



JAN-MAR
2009

Case Study
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Youth

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Radicalization among Educated Pakistani Youth

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Radicalization has a long history in Pakistan and its spread among various segments of society has long been debated. The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies and the Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, jointly conducted an empirical quantitative research study to identify the trends and gauge the extent of radicalization among educated Pakistani youth. A survey was conducted to determine the nature of radicalization and identify root causes, trends and scale of the phenomenon among Pakistani youth. Quaid-i-Azam University students, both from natural and social sciences departments, were chosen as the survey sampling population.¹ The survey was based on responses from 70 students, aged between 20 and 35, to closed-ended questions.²

The respondents included 35 male students and an identical number of females. However, as Table 1 shows, respondents from the rural and urban backgrounds were not represented in equal numbers.

Table 1: Population sample

Rural areas	Urban areas
29%	71%
Male	Female
50%	50%

The survey's findings can be compared in further studies with similar surveys in other education institutions in Pakistan and abroad for a better understanding of the subject. It may be noted that at some points percentages do not add up to 100 percent for the reason that the categories deemed not adding much to the information are not included in the narration.

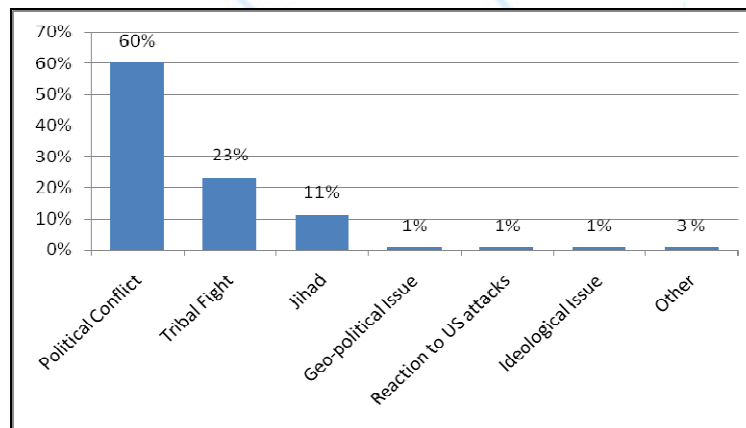
The survey results show the urban youth to be liberal compared to their counterparts from rural areas. The former also seem to have moved away from the traditional perception of women's role in society. They support equal rights for both genders.

The survey reveals that compared to those hailing from rural areas, respondents belonging to cities are keener to bring a change in society. Religious and cultural radicalization was more noticeable among the rural youth. The respondents attached priority to fulfilling *huqooq-ul-ibad* (religiously-ordained human rights) over *huqooq-ul-Allah* (rights owed to God). Most of the respondents, 60 percent, stated that the conflict in Afghanistan was purely political and had nothing to do with Islam, whereas 23 percent saw it as a tribal conflict.

Table 2: Nature of Conflict in Afghanistan

Responses	Percentage
Political conflict	60%
Tribal fight	23%
Jihad	11%
Geo-political issue	1%
Reaction to US attacks	1%
Ideological issue	1%
Others	3%

Chart 1: Nature of Conflict in Afghanistan



The survey's findings show that 20 percent of the respondents prefer to don western clothes, 44 percent Pakistani clothes, whereas 36 percent say they wear both.

Of those who favored Pakistani dress, 23 percent cited cultural and traditional reasons for their preference. Twenty-nine percent said they preferred the local dress because they felt comfortable wearing it. Only 13 percent mentioned religion as the reason for their dress choice, whereas 10 percent cited both religious and cultural reasons. Twenty-five percent said that their choice for the local dress did not have any special reason.

The majority of the respondents, 59 percent, denied that their dress preferences were related to religion, whereas 29 percent said it was. However, 1 percent held that the choice of dress was linked to religion for girls but not for boys.

Sixty-three percent of the respondents did not agree that wearing western clothes diverted individuals from religion, 24 percent thought it does. Eleven percent chose not to express an opinion.

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed – 90 percent – said they like listening to music for entertainment, relaxation and fun. Ten percent avoided music due to religious reasons and 59 percent stated that quitting singing for religious reasons was appreciable.

The respondents overwhelmingly subscribed to gender equality. Eighty-seven percent of those questioned said that women's education was extremely important while 10 percent said it was not. To a question about women working outside their houses, 63 percent of the respondents said that women should have the freedom to pursue such work. Sixty percent said that women should have the right to divorce, whereas 30 percent opposed such a right.

