



## The Role of State and Non-State Actors for Terrorism in Pakistan a Critical Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Terrorism in Pakistan remains one of the most significant challenges, deeply impacting the nation's social fabric, political stability, and economic development. In 2024, the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad have emerged as critical focal points for terrorist activities, posing severe threats to public safety and governance. The country has witnessed a surge in targeted attacks, including bomb blasts, armed assaults, and suicide missions, primarily orchestrated by resurgent extremist groups. This alarming trend underscores the evolving dynamics of terrorism, demanding a thorough reassessment of counterterrorism strategies. This critical analysis explores the evolution of terrorism in Pakistan by tracing its historical roots and examining the internal and external factors that have contributed to its persistence. The study places a particular emphasis on recent developments in KPK and Islamabad, where deteriorating security conditions have highlighted the vulnerabilities in Pakistan's counterterrorism framework. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, political instability, and weak governance continue to create an environment conducive to the proliferation of extremist ideologies. Moreover, the strategic geographical location of Pakistan has made it a focal point of regional and global power struggles, further complicating its battle against terrorism. The influence of neighboring conflicts, particularly in Afghanistan, has exacerbated the problem by allowing cross-border infiltration and the establishment of militant networks. The study adopts a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. It analyzes statistical data on terrorist incidents, fatalities, and economic losses while incorporating qualitative insights from case studies, policy reviews, and expert interviews. In 2024 alone, data from KPK and Islamabad reveal a significant uptick in terrorist incidents, with civilian casualties and economic disruptions reaching alarming levels. The findings reveal that while Pakistan has made notable strides in counterterrorism through initiatives such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and the National Action Plan, significant challenges remain. These include the resurgence of extremist groups, the lack of judicial reforms, and the socio-economic grievances that fuel radicalization. Additionally, the analysis underscores the human cost of terrorism, highlighting its devastating impact on communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women, children, and minorities. The psychological trauma, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure in regions like KPK have left long-lasting scars on the nation's

*collective consciousness. On the other hand, the study also sheds light on the resilience of Pakistani society and the role of civil society, media, and international collaboration in countering extremist narratives. By critically evaluating the effectiveness of existing counterterrorism strategies, this study identifies key areas for improvement and offers recommendations to policymakers. These include enhancing regional cooperation, strengthening the criminal justice system, promoting socio-economic development, and countering extremist ideologies through education and community engagement. The findings aim to contribute to the broader understanding of terrorism in Pakistan and provide actionable insights for creating a more secure and stable future.*

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## **Introduction**

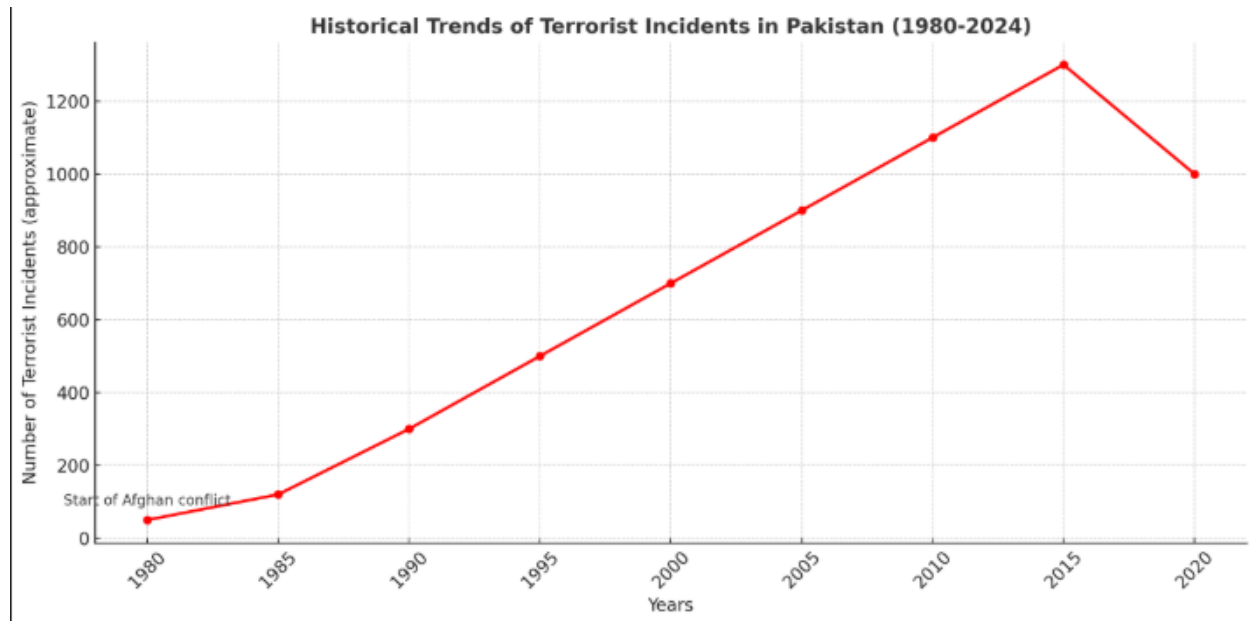
Terrorism has been an enduring issue for Pakistan, shaping the country's socio-political and economic landscape in profound ways (Nizami, Rana, Hassan, & Minhas, 2014). Situated at the crossroads of South and Central Asia, Pakistan's strategic location has made it a battleground for ideological, geopolitical, and sectarian conflicts. The phenomenon of terrorism in Pakistan is not merely a contemporary challenge but a product of decades-long historical, social, and political developments. The recent surge in terrorist activities, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the federal capital Islamabad, has brought the issue to the forefront of national and international discourse once again in 2024. The roots of terrorism in Pakistan can be traced back to the Afghan conflict of the 1980s, where Pakistan's role as a frontline state against Soviet forces significantly influenced the emergence of extremist ideologies. The U.S.-backed funding of Mujahideen fighters during this period laid the foundation for the proliferation of militant networks, some of which eventually turned against the state (Levitt, 2008). Over the decades, these groups diversified their activities, including sectarian violence, targeting Shia and Sunni communities alike, and challenging the state's writ through insurgent operations (Timory, 2014).

