



RESEARCH PAPER

**Global Jihadist Ideologies and their Contribution to the
Radicalisation of Pakistani Youth**

¹Abdullah* and ²Ashfaq Ali Khan

1. M.Phil. International Relations Scholars, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid e Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan
2. BS Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** abdullahfarooqi665@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of global jihadist ideologies in the radicalization of Pakistani youth, emphasizing how extremist narratives exploit religious sentiments, socio-economic deprivation, and political disenfranchisement. Tracing ideological roots from figures like Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab, and Sayyid Qutb, the research highlights how their distorted interpretations underpin the agendas of groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The paper investigates how Pakistan's historical experiences—particularly Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies, the Afghan-Soviet war, and U.S. drone strikes—have created fertile ground for militancy. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving content analysis, categorize recurring themes, symbols, and narratives within jihadist discourse. The research introduces the concept of the "Oppressoterror Nexus" arguing that state violence and neglect often serve as catalysts for terrorism rather than deterrents. Ultimately, the paper advocates for justice-oriented counter-radicalization strategies that address root causes—socio-economic inequality, political exclusion, and ideological manipulation—while promoting inclusive governance, education reform, and digital literacy.

KEYWORDS Global Jihadism, Radicalization, Pakistani Youth, Socio-Economic Vulnerabilities, Extremist Narratives, Drone Strikes, Oppressoterror Nexus

Introduction

In the modern international environment, concerned with and defined by the emergence of extremist ideologies, national security and social stability are prone to threats, especially in places where socio-economic susceptibility is crossed with historic resentments and cultural discontent. Radicalisation of youth is among the most urgent issues in this respect and particularly in such countries as Pakistan, where large proportions of young people make up the population.

The importance of this subject matter is hard to overestimate and is closely linked to the fact that perceived concerns over the process of radicalisation among the young population become increasingly prevalent regarding national security, society cohesion, and peace between world nations. It is said that the most influential and easily influenced as a whole is the youth of the community, the thing is that they tend to believe in radical narratives that offer a sense of power, belonging, and identity. Due to the increasing success of global jihadist ideologies, the issue of the influence on Pakistani young people becomes topical requiring comprehensive analysis and knowledge.

The theoretical perspective of this study is based on the belief in the complexity of radicalisation as an action-oriented movement due to the existence of multiple factors such as socio-economic environments, cultural backgrounds, and ideological discourse. The present paper puts forward this insightful idea that global jihadist ideologies have

been instrumental in radicalising the Pakistani youths by capitalising on these socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural disaffection as well as a religious feeling.

To begin with, we have to briefly get acquainted with the socio-economic background of Pakistan, which has serious problems of poverty, unemployment, and affordable education opportunities. As stated in The World Bank reports, the poverty level in Pakistan increased to 40.5 percent in 2024 (World Bank Group, 2024). Forty point five percent of the population lives below the national poverty line and the level of youth unemployment is significantly higher than the national average. Such economic struggles provide fertile outlooks of extremist ideas to be sown since disaffected young citizens look to other predominant descriptions that guarantee change and meaning.

Also, discontentment due to the perceived mistreatment and injustices affecting cultural groups contributes significantly to the radicalisation process. This dissatisfaction may take different forms as ethnic hostilities, partisan hostilities, and political marginalization. Such sentiments are skillfully utilized by the extremist groups who position themselves as the supporters of those marginalized and express the anger of the alienated young generation. These groups succeed in recruiting youth who are not connected with the mainstream society through compelling messages that make sense out of their experiences and worldviews.

In addition, religious feelings also cannot be ignored as one of the factors contributing to radicalisation in Pakistani young people. Pakistan is a majorly Muslim nation, and national identity is closely interconnected with religious identity. Nonetheless, an extremist version of Islam has twisted the arguments to advance the rhetoric of jihad that sanctifies violence and the ability to be martyred. This biasing of religious instructions is usually attractive to young minds because they might end up in a conflict between the religion they practice and the socio-political settings of their lives. Extremist groups are able to instill support and mobilize youthful fighters towards their cause by constructing their cause (in this case a just fight against perceived enemies).

To sum up, radicalisation of Pakistani youth occurs due to a combination of socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural frustrations and feelings of religious identity that are heightened by the prominence of global jihadist narratives. Presuming how these ideologies take effect in relation to our efforts on effective strategies toward fighting radicalisation and fostering social cohesion is vital. The current research is in that direction, and it highlights the necessity of united efforts in solving this burning problem on national and international levels. On the way forward, dialogue, education, and empowerment of young people is also essential in combating the draw of extremist messages and thus creating a more diverse and inclusive peaceful society.

Literature Review

Youth radicalisation due to jihadist beliefs has become an urgent field of study especially in Muslim dominated countries such as Pakistan. Researchers have reviewed the way global jihadism discourses within theological, political and socio cultural perspectives influence the perception of at-risk youth. This literature review summarizes important scholarly publications that allow to track the ideological roots of jihadism, the socio-economic situation in Pakistan, and the processes of attracting recruits, especially younger ones.

Many scholars attribute the intellectual pedigree of global jihadist ideology to such individuals as Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab and Sayyid Qutb. The fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah in the 13th century, the puritanical orientation of Wahhab reformism, as well as the call to jihad of Qutb against the *jahili* societies have provided the doctrinal basis of groups such as the Al-Qaeda and ISIS ((Maevskaya & Aga, 2021). The jihadists often refer to these ideologues to justify violence against Muslim and non-Muslim opponents.

