



YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN PAKISTAN

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14th July, 2022

Sequence of Presentation

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Youth Radicalization in Pakistan

Introduction

- Pakistan is considered the 5th largest young country in the world
- Around 63% of Pakistan's population comprises youth between 15 and 33 years¹.
- The youth bulge is projected to continue at least for next 3 decades
- This can either be an asset or a liability depending on how effectively this segment is integrated in the society
- The youth is the most important demographic group in Pakistan, and also the most impressionable

Introduction

- Pakistan has been facing serious domestic religious extremism challenges
- More than 47,000 lives have been lost in terrorism related violence in Pakistan over the past decade or so
- One of its major subsidiaries has been “radicalization”
- The country possesses a combination of diverse but tolerant cultures and religious ethos which have been severely damaged by menaces of radicalization, religious extremism and terrorism
- As a society and state, Pakistan is being engulfed by yet another threat, which is growing radicalization in the educated youth of Pakistan

Introduction

- Youth belonging to affluent families, educated in elite institutions of Pakistan are being increasingly radicalized
- Radicalization of educated youth is dangerous because militants with higher education are better positioned to plan sophisticated attacks and infiltrate elite Government and military circles
- They also facilitate increased connections between Pakistan based groups and transnational jihadist groups
- Deprived and confused youth, especially those who cannot find answers to their problems, are most vulnerable to extremist propaganda

Background of Radicalization

- Pakistani society was mainly radicalized during “Afghan Jihad” against Soviet invasion in the 1980s and 1990s
- The youth of Pakistan was one of the Prime victims of “Radicalization”
- Intolerance and extremism as side effects of this radicalization of Pakistani society affected the youth from all strata of social classes and economic background equally, especially the educated youth
- Consequently the perpetrators of terrorism have been successful in using the educated youth of Pakistan for their own irrational objectives

Background of Radicalization

- Example:

Pakistan had to put up a fight against considerably large groups of educated terrorists like “Jammat-ul-Ahrar and Ansar al-sharia Pakistan (ASP) who were not only educated and politically motivated but also equipped with technology which made job of Pakistan’s law enforcement agencies even harder

Factors Behind Educated Youth Radicalization

- Youth radicalization in Pakistan can be understood as the product of an exclusively Islamic identity
- This means that at a majority of youth (92%) identify primarily through their religion over nationality, combined with a broader reactive movement comprised of militant, political and missionary organizations
- Pakistan's educational system has evolved into a fairly rigidly stratified one
- The three school systems provide distinct type of environments/ teaching experience and are as follows:
 - i. Elite Private Schools
 - ii. Public Schools
 - iii. Deeni Madaris (religious seminaries)

Factors Behind Educated Youth Radicalization

- These diverse mindsets among students of the respective school systems imply the potential for polarization among them
- Education system of Pakistan which is stratified along socio-economic lines is contributing to increasing trend of radicalization among educated youth
- Components like socio-economic deprivation, alienation, poverty and motivation to drive occupying forces out of one's country, are a few root causes of extremism and terrorism
- Moreover, the current trend of increased radicalization in educated youth in Pakistan has much to do with extremist narrative

Factors Behind Educated Youth Radicalization

- This is based on certain religious and political beliefs that shape an individual's convictions and motivates them to become radicalized and ultimately resort to violence
- Youth absorb radical ideas because they become part of Popular Culture without necessarily understanding their underlying message
- This is also due to the fact that alternative discourses are not available
- The lack of alternative narratives and world views coupled with distorted historical curriculum that glorifies militant jihad and limited employment opportunities push youth towards radicalization in Pakistan

Factors Behind Educated Youth Radicalization

- Moreover, trends driving youth radicalization at campuses such as university-based student cells of militant organizations have contributed to youth spill over into violent extremism
- In the absence of youth specific strategies in Pakistan's Counter Terrorism and extremism framework, educated youth radicalization is likely to continue

Recommendations

- Counter radicalization stands for countering the narrative of those elements that are spreading radicalization
- Confronting youth radicalization in Pakistan requires a holistic approach, which in addition to police actions against militant organizations, also supports political, social and educational alternatives to this narrow Islamic identity
- Only a comprehensive approach can empower the groups espousing violence in the name of reactive Islamic identity

Recommendations

- Some recommendations in this regard should include:-
 1. It is imperative for Pakistan policy makers to come up with a strong, unbiased and moderate 'national narrative' that is unanimously agreed upon by all segments of Pakistani society
 2. Strengthen civil society initiatives to reform the education curriculum, and engage large media house executives to support programming that covers inter-faith and inter-sectarian harmony, tolerance, and diversity within the religious framework

