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*Radicalization: Perceptions of Educated
Youth in Pakistan*

A Survey by Pak Institute For Peace Studies



Introduction

Any study that seeks to understand the phenomenon of radicalization in any society cannot afford to ignore the educated youth. This segment gains even more significance in Pakistan where an estimated 103 million people, or 63 percent of the population, are less than 25 years oldⁱ and often lack access to education and employment opportunities. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2007-2008, there were 113 mainstream universities and 1,371 degree colleges in the country in 2007, where 424,271 and 324,988 students were enrolled, respectively.ⁱⁱ There were also some unregistered universities and degree colleges but their number was negligible.

The ratio of youth is a significant demographic feature of Pakistan's population. The rising militancy and violence in the country, deteriorating socio-economic conditions and a decrease in employment opportunities have caused disenchantment among the youth. The youth in conflict-hit areas are the most affected because of closure of educational institutions and discontinuity of education due to a combination of militancy and security forces' operations. Political violence at university campuses, particularly in Karachi, has also had severe implications for Pakistani students. Students hailing from conflict areas, studying in Islamabad, show symptoms of major psychological problems.ⁱⁱⁱ

Further, incidents of harassment and violence in the country's leading universities present worrying signs of possible radical tendencies among the educated youth.^{iv} However, despite grave implications, not a single study has been conducted so far to focus on radicalization among the educated youth of Pakistan. The present study is an effort to assess the general perceptions of the educated youth in Pakistan on specific social, political and religious issues in order to identify factors that enhance radical sentiments among them. The scope of the study is limited to students of post-graduate colleges and universities in Pakistan.^v

Radicalization among Muslim youth has emerged as a global phenomenon. The governments and national and international bodies not only recognize the scale of the threat, but considerable academic efforts have also been devoted to studying the issue in a scientific manner. However, numerous lacunae remain. Firstly, a major part of the literature available on youth radicalization is focused almost solely on violent radicals, overlooking non-violent manifestations of radicalization. Secondly, the literature on youth radicalization is more theoretical and lacks empirical research, especially in the context of Pakistan.

Given the higher risk of youth radicalization among Muslim communities, European scholars have contributed an enormous volume of knowledge on the topic in their own demographic context. In his book "Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West", Quintan Wiktorowicz explains how young individuals are drawn to radical groups and convinced to engage in high-cost and high-risk activism.^{vi} However, while analyzing what influences a young Muslim to join radical militant groups such as Al-Muhajiroon and Hizbut Tahrir, Wiktorowicz overlooked non-violent radicals who are not necessarily involved in terrorist activities. Factors behind non-violent radicalization may not be the same.

"Young Muslims in Italy" by Donatella della Porta and Lorenzo Bosi is one of the most comprehensive research reports focusing on patterns of youth radicalization in Italy. Using concepts and hypotheses developed within social movement studies, the report investigates how perceived political opportunities, at different geographical levels, influence young Muslims' attitudes and behavior in terms of social and political commitment. The scope of this study is only limited to Italy and can be extended by applying similar theoretical and empirical components.

Colleen McCue and Kathryn Haahr have discussed patterns of violent radicalization and youth violence in the American perspective.^{vii} The authors outline the impacts of the European radicalization experience on American society and how the youth 'bulge' of radical Islamists in the US transforms into homegrown terrorists. Since the paper lacks empirical data, it is difficult to determine the factors of violent and non-violent radicalization among young Muslim Americans.

Vitaly V. Naumkin presents a historical background of Islamic radicalization in the context of Central Asia in his book "Radical Islam in Central Asia: between pen and rifle."^{viii} However, the study does not measure the level of youth radicalization in the Central Asian region, nor does it assess the social, political and cultural variables that influence young individuals in Central Asia to subscribe to radical ideologies or explains why individuals join radical groups.

Apart from these studies, a great body of literature exists on radicalization in different geographic contexts with a specific focus on youth. In the case of Pakistan, however, the issue has rarely been a topic of empirical or theoretical research. Indeed only a few studies have tried to explore the issue in a methodical manner.