In the South Asian case, the jihadi environment further grew since the Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1989), when jihad became an organized militant movement (Afridi, Haroon, and Syed 2022; Sayed 2020). It was also in this time when Pakistan started to be used as a training spot by the jihadists largely due to its American and Saudi backing on top of it being run by the intelligence agency of the country. As a result of this state-sponsored jihad, cross-border networks were established and the militant ideology became normalised in local discourse.

Islamization policies of General Zia-ul-Haq continued the entrenchment of extremist interpretations into the state and society. Institutions of learning, the press and religious rhetoric were relocated to a warrior view of Islam. Indeed, scholars such as Khan (2020) and Rahim, Ishrat and Rauf (2022) indicate that the spread of the madrassas (which were often funded by Gulf states), led to the formation of ideological environments in which violent jihad was promoted and glorified.

Some scholars claim the position that socio-economic and political frustrations are crucial factors that predispose young people to extremist discourse. According to Rizvi and Jamil (2019), low levels of governance, unemployment, and inequality have led Pakistan to fertile grounds of radicalisation. Young people who feel disempowered by a lack of opportunities and corrupted institutions are easily tempted by the jihadist organizations that offer them dignity, identity, and empowerment (Javed, Elahi, and Nawab 2023; Ismail et al. 2022).

An overshadowing corpus of literature exists that particularly deals with the digital aspect of radicalisation. According to Warraich, Haider, and Mukhtar (2023), online spaces have come to play a key role in jihadism recruitment, as it provides those involved with a sense of anonymity, proximity, and content with sheer impact that seek to appeal to young people. As Khan et al. (2023) confirm, social media has become the leading tool in the dissemination of jihadist ideologies in Pakistan, and the conventional counter-radicalisation practices are gradually becoming ineffective.

With respect to localisation of global jihadist narratives. Other groups, such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) have effectively translated global jihadist messages to local grievances of American drone attacks, sectarian violence, and government repression (Basit 2019; Khalid, Akbar, and Khan 2023). These groups exploit the stories of victimhood and moral goodness to justify violence.

Female radicalisation in Pakistan finds place in a limited but increasing body of literature. In their studies, Hashmi and Adnan (2024) and Khalid, Akbar, and Khan (2023) examine the ways in which women are being recruited in greater numbers to radical networks through emotional traumatization, ideology brainwashing, or family connections despite the world of the traditional jihad being dominated by men.

Nevertheless, these contributions still support gaps in certain areas which include the psychological processes of radicalisation and the success of counter-narratives. According to Sajjad, Christie and Taylor (2017), it could be possible that liberal religious narratives hold some potential in the deradicalisation of young people, although empirical research on this is rare.

The literature in short forms an apparent connection between the global jihadist ideologies and radicalisation of Pakistani youth, which is influenced by the socio-economic inequities, spiritual distortion, and technological carrying. Nevertheless, strategic studies ought to be done in the future to identify certain individual pathways to extremism to counter such tendencies and strategies more effectively.

Theoretical Framework: A Constructivist Perspective

In my study, Constructivism is the key theory that is used to analyze how Pakistani youth is getting radicalised by global jihadist ideologies. Constructivism is based on sociological thought and international relations theories; it underlines social construction of reality, that is, defined identities, interests, and definitions do not exist but are created and conceptualized over continued interactions, beliefs, traditions, and stories.

Constructivism criticises the materialist explanations of political behaviour and outcomes based on the basic economic and military power, claiming that ideas, perceptions, and the ideologies determine the political behaviour of people and their social outcomes. This framework may be applied to the study of radicalisation and help us to consider the way in which extremist discourses create a specific perception of the world and construct the sense of identity, distinguishing self and other and justifying violence and a system of identity providing a way of identification that attracts the disappointed young people.

Identity Formation

Constructivism is a theory according to which identities are not intrinsic but rather made through discourse and socialization. Marginalized young people can find themselves an alternative form of identity in global jihadist ideologies which provide feelings of belonging, purpose and moral superiority. Such identity tends to set itself against the West, the apostate state, or secular society through the diction of religion and the symbolic discourse.

Norm Diffusion and Internalization

Transmission of jihadist ideas indicates how the violent norms expand via transnational platforms, madrassas, and the internet. Internalisation of these norms does not occur merely by coercion but also by dictations peddled by persuasive narratives of how violence is progressive in God, how martyrdom is an honour, and jihad is a kind of resistances. It is internalized by local community structures; family, religious leaders, peers, and communities online.

Narrative Construction and Meaning-Making

Constructivism highlights the strengths of narratives in forming human interpretation of the surrounding. Groups such as the jihadists provide the benefit of clarity in terms of piecing together a story behind suffering within a country such as

Pakistan which has been plagued by poverty, political volatility, and foreign intervention. These stories re-read political grievances, drone attacks, and state failures as evidence of a conspiracy by the world against Islam and thereby justify radical intervention.

Radical Discourse and Social Environment

The social surrounding takes a significant part in determining attitudes and behavior. The constructivist theory underscores the fact that young people do not wake up suddenly radical; instead, they are socialized into radical ideology by continually hearing the religious rhetoric, getting confirmation through peer approval, and the content they watch online. Group identities that are built in these echo chambers pose on binary worldviews and allow aggression towards perceived adversaries.

