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Provincial Mapping of Militancy in Pakistan¹

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ABSTRACT

This study posits various forms of militant manifestation in Pakistan at the provincial level in order to identify distinct factors of militancy in Pakistan. In this context, militants in Pakistan are formally structured groups based mainly on religious and ethnic identities. Religious and sectarian indoctrination, the rise of extremism along with issues of poverty, illiteracy, and socio-economic factors have contributed to the rise of militant activities across the country. The nature of militancy differs across the provinces in terms of their tactical capability, recruitment and organizational base. This piece of descriptive and exploratory research intends to map out variant forms of militancy that exist across Pakistan with different intensities and factors. Though the activities and strongholds of militants in Pakistan have been drastically reduced after operation Zarb e Azb and Raddul Fassad but the presence of militants in certain pockets explicates their strong roots and networking. Consequently, it is being observed that religious, ethnic, sectarian, and external support to some militant groups are driving factors of militancy in Pakistan that in turn becomes a major challenge to the national security of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Climate Change, Super Game, One-Shot prisoner's dilemma, Intergenerational, Intra-generational, Immediate threat factor.*

Introduction

The existence and demand making of identity groups based on ethnic, linguistic, religious, and ideological lines within the constitutional framework of a state is a common phenomenon in diverse societies. But in the case of Pakistan, the emergence of certain non-state actors mainly on ethnic and religious lines has created deep fault lines within the federation. In this perspective, the rise of militant groups, in particular, has been a major challenge to the security and stability of Pakistan because militant groups not only challenged the writ of the state but also negated the constitutional framework of Pakistan. Militant formations in Pakistan have a backdrop that explicates their emergence and expansion since the 1980s. Dictatorial governments, weak federal structure, lack of democratic practices, ethnic strife, religious intolerance, sectarian divide, poor governance, weak internal

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security apparatus, grave socio-economic issues, and external factors all have contributed to providing a space for militant tendencies to proliferate within the Pakistani society. It was in the late 1970s and 1980s that sectarian and ethnic-based groups emerged and gradually expanded their activities. In the later years, the new anarchic form of militancy which proliferated after 2001 became more complex as it was muddled up with a different set of religious, sectarian, ethnic, regional and international factors. Militants in the tribal belt of Pakistan completely negated the constitutional, legislative and judicial parameters of the Pakistani state. Besides this, they tried to evolve an alternate state-styled governance system based on their version of religious jurisprudence which was then countered through a series of military operations conducted by the armed forces of Pakistan. In this context, it is substantial to draw an explanation of militancy at the provincial level. Keeping in view the fact that security has a local nature, every province of Pakistan has been affected by militant manifestations with different intensity, magnitude, and nature.

In terms of provincial orientation, though Pakistan is based on a federal structure, the names of all provinces are based on their ethnic identity². Besides this, religious identity is another important identity in Pakistan. Pakistan having a majority Muslim population also has a Christian, Hindu, and Sikh population. In addition, every province has its distinct local environment, geographical realities along with a different political and socio-cultural discourse that dominates the system of the province.

Within the Muslim population, the main binary division is between Sunni and Shia theology, which became a leading issue of dissent in the 1980s in the form of sectarianism. Furthermore, within the Sunni sect, sharp fault lines are present mainly between Deoband, Wahhabi, and Barelvi theological schools of thought. In the post-2001 years, divisions between the Sunni groups became more intense. For instance, the attacks on Sufi shrines by TTP and other groups, who follow Deoband-Salafi theology became more intense. For instance, attack on Data Darbar in Lahore in 2010 and 2019, attack on Shewan Sharif in southern Sindh and shrine of Syed Cheesal Shah in Balochistan, and shrine of Rehman Baba in Peshawar in 2017. The above example entails that militant groups targeted all provinces of Pakistan. In this respect, the following discussion intends to identify the main driving forces of militancy in Pakistan at the provincial level.

- What are the main driving factors of militancy in all provinces of Pakistan?
- How the backdrop and emergence of militant activities across the provinces differs from each other?