The closest attempt to exploring factors of violent radicalization among Pakistani youth has been made by Sohail Abbas in "Probing the Jihadi Mindset."^{ix} He has endeavored to explore the 'Jihadi' mindset by conducting case studies of militants involved in the "Afghan Jihad" who are detained in Haripur and Peshawar jails in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwestern Pakistan. Abbas has focused on individual psychological analyses of the sample to understand their mindset. Since the sample only consisted of detained militants, the non-violent manifestation of radicalization among Pakistani youth in the larger society remained unexplored.

Moeed Yousaf's analysis paper, "Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan: Implications for US Policy," is a description of indicators that are known to increase the likelihood of youth radicalization.^x Devoid of empirical data, the paper can only be described as an objective analysis of the trend of youth radicalization in Pakistan, not a comprehensive empirical and theoretical study. It does not necessarily measure the scale of the threat or explore the factors of youth radicalization with academic rigor.

However, some studies and opinion polls have tried to bridge this gap, attempting to measure the scale of radicalization among Pakistani youth and exploring the youth perspectives of jihad, extremism and radicalization, which is the focal point of this paper.

Herald, a monthly publication of Dawn group from Karachi, conducted a mass survey in late 2009 to seek Pakistani youth's opinion on a range of issues, including politics, war, economy, suicide bombings and the American presence in Afghanistan. The survey yielded interesting findings regarding youth perspectives and some answers confirmed conventional wisdom on multi-dimensional issues facing contemporary Pakistan. However, though the report of the survey carried out by Herald describes various variables causing radical tendencies among Pakistani youth, it falls short of analyzing the findings in any particular theoretical framework. The survey attempts to make the case that extremist tendencies are on the rise among Pakistani youth but fails to explain why some individuals are more inclined towards these ideas.

Saba Noor's case study "Radicalization among Educated Pakistani Youth" is an empirical portrayal that identifies trends of radicalization among educated Pakistani youth, albeit on a small scale. The study, which revolves around both male and female students of Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad,

indicates that the educated youth of Pakistan is generally not radical and supports equal rights for men and women.^{xi}

Internationally, the issue of youth radicalization has attracted enormous research work. But Pakistan lacks empirical studies to explore patterns of radicalization among different segments of youth in a scientific way.

The present study is an effort to explore the phenomenon of radicalization among the educated youth of Pakistan through empirical research that will help to understand the general perceptions of the educated youth on certain important issues that have the potential to radicalize this segment of society.

Methodology

The present study is a combination of theoretical and empirical research methods aimed at exploring the general perceptions of the educated youth regarding various social, political and religious aspects that can play a vital role in radicalizing this segment of society. A countrywide survey was conducted in various universities and colleges, and a wide range of literature by Pakistan and foreign authors and researchers was reviewed for this purpose.

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) developed a comprehensive questionnaire in English language with a total of 63 questions in four main categories: personal information; leisure and media interests; views on religion; and views on politics. From February to April 2010, a team of eight field researchers visited 16 public and private universities and post-graduate public colleges across the country. The selection of universities reflected the population of the four provinces, the federal capital, Azad Kashmir, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Gilgit Baltistan, the region formerly known as Northern Areas. (See Annexure 1) As many as 345 university students, 40 percent of them girls, participated in the survey. The response to the questionnaires was coded, tabulated and analyzed under Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0, the computer program used for statistical analysis.

Findings

Most of the respondents (99.4 percent) were Muslims. The survey population was equally divided between students from rural (49.6 percent) and urban (50.4 percent) areas. It was observed that the families of the majority of the respondents had migrated from villages to cities as 58 percent said that their parents used to live in rural areas.

The majority of the respondents had received their basic education from public schools. However, a sizeable proportion had studied at private (20.5 percent) and elite English medium educational institutions (13.6 percent).

Most of the respondents said that they listened to music (89.2 percent), watched movies (80.1 percent) and read poetry (59.4 percent). A substantial number (45.6 percent) also read fiction in their spare time.