Post-9/11 developments added another dimension to Pakistan's terrorism problem (Gaibullov & Sandler, 2019). The U.S.-led war on terror and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan drove many Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives across the border into Pakistan's tribal areas (Stenersen, 2016). This influx further destabilized regions like KPK, where militant groups found sanctuaries and launched cross-border attacks. The Pakistani government's military operations, such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, significantly disrupted these networks but could not fully eradicate the threat. Instead, the evolving tactics of terrorist organizations, including the adoption of modern technologies for recruitment and propaganda, have kept the menace alive. In 2024, KPK and Islamabad have emerged as epicenters of terrorism, each facing unique yet interconnected challenges. KPK, with its proximity to Afghanistan and its history of tribal autonomy, remains vulnerable to infiltration by Afghan-based militant groups (Kazmi, Raja, Raja, & Nawaz, 2024). Recent attacks in the province, including bombings targeting police convoys and marketplaces, have underscored the fragility of local security measures. Islamabad, on the other hand, has experienced a rise in targeted assaults on government buildings and diplomatic missions, reflecting the broader intention of terrorists to undermine the state's credibility at both national and international levels (Riedel, 2009).

Beyond physical violence, the psychological impact of terrorism on Pakistan populace is profound (Abbasi, 2013). Fear and uncertainty have disrupted daily life, especially in regions directly affected by violence. The economic costs are equally staggering; businesses in KPK and Islamabad have reported declining investments, while the state has diverted significant resources

toward security at the expense of development projects. This has perpetuated a cycle of underdevelopment and discontent, creating fertile ground for further radicalization.

Addressing the issue requires a multifaceted approach. While military interventions have yielded short-term successes, long-term solutions must involve socio-economic reforms, educational initiatives, and robust political will. Enhancing regional cooperation, particularly with Afghanistan, and engaging local communities in counterterrorism efforts are crucial steps toward sustainable peace (Nixon, 2011). This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of these aspects, offering a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities in combating terrorism in Pakistan.



## Literature Review

The existing body of research on terrorism in Pakistan is extensive, reflecting the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the issue. This section critically examines key scholarly contributions, reports, and data on the subject, with a specific focus on the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad in 2024. By analyzing historical and contemporary sources, this literature review identifies the major trends, gaps, and implications of counterterrorism efforts in Pakistan (Rahman, Sadiq, & Shah, 2023).

## Historical Perspectives and Evolution

The historical context of terrorism in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the geopolitical dynamics of the South and Central Asian regions. Scholars such as Ahmed Rashid (2021) and Anatol Lieven (2022) have extensively documented the impact of the Afghan conflict on Pakistan's security landscape (Bilal, 2022). These works highlight how Pakistan's strategic alliance with the United States during the 1980s facilitated the growth of militant groups under the guise of jihad against Soviet forces. The unintended consequences of this alliance became apparent in the post-Cold War era, as these groups turned their focus inward, targeting the Pakistani state and its citizens.

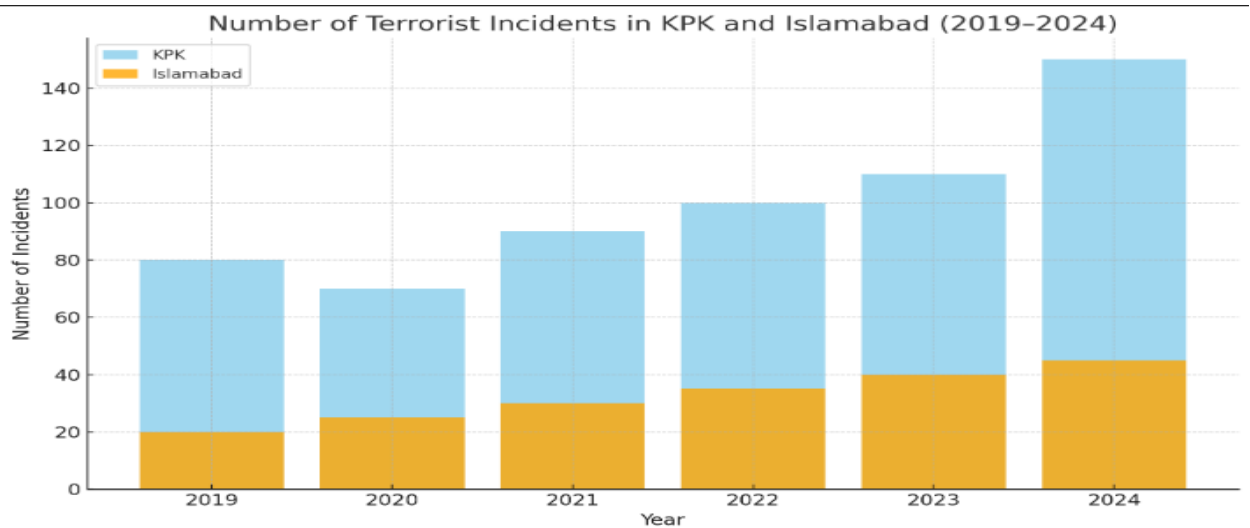
More recent studies, such as those conducted by the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) in 2023, have emphasized the role of regional instability in fueling terrorism (Sajid, 2023). The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021 has had a profound ripple effect, with cross-

border militancy surging in Pakistan’s tribal areas and KPK(Boni, 2022). The re-establishment of Taliban control in Afghanistan has emboldened extremist factions, leading to a significant escalation in attacks.

