

SOCIO ECONOMIC FACTORS BEHIND RADICALIZATION: EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN

*Fozia Tanoli, Dr. Qaim Raza Jaffry and Sardar Ali**

Abstract

This article aims to explore the socioeconomic factors behind radicalization in Pakistan. This study highlights that radicalization is a process by which extreme social, religious and political views are adopted by the individuals or groups to undermine and reject the freedom of speech, status quo, fragile law and order situation, emerging trends and ideas at the societal level. The Human Needs Theory has been employed to analyse the phenomenon of radicalization in Pakistan as this theory states that the deep-rooted social conflicts spring from unfulfilled basic human needs. In context of Pakistan, social injustice and poverty, age and modernity, role of media, rising unemployment, and lack of human development opportunities appear significant contributors of radicalization. Moreover, the article suggests that the government and policy makers should address the issues of poverty, injustice and unemployment on priority basis to discourage radical elements of the society. In the era of globalization, media can play crucial role to discourage radical groups of the society. Rather than just focusing on the coverage of violent incidents, media should highlight the dangerous consequences of radicalization on life of the individuals and society as a whole. Finally, the government of Pakistan rather than just focusing on income level in the economy should consider development indicators like education, health facilities, governance and institutional quality while formulating macroeconomic policies alongwith strengthening and practicing the democracy in its true sense.

Keywords: Radicalization, Socio-economic Factors, Unemployment, Basic Human Needs.

Introduction

Radicalization is posing serious challenges and affecting the socio-economic fabrics of Pakistani society. Therefore, it is necessary to understand this phenomenon. Although, radicalization is not mainly related with religion, it prevails in different forms. The use of term 'radicalization' also depends on the ideology of that particular individual or group. One's ideological perspective and political context are also important to understand radicalization. Different scholars have identified different causes of prevailing radicalization in a society. Moreover, economic, social, religious and political factors are important to understand the reasons of radicalization.

*Fozia Tanoli is a Ph.D scholar and Dr. Qaim Raza Jaffry is a research supervisor and faculty member at NDU Islamabad. Sardar Ali is M.Phil scholar at the Department of Leadership and Management Studies, NDU, Islamabad.

Radicalization can be defined, “as process by which extreme social, religious and political views are adopted by the individuals or groups to undermine and reject the freedom of speech, status quo, fragile law and order situation, emerging trends and ideas at the societal level.” It can be violent and non-violent. Non-violent radicalization is not as much harmful as violent radicalization. This is the reason that the literature available on radicalization revolve around the discussions on radicalization which results in violent extremism. There are number of factors behind radicalization which can be independent but reinforcing each other’s.¹ The identification of forces behind radicalization is a complex phenomenon which requires a combination of effective strategies at both national and international levels. The complex nature of radicalization problem also indicates that we cannot apply one strategy to deal with this issue. Thus, a separate set of policies is required for each group of radicalized individuals by considering the socio-economics and religious dimensions.

Radicalization: A Menace for the Society of Pakistan

The roots of radicalization in Pakistan can be traced back to 1947, when Pakistan got independence. After independence, Majlis-e-Ahrar-e-Hind, which was one of the religious parties declared its restoration as a Pakistani religious unit.² This religious group was against the partition of India and after independence they became active in Punjab. Since then it has been a story of ignorance and frustration. Quaid-i-Azam realized the dangers for the society in the use of religion in politics. In his first address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on 11th August 1947, he declared that religious faith and sectarian beliefs would play no part in politics of Pakistan.³

Between 1952-54 Ahmedi agitation and the Bhutto’s decision in 1974 to declare them non-Muslims further aggravate the situation. Later on, the Islamization and pro-Sunni policies of Zia and Iranian policy to back Shia militant groups against Saudi Arabia’s support for Sunni militant groups promoted sectarianism in Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan’s decision to become an ally of US on War on Terror against the radical and extremist groups poses serious challenges for the country as a whole. After this decision, the numbers of terrorist incidents and bomb blasts have increased significantly in Pakistan. The government of Pakistan and Pakistan Army responded actively against these emerging threats and launched different operations including Operation Rah-e-Rast, Operation Rah-e-Nijat and the most successful operation Zarb-e-Azab. Despite all these efforts it is also a fact that radicalization and extremism are still biggest challenges faced by the government of Pakistan.

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the socio-economic causes behind radicalization in Pakistan. This will further be helpful to de-radicalize this evil from our society. Our focus will revolve around violent radicalization and its solutions in context of Pakistan. Hence, this paper will help to understand the role and socio-economic factors which are contributing in radicalization. It aims to bring revolutionary changes at religious, social, ideological and political levels. Thus, in order to eliminate the evil of radicalization it is essential to figure out root causes behind this phenomenon.

