



PAKISTAN

Quick Facts

Population: 238,181,034 (July 2021 est.)

Area: 796,095 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Punjabi 44.7%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.4%, Sindhi 14.1%, Saraiki 8.4%, Muhajirs 7.6%, Balochi 3.6%, other 6.3%

GDP (official exchange rate): \$253.183 billion (2019 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated March 2021)

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan was established in 1947 as a homeland for South Asia's Muslims after British colonial rule ended in India. The majority of Pakistanis practice a moderate form of Sufi Islam, but Islamist political parties nonetheless exercise significant influence in the country, shaping political debates, foreign policy, and legislation. Moreover, throughout Pakistan's history, its military and intelligence services have developed ties with violent Islamist groups to achieve regional strategic objectives. The U.S. war in Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and Pakistan's role in fighting terrorism, have severely complicated the political landscape in Pakistan. The emergence of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, or Pakistani Taliban)—an amalgam of anti-state militants that formed in reaction to the Pakistan military's storming of the notorious Red Mosque—destabilized the nation significantly between 2007 and 2014. The TTP conducted countless terrorist attacks, killing some 30,000 civilians and security forces, prompting a major Pakistan Army operation against the militants in 2014. While Pakistan has continued to be hit by terror attacks in the years since operations began, the number has fallen significantly. In the context of terrorism threats, Pakistan is much more stable now than it was in the period between 2007-2014.

Pakistan will continue to grapple with its status as a Muslim constitutional democracy, and with developing ways to channel Islamist ideologies. While Islamist political parties are unlikely to take power in the near future, they will continue to influence the country's legal framework and political discourse. While societal attitudes will also shape Islamist trends in Pakistan, the military's posture and attitude toward violent Islamists may be a core factor in determining the country's future (i.e., whether it remains positively engaged with Western countries or takes a decisively Islamist turn that severs its alliance with the United States).

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

The Afghan Taliban

Pakistan's military and intelligence services (particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISI) historically have had close ties with the Afghan Taliban. Before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Pakistani government openly supported and recognized Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Pakistan continued to support the Taliban into the late 1990s, long after Osama bin Laden took refuge in Afghanistan in 1996 and despite the growing problems that it created for Islamabad's relations with Washington. Although Pakistani officials largely disagreed with the Taliban's harsh interpretation of Islam, the movement was considered the government's best chance to achieve its own strategic interests in the region, including denying India, Iran, and Central Asian countries a strong foothold in Afghanistan. Additionally, Pakistan hoped to ensure no territorial claims on Pashtun areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border were made.

Despite pledging to break ties with the Taliban after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Islamabad failed to crack down forcefully on the group's leaders or to disrupt their activities. U.S. officials have acknowledged that ISI officials maintain relationships with Afghan Taliban leaders (some ISI officials believe that the Taliban will again play a role in Afghan politics).¹

Hopes for a negotiated Afghan settlement were raised in July 2015, when Pakistan hosted talks between the Afghan government and Taliban leaders. Just before a second round of talks were to be held, however, reports surfaced that Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar had died two years prior caused disarray within the movement. Pakistan helped install Omar's successor, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who was subsequently killed in a U.S. drone strike on May 21, 2016.

Escalating Taliban violence in Afghanistan, as well as major Taliban gains on the battlefield closed the door on negotiations for much of 2016 and 2017. The Trump administration's South Asia strategy, unveiled by the president in August 2017, directs U.S. forces to increase fighting against the Taliban.² While President Trump didn't rule out talks, he indicated that they were a distant prospect.

Efforts to jumpstart reconciliation continued.³ The United States, China, Pakistan, and Russia all attempted to bring the Taliban to the table in the last few years. Initially, the Taliban, which has little incentive to abdicate the battlefield given the major gains it has achieved there, has generally expressed muted interest in such a move. Eventually, however, the Afghan Taliban would agree to participate in peace talks between itself and Washington, rather than Kabul.⁴ In September of 2019, those negotiations broke down amid a renewed series of attacks by the Taliban, which prompted President Donald Trump to scupper a planned peace summit.⁵ However, the talks soon resumed, and the two sides reached a deal at the end of February 2020. But while that deal largely halted Taliban attacks on U.S. forces, it did not require the group to stop targeting the Afghan state. The Taliban continued to wage its fight into the summer of 2020, even as the Afghan and U.S. governments sought to launch a formal peace process.

