



Social harmony and equal citizenship

Summary

- This policy brief summarizes the deliberations of the second of six provincial-level policy dialogues on countering violent extremism (CVE) in Punjab. The second policy dialogue focused on social harmony and equal citizenship in the context of countering violent extremism in Punjab. The first dialogue, held in May, focused on the cultural, religious and social diversity in the province as a means to counter violent extremism.
- There was a consensus that extremism, intolerance and inequality in Punjab could not be attributed entirely to any single factor and the response also needed to be holistic.
- The participants stated that in terms of social cohesion and equality among citizens, the most important elements were the state's behaviour, thoughts, policies and basic concepts about that and society. Cohesion and equality were difficult to achieve otherwise.
- Not just Punjab, but the entire country had struggled to deal with the 'problem' of diversity or to understand or accommodate it. The constant efforts at nation building through emphasising unification had meant that diversity had not been readily tolerated or considered a source of pride and strength.
- Punjab is a caste- and class-based society, which provides additional cross-cutting elements or markers of identity in terms of inequality.
- In present day Pakistan, if any province practically faced division it was Punjab, at the time of partition of India. In view of that harrowing experience, many people expected Punjab to have considerable tolerance towards religious minorities and all manners of diversity.
- For the sake of harmonising the state and society, it must first be conceded that in modern era society is not a subject but a participant and partner and the state too is not the ruler. The basic issue is governance and how the basic needs and problems of the people will be addressed. Governance through a centralised-based model and the manner of democracy with which we want to run the system are important factors. The local government system has been stripped of all things of value to the citizens at the grassroots.

- For marginalised groups, the state only has charity-based models. It should ensure fundamental rights and entitlements for all citizens.
- State and civil society are at par, they have equal standing, because society has created the state and should monitor and ensure that the principles on which the state was created are being adhered to. Civil society should be proactive and organised.
- In theory, all citizens of Punjab are entitled to all rights that are available to any other citizen of Pakistan under the constitution.
- The media has at times been criticised for not playing its due role in highlighting the faith-based challenges of non-Muslim communities.
- A very big demographic of Pakistan is child or youth, who are completely ignorant of history, particularly Pakistan's history. The coming years offer an opportunity to add to their education.
- Trying to challenge faith-based inequality has become more difficult over time. Individuals and civil society organisations trying to promote minority issues are demonised.
- The majority is almost completely ignorant of the problems of non-Muslims. The general population is also not aware of the contribution of non-Muslim leaders of the independence struggle.
- The debate on equality centers on economic opportunities and spaces. It is important to note concerns regarding the use of religion as a tool to settle personal vendettas, or to ensure economic or political benefits.

Background

On July 5, 2017, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized the second of six provincial-level dialogues in Lahore, exploring the prospects of social cohesion and equal citizenship in the province to counter extremism.

The idea of the dialogue was also to suggest avenues how to promote equality and cohesion in Punjab.

This was the second in a series of provincial consultations built on earlier findings from a range of discussions organised by PIPS. The first dialogue focused on Punjab's

diverse social and cultural scenarios and how cultural diversity could be channelled to tackle extremist tendencies.

Earlier in 2017, PIPS released a strategy document for countering violent extremism in Pakistan, based on the Institute's experiences and ten expert-level consultations on key aspects of countering extremism. Following points are noteworthy:

- Ideologically spaces against militants can be secured by treating all citizens, irrespective of their faith, with equality; physically spaces can be secured, by according all regions with uniformity.
- There is a need to adopt a framework or narrative, which treats all citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity, creed and geography, with equality. This framework of citizenship will automatically help in embracing minorities, otherwise pushed to the side-lines.
- Part of the inequality stems from the multi-layered education system, which shall be immediately revisited.

Key considerations

The following main points were raised during the deliberations:

- The 'problem' of diversity is new for Pakistanis, who in their logic and worldview have not been able to fathom or accommodate it. The constant national struggle has been to unify as an attempt at nation building. Because of the emphasis on unification, essentialism has come into our logic. Essentialism puts more emphasis on differences and we try to homogenise them. The modern era requires that diversity should be respected and honoured and differences should be made a source of strength.
- There is inequality between Punjab and other provinces as well as within Punjab. The rate of growth in Punjab is very high. Wherever there is high rate of growth inequality would be high too. These factors must be gotten rid of if

the goal of a cohesive Punjab is to be achieved.