Oppressoterror Nexus as a Constructed Reality

Oppressoterror Nexus, or, an idea that state violence and perceived oppression are the psychological and symbolic antecedents of radicalisation. According to a constructivist perspective, such nexus is a response to physical psychological and violence but a product of socially constructed perception, which positions the state as illegitimate, tyrannical actor. This discourse rationalizes revenge kills and perpetuates militant activism.

Material and Methods

The current uses qualitative research design, and the main research tools adopted to explore how the global jihadists ideologies have been influencing the radicalisation of the youth in Pakistan are content analysis and discourse analysis. Radicalisation is ideologically, symbolically, and narratively based and therefore a more interest-based approach is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning, context, and interpretation of words in jihadist texts, speeches, propaganda and state countermeasures and qualitative methods are best suited to fulfill this purpose.

Research Design

The research follows an interpretivist approach, rooted in the assumption that social phenomena – such as radicalisation – are constructed through language, ideology, and cultural context. Rather than quantifying behavior, this study seeks to understand how jihadist ideologies construct persuasive narratives that resonate with vulnerable youth and how these narratives are received and internalized within the Pakistani context.

Result and Discussion

Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data sources, drawn from the following materials:

- **Primary ideological texts** from jihadist thinkers such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, and Sayyid Qutb (in translation).
- **Propaganda materials** (videos, online manifestos, magazines, and social media content) produced by jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and TTP.

- **Reports and case studies** from government sources, NGOs, and think tanks (e.g., International Crisis Group, Institute for Strategic Dialogue).
- **Academic literature** on jihadist ideology, radicalisation, youth psychology, and Pakistani socio-political dynamics.
- **News articles and interviews** related to real-life radicalisation cases in Pakistan.

These materials are selected purposively to represent a wide ideological spectrum and to highlight the evolution of jihadist discourse and its relevance to youth in the Pakistani context.

Data Analysis

The collected materials are analyzed using two interrelated methods:

Content Analysis

This method is used to identify and categorize recurring themes, symbols, and narratives within jihadist discourse. Texts are examined for specific keywords (e.g., martyrdom, oppression, jihad, caliphate), ideological references, and strategic framings (e.g., victimhood, divine duty, enemy construction). This helps map the core components of radical ideology and how they are tailored to youth audiences.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is applied to uncover the power relations, identity constructions, and socio-political meanings embedded in extremist rhetoric. Special attention is given to how these discourses construct the enemy, justify violence, and provide emotional and moral frameworks that appeal to marginalized youth. It also examines state narratives and drone strike justifications to compare how opposing discourses interact and shape youth perceptions.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses primarily on the ideological and discursive elements of radicalisation. It does not conduct fieldwork or interviews due to security and ethical concerns, and it relies on publicly available texts and documented case studies. While this may limit direct empirical access to radicalized individuals, it allows for a deeper and safer exploration of the symbolic and ideological dimensions of jihadism.

Ethical Considerations

Care has been taken to avoid reproducing extremist content in a manner that could incite or glorify violence. All jihadist materials have been analyzed solely for academic purposes, with proper contextual framing and critical distance. Sensitive material has been handled with caution to uphold academic integrity and responsibility.

Historical Context and Spread of Jihadist Ideologies

Ideological Architects of Global Jihad

Understanding the global jihadist movement requires examining a complex intersection of religious ideologies, historical events, and socio-political dynamics. What is often perceived as a monolithic threat is, in reality, a multifaceted phenomenon shaped

by diverse and evolving narratives. These narratives draw from Islamic theology, revolutionary political thought, and responses to both local and international conflicts.

The concept of jihad, which in its broader Islamic context signifies "struggle" or "effort," has historically encompassed both personal spiritual endeavours and communal efforts to uphold justice and righteousness (Warraich, Haider, & Mukhtar, 2023). However, the term underwent significant reinterpretation in the 20th century, particularly as it was co-opted by Islamist thinkers to justify armed struggle. At the center of jihadist ideological development is the towering figure of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, a 13th-century Islamic scholar whose fatwas and legal rulings have become a cornerstone for modern militant discourse. His writings, especially those on jihad, governance, and the concept of takfir (excommunication), are frequently cited—though often misinterpreted or decontextualized—by jihadist movements. Ibn Taymiyyah's call for jihad against the Mongol rulers, who had nominally accepted Islam but implemented un-Islamic laws, has been widely reappropriated to justify violence against contemporary Muslim states. His legacy forms a theological backbone that is invoked by both transnational organizations like al-Qaeda and ISIS and regional actors like TTP in Pakistan (Reuters, 2025).

Following this foundation, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, an 18th-century Arabian reformer, advanced a puritanical vision of Islam that emphasised Tawhid (the oneness of God) and sought to eliminate what he deemed un-Islamic innovations (*bid'ah*). His alliance with the House of Saud helped institutionalize these views, giving birth to the modern Salafi movement. Over time, however, his teachings were reinterpreted by militant Salafists to support sectarianism and political violence, in stark contrast to the nuanced positions of traditional Islamic jurisprudence. (Reuters, 2025)

In the 20th century, Sayyid Qutb, a leading thinker of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, further radicalised the concept of jihad. His theory of *jahiliyyah*—a state of moral and social ignorance he applied to modern Muslim societies—called for revolutionary jihad to overthrow secular or un-Islamic governments. For Qutb, jihad was not just defensive but a necessary means to reestablish divine sovereignty (Khan, 2003). His works inspired countless militants across the Muslim world and laid the ideological groundwork for movements like al-Qaeda, particularly through the influence of Ayman al-Zawahiri (Reuters, 2025).