Sources of Information

Most of the respondents relied on multiple sources of information to keep themselves abreast of the latest developments. These information sources included television channels, newspapers and the Internet. The survey findings also suggest that most of the respondents wanted to keep themselves significantly informed. Around 93 percent of the respondents owned television sets. A little over half of the survey

population (50.2 percent) relied on Geo News, an Urdu cable news channel, for information and only four percent said they watched QTV, a religious education channel. (See Table 1)

Table 1: Favorite TV Channel

Which is your favorite TV channel?		
	Frequency	Valid Percentage
PTV (state-owned)	43	13.1
Geo News	165	50.2
QTV	13	4
ARY	9	2.7
Star Plus	15	4.6
Any other channel	36	10.9
More than one channel	34	10.3
Don't know	14	4.3
Total	329	100
*16 respondents did not respond to the question.		
** SPSS 16.0 software distributed the 16 missing values accordingly with the distribution of frequencies of the 345 answers given.		

Nearly 86 percent of the respondents said they read newspapers. Most of them named mainstream Urdu broadsheets such as *Jang* (40.7percent), *Express* (19.9 percent) and *Nawa-e-Waqt* (9.4percent). Only a few were interested in militant media publications such as *Daily Islam* (2.7percent) or *Zarb-e-Momin* (0.7 percent). (See Table 2) This despite the militant media's claims of having greater outreach and circulation than some of the leading mainstream media publications in the country. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to mention that some strands of militant discourse can also be observed in the conservative segments of Pakistani media. Hence, young people remain exposed to radical ideas whether they read militant media publications or not.

Table 2: Favorite Pakistani Newspapers

Which is your favorite Pakistani newspaper?		
	Frequency	Valid Percentage
Nawa-e-Waqt	28	9.4

Jang	121	40.7
Islam	8	2.7
Express	59	19.9
Zarb-e-Momin	2	0.7
More than one	17	5.7
Others	52	17.5
Don't know/ no response	10	3.4
Total	297	100
*48 respondents said that they do not read any newspaper.		

Attitude Towards Religion

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (92.4 percent) maintained that religion played a pivotal role in their life. However, only 51.7 percent said that they had attended any religious service in the last seven days. More than half (55.8 percent) insisted, nevertheless, that religious values were critical to Pakistan's progress. Significantly, 51.3 percent of the respondents endorsed the country's hybrid legal system in which *Shariah* is not the only source of law. A sizeable percentage of the survey population (28.2 percent), however, believed that religion should be the only source of law in Pakistan. It was observed that while a significant majority of the respondents from Punjab (76.5 percent) believed that religious values were critical for the country's progress, a much smaller number of respondents from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (36 percent) and FATA (53.8 percent) agreed with them. Nonetheless, the view of 50 percent of the respondents from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 61.5 percent from FATA that *Shariah* must be the only source of law in the country might be due to the impact of Talibanization in the region. (See Table 3)

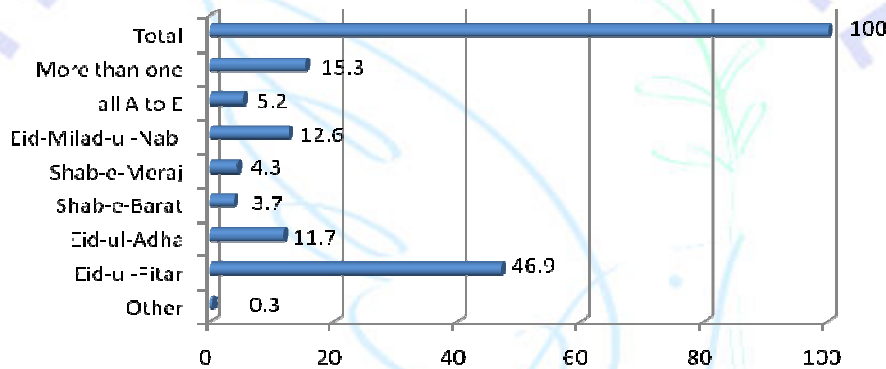
Table 3: *Shariah* as a Source of Law

	<i>Shariah</i> must be the only source of law	<i>Shariah</i> must be a source of law, but not the only source	<i>Shariah</i> should not be the source of law	Don't know/ no response
Punjab	16.9%	61.0%	9.3%	12.7%
Sindh	22.9%	44.3%	1.4%	31.4%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	50.0%	40.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Balochistan	30.0%	52.5%	12.5%	5.0%