Punjab

Being the most populated and considerably developed province among others, Punjab always has a dominant role in the ruling elite and bureaucratic circles. It can be demographically divided into North, Central, and Southern Punjab which differ in terms of development, needs and facilities. Therefore, in terms of socio-cultural practices, religion and its practice has been a dominant feature of the people of

² Punjab the largest province in terms of population is named on Punjabi ethnic group, Sindhis resides mostly in Sindh, Pashtun resides in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan is named after Baluchi's

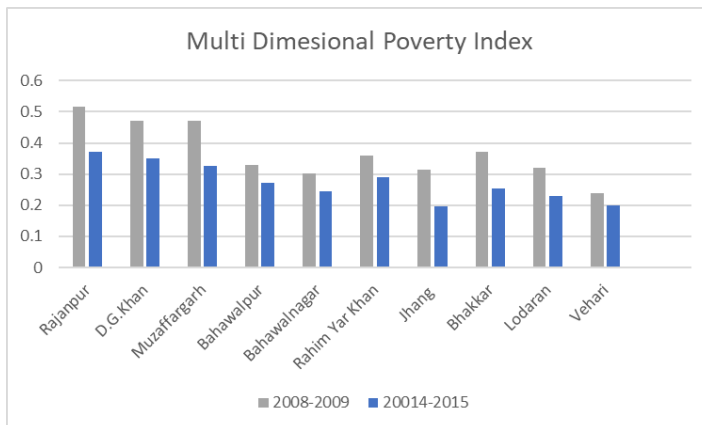
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Punjab. Barelvi and shrine-associated groups and *Sijjada Nashin* have a central role in rural areas of Punjab. Moreover, missionary and reform-oriented movements including Tablegi Jamaat, Al-Huda centers for females are located in Punjab which are non-militant. In terms of militant formations following categories explains the multifaceted nature of militancy

- Two major militant sectarian outfits i.e. Sipha Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Sipha Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) have their origin in Punjab. Jhang city remained an epicenter of sectarian-based religious indoctrination and sectarian killings in the 1980s and 1990s. Laskar e Jhangvi (LeJ), a militant faction of SSP was formed in 1996. LeJ expanded its militant activities after 2001 across Pakistan by allying with Tehrik Taliban Pakistan. Later, LeJ Al-Almi group has been reportedly linked with IS as well. LeJ has been one of the most violent militant groups in Pakistan as most of the sectarian attacks in Pakistan are linked with them. In this context, Southern Punjab has been the main recruitment cell of LeJ and other jihadi groups as well. In post-2001, the term Punjabi Taliban was used for the militant belonging to Punjab, who were mostly associated with LeJ and SSP. It was reported that approximately 70 to 80 percent of mosques and madrassas located in Rahimyar Khan and Bahawalnagar regions had links with LeJ (Nafees, 2017). Because of strong local roots, they have been able to sustain for decades.
- Sectarian-oriented religious political parties, for example, ASWJ, TJP, Sunni Tehrik, Markazi Jamiat Al-Hadith, and Tehrek Labiak Pakistan (TLP) have a reasonable following in certain constituencies. Although, these political parties do not have a national profile neither they had any major vote bank that can make any reasonable representation in the national legislature, but they tend to have strong street power and following in their particular areas. In addition, their strong sense of exclusionism based on sect plays a vital role in developing radicalization and extremism. Therefore, at times their support system provides space for sectarian elements to operate under their umbrella. For instance, the rise of TLP in the past few years explicates this trend as it has not only participated in the electoral process but they have been able to act as a pressure group based on religious lines. Their large following within the urban centers of Punjab is a new phenomenon and it also illustrates the increasing tendency of extremist manifestations in the Barelvi sect.
- Other than sectarianism, Kashmir-based Jihadi groups also have a strong base in Punjab. Punjab has been an epicenter of Kashmir-based Jihadi groups including Lashkar e Taiba (LeT) later labeled as Jamat ul Dawa (JuD), Harkatul Mujahideen (HuM) and its splinter groups, Jaish e Muhammad (JeM). These groups have two distinct features in the shape of street power and youth affiliated with their student wings and madrasa. Therefore, they have strong local roots. LeT's main headquarter is located in Muridke and Lahore. Moreover, it has a wide range of support systems from southern Punjab in the shape of recruits and training facilities. JeM (Jaish e Muhammad), led by Maulana Masood Azhar has strong links and roots in Bahawalpur (Rehman, 2011).