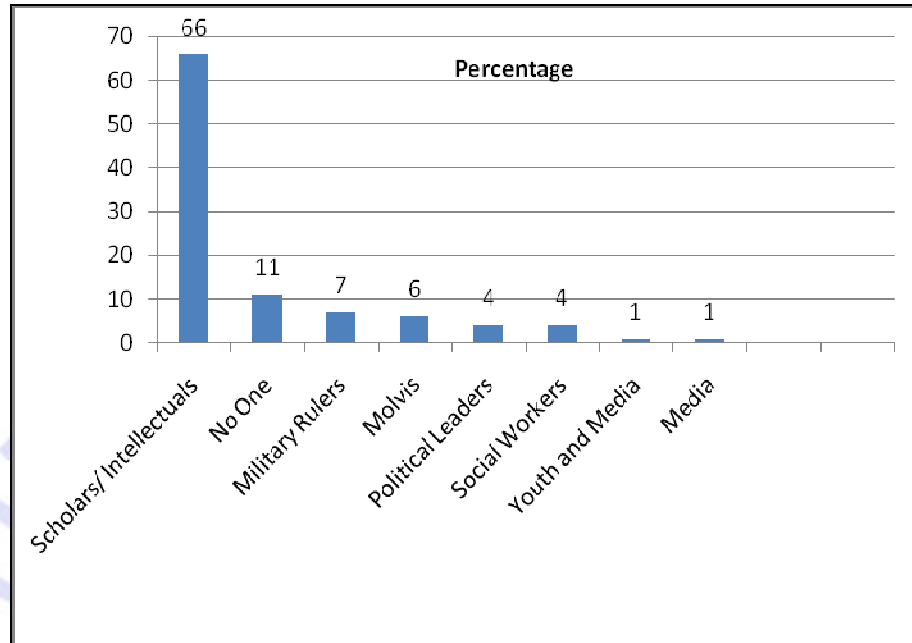
Twenty percent of the respondents received their basic religious education only from their parents; 27 percent from all means listed in Table 3; 17 percent both from parents and schools; 7 percent from schools; 6 percent from mosques; 6 percent from parents, schools and mosques; and 3 percent received religious education from *madrassas*. Most of the respondents stated that clerics and *madrassas* used religion to pursue sectarian agendas. They held that that was why the education *madrassas* impart was limited in scope and promoted their respective sects.

A minority of the respondents, 23 percent, said they favored rule by religious parties in the country, compared to 58 percent who opposed it. When asked who was serving Islam and the people in the real sense in the Pakistani society, 66 percent of the students mentioned intellectuals and scholars. Only 6 percent thought clerics were serving Islam. (See Table 3)

Table 3: Who is best serving Islam in Pakistani society?

Responses	Percentage
Scholars and intellectuals	66%
No one	11%
Military rulers	7%
Clerics	6%
Political leaders	4%
Social workers	4%
Youth and media	1%
Media	1%

Chart 2: Who is best serving Islam in Pakistani society?



Forty-six percent of the respondents deemed *pardah* (veil) for women to be a religious obligation, 33 percent said the observance of *pardah* depended upon the situation, 16 percent believed it was a matter of personal choice, whereas 4 percent considered it unnecessary.

Thirty percent cited deviation from the Quran and *Sunnah* (practice) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the reason for the Muslim world's deficient progress, 11 percent said it was a lack of scientific and technological knowledge, 6 percent blamed Western control over Muslim countries' economies, 2 percent mentioned absence of jihad, whereas 10 percent believed that a combination of lagging in science and technology and deviation from the Quran and *Sunnah* were the reasons for Muslims' lack of progress. Three percent pointed to wrong religious concepts, while 31 percent said that all of these were among the reasons.

Forty-one percent of the students questioned thought that a person could be a better Muslim even if s/he did not offer prayers five times a day but took care of others' rights. Seventy-nine percent held that marriage should take place between followers of the same religion, whereas 17 percent did not deem a common religion to be that important.

Commenting on differences among various Islamic school of thought, or *fiqah* (religious jurisprudence) – such as the *Deobandi*, *Barelvi*, *Shia* or *Ahl-e-Hadith fiqah* – 33 percent of the respondents stated that the difference was that of interpretation; 17 percent believed that it was a basic religious difference; 9 percent saw it as a political conflict. According to 30 percent, it was a difference of opinion.

Twenty-seven percent saw differences among various religious sects as natural, 24 percent believed that the differences were harmful and 26 percent thought they were based on ignorance.