Al-Qaeda

The unilateral 2011 U.S. raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan that eliminated Osama bin Laden exposed deep fissures in U.S.-Pakistan relations. Pakistanis were incensed that the U.S. did not take its leadership into confidence before the raid. U.S. officials, on the other hand, were incredulous that the world's most wanted terrorist could live in a Pakistani garrison town for years without the knowledge of officials within the military establishment. U.S. Senator Susan Collins said the bin Laden killing revealed the "double-game" Pakistan has been playing and called for stricter conditions on U.S. aid to the country.⁶ However, the CIA has said that top Pakistani military leaders did not know that Bin Laden was in Pakistan.⁷

Pakistan's subsequent arrest of Dr. Shakil Afridi, a Pakistani doctor who helped the U.S. track bin Laden's whereabouts through a fake vaccination campaign, was a blow to bilateral relations. Afridi was initially sentenced to 33 years in prison on trumped-up charges of supporting a militant group. In August 2013, however, Afridi's sentence was overturned, and a retrial ordered.⁸ Pakistani authorities privately

acknowledged that the doctor was being punished for helping the CIA. In mid-December 2016, a senior Pakistani official indicated that Pakistan would be willing to discuss the release of Dr. Afridi with the Trump administration however, as of early 2019, nothing had materialized.⁹ Pakistan may agree to exchange Afridi for Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani scientist and *cause célèbre* in Pakistan who is currently in a federal prison in Texas on terrorism charges.¹⁰ However, the Trump administration is unlikely to agree to such an arrangement, given its hardline stance on Islamic terrorism.

The Obama administration's intensive drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal border areas hindered al-Qaeda's ability to plot and train for terrorist attacks across the globe. Pakistani officials and media outlets regularly criticize the drone missile strikes as a violation of Pakistani sovereignty, but the program appears to be at least tacitly accepted at the highest levels of the Pakistani government. Indeed, Mark Mazzetti of the *New York Times* reported that the ISI and CIA had an agreement authorizing the use of drones, so long as they were restricted to the tribal areas.¹¹ There have been roughly 400 drone strikes carried out in Pakistan since 2004, including the strike on Mansour in Baluchistan and one that the Trump administration carried out in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in 2017 (there have only been about a half dozen drone strikes carried out in Pakistan since 2017, with the last known one carried out in July 2018).¹² The hit on Mansour angered Pakistani officials, who called it a violation of national sovereignty.

Due in part to Pakistani public anger over the drone campaign and complaints from human rights organizations about civilian casualties, the U.S. administration has considerably reduced its reliance on drones. The United States has also eliminated all its key targets—which, at least as defined by the Obama administration, were senior al-Qaeda leaders, the Pakistani Taliban, and other terrorist groups that pose a threat to both Pakistan and the United States. There were only 10 drone strikes in Pakistan in 2015, down from a peak of 128 in 2010. According to the New America Foundation, there were 16 drone strikes since the start of 2016 and none since July 2018.¹³

To fend off ISIS, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has sought to strengthen relations with Pakistan-based terrorist groups and to make inroads with the Muslim populations in other parts of South Asia. In September 2014, Zawahiri made a video announcement launching an al-Qaeda wing in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). In the video, Zawahiri assured Muslims in India, Bangladesh, and Burma that the organization “did not forget you and that they are doing what they can to rescue you from injustice, oppression, persecution, and suffering.”¹⁴ Just two days after the launch of AQIS, the group attempted to attack a Pakistani navy frigate in order to target American naval assets in the Indian Ocean. Al-Qaeda remains resilient in Pakistan and the broader region despite drone strikes and other counterterrorism tactics. This can be attributed to the support it receives from powerful, local terror groups and its rebranding effort to seem like an ISIS alternative.¹⁵

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The TTP, a collection of Pakistani militant groups loosely affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, was formed in 2007. TTP's numerous suicide attacks since 2012 have killed over 9,000 Pakistani civilians and 2,400 Pakistani security forces.¹⁶

In the six weeks before the May 2013 Pakistani elections, the TTP took responsibility for attacks that killed scores of election workers and candidates, mainly from secular-leaning political parties. Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League/Nawaz (PML/N) party ran on a campaign of supporting negotiations with the TTP and failed to denounce the attacks. Six months after winning the elections, the Nawaz Sharif government offered to negotiate with the TTP. Those talks officially started in January 2014, but did not last long. The TTP claims of instituting a cease-fire were undermined by attacks against civilians and security forces.