Determinants of Radicalization in Pakistan

Social Injustice and Poverty

Social injustice, unemployment and deprivation of basic facilities of life could encourage individuals and different groups to use radical means to get their right. Social injustice and poverty can create a sense of exclusion from the society among masses. In Pakistan, two third of the total population lives in the rural areas and most of them are deprived of basic facilities such as clean water, sanitation, education etc.⁴ According to the World Bank, headcount ratio indicates that 60.19 percent of the adult population in Pakistan is living below the poverty line and they hardly earn US \$ 2 per day.⁵ Poverty not only deprived individuals from the basic necessities of life like food, shelter, education and health care but it also leads to social problems including mistrust, hopelessness, chaos, apathy and sense of deprivation. Particularly, if we take the example of FATA, which is poorest region in the country with almost three million population, 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and they are deprived of basic necessities of life. Additionally, the government expenditures on education, health and development are also minimal as compared to national expenditures on these heads. In this situation, poverty can be a significant contributor to the militancy in FATA because poor infrastructure and lack of basic necessities of life which creates a sense of deprivation among masses. As a result people adopt illegal means to earn financial prosperity which they can't achieve by any other way.

On the other hand, Taspinar⁶ argues that relative deprivation is more important concept to understand the causes of radicalization rather than just focusing on absolute poverty because in context of globalization relative deprivation matter more than absolute deprivation.⁷ Relative deprivation can be defined in terms of lack of opportunities in comparison to expectations of the masses. The wave of globalization has created awareness among people regarding the opportunities available elsewhere in the world which is a potential source of creating frustration, humiliation and hopelessness among unemployed, urbanized and less educated segment of the society.⁸

Social Reconstruction and Radicalization in the Age of Modernity

In Pakistan, 63 percent of the total population is below 25 years of age. The increase in unemployment, lack of equal opportunities, disintegrated socioeconomic conditions are some key factors behind youth disenchantment. These young minds are the most potential target of radical networks working nationally and internationally. They can easily be attracted by radical networks which offer them social cohesion and narrative to their beliefs. In Pakistan, it is evident from terrorist activities that most of the terrorists were between 15 to 30 years of age which shows that young people can reject their own views and accept others viewpoints easily.

Therefore, it is very important to provide them equal opportunities, better socio-economic conditions and mostly importantly education facilities because radical groups use the name of religion to exploit young minds and motivate them first towards

radicalization and ultimately towards terrorism. Wiktorowicz, in his book, '*Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*,' have analyzed that young people who do not have clear understanding of Islam and searching their faith first time are most vulnerable to extremists groups.⁹ The easiest way to tackle this issue is to educate our young minds by providing them opportunities to get awareness about the mainstream teachings of Islam to make them able to differentiate between radical and non-radical narratives.

Similarly, modernity is another important cause of radicalization. Here we are considering urbanization, information technology, social networking and mass transit facilities as a measure of modernity. Modernization helps to spread radical thoughts among people. For example, the social networking websites like twitter and Facebook provide a powerful platform to share and reinforce extreme view and ideas among masses. It does not imply that every internet user is a radical entity but the provision of these facilities provide a forum to radical groups to share and spread their thoughts more swiftly than any other available means of communication. Similarly, urbanization brings people together where they can share and communicate with each other. Radical groups can take the advantage of urbanization by spreading negative thoughts to diffuse their ideology into masses. Pakistani society is already facing the problem of extremism and modernity may contribute positively to worsen the condition. These negative impacts can be minimized by strict check and balances and improving the law and order and the economic condition of masses.

The Role of Media in Countering Radicalization

In this globalized world, the role of media is quite important in all aspects of life. Media's coverage of different incidents, suicide attacks, bomb blasts and other such incidents, may also encourage some deprived individuals, groups to join such terrorist organization and take revenge from society or state. For instance, the coverage of Lal Masjid incident divided Pakistani society in two groups. Few people were criticizing the government action against the authority of Lal Masjid and they were having sympathy for them. Though, the rest of society was appreciating the government actions to eliminate such fundamentalist and radical groups who were using religion for their interests. Therefore, media can play positive role to create awareness among educated and especially in illiterate segments of society to understand their role and responsibilities. Since Arab uprisings the role and influence of social and electronic media has become significant and undeniable factor in shaping and reshaping the society.