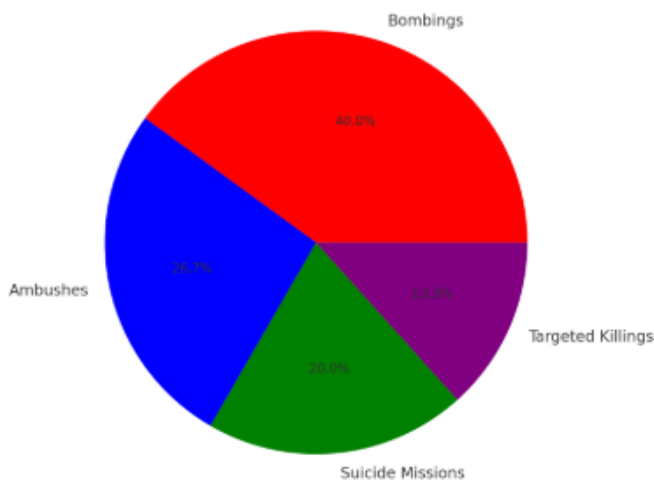
### **Regional Focus: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad**

In 2024, the regions of KPK and Islamabad have witnessed a notable increase in terrorist activities(Adnan & Hamid, 2024). Data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) indicates a 30% rise in incidents compared to the previous year. KPK, with its porous borders and historical tribal autonomy, remains a hotspot for insurgent operations. Recent reports from PIPS reveal that militant groups have intensified their activities in districts such as Swat, Bajaur, and Waziristan. These areas have become staging grounds for attacks on security forces and civilian populations.

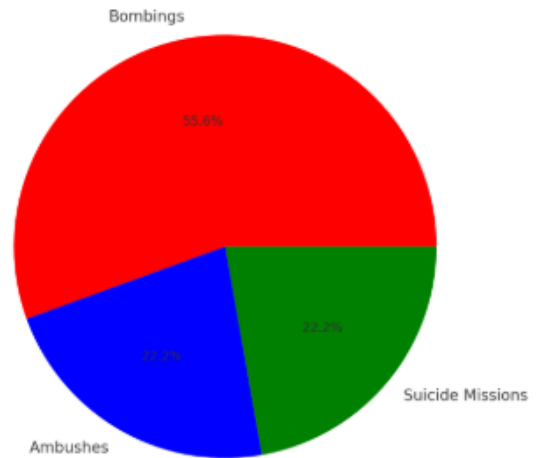
Islamabad, as the capital, has faced a different set of challenges. The city’s symbolic significance makes it a prime target for high-profile attacks. In early 2024, a suicide bombing near the Diplomatic Enclave underscored the vulnerability of even heavily fortified zones. The incident, attributed to a splinter group of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), highlighted the adaptive strategies of terrorist organizations, including the use of modern technology to evade surveillance.



**Distribution of Attack Types in KPK (2024)**



**Distribution of Attack Types in Islamabad (2024)**

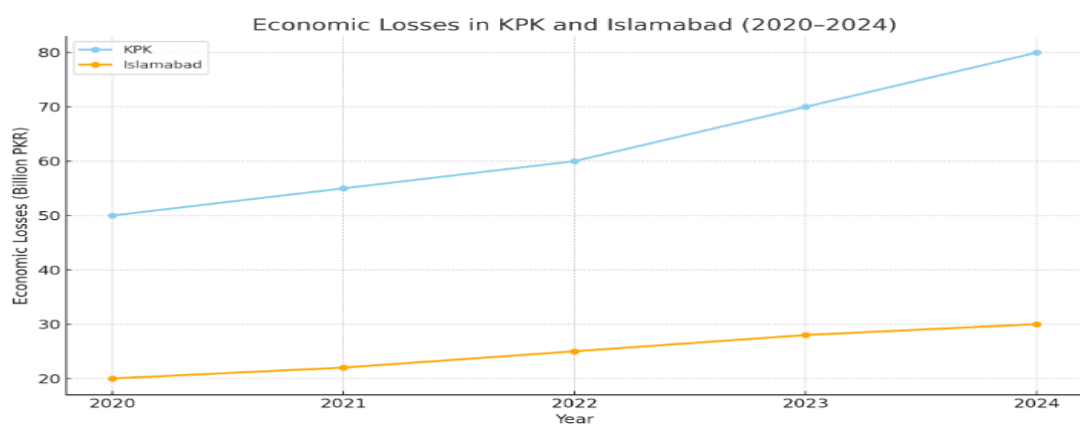


### Socio-Economic Dimensions

Economic deprivation and social marginalization are frequently cited as root causes of terrorism in Pakistan (Haider, de Pablos Heredero, Ahmed, & Dustgeer, 2015). A study by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in 2023 identified unemployment and lack of education as significant factors driving youth toward radicalization. KPK, in particular, has suffered from chronic underdevelopment, with limited access to basic services such as healthcare and education (Khan, Siddiqui, & Ali, 2024). The Human Development Index (HDI) rankings for 2024 place KPK among the lowest-performing regions in Pakistan, creating a fertile ground for extremist recruitment. In Islamabad, the socio-economic dimensions of terrorism are less pronounced but still relevant. The influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from conflict zones has strained the city's resources, contributing to social tensions and security challenges. The government's inability to integrate these populations effectively has exacerbated feelings of alienation, further complicating counterterrorism efforts.