- In Punjab, there are disparities and inequalities among the citizens based on their religion, sect, caste, social class, gender, and even on the basis of where they live. People instinctively take a reductionist view regarding social harmony. In fact, social harmony is fragmented even within the structure of Islam, which is the major belief system.
- References are often made to faith-based or inter-communal aspects of social harmony, but the problem is intra-communal too. Punjab is a caste- and class-based society too which provides additional cross-cutting elements or markers of identity in terms of inequality.
- The word minority can be a reference to nothing more than a mathematical notion, not a concept. To end this notion, we need to give currency to the true meaning of citizenship. Equality of citizenship is equality before the law without discrimination. That must be emphasised without exception. Irrespective of one's faith, everyone must have equality before the law. Any discrimination or exceptions to that weaken the state.
- Conflict is the foundation of the political science we teach in our educational institutions. Our thoughts, worldview and strategy are focussed towards reconciliation, compromises, etc., and therefore do not honour or happily tolerate differences or diversity.
- The basic issue for a state, irrespective of its ideology, is to correct governance issues, fixing basic needs. As long as basic needs are provided without discrimination, all citizens, no matter what their numerical strength, will find a strong bond with the state. Without governance standards, differences can emerge to the front, morphing into conflicts. Afterwards, the entire effort is made at resolving those conflicts; had disparities addressed earlier, avenues of conflict would have been shut much earlier.
- For the sake of harmonising the state and society, it must first be conceded that in modern era society is not a subject but a participant and partner and

the state too is not the ruler. The notions of division of power, balance and above all participation are key. Unless civil society is strengthened in that participation, the state could well go towards absolutism and take more and more power in its hands. Civil society can join the state as a partner, and help the state see, for example, that the use of the social media can be strength as a means to assess society's perceptions and discussions and trying to control the social media would deprive us of that benefit.

- The state cannot be allowed to operate as it pleases. Civil society needs to be strengthened and focused to keep the state on the straight and narrow. State and civil society are at par; they have equal standing, because society has created the state and should monitor and ensure that the principles on which the state was created are being followed. The concept of civil society is that it should be proactive. It must be organised and active and should not be a mere crowd.
- Nationalism or ethno-centralism of the majority invariably leads to fascism.
- In theory, all citizens of Punjab are entitled to all the rights available to any other citizen of Pakistan under the constitution.
- In terms of equality of citizens or absence of that, faith is an important element. The roots of many problems leading to inequality lie in deviation from the constitution, deviation from citizens' contract with the state and denial of democracy. The issue is to ensure the rights of non-Muslim citizens, who are equal citizens of Pakistan, both in law and practice.
- One difficulty in seeking guidance from the constitution in this respect is that Pakistan remained a land without a constitution until 1956 and even the 1956 constitution lasted only 926 days. Perusing the history of exclusions demonstrates that in the democratic system under the 1962 constitution the role of women and religious minorities disappeared. They could not even reach parliament whereas earlier they were ministers and legislators. The 1973 constitution was not a social contract under normal circumstances, it

was a post-conflict constitution.

- Another dilemma is that we are operating under a constitution which suffered excessive adulteration and mutilation under various undemocratic dispensations.
- The debate of equality hovers around economic opportunities and space. Economic perspective and deprivation must be addressed. In South Punjab, if a child's family affords to give him two square meals a day he may not be sent off to an establishment where he might be radicalised.
- The urbanisation process is anti-harmony. In rural settings, individuals are tied by common interest, but as they move to cities that common interest disappears because the sources of livelihood are different and interaction is reduced. There is more social harmony in the suburbs than inside the cities themselves. Rural settings could be called backward in terms of infrastructure but urban culture is poor in terms of social harmony.
- The Citizenship Act 1951 is discriminatory in terms of gender as well as other things. A Pakistani man marrying a foreigner can lead to grant citizenship to his spouse but the same is not true for a foreign national spouse of a Pakistani woman. An even bigger objection to this law is that it does not say anything substantive about citizenship, such as rights, entitlement or commitments. It is more based on deadlines and a chronology of your allegiance with the state instead of the substance that we need to have as citizens of Pakistan. Until that happens we will not be able to internalise that concept of citizenship.
- The quality of governance is an important factor. Extremism, violence, models of disparity, reactionary approaches, and disconnect from the state cannot be addressed if we proceed without understanding the context of governance. Governance through a centralised-based model and the manner of democracy with which we want to run the system are important factors. The local government system has been stripped of all things of value to the citizens at the grassroots. Elected local government representatives were made to wait 18 months and the system was not allowed to function. Afterwards all

meaningful authority was taken away from local government institutions.

- For marginalised groups, the state only has charity-based models. The state is obligated to ensure provision of fundamental rights and entitlements to all citizens.
- One lens and concept that can help the understanding when talking about Punjab in particular is the economy around religion. By aspiring for a religious social order from the beginning we overlooked the formation and principles of a modern democratic state. When that state materialised, intolerance was inbuilt, which needed to be treated and the August 11 speech by the Quaid-e-Azam had the potential to prevent that from getting ingrained. Not only has religious and sectarian intolerance become institutionalised, it has also become self-generating and no longer needs external support. It now has the assets, infrastructure and ideology which are self-reliant and can adapt. The elements who control political economy want to assert that control. Our policy on governance, which is in dysfunction, has been put in dysfunction by that religious economy.
- Important instruments including the constitution have imbedded weaknesses and can protect neither democracy nor rights. Since we are saddled with these institutional weaknesses at the normative level we are losing the potential for reform.
- The concerns regarding the use of religion as a tool to settle personal vendettas or to ensure economic or political benefits must be addressed.
- A very big demographic of Pakistan comprises children or youth, who are completely ignorant of history, particularly Pakistan history. The coming years offer an opportunity to add to their education.
- On the question of extremism, Article 256 of the constitution says: "No private organization capable of functioning as a military organization shall be formed, and any such organization shall be illegal." Private Military Organizations (Abolition and Prohibition) Act was promulgated by the parliament of Pakistan