Media in any state defines not just its policies but also the nature of the society. Previously, media in Pakistan was heavily dependent on the President, which always dictates media to define its ethics and approach. Later on, Musharraf brought freedom of expression in media which provided a new room and space for the development of media. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was established on March 01, 2002 to regulate the electronic media and its content being on air. Starting from one government channel now there are more than hundred channels and today media is enjoying freedom. We can categorize media into two groups, the Urdu media

and the English media. Both types of media differ from each other in their coverage as well.

The Urdu media coverage is conservative in its nature because they believe that people in Pakistan are conservative. According to a study conducted by the Institute of Peace Studies (IPS), the contribution of Pakistani media in the process of radicalization can be traced back to 1950s when media promoted and propagated radical views regarding Ahmadi's. Correspondingly, radical issues and extremist activities are getting more attention because of increasing competition among media channels and newspapers. Media groups are giving full coverage to even minor incidents of extremism and radicalization to improve their ratings.¹⁰

Unemployment: Really a Justification of Radicalization?

The main forces behind the Jasmine revolution and the Arab spring were extensive corruption, unemployment followed by Ben Ali's action in Middle East and North African countries.¹¹ Moreover in developing countries, usually skills offered by different universities mismatch the skills demanded by the employer which lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among youth¹². According to Jan Eliasson, the UN Deputy Secretary General:

“Globally, as many as 73 million young people are looking for jobs. Young people are three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Many more are trapped in jobs where they are objects of exploitation. When young people sense frustration and anger at a glaring lack of opportunity, they are more likely to lose faith in government and in institutions. In many parts of the world, this leaves young people receptive and vulnerable to marginalization and radicalization.”

From all over the world, youth is joining and supporting different extremist organizations (such as; The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), Al-Qaeda, and Hamas etc). People join such organizations and groups to show their dissatisfaction towards political system, poverty, unemployment, inflation, injustice and the lack of proper facilities. Unemployment alienates them from the rest of the society and they can easily be exploited by the radical groups by promising them to provide work opportunities and attractive salary packages.

During the FY-2016-17, unemployment rate in Pakistan was 6 percent which is quite high as compared to other countries.¹³ The main reason behind such a high rate of unemployment includes energy crisis and dreadful law and order conditions, which have closed down large number of industries and reduced the foreign investment in Pakistan. The uneducated and unskilled labor force in Pakistan is the most affected segment of the society due to this higher rate of unemployment. Moreover, high poverty rate have not only deteriorated the economic conditions but also affected the psyche of the general public. As a result, people become more vulnerable to radicalization because they lose trust on the institutions and governments. These conditions also provide a fertile ground to radical and extremists groups to strengthen their roots in Pakistan by attracting young minds.

The Role of Human Development in Fight against Radicalization

Human development is considered as a broader concept as compared to economic growth because it incorporates both social and political dimensions of the society in its definition. Nobel Laureate winner Amartya Sen emphasizes on the importance of democracy, freedom, human rights and improvement in the quality of life at both national and international levels. He also considers the quantity of economic growth as an inappropriate measure to draw any conclusion about the improvement in a society. Similarly, law and order conditions, good governance, state's security, economic capacity, and legitimacy of state are integral components of Sen's approach of human development. In simple words, human development has widened the meaning of growth in a similar way as relative deprivation among masses has expanded the meaning of poverty. Human development can also be considered a crucial factor behind radicalization. The human development approach places more importance to economic, social and political factors as a determinant of radicalization rather than only emphasizing on the per capita income in a society because the political control and economic structure in an economy strongly dependent on each other. The process of radicalization is closely linked to the social, economic and political conditions of an economy.

A well progressive and democratic country provides less space to radical and terrorist elements to grow and expand because of developed political institutions, high literacy rate; religious and ethnic homogeneity, equal distribution of income, social justice, and most importantly well-structured military and defense structure. The absence of all these elements makes a society more vulnerable towards civil wars, radicalization and terrorist activities besides creating an environment to accept radicalism and political violence at society level. It is also clear from the experience that most of the radical organizations and groups have emerged from the poor and failed states of the world such as Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leona. Overall, most of the developing countries of Africa and Asia lack in human development investment, which has created a greater challenge to deal with the issue of radicalization in these countries. Susan Rice¹⁴ pointed out that *"These states provide convenient operational bases and safe haven for international terrorist. Terrorists organizations take advantage of failing states porous borders, of their weak and non-existent law enforcement and security services, and of their ineffective judicial institutions to move men, weapons, and money around the globe"*.

Like many other developing countries, the level of human development is also not encouraging in Pakistan.¹⁵ Whereas, the small countries of South Asia including Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal are ranked higher than Pakistan in terms of human development. Lack of bureaucratic accountability, bad governance, disruptions in the democratization process, poverty and income inequality, and lower literacy rate are some important factors behind Pakistan's inability to invest in the human development. All these factors are posing serious security threat along with creating a social milieu for the radicalization in Pakistan.