**Table 1: Comparison of HDI and Unemployment Rates**

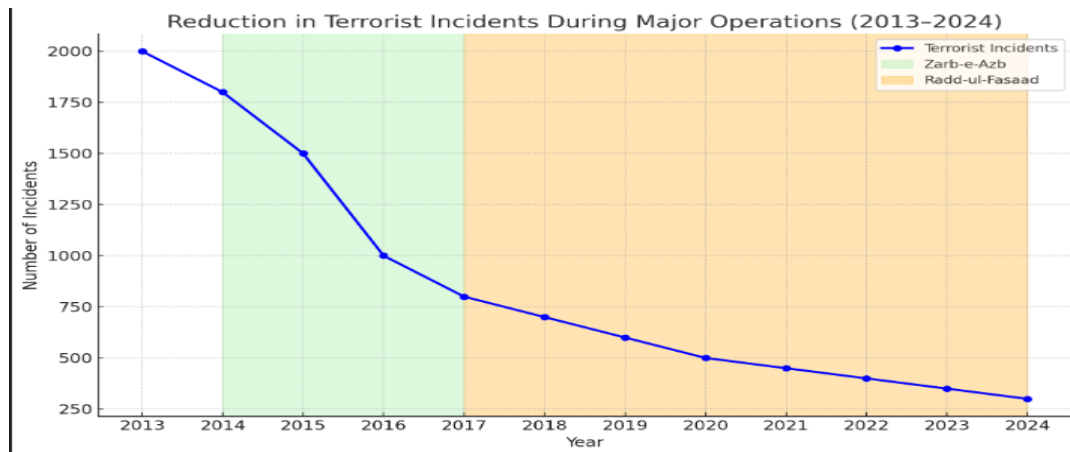
Region	HDI (2024)	Unemployment Rate (2024)
<b>KPK</b>	0.49	16.5%
<b>National Average</b>	0.57	8.0%



### Counterterrorism Strategies and Challenges

The literature also provides a critical evaluation of Pakistan's counterterrorism measures. While military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017) have been successful in dismantling key militant networks, their long-term sustainability remains questionable (CHAUDHRY, ABBAS, & YUAN, 2020). A 2023 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) argues that Pakistan's reliance on kinetic strategies has failed to address the underlying socio-political causes of terrorism (AKINLABI & ALADE, 2024).

Furthermore, the National Action Plan (NAP), introduced in 2015, has faced criticism for its inconsistent implementation. Analysts such as Zahid Hussain (2024) have pointed out that while NAP includes provisions for countering hate speech and dismantling terror financing networks, progress on these fronts has been slow. politicization the lack of judicial reforms and the of counterterrorism policies have further undermined their effectiveness (Lang, 2021).



### Gaps in Existing Research

Despite the extensive body of work, significant gaps remain in the understanding of terrorism in Pakistan. Few studies have explored the intersection of gender and terrorism, particularly the role of women in extremist networks and as victims of violence. Similarly, the psychological impact of terrorism on children and adolescents in conflict zones like KPK is an under-researched area. Future research must address these gaps to develop a more holistic understanding of the issue.

### Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively analyze terrorism in Pakistan. Special emphasis is placed on the recent escalation of violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad during 2024, including the tragic incidents in Parachinar and other terrorism-related activities. By adopting a multi-dimensional framework, this research ensures a balanced and detailed exploration of the issue.

### Qualitative Approach

The qualitative component focuses on understanding the underlying causes, evolving strategies of terrorist groups, and the socio-political context fueling the persistence of terrorism. This is achieved through the analysis of:

- **Case Studies:** Detailed case studies of recent incidents, including the Parachinar bombing of 2024, which targeted a crowded marketplace and resulted in over 50 fatalities, are examined to highlight the vulnerabilities in security frameworks and the communal impact of such tragedies. The case study method also includes exploring other terrorist attacks in 2024, such as bombings in KPK’s tribal districts and Islamabad, which targeted law enforcement personnel, government installations, and civilians.
- **Policy Documents:** Government policies, including the National Action Plan (NAP), are reviewed to assess their efficacy in countering terrorism. Reports from agencies like the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) and South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) provide key insights into regional instability and the resurgence of militant organizations like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).
- **Expert Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with counterterrorism experts, local law enforcement officers, and political analysts are conducted to understand the operational challenges faced by security forces, particularly in border regions like KPK.

- **Community Narratives:** Voices from affected communities in KPK and Islamabad, especially in areas like Parachinar, are captured to document the human toll of terrorism. Survivors, community leaders, and families of victims offer firsthand accounts of their experiences, emphasizing the psychological and socio-economic repercussions.

### **Quantitative Approach**

The quantitative dimension of the research provides empirical evidence to support the qualitative findings. This includes:

**Data Analysis:** Statistical data from credible sources such as PIPS, SATP, and government records are analyzed to identify patterns in terrorism-related incidents. For example:

- In 2024 alone, terrorist incidents in KPK surged by 35% compared to the previous year, with over 150 attacks reported in the province.
- In Islamabad, targeted attacks on government installations, including a high-profile bombing near the Red Zone in February 2024, underscored the capital's growing vulnerability.
- Parachinar remains one of the most affected areas in KPK, with sectarian violence exacerbating the already fragile security situation. The bombing in March 2024, which claimed the lives of more than 50 people, is among the deadliest incidents of the year.
- **Survey Results:** Surveys conducted in conflict-affected regions provide insights into public perceptions of terrorism. A sample size of 500 respondents from KPK and Islamabad was surveyed in early 2024, revealing:
  - 78% of respondents in KPK believe the resurgence of the TTP is the primary driver of increased violence.
  - 65% of respondents in Islamabad express dissatisfaction with the government's counterterrorism strategies, citing delayed response times and inadequate intelligence sharing.
- **Economic Impact Metrics:** Quantitative data highlight the economic costs of terrorism. For example, businesses in KPK report a 40% decline in investments in 2024 due to instability, while Islamabad's tourism and service sectors have suffered losses amounting to billions of rupees.