FATA	61.5%	30.8%	0.0%	7.7%
Islamabad	25.0%	68.8%	0.0%	6.3%
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	47.4%	42.1%	10.5%	0.0%
Northern Areas	13.3%	53.3%	0.0%	33.3%

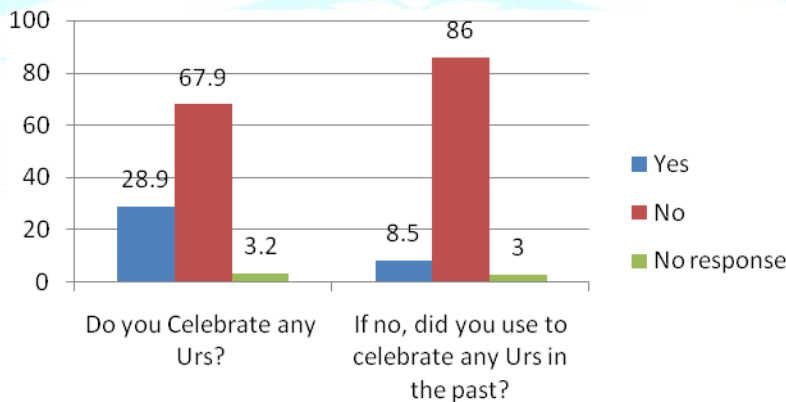
Nearly 95 percent of the respondents said they celebrated Islamic holidays. Almost half of them (46.8 percent) named Eid-ul-Fitr as their favorite religious festival. Very few celebrated Shab-e-Barat (4.1 percent), Shab-e-Meraj (4.1 percent) or Eid-Milad-un-Nabi (12.6 percent), the three Islamic holidays which are considered *bid'at* (innovations) by the Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi sects of Islam. (See Chart 1)

Chart 1: Favorite Islamic Holiday



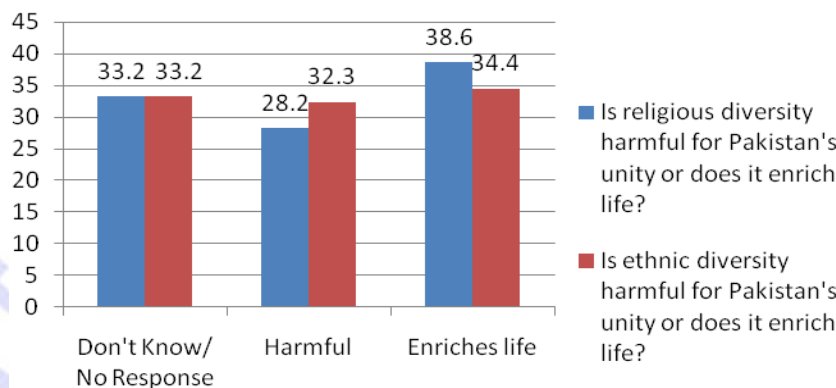
Around 68 percent of the respondents said they did not attend festivals such as *Urs*, or death anniversary, of a Sufi saint. This was despite the fact that 8.5 percent of them used to participate in such events previously. Their answer indicated a movement away from Islam's benign mystical tradition towards a more literalist and orthodox version. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2: Participation in *Urs* Celebration