Linkage between Radicalization and Inflation in Pakistan

In Pakistan, inflation is another major reason behind dissatisfaction of common citizens and radicalization. After 9/11, Pakistan became an active ally of US in war against terror and it further affected the fiscal policy of country. Pakistan used its resources to fight against terrorism and it diverted the development process and policies. Security becomes the major concern for Pakistan and huge amount and resources were allocated to counter terrorism and security threats. It further reduced the foreign investment and all this resulted in high prices of goods. Furthermore, poor law and order condition, inappropriate economic policies, high debts at internal and external levels, unemployment, and backwardness in agriculture, untrained labor, income inequality and corruption are some contributing factors. Besides this, demand for commodities has reduced because of high prices and low quality of products. According to Pakistan Economic Survey (PES), Inflation ratio in Pakistan, during July-April FY 2017 was recorded 4.1 percent.¹⁶ The mounting prices of oil, gas and electricity are also increasing inflation and cost of production as well. The government did not take proper measures to deal with inflation and due to lack of good economic policies inflation is increasing day by day.¹⁷ The high prices are also affecting the purchasing power of a common citizen and it is also increasing depression and frustration against political elites¹⁸. As a result, some people adopt radical means to get justice and their share in state resources. It is very important for government and political leadership to address the economic problems for the establishment of peaceful and progressive Pakistan.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The entire world is suffering from the menace of radicalization. It has also become a matter of serious concern in Pakistan because it has created a risky and chaotic atmosphere in the country by providing sturdy opportunities to the radical groups to spread and implement their ideologies. Individuals, families, society and the country at large are not secure from the threat of radicalization. In order to impede and eliminate the process of radicalization exact identification of the causes behind radicalization as well as intensive and diverse counter-radicalization measures can play a crucial role. At the same time, it is also a bitter reality that there are large numbers of interlinked factors which are responsible for this curse. It is quite difficult to tackle and discover solutions towards combating radicalization by considering few factors and ignoring others. Thus, diverse and multiple dimensional policies are required to deal with the issue of radicalization. This paper highlighted few possible factors behind radicalization in Pakistan.

These factors cannot be considered as the merely imperative factors behind radicalization but these factors can be helpful to understand the social and economic environment which is aggravating the situation in our country. Authors consider social injustice and poverty, age and modernity, role of media, unemployment and lack of human development opportunities as main drivers of radicalization in Pakistan. The inability of Pakistani governments to address the socio-economic and political grievances of general public has created ideal ground for radicalization. Human need

theory also highlights the importance of basic facilities of life and the role of state to timely address the public needs. Furthermore, the key motivation behind fundamentalism and radicalization in Pakistani society was the inability of civil and military government to deal with these challenges. The policy recommendations are as follows;

To de-radicalize the Pakistani society there is need of commitments at three levels. Firstly, at individual level that is called affective commitment to encourage youngsters to be aware of their positive role in society. Many individual become radical because of their close affiliation with their friends, family member or relatives, who were already involved in such activities. Secondly, at societal level there is need to provide enough economic opportunities, jobs, basic faculties of life and justice to discourage such sentiments against society and State.

Besides this, in Pakistan, social and economic factors like poverty, injustice and unemployment are main causes behind the escalation of radicalization. The government and policy makers should address these issues on priority basis to discourage radical elements of the society. Moreover, in the era of globalization, media can play crucial role to discourage radical groups of the society. Rather than just focusing on the coverage of violent incidents, media should highlight the dangerous consequences of radicalization on life of the individuals and society as a whole. In this way media can impede and avert the radical intentions of the general public.

Furthermore, government should introduce structural reforms to strengthen institutions and to bring stability in the economy. Strong institutional setup ensures improvement in the well-being of the general public through justice, progress and provision of equal opportunities to every segment of the society alongwith increasing the efficiencies, competencies and capacity building of the institutions by eliminating the phenomenon of radicalization. It is very important to understand that Pakistani society cannot deal with this challenge without the active role of governments. Radicalization is a process and it may take time to de-radicalize our society. People may leave different extremist groups and organizations but they may not cut-off their extremist beliefs. Therefore, there is need to educate people about their positive role to bring peace and stability in society.

The human development approach emphasizes on the importance of education, law and order and democracy along with considering income level in the economy. The government of Pakistan should strengthen and practiced democracy in its true sense. Similarly, rather than just focusing on income level in the economy it would be preferable to consider development indicators like education, health facilities, governance and institutional quality while formulating macro-economic policies.

NOTES

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