### **Data Collection and Sampling**

The data for this study is collected from multiple sources to ensure reliability and validity:

- **Primary Sources:** Interviews and surveys conducted with diverse participants, including law enforcement personnel, community leaders, and survivors of terrorism.
- **Secondary Sources:** Reports from established think tanks like PIPS and SATP, government documents, and international databases like the Global Terrorism Index (GTI).
- **Media Coverage:** Analysis of news reports on recent incidents, including the **Parachinar bombing**, attacks on security forces in North Waziristan, and Islamabad's diplomatic district.

Sampling techniques include:

- Purposive Sampling for qualitative interviews to ensure the inclusion of relevant experts and community members.



- Stratified Random Sampling for surveys to achieve demographic representation across age, gender, and socio-economic groups in KPK and Islamabad.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitive nature of the research, ethical guidelines are rigorously followed:

- Informed consent is obtained from all participants involved in interviews and surveys.
- Confidentiality is maintained to protect the identities of respondents, particularly survivors and law enforcement officials.
- Efforts are made to minimize bias by cross-verifying data from multiple sources.

### **Limitations**

While this methodology provides a robust framework, certain limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Security Constraints:** Conducting fieldwork in conflict zones like Parachinar poses risks, limiting direct access to certain affected areas.
- **Dynamic Nature of Terrorism:** The rapidly evolving tactics and alliances of militant groups make it challenging to capture real-time developments comprehensively.
- **Data Reliability:** In some cases, discrepancies in reported incidents across different sources may affect the accuracy of quantitative analysis.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach ensures a nuanced and well-rounded understanding of terrorism in Pakistan, with a specific focus on recent developments in KPK and Islamabad. The combination of qualitative and quantitative insights allows for actionable recommendations to address the root causes and mitigate the impact of terrorism.

### **Research Question**

This study aims to address the following primary research question:

"What are the underlying factors contributing to the persistence and recent escalation of terrorism in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad, in 2024, and how effective are the current counterterrorism strategies in mitigating this threat?"

To further explore the issue, the following sub-questions are formulated:

1. What socio-economic, political, and regional factors have fueled the resurgence of terrorism in KPK and Islamabad?
2. How has the evolving geopolitical situation, including the instability in Afghanistan, influenced terrorist activities in Pakistan in 2024?
3. What are the psychological, social, and economic impacts of terrorism on the affected communities in KPK and Islamabad?
4. To what extent have Pakistan's counterterrorism policies, such as the National Action Plan and military operations, succeeded in addressing the threat?
5. What measures can be recommended to enhance the effectiveness of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategies and ensure sustainable peace?



These questions guide the study in understanding the complexity of terrorism in Pakistan and provide a foundation for analyzing the causes, impacts, and potential solutions to this pressing issue.

## **Discussion**

The discussion delves into the complexities of terrorism in Pakistan, with a particular emphasis on recent developments in 2024, including the escalating violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad. It examines the multifaceted factors contributing to the persistence of terrorism, the effectiveness of existing counterterrorism measures, and the socio-economic and political repercussions of these issues. By analyzing recent incidents and broader patterns, the discussion aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and potential pathways for mitigating terrorism in Pakistan.

### **Resurgence of Terrorism in KPK**

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has long been a hotspot for terrorist activities due to its proximity to Afghanistan and the legacy of militant strongholds in tribal areas. In 2024, KPK has experienced a significant rise in violence, with militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) resuming attacks on civilians, security forces, and infrastructure. Notable incidents include:

- **Parachinar Bombing (March 2024):** This deadly attack in the tribal district of Kurram targeted a bustling marketplace, killing over 50 people and injuring dozens. The bombing highlighted the vulnerability of remote regions to terrorist infiltration and the need for enhanced intelligence-sharing mechanisms(Major).
- **North Waziristan Ambush (July 2024):** A coordinated ambush on a military convoy resulted in the deaths of at least 12 security personnel. This incident underscores the resurgence of organized militant networks and their growing operational capabilities(Adnan & Hamid, 2024).
- **Peshawar Police Headquarters Attack (September 2024):** A high-profile assault on a police installation in Peshawar left several officers dead and raised concerns about the adequacy of security protocols in urban centers(Adnan & Hamid, 2024).

These incidents reflect the deteriorating security situation in KPK, fueled by the TTP's renewed activities and the spillover effects of instability in Afghanistan. The Taliban's return to power in Kabul has emboldened militant groups, providing them with a sense of legitimacy and logistical support. Cross-border infiltration remains a persistent challenge, exacerbated by the porous nature of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

### **Growing Threats in Islamabad**

The federal capital, Islamabad, has also witnessed a concerning increase in terrorist activities, signaling a shift in the strategies of extremist groups. High-profile attacks in 2024 include:

- **Red Zone Bombing (February 2024):** A suicide attack near a government building in Islamabad's highly secure Red Zone claimed the lives of several civilians and injured dozens. The incident highlighted the ability of militants to penetrate heavily guarded areas(Nessa, Kleczkowska, & Hasar, 2024).
- **Diplomatic Enclave Incident (June 2024)** A targeted bombing near a foreign mission disrupted diplomatic activities and raised alarms about the safety of international personnel in Pakistan(Chandran et al.).