These three thinkers—Ibn Taymiyyah, Abdul Wahhab, and Qutb—form the intellectual triad at the heart of the modern jihadist worldview. Militant groups like ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their regional offshoots have cherry-picked from their writings to construct an absolutist, exclusionary ideology that contradicts the broader Islamic scholarly tradition, which historically emphasized contextual reasoning, tolerance, and ethical deliberation. The result is a rigid framework that legitimizes violence against non-Muslims and fellow Muslims alike, particularly those deemed to be apostates or collaborators (Reuters, 2025).

A pivotal moment in the evolution of global jihad occurred during the Afghan conflict of the 1980s, which served as a unifying ground for Islamist ideologues and fighters. The war attracted militants from across the Muslim world, including Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who later established al-Qaeda. This organisation transformed disparate ideological threads into a coherent transnational jihadist agenda, promoting global resistance against perceived enemies of Islam—whether Western powers or Muslim regimes labelled as corrupt or apostate.

Although military and intelligence efforts have weakened the centralized structure of al-Qaeda, its ideological legacy continues to thrive. Today, the jihadist movement is decentralized, marked by the presence of both organized affiliates and informal actors. Individuals or small cells—often radicalized online—contribute to the jihadist cause without any formal command structure. This “bottom-up” model of radicalization has, in some cases, reversed traditional hierarchies, where grassroots militants now shape the ideological direction of jihadist discourse.

The role of the internet and social media is pivotal in this transformation. Digital platforms allow extremists to share propaganda, training manuals, and ideological materials with a global audience. These tools have democratized the production and dissemination of jihadist narratives, enabling what some scholars call a “virtual caliphate.” Online radicalization has blurred the lines between local and global, individual and collective, turning even isolated actors into part of a broader jihadist project. Radicalization is no longer confined to conflict zones or religious institutions. It now takes place across diverse settings: mosques, prisons, community centers, university campuses, domestic spaces, web forums, satellite TV, and music scenes. The availability of extremist content in both physical and virtual spaces facilitates a multiplicity of interpretations of jihadist ideology, catering to different audiences and regional contexts (Warraich, 2023).

In Pakistan, these global currents intersect with local religious traditions. The militant landscape is dominated by Salafi and Deobandi ideologies, both of which invoke the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah and Abdul Wahhab while aligning with Qutbist revolutionary narratives. Groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) align its actions with Ibn Taymiyyah *fatwas*, while IS-KP utilize this ideological blend of Abdul Wahab and Ibn Taymiyyah to justify insurgency, sectarian attacks, and opposition to the Pakistani state. The ideological infrastructure is further reinforced by certain madrassas, clerics, and informal religious networks that perpetuate binary worldviews of belief and unbelief.

This confluence of global ideology and local context has produced a volatile environment where militant groups use selective theology, political grievance, and digital mobilization to sustain their movements. The cumulative result is an ideological ecosystem that is both resilient and adaptive, posing enduring threats to regional stability and global security.

Table 1
Key Ideologues and Influencer

	Modern	Medieval
Scholars	Al- Maqdisi	Ibn Taymiyya
'Jihadi Theorists'	Abd al- Qadir	
	Abu Basir al-Tartusi	
	Ayman al-Zawahiri	
	Osama bin Laden	
	Sayyid Qutb	
'Jihadi Strategists'	Yousaf al Uyayri	
	Ubayd al-Qureshi	

Key Tenets of Jihadist Ideology:

- Rejection of Pluralism: Jihadist ideologues dismiss the legitimacy of diverse interpretations of Islam and instead promote a single, rigid vision of the faith.

- Perception of Global Jahiliyya: They argue that the world is in a state of jahiliyya (ignorance and moral decline), which, in their view, activates the wartime provisions of the Qur'an.
- Condemnation of Muslim Regimes: Modern Muslim governments—particularly in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia—are seen as apostate, corrupt, and subservient to Western, especially American, cultural and economic influence.
- Deculturalization of Islam: They call for the removal of cultural traditions and innovations (bid'ah) from Islam, insisting that only the Qur'an and the example of the salaf (early righteous generations) as found in the Sunnah should guide Islamic practice.
- Revival of the Caliphate: This purified version of Islam includes the reestablishment of a unified Caliphate governed strictly by Shari'a law, modeled on the practices of the Prophet Muhammad.
- Legitimization of Violence: Violence is framed as a religiously sanctioned tool to achieve ideological goals. Jihad is interpreted not as personal spiritual striving, but as a perpetual external obligation—sometimes considered a de facto “sixth pillar” of Islam (The Change Institute, 2008).

Jihad, Islamization, and State Policy

The historical evolution of jihadist ideologies and their global dissemination represent a complex interplay of religious, political, and socio-economic factors. Over the past century, these ideologies have transitioned from localized, context-specific movements to transnational networks that exploit grievances, foster extremism, and often lead to violence. In the context of Pakistan, the entry and proliferation of jihadist ideologies are deeply intertwined with the regional and global dynamics of the late 20th century, particularly the Afghan-Soviet war. In this section, the ideological basis of global jihadism, as well as the processes of how these worldviews infiltrated the Pakistani society, along with the political and geopolitical conditions that fostered their establishment, are discussed.