Talks broke down altogether following a major TTP attack on the Karachi airport in June 2014 that killed 36. One week later, the Pakistani military announced the launch of a new military offensive against TTP bases in North Waziristan called Zarb-e-Azb (“Strike of the Prophet's Sword”). The Pakistani

Army intensified its counterterrorism operations following an attack on a military school in Peshawar in December 2014 that killed 130, mostly children. Military operations in the FATA reportedly contributed to a nearly 50 percent decline in terrorist attacks in the country between 2014 and 2015.¹⁷ This decline continued into 2019. However, factions of the TTP have continued to stage sporadic attacks in Pakistan, mostly in the western provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from hideouts in Afghanistan.

The National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism passed by the Pakistani parliament in January 2015 has attempted to lay the initial groundwork for delegitimizing extremist ideologies. The plan includes lifting the moratorium on the death penalty for terrorists, establishing special military courts to try terrorists, curbing the spread of extremist literature and propaganda on social media, freezing the assets of terrorist organizations, and forming special committees comprised of army and political leaders.

Still, Pakistan has a long way to go in reversing the tide of extremism and terrorism in the country, as evidenced by several major terrorist attacks that occurred in 2016 and 2017. On January 20, 2016, militants stormed a university in the Pakistani city of Charsadda, killing at least 20 students and teachers. Afghanistan-based TTP leader Omar Mansour claimed credit for the attack (Mansour's faction of the TTP was also behind the 2014 attack on the school in Peshawar).¹⁸ A U.S. drone strike in eastern Afghanistan subsequently killed Mansour in July 2016.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, another splinter group of the TTP, was responsible for a suicide bombing at a park in Lahore on Easter Sunday 2016. The group said it directly targeted Christians and that the bombing was a message to the Pakistani government that “we will carry out such attacks until Sharia is imposed in the country.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, most victims were Muslim, and about half of the 72 killed were children.

In February 2017, Pakistan was convulsed by a series of attacks over a period of four days. Militants struck all four provinces and three major urban areas. The TTP claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack in the eastern city of Lahore in July 2017 that killed nearly 30 people. TTP attacks continued in 2018. An attack on an election campaign rally in Peshawar killed at least 20 people, including a senior politician named Haroom Bilour.

The Haqqani Network

The Haqqani Network has been a major facilitator of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, and responsible for some of the fiercest attacks against U.S. and coalition forces there. Its founder Jalaluddin Haqqani—a powerful Afghan militant leader whose followers operate in the border areas between Afghanistan and the FATA—was allied with the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani intelligence before his death in 2014. Jalaluddin's son, Sirajuddin, has taken over operational control of the militant network and currently serves as second in command of the Afghan Taliban.

Haqqani forces were responsible for four of the most dramatic and devastating terror attacks in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2017. The attacks targeted U.S., Indian, and Afghan government officials. Over 260 people were killed in the four attacks.

The source of the Haqqanis' power lies primarily in their relations with different terrorist groups (al-Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban, and India-focused groups like the *Jaish-e-Muhammed*), while also maintaining links to Pakistani intelligence agencies. Pakistani military strategists view the Haqqani Network as their most effective tool for blunting Indian influence in Afghanistan.²⁰

U.S. officials have appealed to Pakistani leaders to crack down on the Haqqani Network. During a press conference in Kabul in July 2017, Senator John McCain declared that if Pakistan doesn't change its position toward the Haqqani Network, then “maybe we should change our behavior toward Pakistan as a nation.”²¹ However, American authorities have been rebuffed with declarations that the Pakistani military is overstretched and incapable of taking on too many militant groups at once. The Zarb-e-Azb offensive, despite claims to the contrary by Pakistani authorities, did not target the Haqqani Network. Many analysts contended that, after the operation began, the group simply relocated from the North Waziristan tribal agency to the Kurram tribal agency.²²