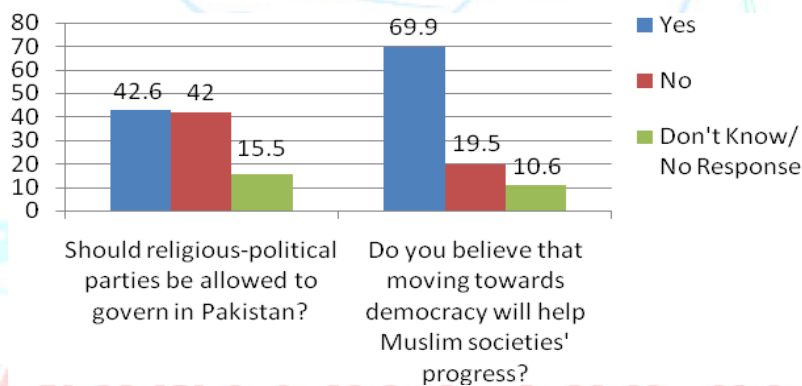
As many as 38.6 percent of the respondents considered that religious diversity enriched life, while 28.2 percent believed that it was harmful for Pakistan’s unity. Similarly, 34.4 percent of the respondents viewed that ethnic diversity was necessary to enrich life, whereas 32.3 percent considered it detrimental to Pakistan’s unity. (See Chart 3)

Chart 3: Religious and Ethnic Diversity

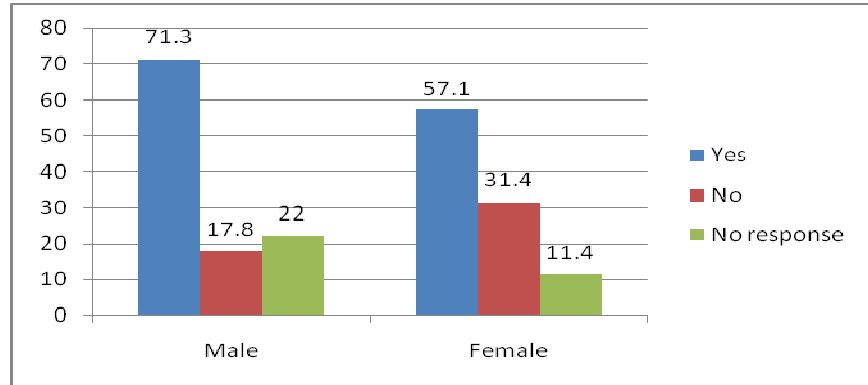


The respondents were almost equally divided when asked if religious-political parties should get a chance to rule the country, with 42.6 percent endorsing the idea and 42 percent opposing it. Meanwhile, 69.9 percent believed that a movement towards democracy could ensure progress in the Muslim world. But a fairly large percentage, 19.5 percent of the respondents, thought that following the democratic path would not lead to progress. (See Chart 4)

Chart 4: Role of Religious-Political Parties and Democracy in Governance

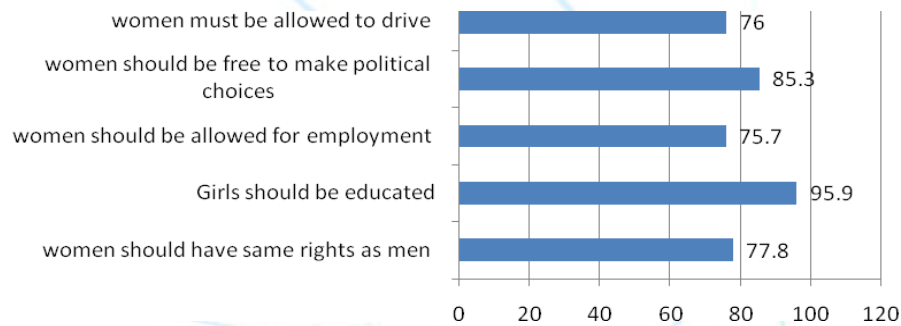


Most of the respondents (65.5 percent) also thought that women should observe *pardah* (veil) outside their homes. The ratio of male students favoring that women observe *pardah* is quite high compared to female respondents. (See Chart 5)

Chart 5: Should Women Observe *Pardah* Outside Their Homes?