Geopolitical factors including the Arab-Israeli conflict and the cold war catalyzed the ideological transformation of jihad against an interpretation based on defense. These wars served as a source of inspiration to the radical ideologists who used this as a way of portraying their war as a universal one against perceived Islam enemies. The Soviet-Afghan war was the alchemist of operationalization of these concepts, transfiguring jihad in a theoretical matter and turning it into a matter of mobilization and resistance.

The Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1989) served as a turning point in the history of jihadist ideologies as the latter went through the transformation into global movements. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was packaged as a threat to the very existence of Islam and therefore it resonated well with the entire Muslim world. Thousands of young men, including Pakistanis, were drawn to the conflict, viewing it as a religious duty to defend their Afghan brethren. The war was not only a battleground but also a training ground, where militants gained combat experience and ideological indoctrination (Sajjad, Christie, & Taylor, 2017).

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 placed Pakistan at the center of a U.S.-backed global jihad, turning it into a launchpad for Afghan mujahideen. With support

from the ISI, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan trained and armed militants, embedding Wahhabi ideology into a society previously shaped by Sufi traditions. This jihadist infrastructure not only helped repel Soviet forces but also radicalized Pakistan's society, laying the groundwork for future extremist groups like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. This militant turn was reinforced by General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies, which merged Islamic law with military rule after his 1977 coup. By institutionalizing jihad and reshaping education, media, and governance along religious lines, Zia created a generation of ideologically driven militants. His regime transformed jihad into a state policy tool, aligning Pakistan with conservative Islamic regimes and deepening the military's role in religious and foreign affairs, especially in Kashmir and Afghanistan (Hussain, 2009).

Pakistan played a central role in this conflict, serving as a frontline state and a staging ground for the Afghan resistance. With the backing of the United States and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan became a conduit for billions of dollars in financial aid and military equipment. This international support was channeled through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which worked closely with Afghan Mujahideen groups. The Zia-ul-Haq regime, which had already embarked on a policy of Islamization, further facilitated the proliferation of jihadist ideologies by promoting a narrative of Islamic solidarity and resistance against communism (Rahman, Khan, & Rahman, 2025).

The war's aftermath saw the institutionalization of jihadist networks in Pakistan. Many of the foreign fighters who had come to Afghanistan during the conflict chose to remain in the region, establishing bases and recruiting new members. These networks not only perpetuated the ideology of armed jihad but also adapted it to new contexts, targeting perceived enemies within and outside Pakistan.

Geopolitical and domestic policies that facilitated jihadist ideologies in Pakistan cannot be studied without understanding why it has spread; why it continues to take place in Pakistan. Because of Pakistan's geopolitical position, it became a strategic ally of the United States during the Cold War, which wanted to lose Soviet control in the area. Along with important military and economic assistance, this unification led to the promotion of a mentality of militarization and ideological radicalization. Not only did Pakistan serve its foreign policy interest by aligning itself to Islamist parties, but by doing so, it inadvertently helped to establish a climate in the country favorable to extremism (Basit, 2019).

Domestically, Islamization policies of the Zia-ul-Haq regime were very significant in integrating the jihadist ideologies in Pakistani society. Zia sanctioned the use of conservative Islamic interpretation by the state, which became a part of the educational system, law, and the language. During this time, madrassas (Islamic seminaries) multiplied with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries funding many of them. Such institutions commonly focused on a restricted militant version of Islam and gave birth to a generation of those young people who were prone to becoming radicalized (Khan, 2020).

The issue was aggravated by the geopolitical changes brought about by the 9/11 attack. The War on Terror led (or rather perpetuated) by the United States against the jihadist organizations in Afghanistan and Pakistan resulted in a blowback in some quarters of the Pakistani elite. It was during this time that such groups as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) came into being and blended local resentments and local concerns with the global jihadist discourse. Religiosity and associated socio-economic

vulnerabilities caused young Pakistanis to be groomed and recruited by the TTP and other such groups, which further fueled the violence and radicalization cycle (Khalid, Akbar, & Khan, 2023).

The Jihadist ideologies have spread in Pakistan on diverse mechanisms which include the religious institutions, media and social networks. Madrassas have especially been very instrumental as learning centers, even as the centers of recruitment. Although not every madrasa promotes extremist views, many of these institutions have been associated with extremist organizations, and they serve as sources of ideological brainwashing and logistic assistance (Rahim, Ishrat, & Rauf, 2022).

Drone-Induced Radicalization: Anti-State and Anti-American Sentiments in Pakistan

Drone attacks play a key role in the radicalization of Pakistani youth and have contributed significantly to terrorist recruitment. These strikes often alienate and anger local civilians, creating fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. This sense of victimization, especially among communities that perceive the United States or the Pakistani government as common enemies, makes individuals more susceptible to recruitment by militant groups. Driven by feelings of oppression, many radicalized youth are drawn into terrorism. Consequently, drone strikes not only deepen political and psychological resentment but also enhance the operational strength of terrorist organizations by enabling them to mobilize more manpower and resources (Johnston & Sarbahi, 2016).

Drone strikes have significantly influenced public perceptions, particularly in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (ex-FATA), where local communities have openly criticized the state's covert policies. These strikes not only fueled anti-American sentiment but also deepened distrust toward the Pakistani state. Many residents believe that U.S. operations in Pakistan, including drone attacks, occurred with the tacit approval or cooperation of the Pakistani establishment. As a result, a growing segment of the population—especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)—has developed strong anti-establishment views, perceiving the state as complicit in policies that led to civilian casualties and long-term insecurity (Aslam, 2014).