On September 7, 2012, under pressure from Congress, the U.S. State Department listed the Haqqani Network as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), subjecting it to financial and immigration sanctions.²³ Since the designation, the U.S. has killed several Haqqani Network leaders in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's tribal border areas.²⁴

The U.S. has periodically blocked military aid to Pakistan due to the latter's failure to crack down on the Haqqanis. The U.S. withheld \$300 million in CSF payments to Pakistan in FY 2015 because the Obama administration could not certify that Pakistan's military offensive in the tribal border areas included operations against Haqqani bases.²⁵ Furthermore, Congress blocked U.S. funding for the transfer of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan in the first half of 2016 because of Islamabad's lack of action against the Haqqani sanctuary within its borders.²⁶ And in January 2018, the Trump administration froze all security aid to Pakistan until the country demonstrates action against the Haqqani Network on Pakistani soil.

The extent to which these punitive measures have affected the Haqqani Network is unclear. As of the summer of 2020, there was no evidence indicating that Islamabad has sought to sever its ties to what amounts to one of its most important militant assets.

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)

Groups like LeT and JeM focused their attacks throughout the 1990s on Indian security forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Now, the groups conduct attacks throughout India and target both Indian and Western civilians. The Pakistani government's failure to shut down groups like JeM and LeT is thus creating instability in the region. In March 2010, Pakistani-American David Headley pleaded guilty to involvement in the Mumbai attacks and a plot to attack Danish newspaper offices for publishing caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed. In four days of testimony and cross-examination, Headley detailed meetings between himself and a Pakistani intelligence officer, a former Army major, and a Navy frogman, all of whom were among the key players orchestrating the assaults. Headley's revelations raised questions about whether there was official Pakistani involvement in the Mumbai attacks.²⁷

Following the Mumbai attacks, Islamabad responded to U.S. and Indian pressure by arresting seven LeT operatives, including Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi and Zarar Shah, whom India had identified as the ringleaders of the attacks. The Pakistani government also reportedly shut down some domestic LeT offices. Despite these actions, there are indications that the LeT continues to operate relatively freely in the country. Pakistan released LeT founder Hafez Muhammed Sayeed from detention in June 2009 when the Lahore High Court determined there was insufficient evidence to continue his detainment. Sayeed has taken an increasingly public role in Pakistan; he frequently speaks at political rallies and calls for jihad against India. In 2012, the U.S. issued a \$10 million reward for information leading to his arrest and conviction.²⁸ As further evidence of its unwillingness to act against the LeT, Pakistan released Zaki ur Rehman Lakhvi from jail in April 2015, just days after the U.S. approved the sale of nearly \$1 billion in military equipment to Pakistan.

The LeT has put down roots in Pakistani society through its social welfare wing, the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD). The JuD runs schools and medical clinics and is especially active in central and southern Punjab. The headquarters of the LeT/JuD is a 200-acre site in Muridke. The JuD increased its popularity while helping victims of the October 2005 earthquake in Pakistani Kashmir. The U.S. government considers JuD a front organization of the LeT. The U.S. State Department designated the LeT as a FTO in December 2001, and later included the JuD on the Specially Designated Global Terrorist Designation list as an alias of the LeT.²⁹ On December 11, 2008, the United Nations Security Council designated JuD as a global terrorist group.³⁰

There are well-known links between both the LeT and JeM and international terrorism. Shoe bomber Richard Reid apparently trained at a LeT camp in Pakistan; one of the London subway bombers spent time at the LeT complex in Muridke; and al-Qaeda leader Abu Zubaydah was captured from a LeT safe house in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The LeT signed Osama bin Laden's 1998 fatwa calling for Muslims to kill

Americans and Israelis.

Reports indicate that a prime suspect in the 2006 London airliner bomb plot had family ties to Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of JeM. The JeM has also been linked to the kidnapping and brutal murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in January 2002. Pakistan officially banned the JeM in 2002, but Azhar has never been formally charged with a crime. Indeed, reports indicate Masood Azhar addressed a large public rally in Pakistan via phone in early 2014 and called on his supporters to resume *jihad* against India. Furthermore, the JeM conducted a major attack on the Indian air base at Pathankot in early January 2016, just six days after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made a surprise goodwill visit to Lahore, where he met with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Efforts to have Azhar formally designated by the UN as a terrorist have repeatedly failed, as Pakistan's close ally China has used its Security Council veto to block such a move.

