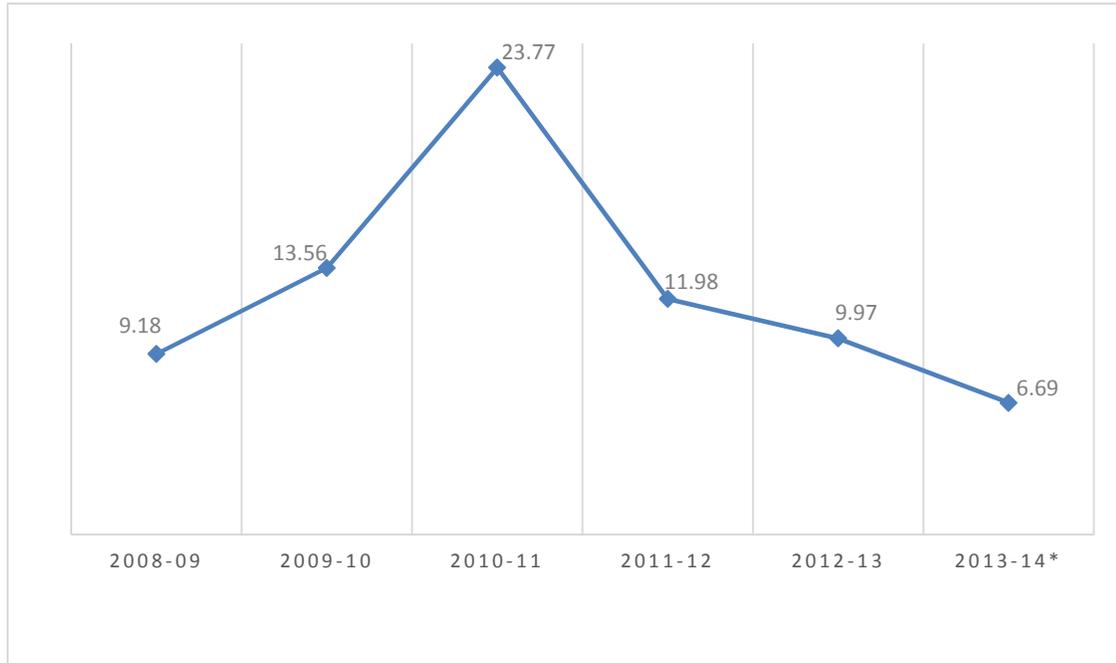
Source: (GoP 2014c)

### Religious Minorities

In South Asia, and particularly in Pakistan, the case of religious violence is not new but in present times, violence in the name of religion has developed its deeper roots. In 2008, during my trip to Nepal, I met hundreds of asylum seekers belonging to the Ahmadiya community of Pakistan. At that point, I could not completely understand their plight of living with no identity in Nepal while facing numerous hardships. However, when, in May 2010, terrorists in Lahore (Pakistan) attacked a couple of Ahmadiya mosques then I realized that the country is increasingly becoming insecure for religious minorities. This has

become a huge push factor for Ahmadiyas to migrate to other countries, such as Nepal, Canada, UK, USA, Germany and so on.

**Figure-3**  
**Costs of War on Terror (US\$ Billion) from 2008 to 2014**



Source: (GoP 2014c)

\*Estimated based on nine month actual data (July-March).

In Pakistan, the rise of terrorism has led to an increase in attack on religious minorities who are socio-economically marginalized. The severity of the problem has been intensified in the post-9/11 era, as can be seen through brutal attacks on religious minorities since 2002. In March 2015, 17 Christians lost their lives because of terrorist attack in Youhanabad, Lahore (*Pakistan Today*, 21 March 2015). These ongoing attacks on religious minorities have created a constant traumatized environment for millions in the country. This is also a major cause behind tens and thousands of non-Muslims leaving the country. Several reports have pointed out to a large number of Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Ahmadiyas from Pakistan migrating to India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Thailand mostly as asylum seekers.

Muslim-Christian relations in Pakistan have reached their lowest ebb in the recent past mainly due to a number of international events, such as the so-called ‘war against terrorism’ in Afghanistan, the Iraq War, the issue of blasphemous cartoons being published by a Danish newspaper and others. Such issues abroad have added misery to the lives of innocent Christians in Pakistan; often they have been called

as '*American jasoos*', meaning American agents. Nonetheless, the religious minorities were always mistreated, but the post-9/11 era has led to greater adverse consequences for non-Muslims, especially Christians, in Pakistan.

### **Psychological Issues**

People are feeling very insecure in Pakistan and this general feeling can be observed by analysing people's behaviours. Terrorism is unlike traditional warfare because sometimes it is difficult to classify terrorists. The identification of terrorists is also difficult because there are diverse understandings of 'terrorism'. Consequently, there is a lack of consensus on defining terrorism at global levels because one country's freedom fighters are terrorists for another country.

In the case of Pakistan, it is also the invisibility of terrorists, which has spread the feelings of insecurity in the minds of the masses. This emotion has triggered some psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression etc. These problems are mostly identifiable among the youth because in some parts of the country they have been victims of direct and indirect exposure to terrorism. On the whole, everywhere in the country and everyone is experiencing indirect impacts of terrorism via mainly electronic media. According to a study conducted in Karachi, 91.5 percent university students were exposed to terrorism through TV channels (Ahmed et al. 2011: 410). Nevertheless, the level of insecurity is very high in places where people witness terrorism on regular basis e.g. Karachi, Peshawar, FATA, Quetta etc.

Changes in people's behaviours can be studied to explore the seriousness of psychological issues, especially among the youth – the future of a country. Stress levels range from mild to strong among the youth in Pakistan. A research found 65.8 percent university students under mild stress in Karachi - the city's history of violence was reported as a cause of 'resilience' among the youth (Ahmed et al. 2011: 410). It is an astonishing fact that even under a lot of emotional stress caused by rising insecurity in Pakistan; people are not facing mental breakdowns. A study conducted on behaviours of youth found a reason of that, 'youths are turning to religious groups to address their grievances' (Fair 2004: 492). This also reflects that the youth of Pakistan are turning to religion for dealing with their anxieties.

### **Conclusion**

The manner in which terrorists have affected the lives of millions, both directly and indirectly, in Pakistan is a mere reflection of the gravity of the problem. There have been frequent terrorist attacks in major cities like Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad and Lahore; therefore, a general feeling of insecurity has spread across the masses. Firstly, this insecurity continues to have negative impacts on the economic

development in Pakistan because foreign investment has decreased causing an increase in unemployment. Secondly, people in general, are feeling powerless and stressed by combination of factors like terrorism, poverty, unemployment, corruption and others. The stress levels have been visible among the youth who are finding a remedy in religion for addressing their psychological troubles. Thirdly, the lives of religious minorities have been directly affected by direct terrorist attacks on them across the country. Finally, a combination of both direct and indirect impacts of terrorism is having long-lasting developmental impacts on Pakistan, which is also evident by a massive brain drain in the country. Considering the fact that the country is home to a large portion of youth, there is an urgent need of devoting extra consideration to the special needs of youth under the present scenario, which is dominated by widespread terrorism.

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