The U.S. drone program has been widely criticized as a form of international terrorism due to its psychological and humanitarian impact on civilian populations in targeted regions such as Yemen and Pakistan's former tribal areas. For individuals living in villages like those in North Waziristan or rural Yemen, the constant fear of sudden, unexpected drone strikes creates a pervasive sense of terror. Civilians often have no warning or clear understanding of when or why a strike may occur, making them live under the constant threat of death or destruction—what many scholars define as a form of sustained psychological warfare. This fear is not hypothetical; it is deeply embedded in the daily lives of those under drones' surveillance. One Yemeni villager, who testified before the U.S. Senate, recounted how, for a year, local militants had failed to turn his community against the United States. However, following a single drone strike that killed civilians, public sentiment shifted dramatically, and widespread anti-American hostility took root (Savage, 2013).

This testimony highlights how drone strikes, beyond their military objectives, often function as a terror-generating mechanism that fuels anti-Americanism and may contribute to radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups (Chomsky, 2017).

Following the evidence, the argument that a similar trend has occurred in Pakistan can be provided where the residents of the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), who were always regarded as one of the most loyal citizens of the country, are becoming alienated can be provided. Decades of state repression through multiple military offensives, political isolation, and relative socio-economic marginalization have added to a sense of desolation and enmity towards the Pakistani state. This increased feeling of alienation has consequently contributed to radicalization and ease of recruitment of people in the region into militant groups fighting the state.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Vulnerabilities

This part, provides an in-depth discussion on the socio-economic and cultural aspects that can make the Pakistani youths vulnerable to radicalisation by the jihadists. Radicalisation of youth is a complicated process and it is rooted in numerous socio-economic and cultural processes that influence identities and worldviews of young generations. Being aware of such vulnerabilities plays a significant role towards tackling the cause of extremism and avoiding inculcating extreme ideologies among the young people.

Poverty is highly widespread in Pakistan where millions of people are affected especially young people. According to World Bank, poverty in Pakistan had increased to 40.5 percent by 2024, (World Bank Group, 2024) more citizens in poverty living at the edge with many unable to suffice their needs. Without jobs, the youth end up in a situation of despair and disappointment. Frustration and anger can stop at some point because someone is financially struggling, and thus, they become easier targets of extremist narratives, where a purpose or belonging is trailed.

Economic inequality has a very strong effect especially in rural communities where education and other resources are scarce. In some of these areas, the young generation has a dim future because they have almost no possibility of rising to higher levels. Extremist groups may take advantage of that frustration caused by economic deprivation and offer radical ideologies that seem to correct the situation. As an example, they can give financial grants and promises of a prosperous life to those who are willing to join their side, thus attracting susceptible young people into the world of violence and extremism.

In addition, poor governance, corruption and political instability in Pakistan worsens the economic condition. All these add to the loss of confidence in state instruments thus pushing the young into further marginalization of mainstream politics. Young people failing to find a solution through the state or having a sense of injustice or corruption within the state may invoke other stories that may include extremist ideologies that respond critically to the state and offer an alternative vision to the society. This misconception may result in radicalisation where the youth find a sense of belonging and identity in groups that promise something, even though that something is violence.

Another important issue that leads to the radicalisation of Pakistani bareness is unemployment. According to the World Bank, in 2024 Pakistan had a total unemployment rate of 5.472 percent. This indicator reflects the percentage of the working population that has no employment and is seriously seeking one (World Bank, n.d.). Such mismatch is indicative of the increasing inability of the education system to keep pace

with the requirements of the job market in which graduates with no acceptable employment opportunities.

The youths step into the job market with great expectations only to end up disappointed. The absence of any employment opportunity may result in inferiority complex and cynicism, prompting them to find alternative means of self-validation. In this regard, extremist organizations tend to exploit these weaknesses by providing a sense of value and belonging. They are a way of getting out of the routine of unemployment, of seeing new things, of having fun, causing fun, and having a purpose beyond me.

Likewise, the informal sector in Pakistan contributes to a high level of jobs that are commonly low-waged and insecure. This unstable position in life exposes young people to oppression and exploitation. Extremist groups can provide monetary help.