Indo-Pakistani tensions escalated further following a September 18, 2016, attack by Pakistan-based terrorists on an Indian military base in Kashmir that killed at least 18 Indian soldiers. New Delhi concluded that LeT was behind the attack. Ten days later, India launched surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) to neutralize terrorist bases inside Pakistani territory. Shelling and firing across the LoC, which had become an almost-daily occurrence, decreased later in 2016 and into 2017, but rhetoric from both Pakistani and Indian officials remains heated. Cross-border firing surged during the first few months of 2018.³¹

The Pakistan-based anti-India terror groups at the heart of India-Pakistan tensions, like JeM and LeT, remain dangerous. In July 2017, New Delhi blamed LeT for a deadly attack that killed seven Hindu pilgrims in Kashmir. New Delhi again implicated LeT in a March 2018 attack in Kashmir, this time an assault on security forces that killed three Indian soldiers and two policemen.

In 2019, LeT went largely quiet, but JeM seemingly made a comeback. After being relatively passive for a long period of time, the group staged a series of attacks in Jammu and Kashmir. Its deadliest attack, which killed more than 40 Indian security forces in the town of Pulwama on Valentine's Day 2019, brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war. The crisis deescalated relatively quickly, but tensions remained high. In March 2019, China blocked a UN Security Council effort to designate Azhar as a terrorist for the fourth time.

While the surge in JeM-led attacks has injected more venom into India-Pakistan relations, it's worth noting that most of these attacks have been carried out by local JeM militants in Kashmir using local weaponry. There is no indication that the Pakistani state endorsed or assisted these attacks. However, for New Delhi, given that JeM is still based in Pakistan and still enjoys ties to the Pakistani state, Islamabad is guilty by association.

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government carried out its longstanding threat to repeal the special autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and designated it as a union territory of India. For Pakistan, which has long claimed J&K as its own, the move was regarded as provocative and hostile. In the following weeks, Islamabad launched a major global diplomatic effort to convince key capitals, including Washington, to chastise India for affront. However, despite some comments criticizing New Delhi for the ensuing security lockdown and media blackout in J&K, the international community did not oppose India's decision.

The implications are stark. In order to push back against New Delhi, a frustrated Islamabad may encourage the non-state assets at its disposal – particularly LeM and JeM – to stage attacks in Kashmir and across India. However, this may be mitigated by pressure imposed upon Islamabad by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a terrorist financing watchdog, to curtail its ties to terror groups and their financial networks. Pakistan has not infiltrated nearly as many militants across the border in the last few years as it had done in the 1990s. One reason why is that Pakistan's involvement in the insurgency in Kashmir hasn't been necessary. In recent years, increasingly heavy-handed tactics from the Indian government in Kashmir

have radicalized young Kashmiris, with some of the most recent mass-casualty attacks — including an assault on Indian security forces in Pulwama in February 2019 that sparked a major India-Pakistan crisis — organized and carried out by local residents. Still, a combination of factors — the Article 370 repeal, India’s continued repressive acts in Kashmir, Islamabad’s inability to attract international focus to the Kashmir issue, and a lack of clear Pakistani options to deter India — suggest that the threat of Pakistan deploying India-focused assets across the border remains a very real threat.

Additionally, the end of J&K’s autonomous status increases the likelihood of conflict between India and Pakistan. Any major future attack on Indian forces in Kashmir – whether staged with assistance from Pakistan or not – will likely be blamed on Pakistan by India, inciting limited military retaliations.