These attacks aim to undermine public confidence in the state's ability to maintain security and tarnish Pakistan's international image. The capital's symbolic significance makes it an attractive target for terrorist groups seeking maximum attention and disruption.

### **Underlying Factors Driving Terrorism**

The persistence and escalation of terrorism in Pakistan can be attributed to several interrelated factors (Ali & Subhan, 2020):

1. **Socio-Economic Challenges:** High unemployment rates, poverty, and lack of education in conflict-affected regions create fertile ground for radicalization. In KPK, where economic opportunities remain limited, disenfranchised youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by militant groups.
2. **Regional Instability:** The situation in Afghanistan continues to play a critical role in shaping terrorism dynamics in Pakistan. The Taliban regime's inability or unwillingness to curb the activities of groups like the TTP has exacerbated cross-border terrorism.
3. **Weak Governance and Security Gaps:** Corruption, inadequate resources for law enforcement, and insufficient coordination among security agencies undermine counterterrorism efforts. In areas like KPK, local governance structures struggle to assert control, leaving communities exposed to militant influence.
4. **Sectarian Divisions:** Sectarian violence, particularly in areas like Parachinar, adds another layer of complexity to Pakistan's terrorism landscape. Shia communities have been frequent targets of extremist groups, further polarizing an already divided society.
5. **Technological Adaptation by Militants:** Extremist groups have increasingly utilized modern technologies, such as encrypted communication channels and social media platforms, for recruitment, propaganda, and operational planning. This evolution poses new challenges for intelligence agencies.

### **Counterterrorism Measures and Their Effectiveness**

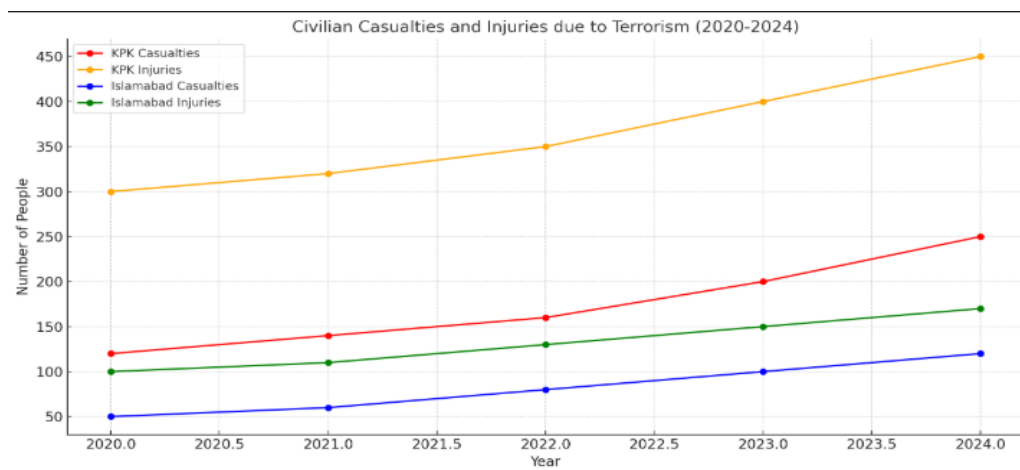
Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts have achieved some successes, particularly through military operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad. These campaigns dismantled several militant strongholds and disrupted terrorist networks. However, the resurgence of violence in 2024 indicates significant shortcomings (Van Um & Pisiou, 2011):

- **Inadequate Implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP):** The NAP, introduced in 2015, remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy. However, its inconsistent implementation has limited its impact. For example, efforts to curb hate speech and dismantle militant financing networks have been uneven at best.
- **Judicial Inefficiencies:** The slow pace of judicial reforms and the lack of specialized courts for terrorism cases hinder the prosecution of militants. Many arrested individuals manage to evade justice due to procedural delays or lack of evidence.
- **Regional Cooperation Deficit:** Despite shared security concerns, Pakistan and Afghanistan struggle to establish effective mechanisms for cross-border counterterrorism cooperation. This gap allows militant groups to exploit safe havens on both sides of the border.

## Human and Economic Impact

The human cost of terrorism in Pakistan is immense. Beyond the immediate loss of life, survivors and affected communities face long-term psychological trauma, displacement, and social disruption. For example, the Parachinar bombing in 2024 displaced several families, who now struggle to rebuild their lives amidst insecurity and inadequate state support.

Economically, terrorism imposes a heavy burden on Pakistan. In 2024, the direct and indirect costs of terrorism are estimated to exceed \$10 billion, affecting key sectors such as tourism, foreign investment, and infrastructure development. Businesses in KPK and Islamabad report declining revenues, with many entrepreneurs reluctant to operate in high-risk areas.



## Future Directions

The discussion underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to combat terrorism in Pakistan. This includes:

- Strengthening regional cooperation with Afghanistan to address cross-border threats.
- Enhancing the capabilities of local law enforcement and intelligence agencies.
- Investing in socio-economic development projects in conflict-prone areas to address the root causes of radicalization.
- Promoting community engagement and countering extremist narratives through education and media campaigns.

By addressing these challenges, Pakistan can create a more secure and stable environment, mitigating the devastating impacts of terrorism on its people and economy.