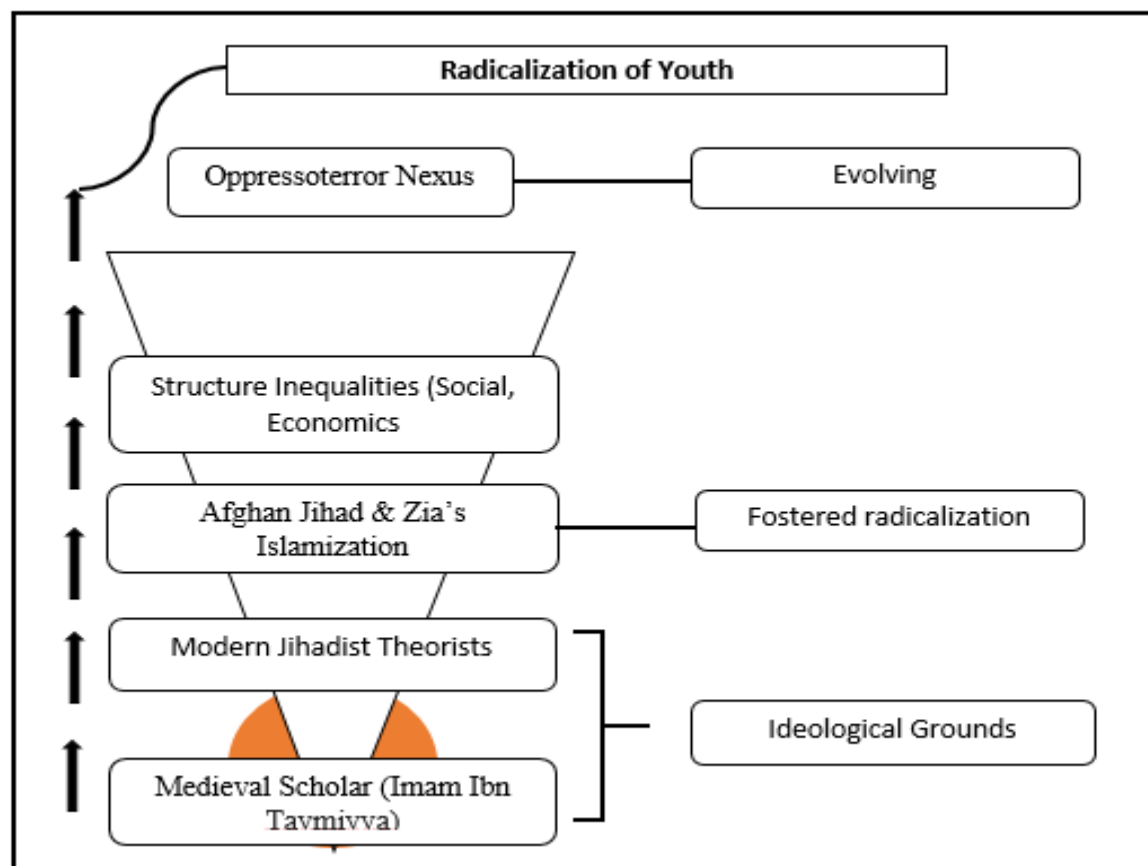


Figure 1: Core to Oppressoterror Nexus

Case Studies: Impacts of Radicalisation on Pakistani Youth

The issue of radicalization of young people in Pakistan has become one of the most burning questions in the last few years, particularly the aspect concerned with the rise of more jihadist ideas. The phenomenon has deep routes in religious extremism, as well as it is based on socio-economic marginalization, political neglect, and the growing use of digital platforms wrongly. Several case studies demonstrate that young people have been used to the extremist approach to the worldview and militant membership by

ideological stories together with factors like poverty, alienation, and a lack of an opportunity.

Political extremist groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda have been at the heart of this process. TTP that was founded in the early 2000s as response to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, planned a number of terrorist attacks in various parts of Pakistan against both security forces and unarmed civilians. The group has successfully attracted young people who have lost their ways and given them a sense of identity, belonging and purpose, all in the name of a bigger ideological fight. In most cases, the TTP recruit young men who have not received good education and who are deprived of jobs in the underprivileged areas, especially the tribal areas. These young men are lured by promises of financial rewards, empowerment and spiritual reward.

The radicalization process has much to do with digital technology as an accelerator. Pakistan has a very huge and young population who has relatively low-cost access to mobile and internet services. But the lack of critical thinking skills and literacy in technology has rendered a lot of youth vulnerable to extremist narratives in the online world. This weakness has enabled radical groups to use social media as a recruitment site. They post provocative videos, religiously charged texts and emotionally manipulative subject to radicalize young people in other parts of the world.

Several high-profile cases exemplify this alarming trend. One such instance is that of Noorul Ain Laghari, a medical student from Liaquat University of Medical Sciences in Hyderabad, who disappeared to join the Islamic State (IS). She was later recovered from the home of a senior IS militant, involved in plotting attacks against minority communities. The militant was killed in a police encounter in April 2017 (Warraich, 2023).

In another case from January 2018, a student murdered his college principal over allegations of blasphemy. The principal had earlier criticized students for skipping classes to attend a religious protest. During interrogation, the student revealed he was deeply influenced by online religious content and was a supporter of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) he proclaimed "I committed this murder and I accepted it. It was ordered by God," (Boone, 2018).

In March 2018, the Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) arrested Imran, alias Saif-ul-Islam, an ISIS member from Balochistan, who used encrypted platforms like Telegram to radicalize girls and promote jihadist ideology. He managed a digital propaganda page operated from a location near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Warraich, 2023).

These examples underscore a broader pattern: sympathizers of jihadist ideologies are increasingly radicalized without direct contact with terrorist networks. Through digital platforms, individuals are drawn into extremist narratives and may carry out attacks without fully understanding the ideologies or objectives of the groups they support.

In South Punjab, an underdeveloped and disaster-prone region of Pakistan, such trends are particularly evident. Militants have gained footholds by exploiting socio-economic despair, offering both ideological guidance and practical relief through their charity wings. Such groups have also allegedly acquired bureaucratic power with even the complicity of the state. Simultaneously, organizations of the civil society, potentially serving as counter-balancing forces, may be excluded or intimidated into silence.

Even after extremist ideologies, the South Punjab population still has a good number of people who also practiced Sufi and Bareilvi form of Islam which were syncretic and tolerant. Unluckily, these cultures are being eroded more and more by the Deobandi and Salafis/Wahhabi, who identify such beliefs as heretical. The social segregation and intolerance, especially towards religious minorities and women, are being catalyzed by the fact that hate speech and sectarianism is being fostered with impunity.