A large proportion of the respondents stated that women had the same rights as men (77.8 percent) and there should be no restriction on their access to education (95.9 percent) or to gainful employment (75.7 percent). Most of the respondents believed that women should be free to make political choices (85.3 percent) and must be allowed to drive (76 percent). (See Chart 6)

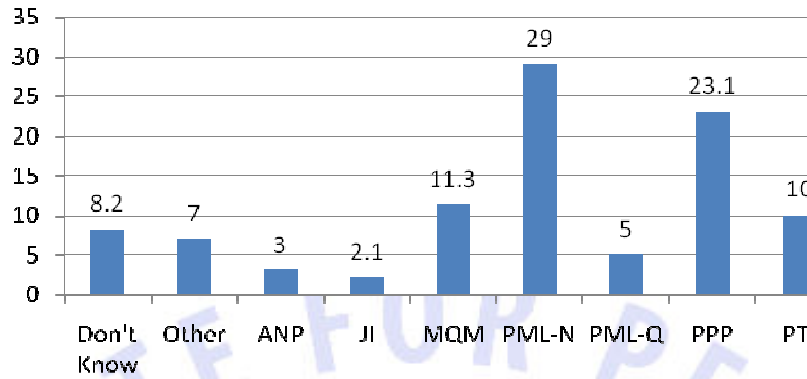
Chart 6: Views on Women's Rights



Political Attitude

Most of the respondents (66.4 percent) appeared to be politically conscious and said they will cast their vote in the next elections, indicating the desire to use the democratic process to bring about a change. Significantly, the respondents largely seemed frustrated by the current state of affairs in Pakistan: only 23.1 percent said that they would vote for the incumbent Pakistan People's Party (PPP); 29 percent said they would support the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the main opposition party in the country. Only 2.1 percent said they would vote for the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). This is despite the fact that the JI has penetrated various educational institutions in Pakistan and has a strong student wing. Interestingly, 10 percent of the respondents named the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by former cricket captain Imran Khan, as their preferred political party, indicating that the PTI was gradually gaining influence among the country's educated youth. There was 11.3 percent support for the urban Sindh-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM); 5 percent for Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) that was allied with former military dictator General Pervez Musharraf; and 3 percent for the Awami National Party (ANP), which is part of the ruling coalition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh.

Chart 7: Preferred Political Party

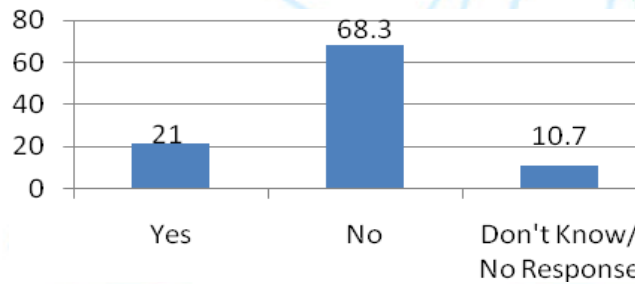


Despite the desire to bring about a positive change in society, most of the respondents (69.5 percent) said they were not involved in student politics. Those who claimed otherwise either supported the People’s Student Federation (23.3 percent), affiliated with the PPP, or Muslim Student Federation (Nawaz) (12 percent), the student wing of the PML-N. Very few said they supported the JI student wing Islami Jamiat Talaba (6.4 percent), or Anjuman-e-Talaba-e-Islam (5.1 percent).

Security Issues

The majority of the survey population (68.3 percent) believed that Pakistan should not support the US-led “war on terror”. (See Chart 8)

Chart 8: Should Pakistan Support the US-led “War on Terror”?



* Seven respondents did not respond to the question.

** SPSS 16.0 software distributed the seven missing values

The highest proportion of the respondents (29.5 percent) identified the United States as the main threat to Pakistan’s security, 14.7 percent mentioned India and a small proportion referred to Al Qaeda (6.5 percent) and the Taliban (6.8 percent). (See Table 4)

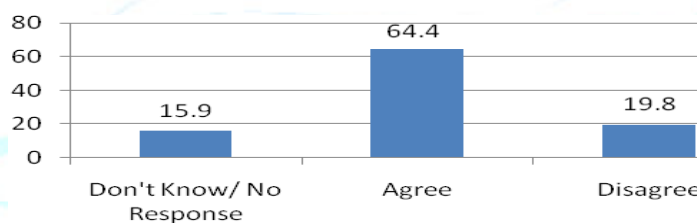
Table 4: Main Threats to Pakistan

Which of the following is the main threat to Pakistan?		
Threat	Frequency	Valid Percentage
India	50	14.7

Iran	3	0.9
United States	100	29.5
Al Qaeda	22	6.5
Anti-democratic initiatives	22	6.5
Taliban	23	6.8
A combination of any two threats cited above	63	18.6
A combination of any three threats cited above	39	11.5
A combination of more than three threats cited above	17	5
Total	339	100
* Six respondents did not answer the question.		
** SPSS 16.0 software distributed the six missing values accordingly with the distribution of frequencies of the 339 answers given.		