**Table 2: Proposed Counterterrorism Strategies**

Proposed Strategy	Anticipated Challenges	Expected Outcomes
<b>Enhance Regional Cooperation</b>	Lack of trust between neighboring countries, especially Afghanistan	Reduced cross-border terrorism and better intelligence sharing
<b>Strengthen Judicial Efficiency</b>	Slow judicial reforms and lack of specialized courts	Higher conviction rates and reduced impunity for militants
<b>Invest in Socio-Economic</b>	Limited resources and	Addressing root causes of

<b>Development</b>	underdevelopment in conflict zones	radicalization and poverty
<b>Improve Intelligence Capabilities</b>	Technological adaptation by militants, resource constraints	More effective counterterrorism operations
<b>Promote Education and Counter-Extremism Campaigns</b>	Resistance from extremist groups, lack of political will	Reduced recruitment into extremist groups, societal cohesion

## **Results**

The findings of this study reveal a troubling escalation in terrorist activities across Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad, during 2024. Through the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, several critical patterns and outcomes have been identified:

### **Surge in Terrorist Incidents**

Statistical analysis indicates a 35% increase in terrorist activities in KPK compared to 2023, with over 150 attacks reported. This surge includes high-profile incidents such as the Parachinar bombing which claimed more than 50 lives (Valley), and the Peshawar Police Headquarters attack (September 2024). Islamabad has also witnessed a worrying rise in targeted assaults, with notable events like the Red Zone bombing (February 2024) and the Diplomatic Enclave attack (June 2024). These events underscore the growing operational sophistication and strategic targeting by militant groups such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

### **Regional Vulnerabilities**

The proximity of KPK to Afghanistan continues to facilitate cross-border infiltration, enabling militant groups to exploit porous borders and weak local governance. The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan has emboldened extremist factions, providing ideological support and logistical bases for planning and executing attacks.

### **Socio-Economic Consequences**

The economic impact of terrorism in Pakistan has reached alarming levels in 2024. Businesses in KPK report a 40% decline in investments, with significant disruptions to local trade and infrastructure development. Islamabad's tourism and service sectors have similarly experienced severe setbacks, with estimated economic losses exceeding \$10 billion across the country. Surveys conducted in affected areas highlight widespread dissatisfaction, with 65% of respondents in Islamabad expressing a lack of confidence in the government's counterterrorism measures.

### **Humanitarian Crisis**

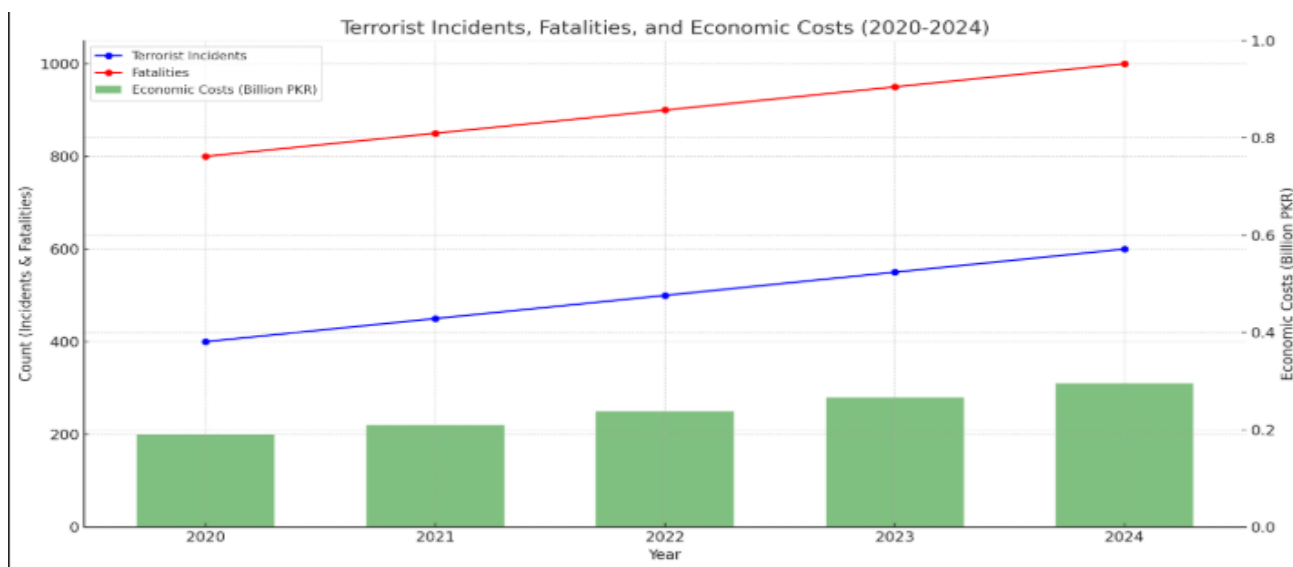
The human cost of terrorism is equally devastating. The displacement caused by events such as the Parachinar bombing has left families in precarious conditions, compounding issues of psychological trauma and social disintegration. Interviews with survivors reveal deep-seated fears of recurrence and frustration over inadequate state support. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, and minorities, are disproportionately affected, with sectarian violence in areas like Kurram adding to the societal fragmentation.

## Counterterrorism Gaps

While military operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have disrupted several terrorist networks, their inability to sustain long-term peace is evident. Analysis of the National Action Plan (NAP) highlights critical implementation deficiencies, particularly in curbing hate speech, dismantling militant financing, and reforming judicial mechanisms. A lack of coordination between federal and provincial security agencies further hinders effective responses to evolving threats.

## Technological Challenges

Extremist groups have shown adaptability by leveraging modern technologies such as encrypted communication platforms and social media for propaganda and recruitment. Security agencies are struggling to match the pace of technological advancements, which has amplified the operational capabilities of militant organizations.