In the post-2001 years, militancy in Punjab can be analyzed through two perspectives. One is the existing home-grown indigenous militancy having sectarian a landscape and the other is the emergence of Punjabi Taliban phenomenon who had strong links with TTP. Laskar -e-Jahngvi emerged as the most lethal militant group in post-2001 years after TTP. They had stronghold in parts of Punjab since 1980s. It is pertinent to highlight that the nexus of Punjab-based militant group LeJ along with TTP and Al Qaeda were involved in a series of devastating terrorist attacks in Punjab mainly in Lahore and the twin cities. For example, an attack on the police training center, the FIA building in Lahore, the GHQ building in Rawalpindi and the attack on the Marriott building in Islamabad were targeted by militants. According to the south Asian portal, Punjab has been home to at least 57 militant groups who were involved in terrorist activities. In addition to it, 28 of them were based in Lahore, the provincial capital of Punjab (South Asia Intelligence Review, 2015). The formation of the Punjabi Taliban and their linkages with the militants in FATA expanded the operational domain and LeJ and TTP across Pakistan. Punjabi Taliban was not a formal organization but an informal allegiance oriented group mainly of recruits from northern and southern Punjab³, who were in majority formerly affiliated with sectarian and Kashmir based groups (Hussain Z. , 2014) (Pakistan's Jihadist Heartland: Southern Punjab, 2016, pp. 5-26). The region of southern Punjab has been one of the main areas for militant recruitment mainly due to its low socio-economic indicators, cultural constraints, increasing religiosity of society and the issue of autonomy and governance for decades. The following statistics show that most of the areas in Punjab that have high poverty index are from the Southern region.

Fig. 1. Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of Punjab



Source: (Poverty Profiling in Punjab, p. 54)

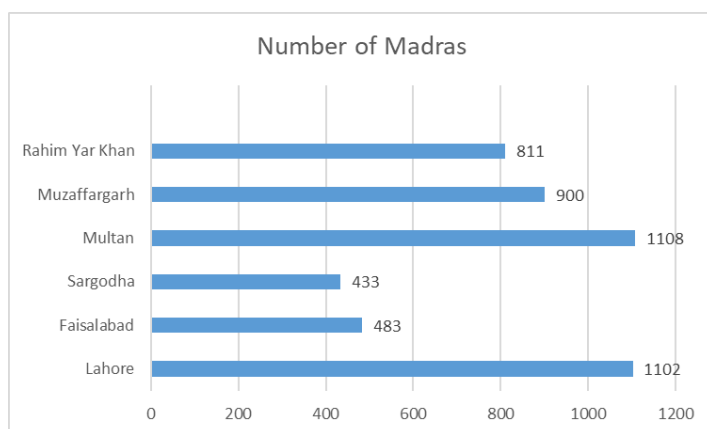
Besides this, Madras and their associated charity wings of religious groups also played a significant role in shaping up the domestic environment of the province in which politico-religious factors were predominantly linked with groups following

³ Southern Punjab is described as an area comprising 13 districts: Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Bhakkar, Dera Ghazi Khan, Khanewal, Layyah, Lodhran, Multan, Muzaffargarh, Rahimyar Khan, Rajanpur and Vehari.

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extremist manifestations. According to one report, a total of 12,500 religious seminaries are situated in Punjab which becomes about 65 percent of the total religious seminaries having approximately 1.5 million students. Out of this, almost 7000 thousand are situated in southern Punjab and 4000 in central Punjab. Moreover, 70 percent of the students in the deeni madaris are enrolled in southern Punjab (Saleem, 2010). Furthermore, most of these madras charity wings had a pronounced psychological impact on the people mainly when they work in areas that are relatively poor and affected by natural disasters mainly floods in Punjab. Therefore, they win the hearts and minds of the people through charity and welfare work (Mehboob, 2012).