Additionally, support similar initiatives in social media, which is the single most important source of information for the youth

Recommendations

3. Encourage the celebration of local cultural diversity and establish centers to ensure youth participation in cultural activities, social clubs and professional and sports organizations
 - Currently most public schools, colleges and universities are bereft of student unions, student clubs and extra-curricular activities
 - Art councils supporting literature, arts and music currently exist only in large cities, and should be strengthened and expanded
 - Youth centers for low-income communities and extracurricular activities for public educational institutions can be supported by nongovernmental organizations, private institutions and education leaders, combining cultural activities and vocational skills

Recommendations

4. Promote greater inter-provincial, inter-national and inter-religious interaction among the youth
 - Support civil society and inter-college youth-led initiatives through student clubs that use inexpensive technology for regular interactive discussion among the youth of different provinces, sects, religions and nationalities
 - Additionally, engage universities and colleges to initiate courses on peace and conflict resolution while also bringing together youth for interactive workshops

Recommendations

5. Learning from International best practices would be extremely beneficial for Pakistan, which will help in improving Pakistan's image internationally

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- The Government of Pakistan has taken a number of steps to counter the radicalization experienced by young Pakistanis
- In the **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province**, multiple programs are being carried out in order to curb youth radicalization
- One such endeavor is a capacity building program that has 6 components
- The first component tackles skill development in educational institutes, while the second tackles skill development in madrassas, which are religious institutes in Pakistan

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- It also includes a drug awareness program, a career counseling program, and an awareness program for young women
- There is also a talent hunt program, which includes a national youth exposure program and an international youth exposure program
- There are also annual youth cultural galas, art exhibitions, adventure tourism programs and education expos held to encourage the young to pursue skill developing activities that further their cognitive abilities
- This in turn helps reduce the number of young people sitting idle and lowers their vulnerability to being radicalized

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- **The Government of Punjab** is following a similar pattern of programs to curb youth radicalization in the province
- An online Rozgaar Training Program has been established to create youth employment and generate self-employment, specifically for women
- PKR 1,463 million have been allocated for carrying out this project this year
- Youth centres have also been established that not only provide educational, legal and career counselling to young people but also monitor media and evaluate whether any online radicalization activity is ongoing

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- **The Government of Sindh** has commenced a youth e-commerce entrepreneur programme to promote self-employment and reduce youth unemployment
- A youth skill development programme has also been initiated to improve socio economic conditions of the youth
- This program will equip the youth with necessary technical skills in order to increase the opportunities available to them
- The YOUCAN Programme has been launched to achieve the SDG target 4.4 which is to increase the number of youth with relevant skills for employment

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- Such programs are intended to encourage skill development and also improve the livelihood of young people whose families depend on them for survival
- A human resource development board has been developed which has provided 103,510 young trainees with employment in their relevant sectors such as health, banking, education and aviation
- These trainees are provided courses in various employable sectors, such as culinary arts, paramedics, beauticians, fashion design, and construction

Steps Taken by the Government of Pakistan to Counter Youth Radicalization

- **The Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir** has conducted 3 inter-provincial youth exchange programs in order to improve the opportunities available to the youth of Azad Jammu and Kashmir
- Work is being done to provide sports facilities and equipment to students in order to improve their mental and physical health
- Youth hostels are also being developed to make it easier for students to avail educational and professional opportunities which are sometimes made difficult due to the great distances that need to be travelled in this mountainous region

Conclusion

- The future of Pakistan and its future generations depend on confronting the monsters of 'Extremism' and 'Radicalism' that are increasingly demonizing the youth, especially the educated lot
- The presence of stratified education system coupled with absence of a coherent, cohesive and progressive national narrative is one of the main reasons for growing radicalization in educated youth of Pakistan
- There's a need to come up with a national narrative, and also create an environment of open conversations on issues considered taboo in Pakistan
- Alternative narratives promoting pluralism, inclusivity and diversity, presenting a moderate outlook of Islam should be promoted

Conclusion

- The 2018 launch of Counter-extremist narrative 'Paigham-e-Pakistan' endorsed by more than 1800 religious scholars is an encouraging step
- However, there is a need to work on its operational strategy to ensure its implementation throughout the country
- Tackling the issue of growing radicalization amongst educated Pakistani youth is going to be an uphill task, requiring utmost dedication, will and unrelenting resolve, not just by the Government, State institutions but by each segment and individual of Pakistani society
- If executed correctly, the Pakistani state will be able to successfully tackle this menace of growing radicalization in Pakistan

THANK YOU