Unless addressed, the ideological and online radicalization of Pakistani youth is likely to be a long-term and serious challenge to social cohesiveness and even the stability of Pakistan. The fight against this problem should not remain limited to only a strong counter-terrorism policy but extend to active education, digital literacy, critical thinking, and inclusive participation in civil society.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented the case of the imminent problem of radicalisation of Pakistani youth and the immense role of the global ideologies of jihad to facilitate this action. The proposed thesis was that these ideologies have largely contributed to the radicalisation of the youths by tapping into already pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural frustrations and religious sentiments. This conclusion is an attempt to echo and further develop these statements and underline the necessity of dealing with this multifaceted issue.

More importantly, the historical and ideological framework through which current state of jihadist thinking in Pakistan has taken form must be revisited. Modern jihadist ideologies can find their roots in the medieval works of the scholar Ibn Taymiyyah whose views on the resistance and rebellion have been interpreted in a selective manner by militant groups. These concepts further resonated to people such as Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab and Syed Qutb, creating two strands of ideology that fueled movements such as the modern jihadists. Whereas Al-Qaeda gets much of its ideology based on Qutb vision of political Islam and world jihad, ISIS is based on the tradition of hardline theological exclusivism of Wahhabism. Pakistan To a large extent, most of the militant factions in Pakistan and notably those that are active in KP and the former FATA region have found ideological inspiration in Ibn Taymiyyah, whose teachings have been distorted to justify assassination. Such ideologues form the basis of beliefs of many radicalized youth in these regions.

The development of jihadism was even accelerated by the jihad of Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and the Islamization policy of General Zia-ul-Haq, which would institutionalize a conservative religious identity in Pakistan. During the reign of Zia, the curriculum was changed and became a means to spread jihadist ideas, reinforce sectarian prejudice, and martyrdom. Not only did these state-sponsored reforms make militancy acceptable under the names of religious duty, but they transformed the regional mindsets in places where you found KP and FATA: to become ideological war zones. The country is Pakistan which was a hotbed of jihadist activity throughout and after the Afghanistan war and its spillover effects continue to be present in the minds of communities in the northwest.

Further, this paper has indicated how socio-economic deprivation, cultural dissatisfaction and state repression overlap to provide a rich land in which radicalisation grow. The tribal regions are characterized by chronic poverty, unavailability of education and political marginalization of youth. It is these susceptibilities that militant groups tap into, giving Militants the feeling of identity, belonging and vengefulness. Specifically, drone attacks have been instrumental in the development of anger and resentment. These attacks that have also been done in collusion with the Pakistani state have led to the indiscriminate killing of civilians and the development of psychological trauma among the communities. According to the testimony of one Yemeni villager in the US Senate, the militants could never gain popular favors until one drone strike made the entire village hate the United States. An identical trend can be noticed in the case of Pakistan, where drone strikes have motivated resentful, grief-stricken young people to join militants. When whole families are swept away during such strikes, engaging in militancy to many people becomes a perceived means of justice against an oppressive system.

It might be said on this basis that state involvement in violence both through covert activities and military operations, as well as inability to protect and compensate victims, has contributed to a general loss of faith in the state. The former FATA citizens, who were seen as one of the most loyal people, tend to show aggression against the state. Radicalisation is not solely caused by poverty and ideology as it is about the feeling that the state is an oppressor, not they alone. Due to this, I suggest the application of a new term, "Oppressoterror Nexus", which outlines the phenomenon when state oppression transforms into a central source of terrorism. The idea here is that the approach towards counterterrorism should not ignore the significance of structural violence, political exclusion, and state cruelty in the creation of the exact extremism they are trying to burnish.

To conclude, the conclusion of this paper highlights the intertwining relationship between global jihadist beliefs, historical track networks, socioeconomic resentments, and the role of the state policies in radicalising the youth of Pakistan. Military solutions will not solve this crisis, which necessitates a justice-centered approach to the situation involving educational reform, inclusive economic development, psychosocial healing, and the political arena. It is way past due that Pakistan faces up to not only the external ideologies but also the domestic breakdowns of the state to come out of the cycle of radicalisation and establish sustainable peace.

Recommendations

In order to counter the problem of radicalization within the youth of Pakistan, a holistic and justice-based approach has to be adopted. This requires a reformation of educational process that builds critical thinking, appreciates diversity, inculcates civic values and removing content that propagates jihadism and sectarianism. The programs that focus on social economic development of the underprivileged areas, like KP and former FATA, must get the first priority to solve the problems of unemployment, poverty, and political marginalization. It is the role of the government to secure justice and compensate victims of drone attacks and other military interventions besides creating accountability systems that would destroy the structures of what this paper has termed the Oppressoterror Nexus. To counter the extremist ideas is necessary to come up with counter-narratives that are based on local religious and cultural traditions and with the help of the community leaders and academics. Political inclusion and participation in democracy have to be guaranteed to help restore trust in state

institutions, whereas psychosocial assistance and trauma counselling must be provided to young people exposed to violence. Moreover, Pakistan needs to evaluate critically its role in international fight against terrorism so as to avoid behaviors that can result in post-negative backlash by the locals. The reinforcement of the civil society and backing up of grassroots peace building activities is also crucial in enhancing sustained opposition to extremist forces.

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