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents described *jihad* as a battle against personal desires, 20 percent explained it as fight against cruelty, 19 percent understood it as taking on the enemies of Islam, and to 7 percent it meant battling against cruelty and personal desires. Commenting on the nature of *jihad*, 51 percent respondents (including 51 percent females and 49 percent males) stated that it should be defensive in nature, 14 percent youth believed it should be offensive, and 31 percent were indecisive. Sixty-four percent of the respondents believed the struggle for the implementation of *Shariah* to be *jihad* as well, whereas 16 percent disagreed with that interpretation. Twenty percent were indecisive. Sixty-four percent identified the struggle against Indian rule in Held Kashmir as *jihad*, 14 percent did not see it as such, whereas 22 percent were indecisive. The majority (89 percent) did not identify the insurgency in Afghanistan as *jihad*.

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents believed that Taliban were not fighting for Islam, while 17 percent held that they were. Seventeen percent of those who believed that Taliban were fighting for Islam condemned attacks on cinemas, video and CD shops, barber shops, and girl schools and colleges. Sixty percent of the respondents remarked that Pakistan's decision to assist the United States in the war against terrorism was not right, whereas 26 percent held that it was the correct decision.

The respondents were also asked questions to assess radical tendencies in their political beliefs and practices. Fifty-eight percent said that they considered their candidate's capability and education while casting their votes, 23 percent based their decision on party affiliation and 7 percent on the candidate's caste. Only 6 percent stated that they vote on the basis of religion.

Responses were also collected to explore the level of awareness regarding Hudood laws³ among the educated youth. Around 53 percent responded that they were aware of the laws, while 33 percent said they were not. Sixty percent of those who knew about the Hudood laws said they should be amended, while 28 percent said they should remain unchanged.

Forty-nine percent of the respondents said they were affiliated with or supported a political party. Only 29 percent were associated with religious political parties. Male respondents were more politically active compared to the females as 54 percent of the former were affiliated with or supported a political party. The figure was 11 percent lower for females at 43 percent. The ratio of male respondents' association with religio-political parties was 17 percent. It was 11 percent for female respondents.

Asked to pick the most influential incident in the country's recent history that directly affected the youth, 32 percent referred to the 2007 Lal Masjid operation in Islamabad, 20 percent to former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination, 19 percent to the judicial crisis, and 15 percent to the military operations in the Tribal Areas. Forty-five percent mentioned the Lal Masjid operation and the judicial crisis both.

Conclusion

The sampling population's opinions *prima facie* reflect that educated Pakistani youth is generally not radical in its outlook. They overwhelmingly support equal rights for both women and men, and believe that the Taliban are not fighting for Islam. However, they disapprove of Pakistan's decision to assist the US in the war against terrorism.

A substantial majority of the youth does not deem that wearing western clothes threatens an individual's religion in any manner. They oppose rule by religious parties in the country and believe that intellectuals and scholars – and not clerics – serve the interests of Islam. The majority of those aware about the subject matter of the Hudood laws call for amending them. Only a small minority says that a candidate's religion is a consideration when they vote.

However, a sizable minority sees a substantial role of religion in the progress of Muslims worldwide and cites departure from the Quran and *Sunnah* as the reason for the Muslim world's lack of progress. They hold that marriage should take place between followers of the same religion. Though they say that *jihad* should only be defensive in nature, the majority believes the struggle for the implementation of *Shariah* law is also *jihad*.

Over two-third of the respondents citing the Lal Masjid operation as the most influential recent incident affecting the youth in Pakistan is also noteworthy.



Notes:

¹ The university admits around 600 students in its master's degree programs every six months; and 200 in its M. Phil and 100 in Ph.D. programs annually. The university draws students from all segments of the society, as reserved seats are allocated for each province and for the rural and urban areas. Three hundred students are admitted to various M.Sc programs of natural and social sciences on self-finance basis (evening programs) in the fall semester (September-January).

² The survey team comprised Sana Aslam, Rabia Aftab, Attia Younis, and Sajida Hina from Department of Defence and Strategic Studies (DSS), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

³ The Hudood laws were a group of laws enacted in 1979 as part of then military ruler General Ziaul Haq's Islamization process. The laws aimed at implementing *Shariah* law by enforcing religiously-ordained punishments for *Zina* (extramarital sex), *Qazf* (false accusation of zina), theft, and consumption of alcohol. Enforcement of Hudood Ordinance, 1979, has been criticized as leading to situations where a woman subjected to rape was accused of extramarital sex and incarcerated. Two of the Hudood laws - relating to the offences of *Zina* and *Qazf* - were amended by the Women's Protection Act of 2006.