However, 79.4 percent of the respondents said that they did not believe that the Pakistani Taliban were doing any service to Islam. As many as 74 percent of the respondents believed that terrorism could not be eliminated as long as poverty and exploitation persisted. A clear majority (64.4 percent) also stated that nothing justified terrorism or taking of human lives. (See Chart 9)

Chart 9: Nothing Justifies Terrorism and Taking of Human Lives

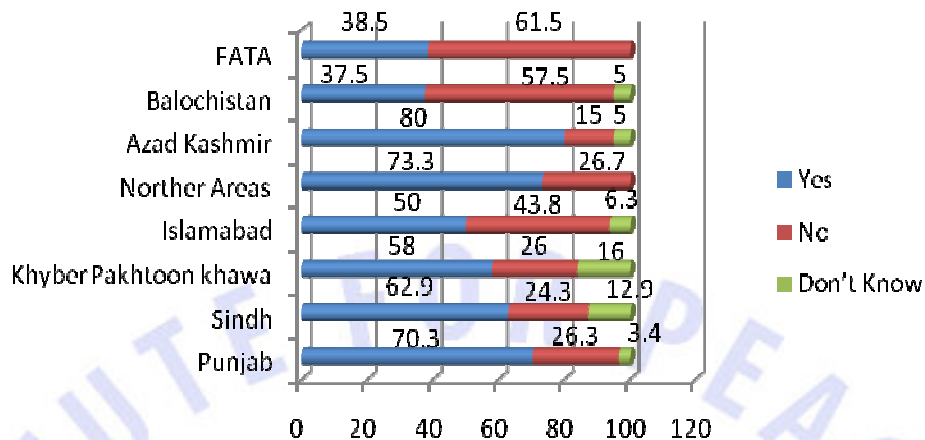


*11 respondents did not respond to the question.

** SPSS 16.0 software distributed the 11 missing values accordingly

Most of the respondents (85.6 percent) believed that Islam did not allow actions such as suicide bombings. A large number of the respondents (61.7 percent) supported the military operations against the militants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. Most of the students in Punjab (70.3 percent), Sindh (62.9 percent), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (58 percent), Azad Kashmir (80 percent) and Gilgit Baltistan (73.3 percent) favored the security operations. But most of the respondents from FATA (61.5 percent) and Balochistan (57.5 percent) opposed them. (See Chart 10)

Chart 10: Support for Military Operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA



Conclusion

In recent years, there has been increasing realization of the need to curb and reverse the trend of radicalization in Pakistan. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the efforts made so far have met a great deal of success. On the contrary, the rising militancy and violence in the country point to further deterioration. Counter-measures have focused almost exclusively on the nexus of radicalization, violence and terrorism and little attention has been paid to factors behind non-violent manifestations of radicalization. A one-size-fits-all approach seems increasingly unlikely to deliver in the circumstances. That is precisely why it is vital to move beyond one-dimensional responses and focus on various segments of the population to assess inclinations towards radicalization in order to come up with an appropriate response in each case and, most importantly, have empirical basis for such measures rather than proceeding on assumptions. An assessment of non-violent radical tendencies of the educated youth may offer valuable insight not only into future prospects but also future patterns of radicalization.