Fig. 2. *Religious seminaries in Central and Southern Punjab*



Source: (Saleem, www.tribune.com.pk, 2010)

Attacks on religious minorities is another issue in Punjab province. For instance, The Gojra incident of 2009 in which houses of the Christian community were burnt and 8 people were killed reflects the deep-rooted religious intolerance and extremism. In 2015, Churches in Lahore were targeted by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of Taliban that killed more than 70 people (Deadly blasts hit Pakistan churches in Lahore, 2015). A suicide attack in 2016 Christian community who were celebrating Easter at a Lahore playground resulted in 70 dead and more than 340 were injured (Why are Pakistan's Christians targeted?, 2018)

Baluchistan

Baluchistan, which encompasses the largest territory within Pakistan is resident to approximately 61 percent of the Baloch population and 33 percent of the Pashtun population which do not include the Afghan refugees in it⁴ (Aamir, 2017). In addition, the Hazara community having a distinct ethnic identity that is approximately seven million in total living in Baluchistan who are mainly followers of the Shia sect (Siddiqi, 2015). Most of the Baloch follow Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence. Also, Zikri community⁵ resides in Baluchistan. Another significant

⁴ In the census of 1998, Baloch population was 63 percent and Pashtun population was 33 percent

formation is the Pashtun-Deoband nexus who mainly resides in Quetta and its adjacent areas. In addition to it, the geographic context of Balochistan has gained a significant position in the global and regional discourse of energy corridor politics. Therefore, the role of external forces has been increased in recent times, particularly Indian linkages with the militant groups is a security challenge to Pakistan. In this context, ethno-separatist, sectarian-based religious discord and the presence of transnational groups defines the nature of militancy in Balochistan.

Ethnic aspirations have a dominant placement in the socio-cultural and political landscape of Balochistan. Baluch identity has a strong historical legacy and context in the region. Therefore, Baloch uprisings in 1948, 1958-1959, 1962-1963, 1973-1977 and 2003 onwards were based on the issue of Baloch nationalism, issue provincial autonomy and later the call for independence from certain separatist groups further fueled the existing complexities. The recent Baloch insurgency escalated after the death of former governor Akbar Bugti by the law-enforcement forces in 2005. The nature of this insurgency was different as the middle and educated class also joined the insurgent movement. In addition to it, ethno separatist groups who either seek independence from the federal government or aim to join the Baloch population of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan became more active. In this context, Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and United Baloch Army (UBA)⁶. Their anti-state position increased militant manifestations in the province as they targeted law enforcement agencies, government installations and infrastructure. In this context, the existing literature and situational analysis carve out the following themes to expound on the nature of the ethnic problem in Balochistan.

- One of the most dominant themes is related to the relationship with the province and the federation of Pakistan. The literature explores that historically, though Balochistan got the provincial status in 1970, Balochistan remained politically and economically marginalized from the mainstream political thinking and policymaking. Rather the use of force by the federal government to contain insurgencies in 1948, 1958, 1962, 1973, and 2003 have negatively affected the center-provincial relations. Therefore, it has created space for non-state actors to operate in the province.
- Another theme revolves around the fact that the issue of Balochistan is mainly driven by resource distribution and its associated economic and social advantage which has been denied to the native population. Baloch nationalist grievances have not been addressed by the federal government by full political will. Rather center has been using the natural resources of the province by providing a very minimum amount of royalty to the local Baloch who possesses the resource and the land. For instance, even though that natural gas from the area of Sui was explored in 1952, but still now only parts of Balochistan have

⁵ Zikri community resides in Quetta, Makran region, Awaran, Turbat and Khuzdar. Though in times of voting Mostly Zikri declare themselves as Sunni, constitutionally they are not considered Muslims and are considered among the minorities (Baloch, 2014)

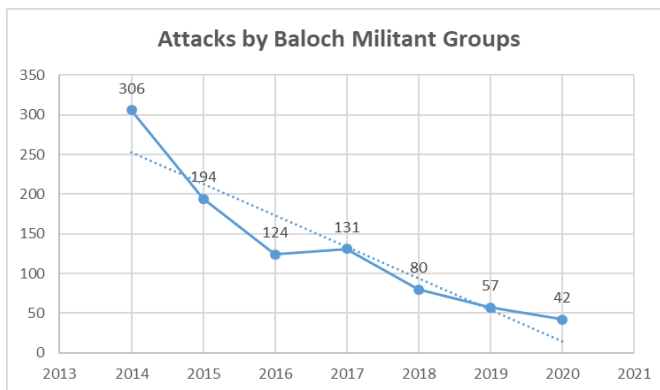
⁶ Balochistan Liberation Front, Balochistan Liberation Army, United Baloch Army

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access to natural gas. Ironically, people in the area of Sui have yet to receive the prospects of resource of their land which is distributed across Pakistan. Similarly, local claims on mineral deposits on similar lines are also a source of dissent between the Baloch and the federation of Pakistan. The issue of resource distribution has been taken as a main justification by the separatist groups to take up arms against the government. That is the reason that this socio-economic aspect is linked with setting grounds for militant activities.