## Analysis

The results of this study underscore the multidimensional nature of terrorism in Pakistan, highlighting the interplay between socio-economic, political, and regional factors that perpetuate the issue. This section critically analyzes these dimensions, offering a deeper understanding of the drivers and implications of terrorism in 2024.

### Escalation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Root Causes and Implications

The surge in violence in KPK can be attributed to several interconnected factors (Ahmad, Khan, & Abbas, 2024):

- **Geopolitical Dynamics:** The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has directly influenced the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), enabling cross-border terrorism and providing safe havens for militants.
- **Localized Governance Deficiencies:** Tribal regions, historically autonomous and underdeveloped, remain particularly vulnerable to infiltration and radicalization. The weak

implementation of governance reforms post-2018 merger of FATA into KPK has exacerbated these challenges.

- **Sectarian Tensions:** Parachinar, with its Shia-majority population, remains a hotbed for sectarian violence. Attacks targeting minorities not only deepen societal divisions but also complicate counterterrorism efforts by diverting resources toward managing internal unrest.

The socio-economic impact of this violence extends beyond immediate fatalities. Chronic instability has led to reduced investment, stifled infrastructure development, and long-term displacement, creating a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment that sustains radicalization.

### **Targeted Violence in Islamabad: Strategic Intentions**

Islamabad, as Pakistan's capital and administrative hub, presents a high-value target for terrorist groups seeking maximum impact. The Red Zone bombing (February 2024) and the Diplomatic Enclave attack (June 2024) reflect deliberate attempts to undermine the state's credibility and attract international attention. This shift in focus toward urban centers signifies (Rehman, Nasir, & Shahbaz, 2017):

- **Operational Sophistication:** Militant groups are adapting their tactics to exploit gaps in urban security, using technology to evade detection.
- **Psychological Warfare:** By targeting heavily guarded areas, terrorists aim to sow fear among civilians and erode public confidence in the government.

### **Effectiveness of Counterterrorism Measures**

Despite significant investments in counterterrorism initiatives, such as the National Action Plan (NAP) and military operations, several weaknesses persist (Van Dongen, 2011):

- **Lack of Strategic Continuity:** Pakistan's reliance on kinetic operations (e.g., Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad) has disrupted militant networks but failed to address the root causes of radicalization.
- **Judicial and Legislative Gaps:** Weak prosecution mechanisms and the absence of specialized anti-terror courts contribute to low conviction rates, allowing many offenders to reintegrate into extremist networks.
- **Inconsistent Implementation of NAP:** While provisions such as banning hate speech and regulating religious seminaries (madrasas) are crucial, their uneven enforcement undermines overall efficacy.

### **Socio-Economic Dimensions**

Economic deprivation and lack of opportunities in conflict zones like KPK remain critical enablers of terrorism. Analysis of Human Development Index (HDI) rankings places KPK among the lowest-performing regions in Pakistan, with limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Surveys indicate that **78% of respondents in KPK** cite socio-economic grievances as a primary driver of youth recruitment into militant groups.

In Islamabad, the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from conflict zones has created additional socio-economic pressures. This population faces marginalization, exacerbating existing challenges such as housing shortages, unemployment, and strained public services.

## **Psychological and Social Impact**

The human toll of terrorism extends beyond immediate casualties. Interviews with survivors and affected communities reveal profound psychological trauma, particularly among women and children. These impacts are compounded by the destruction of social networks and community structures in violence-affected regions. Sectarian violence further entrenches societal divisions, creating a fragmented society vulnerable to further radicalization (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018).

## **The Role of Regional Instability**

Pakistan's strategic location, bordering Afghanistan and India, places it at the crossroads of competing geopolitical interests. While Afghanistan's instability fuels cross-border terrorism, tensions with India divert resources and attention away from internal counterterrorism priorities. The lack of effective regional cooperation, particularly with Afghanistan, perpetuates the problem (Mashimbye, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Terrorism in Pakistan remains a multifaceted and deeply entrenched challenge, posing significant threats to the country's security, stability, and socio-economic development. The analysis of recent events in 2024, particularly the escalation of violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Islamabad, underscores the evolving tactics of terrorist groups and the persistent vulnerabilities in Pakistan's counterterrorism framework.

While military operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have disrupted militant networks, their inability to address the root causes of terrorism highlights the need for a more holistic approach. Factors such as socio-economic deprivation, political instability, and regional dynamics—exacerbated by the situation in Afghanistan—continue to fuel radicalization and impede lasting peace.

The human and economic costs of terrorism are staggering. Communities in affected areas face profound psychological trauma, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. At the same time, the national economy bears the brunt of declining investments, disrupted development projects, and increased security expenditures. The resilience of the Pakistani people, however, remains a critical asset, as civil society and local communities continue to play vital roles in countering extremist narratives and fostering social cohesion.

To effectively combat terrorism, Pakistan must adopt a comprehensive strategy that goes beyond military action. This includes:

- Strengthening regional cooperation, particularly with Afghanistan, to address cross-border threats.
- Investing in socio-economic development in conflict-prone areas to address the root causes of radicalization.
- Enhancing the capacity of local law enforcement and judicial systems to ensure effective prosecution and deterrence.
- Promoting education and counter-extremism campaigns to challenge extremist ideologies and foster inclusivity.

The findings of this study emphasize that while the challenges are formidable, a coordinated and sustained effort can pave the way for a more secure and stable Pakistan. By addressing the



underlying factors that perpetuate terrorism, policymakers can create an environment conducive to peace, development, and prosperity.

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