The findings of this study offer a peep into the mindset of the educated youth, highlighting some areas of concern but also some that hold considerable promise. The clear preference among the youth for peaceful and democratic means to effect change is something that can be built upon. Ensuring that such possibilities for change remain available and meaningful can be vital both in countering radical tendencies and preventing such tendencies from taking root among the overwhelmingly young population of the country. In that respect, the perception among a fairly large number of respondents that democracy would not help Pakistan deal with its problems, as well as widespread frustration over the current state of affairs in the country, needs to be changed. Equally important among the social and religious variables that influence young individuals is the resistance to ethnic and religious diversity among a large section of Pakistani youth, necessitating urgent efforts to counter this distrust.

A perception among the educated youth that the United States—and not Al Qaeda or the Taliban—constitutes the main threat to Pakistan's security perhaps demonstrates a continued denial among the youth of the risks that extremists poses, rather than any large-scale sympathy for the extremists. However, appropriate awareness and education campaigns must seek to contextualize the threats.

Views on gender equality, particularly the changing opinions on gender stereotypes, and the role and influence of the relatively new independent electronic media, such as cable news channels, also hold promise.

This study is a small first step towards providing empirical basis for the strategies to counter and prevent radicalization and justifies a further focus on the cited and additional variables to map patterns of non-violent radical tendencies, which must inform the counter-radicalization discourse.

Annexure 1:

S.No	List of Universities
1.	International Islamic University, Islamabad
2.	Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi
3.	Lahore University of Management Science, Lahore
4.	University of the Punjab, Lahore
5.	Bahauddin Zikrya University, Multan
6.	Government Degree College, Dera Ghazi Khan
7.	Peshawar University, Peshawar
8.	Islamia College, Peshawar
9.	Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan
10.	University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad
11.	Government College Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir
12.	Karakoram University, Gilgit
13.	Karachi University, Karachi
14.	Iqra University, Karachi
15.	Sindh University, Jamshoro
16.	University of Balochistan, Quetta

Notes:

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- ⁱ Youth in Pakistan, United Nations Development Programme Pakistan, <http://undp.org.pk/undp-and-the-youth.html>, accessed on August 17, 2010.
- ⁱⁱ "Education", Pakistan Economic Survey 2007-2008, Chapter 10, p. 173, <http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters/10-Education08.pdf>, accessed on August 17, 2010.
- ⁱⁱⁱ A focused group discussion was held at Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Islamabad on March 26, 2009 with six students at Quaid-e-Azam University, who hailed from conflict-hit parts of the country.
- ^{iv} Saba Noor, "Tarakkiyati Amal: Intiha Pasandi kay Tadaruk Main Muaawin", monthly Tajziat, Islamabad, June 2010.
- ^v A survey conducted by eight field researchers with students at 16 leading educational institutions across the country forms the basis of this study. Saba Noor, Wajahat Ali and Khurram Iqbal contributed to the analysis and the survey report.
- ^{vi} Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West", Oxford, 1st ed, United States of America, 2005.
- ^{vii} Colleen McCue and Kathryn Haahr, "The Impact of Global Youth Bulges on Islamist Radicalization and Violence", CTS Sentinel, October 2008, Vol. 1, Issue 11.
- ^{viii} Vitaly V. Naumkin, "Radical Islam in Central Asia: between pen and rifle", Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1st ed, United States of America, 2005.
- ^{ix} Sohail Abbas, "Probing the Jihadi mindset", National Book Foundation, Islamabad, 2007.
- ^x Moeed Yousaf, "Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan: Implications for US Policy", the Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper Number 14, October 2008.
- ^{xi} Saba Noor, "Radicalization among Educated Pakistani Youth", Conflict and Peace Studies, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1, January-March 2009.

About Institute

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit non governmental research and advocacy think-tank. An initiative of leading Pakistani scholars, researchers and journalists, PIPS conducts wide-ranging research and analysis of political, social and religious conflicts that have a direct bearing on both national and international security. The PIPS approach is grounded in field research. Our surveys and policy analyses are informed by the work of a team of researchers, reporters and political analysts located in different areas of conflict in Pakistan. Based on information and assessments from the field, PIPS produces analytical reports, weekly security updates and policy briefings containing practical recommendations targeted at key national and international decision-makers. We also publish survey-based reports and books, providing in-depth analysis of various conflicts or potential conflicts.



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