- The notion of separatism is yet another concern in Balochistan which directly affects the security, society and the constitutional placement of Balochistan within the federation of Pakistan. These separatist groups are developed based on ethnic identity and nationalism. They trace the independent identity of the Baloch nation from the historical records and further strengthen their argument by claiming the injustice and alienated attitude of the Punjab-dominated federal government. The three leading separatist groups are BLA (Baloch Liberation Army), UBA (United Baloch Army) and BLF (Baloch liberation Front). In the recent past, a loose alliance of these three groups was reported by the law enforcement agencies as BRAS, which is involved in anti-state and militant activities
- The connectivity and linkage theme illustrates that the Gwadar port project and the development of the port has brought Balochistan into the mainstream domestic, regional and international political landscape. Balochistan has a long coastal line near one of the world's most significant shipping lanes, i.e. strait of Hormuz. Therefore, development and connectivity in Balochistan can change the fate of this region. In this perspective, external forces, especially India and certain pockets in Afghanistan have been supporting ethno- separatist elements to destabilize the security environment of the province. The following figures illustrates a series of attacks in the province by militant groups in Balochistan

Fig. 3. Attacks by Baloch Militant Groups



Source: (Muhammad Amir Rana, 2019, p. 17) (Muhammad Amir Rana, 2018, p. 19) (Muhammad Amir Rana, 2016, p. 36) (Muhammad Amir Rana, 2016, p. 19) (PIPS, 2015, p. 16) (PIPS, 2020, p. 19) (Pakistan Security Report 2020, 2021, p. 14)

In addition, sectarian-based religious militancy is another prevalent factor in Balochistan. Since the late 1970s, religiosity has also been a significant driving factor in Balochistan. It was under the Bhutto regime that JUI, as an Islamic party gained strength in Balochistan. Then in the 1980s, the Pashtun population increased in Balochistan due to the influx of Afghan refugees which resulted in a gradual shift in the demographic proportion of the population⁷. Moreover, its geographical proximity with Afghanistan and Iran is a contributing factor in making this area a buffer between two competing religious ideologies. Pashtun population in Balochistan has an important role in defining the politico-religious dynamics of the province which become more relevant in post 2001-years. As the Pashtun belt is home to a large number of Deoband seminaries and Afghan refugees, Therefore, the Pashtun belt in Balochistan has been general recipient for groups coming from Afghanistan and for the general call of Jihad. Since 2002, it was generally believed by the US in particular that Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership has taken shelter in Quetta after the US attack on Afghanistan. These socio-political developments also paved the way for an increased number of Deoband madras and religious convictions in the province. Thus the traditional conflict in Balochistan was not derived by religiously grounded militancy but in post-2001 years, religious militancy gained footages in Balochistan mainly when sectarian-based militant factions like LeJ and LeJ-AL became active in the province. Moreover, TTP also built connections within Balochistan to conduct militant activities. The targeted killing of the Hazara community immensely deteriorated the security of the province. Hazara community⁸ constitutes around 300,000 of the Baloch population and are confronted by the Sunni sectarian militant groups. In most cases, LeJ and their linked groups are involved in terrorist activities against Hazaras. According to one estimate, more than 2000 Hazaras have been killed in Balochistan since 2004-April 2019 (Iltaf, 2019).

Another kind of militancy that entrenched its footsteps in Balochistan is transnational militancy when militant groups mostly from Afghanistan and Iran has expanded their presence and activities in the province. It was after October 2001 that the Taliban from Afghanistan took a safe hideout in Balochistan. In addition to it, pockets of Al Qaeda and Jandullah were also reported which mostly came across the border from Afghanistan and Iran respectively. For the past few years, Islamic State / Daesh has been active in the province. In 2020, Islamic State affiliates and Hizbul Ahrar conducted 10 attacks in Balochistan in which 36 people were killed and 96 were injured (Pakistan Security Report 2020, 2021, p. 14). This trend explicates the rise of religious militant tendencies in the province. Militant activities of these groups were extensive across Balochistan in 2018. In 35 attacks 261 people were killed and 385 were injured mostly in Quetta and Mastung (Muhammad Amir Rana, 2019). Another important illustration that explains the situation in Balochistan is the nature of groups operating over there. Ethno-separatist groups mainly include Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), Baloch Republican Army (BRA), United Baloch Army (UBA), Laskar e Balochistan, and BRAS. In