in 1974. So the militias that have caused much grief were neither the desire of the constitution nor the law. But the fact that rules under the 1974 law are yet to be framed has meant that the law could not be implemented. The parliament provided the constitutional umbrella and promulgated a law. The operationalisation was then the task for the executive. The Senate of Pakistan has for the first time formed a committee on delegated legislation. In Punjab, around a dozen laws adopted by the Punjab Assembly deal with terrorism and extremism. The onus for the steps that disturb our equality or fail to implement it is on the executive.

- Trying to challenge faith-based inequality has become more difficult over time. Individuals and civil society organisations trying to promote minority issues are accused of seeking to enrich themselves. Insensitivity towards anyone whose religious identity is other than Islam has risen to such an extent that complaining about excesses and denial of rights is characterised as an attempt to get visas to other countries. Weaker segments talking of their rights are bracketed with the West. Many people then become fearful and quiet. Minorities have internalised this and become apologetic. That is reflected in their use of vocabulary when they articulate their grievances and seek considerate behaviour from the majority instead of demanding equal rights as citizens.
- The majority is almost completely ignorant of the problems of non-Muslims. That just illustrates the scale of the problem. In Punjab, numerous instances of faith-based violence against minorities have recently been seen in areas where no such practice had been evident in the past. Improving the situation will take nothing short of social re-engineering.
- The contribution of well-known non-Muslim leaders of the independence struggle is neither highlighted in general nor mentioned in the syllabus. Harmony cannot be achieved through selective teaching of history.

Recommendations

- Lack of civic education and constitutional literacy, even among law graduates, must be remedied. In order to be more aware, common citizens should know by heart the first seven articles of the constitution. An active citizen must be familiar with articles 1 to 40 to be aware of the promises regarding citizens' rights under the constitution.
- A dialogue with parliament and the political parties holds the key to solving many of our problems so that the quality of democracy and quality of leadership are made pro-citizen and respond to citizens' concerns on inequality and discrimination.
- A committee should be formed in Punjab to monitor progress on delegated legislation to see provincial and federal laws regarding security, defence and protection of citizens (which are the responsibility of the state and which each tier has to defend) are implemented.
- Colonial laws that were aimed at coercion should be democratised.
- A democratic provincial finance commission award should be established in Punjab to ensure that some districts are not neglected at the expense of others. The award should have the same parameters as the National Finance Commission (NFC) award and should consider the factors of poverty, population, under-development and there should be room for affirmative action in order to support the districts that have fallen behind.
- Tensions with Pakistan's neighbouring countries, particularly India, have also fed radicalisation. Efforts to tackle tensions with India could help defuse radicalisation in Punjab.
- If the youth are more aware of Pakistan's history, and can learn how to ask questions, a way for improvement can be found. Education can be a great equaliser, but it depends on the type, manner and content of education.

- In terms of curriculum, the pedagogy needs to change considerably. Mere changing of books may not work if the same teachers continue to approach the subject from the same mind-set. Teacher training is important.
- Since a very big demographic of Pakistan and Punjab comprises youth, the coming years offer an opportunity to add to their education. The growing footprint of small private schools in education can be harnessed to familiarise the youth with civic awareness as a step towards creating a cohesive Punjab.
- In order to confront the problems facing non-Muslims, the awareness and realisation among the young and the educated should be increased about the faith-based challenges for non-Muslims. Such efforts should be aimed at helping the majority understand the situation and not paper it over, but consider what devices could be engineered to overcome the issue.
- All relevant issues, whether education policy, governance policy, affirmative action policy need to be consistently highlighted, because discriminations on any ground, whether on the basis of gender, religion, sect, ethnicity or language, support each other. That is why all discriminations must be denounced without reservation as without that progress cannot be made in terms of rights.
- In order to address vital issues of equality of citizenship, discrimination and exclusion, more pressure needs to be put on the governance model. Unless people are reassured that they will be governed in a transparent and accountable manner it will be difficult to address the issue of extremism properly.
- Focus on positive human values should be made part of the curriculum in order to promote tolerance and harmonious co-existence. Children and youth should be sensitised that explosions occur not only through gunpowder but injudicious use of the pen or the tongue can also cause serious harm.

- Positive news of inter-faith harmony need to be highlighted to bring communities closer.
- The contribution of non-Muslims and the vital role their communities played in the creation and development of Pakistan should be acknowledged and included in the curriculum to raise awareness.

Participants

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