⁷ According to the officials of the Bureau of Statistics, Quetta, Pishin and Killa Abdullah are the main areas in which Afghan refugees settled

⁸ Hazara community mostly lives in Quetta, Zhob, Loralai, Kuzdar and Dera Murad Jamali districts of Balochistan. For further reading see (Country policy and information note Pakistan: Hazaras, 2016, pp. 1-28)

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addition, sectarian and religiously driven groups also operates in Balochistan that mainly includes Lashkar e Jhangvi (LeJ), Tehrik Taliban Pakistan(TTP) and its affiliates. Furthermore, another alarming situation is the presence and influence of transnational militant groups that includes Islamic State, Jandullah, and Hizbul Ahrar.

Besides this, another prevailing issue from the past few years in Balochistan is the role of external actors, particularly due to the increasing significance of Gwadar and Belt Road Initiative (BRI). In this context, the involvement of India in supporting militant activities in Balochistan has been increased. Moreover, pockets of militants in Afghanistan has also given support to militants operating in Balochistan. Pakistan apex political and military leadership has shown concerned over Indian illicit involvement to destabilize Pakistan through supporting the militant groups (Baabar, 2022).

Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KP) and FATA

KP province formerly known as NWFP and the adjacent tribal region has been a main target of militants. It has been the most affected area of Pakistan mostly by religiously grounded militancy in post 2001-period. Having distinct socio-cultural norms and geographical proximity with Afghanistan, the spillover effect of the Afghan security situation has always affected KP province. During the Afghan Jihad of 1980s, along with the influx of more than 4 million Afghan refugees, KP became the main passage of cross border movement for local, foreign Jihadist and weapons for merely more than a decade. After the end of Afghan Jihad, throughout the 1990s cross border movement was easy and frequent. Similarly, US intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001 was pivotal in explaining the change in the security environment of KP and the tribal belt, which is now part of KP province. Moreover, the local ethnic traits, religious conviction and common cultural norms connect the people of both sides of the border, which was later manipulated by the militant groups as well. In this context, two main trends including religious and transnational militancy can be identified in KP and the tribal belt which accelerated in post-2001 years.

Religious militancy in KP province has been connected with the militant trends that emerged in the tribal region after 2001. The rise of Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its associated tribal chapters, Lashkar e Islam (LI), Ansar ul Islam (AI) and the transformation of Tehrik Nifaz e Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM) from a movement in Swat late 1980s to a militant group explicates that how religion was used by militants to expand their domain within the locals. In 2007, militants extensively targeted female schools and girl's education. As a result, over 900 schools were forcibly closed by the Taliban and over 120,000 girls and over 8000 female teachers were out of school (Pakistan: Surge in Militant Attacks on Schools, 2018). Here it is important to understand that local support and connection are fundamental for militant groups to sustain. In the case of KP and tribal belt, Pashtun identity and their cultural norms were used as a source to connect within the locals. Religious militancy in the tribal belt was anarchic and anti-state in nature as militants challenged the writ of the state and its constitution by establishing a parallel judicial and governance system. Formation of qazi courts, collection of tax (jizya), illegal check posts and radio broadcast were the main modus operandi of TTP and its associated groups. Since 2005-2018, 232 suicide attacks took place in KP province

(South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2018) (Rana, 2019, p. 36). Peshawar, which is the provincial capital of KP has been the most targeted city within the province. In addition to it, the Kurram agency has witnessed sectarian attacks since 1982 when sixty Shia families were forced to displace from the *Sadda* area to Parachinar as it was Shia dominant area. In addition to it, the influx of Afghan refugees also changed the demographic character of the agency as it has frontiers with three provinces⁹ of Afghanistan which provides a space for cross border movement (Munir, 2011). In post-2001 period, the emergence of the Taliban phenomenon increased sectarian attacks in Parachinar. Another major formation of militant nexus has been transnational which included Al Qaeda, Islamic State and their affiliates. The influx of international militant groups was observed in the Tribal belt and parts of KP province after 2001 mainly due to their movement from Afghanistan. These groups were given shelter with some local support. Later they also collaborated with TTP. Pakistan launched series of military operations to counter militancy across the tribal agencies.

Militants operating in tribal belt have safe hideous in Afghanistan as well. In this context, fencing of Pak-Afghan border has considerably reduced the cross-border movement of militants. Therefore, the nature of militancy in KP has an indigenous and transnational character as well. Recently another manifestation of Baluch group led by a separatist Mazar Baloch from Makran joining TTP chapters in KP is an alarming situation for the law enforcement agencies. Reportedly, this merger between TTP and Baluch groups is been observed by the security agencies since 2020 and now it is the 22nd group that has joined TTP. (New militant group joins TTP, 2022). In addition, the resurgence of militant activities in KP also illustrates that the post withdrawal security context of Afghanistan from August 2021, regrouping of TTP and the Islamic State-Khurasan (IS-K), merger of some pockets of Baloch and TTP along with political instability and issues of governance has contributed in the resurgence of militant activities in KP that has increased to 48 percent in 2022 as compared to the previous year (Rana, 2022).

Sindh:

Sindh has been confronted by multiple centrifugal forces including ethnic strife, sectarian divisions, political hostilities along criminal cartels adjoining at times with sectarian and ethnic factors. This multidimensional division in the society created a complex jargon of conflict in Sindh, and particularly in Karachi. In the past 1980s, ethnic issues mainly between Sindhi and Mohajir remained a flashpoint in the political history of Sindh. Later on, Pashtun settlers in Karachi also became a part of this ethno political rivalry. Therefore, the trend of militancy in Sindh can be explained by ethnic and sectarian tensions.

Ethnic strife in Karachi gradually developed between two competing linguistic identities including Mohajir and Sindh in the provincial capital of the province. The formation of MQM in 1984 not only provided a structured form of identity politics but their local street confrontation politics infused violence in the activities. Resultantly, their confrontational politics included a militant posture which was apparent in the form of targeted killing and extortion. Along with this, attack on a journalist, looting offices and burning the dawn newspaper, the abduction and

⁹ Khost, Paktia and Ningrehar

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torture of Major Kaleem Ahmad brought armed forces into action on 19th June 1992 in Karachi. Operation clean up proliferated a different image of MQM (Waseem, 1996, pp. 625-627).

In terms of religiosity, Shia-Sunni tensions were apparent in the 1990s mainly when SSP, LeJ and the SMP were involved in targeted killings based on religious sect. Later, the security environment in post-2001 in Karachi, in particular, was dominated by the phenomenon of Talibanization, sectarian militant groups and even pockets of foreign militants mainly belonging to Al Qaeda penetrated into the city and expanded their activities. In addition to it, the way they tried to utilize the existing deep-rooted issues of ethnicity, social marginalization and general lawlessness it further deteriorated the security situation. Targeted sectarian-based attacks considerably increased in the province. In addition to it, the Sectarian-Taliban-criminal group nexus became a major security concern for the government as offshoots of these organizations became active in the province (Rehman, Karachi in Turmoil, 2013, pp. 43-70). From 2001-2018, 31 doctors in Sindh have been killed in ethnic and sectarian targeted killings (South Asia Terrorism Portal, n.d.) Sindh has also been subject to the growing religious extremism as the Hindu community living there before partition time was facing the issues of forced marriages, abduction and conversions¹⁰ (Thames, 2014). Along with the urban militancy in Karachi, another emerging militant formation has been observed in rural Sindh which has a local context. Local militant groups under the allegiance of TTP and LeJ has been functional in rural Sindh since 2010. For instance, the Hafiz *Brohi* group was reported in 2010 by law enforcement agencies when they were involved in conducting a suicide attack on the 10th *Moharram* gathering but they failed to execute. Then in February 2013, they were involved in the attack on Barelvi spiritual leader¹¹. Then in 2015, the *Brohi* group was involved in three major incidents targeting an *Imambargah*, *Moharram* procession, and a Shia gathering (Rehman Z. u., 2018). Then in 2017, a major suicide attack took place on the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalander in Shewan which killed more than 90 people (Rehman Z. u., 2017).

Strong networking of madrassa also has a significant position in Sindh internal security setting and particularly in Karachi. Zahid Hussain in his book has mentioned that approximately 200000 madrassa students were enrolled in 10000 religious seminaries in Karachi. The main point of concern was their affiliation and link with sectarian groups who were involved in alleged activities. In this regard, Jamia Binoria situated at the heart of Karachi city was said to be host to foreign students residing from more than thirty countries. In addition to it, ten thousand Pakistani students were enrolled in it. According to the writer, a separate course on Jihad was taught to the students in the madrassa in which they were encouraged to fight for religion. At that point in time, the rise of Talibanization within Pakistan, the presence of foreign militant groups, and the US intervention in Afghanistan all contributed to shaping a certain environment for the students in which extremism increased. In addition to it, links of Al Qaeda with certain madras for shelter and local support further radicalized the security environment of the city. These small

¹⁰ See also (Ackerman, 2018, pp. 1-37)

¹¹ Syed Hussain Shah

madrassa which were usually not monitored through a proper channel were acting as sleeper cells for Al Qaeda (Hussain Z. , 2007, pp. 84-86).

Gilgit Baltistan (GB)

The strategic location of GB is quite a significant as it intersects Afghanistan, China, Central, and South Asia. Within Pakistan, it shares a border with KP province and disputed Kashmir. It is an important corridor for Pakistan and its significance has considerably increased as it would act as a gateway for CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) in near future. Gilgit Baltistan having a separate political set up within Pakistan is home to a majority Shia population. Origins of sectarian conflict in GB can be traced back mainly to 1988 when approximately 400 Shias were killed and their villages were set on fire at the hands of tribesmen coming from the south. In the 1990s, small incidents of targeted killings were reported but generally, there was peace in the region.

Table 1. *Religious Denominations in GB*

Shia	39 %
Sunni	27%
Ismaili	18%
Noorbakshi	16%

Source: (Hunzai, 2013, p. 2)

The security condition of GB had been relatively peaceful and nonviolent. But the wave of religious militancy in post-2001 also stimulated the roots of sectarianism in GB. For example, it was on 28th February 2012 that a bus was attacked and 18 pilgrimages who were coming back from Iran were killed at Karakoram High way which comes under the Kohistan district (Hunzai, 2013, p. 2). Mostly Shia population resides in Iran, Iraq, and Syria as a part of their religious pilgrimage as these places are home to the shrines of the family of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.W). Later Jaundallah claimed responsibility for the attack. It was a grave concern for the security forces that how militant groups have made their footsteps in the area. The militants according to reports were wearing military uniforms and asked the pilgrimage to give their CNIC, to see their names and identities. This horrific incident deteriorated the security situation of GB (Ali F. , 2012). Similarly, another attack took place in August 2012 on a passenger bus when 25 Shias were killed after militants seek their identity and lined up to shot them. LeJ was said to be involved in this attack (Shias killed in Gilgit sectarian attack, 2012). These attacks by the militants opened another avenue to contain religiously grounded militancy for Pakistan. Consequently, forces deployment was increased in the region. In 2018, at least 12 schools, including eight girls and four boys school were targeted by the militants. Though militant activities in GB are low, if not governed properly it can be a safe hideout for militants to operate.

Provincial Mapping of Militancy in Pakistan

Table 2. *Nature of provincial militancy in Pakistan*

Province	Nature of Militancy
Balochistan	Ethno-separatist, sectarian and transnational militancy
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)	Religiously grounded militancy, Transnational and anarchic nature of militancy
Sindh	Urban-sectarian militancy
Punjab	Sectarian militancy, Operational Jihadi outfits
Gilgit Balistan (GB)	Sectarian militancy

Conclusion:

It is being observed that in the case of Pakistan homegrown factors of religiosity and ethnicity have been used by the militants to proliferate their support and base within the communities. In addition to it, penetration of international militant networks in post 2001-years further complicated the juncture of militancy in Pakistan. The above discussion illustrates that militant groups have capacitated themselves to operate across Pakistan and in certain cases they were able to develop linkages between themselves in terms of planning and tactical level. Lashkar e Jhangvi, Tehrik Taliban Taliban and its splinter groups in Pakistan has been the most lethal and violent militant organization who were involved in killings thousands of civilian and military personnel in Pakistan long with inflicting infrastructural loss as well.

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