The Islamic State (IS, or ISIS)

IS has sought the allegiance of various regional terrorist groups and, in January 2015, officially announced the formation of its Khorasan “province.” Khorasan is an Islamic historical term used to describe the area encompassed by Afghanistan, parts of Pakistan, and parts of other countries bordering Afghanistan. According to the relevant *Hadith* (sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad), South-Central Asia plays a key role in establishing a global caliphate. The Hadith contains references to the Ghazwa-e-Hind (Battle of India), where the final battle between Muslims and non-Muslims before the end times will supposedly take place. One *Hadith* further says that an army with black flags will emerge from Khorasan to help the *Mahdi* (the prophesied redeemer of Islam) establish his caliphate at Mecca.³²

A handful of TTP and Afghan Taliban leaders have pledged their allegiance to the group and its late leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Pakistan-based, anti-Shia sectarian outfit Jundullah reportedly pledged support to ISIS in late 2014.³³ In July 2015, a U.S. drone strike in the eastern Afghan province of Nangahar killed more than two dozen ISIS fighters, including Shahidullah Shahid, former spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, who had defected to ISIS ranks the year before.³⁴

ISIS’ inability so far to make significant inroads into Pakistan is largely due to the well-established roots of al-Qaeda there; most terror groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan are al-Qaeda-aligned and openly hostile toward ISIS. ISIS’ prospects in Pakistan are also constrained by sectarian issues. ISIS embraces the Salafi school of Islamic thought and rejects the Deobandi school, to which most South Asian militant groups adhere. There have been some operational marriages of convenience, however; several of the February 2017 attacks were claimed by both ISIS and factions of the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Additionally, an October 2017 report from the Soufan Center estimated that around 650 fighters had travelled from Pakistan to join the ranks of the group.³⁵

The collapse of ISIS in the Middle East, set in motion by the loss of its physical caliphate and exacerbated by the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Syria in October 2019, has raised concerns that the group’s central leadership could attempt to redirect resources and activities to South Asia – a worry that was elevated by the 2019 attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. Pakistan presents fertile soil for the group to do so; ISIS claimed several large-scale attacks on both state and civilian targets in Pakistan between 2016 and 2018 (there were none in 2019). These included the bombing of a civil hospital and a police training college in the city of Quetta, the provincial capital of Baluchistan, in 2016; an attack on a Sufi shrine in the city of Sehwan in Sindh province in 2017; and assaults on election targets in three different areas of Baluchistan province in 2018.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

The strategic environment in South Asia and the Pakistani response to regional challenges has influenced Islamist trends in society and heightened religious-inspired violence. The war against the Soviets in Afghanistan (1979-1989) and the Islamization policies of Pakistani president General Zia ul-Haq during

roughly this period strengthened Islamist political forces and puritanical sects over more moderate ones.³⁶ The influence of Sufism, dating back to the eighth and ninth century in South Asia, has a moderating influence on how most Pakistanis practice and interpret Islam.

Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) was founded by Islamic scholar Maulana Abul Ala Maududi in 1941. Maududi came of age as British colonial rule was ending on the Subcontinent and an Indian national identity was developing. Witness to Hindu-Muslim communal tensions, Maududi believed the only way Muslims could safeguard their political interests was to return to a pure and unadulterated Islam that would not accommodate Hindus. He denounced nationalism and secular politics and held that an Islamic state was a panacea for all the problems facing Muslims. He called on Muslims to mobilize against Hindus, breaking free of any Western influences.³⁷ Reflecting Maududi's early thought, modern Islamist extremist literature in Pakistan draws parallels between British colonial rule and U.S. ascendancy.³⁸

In contrast with Maududi, Pakistan's founding father and leader of the Muslim League, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, supported the idea of Islam as a unifying force but envisioned the country as a largely secular and multiethnic democratic state. Thus, although the argument to establish a separate Pakistani state was based on religious exclusivity, Jinnah's ultimate goal was not to establish Pakistan as a theocracy.³⁹ Soon after the creation of Pakistan, however, debate about religion's role in the country's constitutional and legal systems was increasingly influenced by Islamic principles.⁴⁰

Maududi's contrasting vision for Pakistan created problems during the early years after partition. Pakistani authorities questioned the allegiance of JI members to the state and even incarcerated Maududi for his controversial positions on the Indo-Pakistani dispute over Kashmir.⁴¹ After spending time in jail, Maududi eventually stopped questioning the legitimacy of the Pakistani state and focused on encouraging Islamization of the government.

Today's Jamaat-e-Islami political party in Pakistan, led by Siraj-ul-Haq, draws most of its support from middle class urban Pakistanis. It has generally performed only marginally at the polls, capturing about five percent of the vote in most elections held during the last two decades. However, the party's influence on Pakistani politics and society outweighs its electoral performance because of its effectiveness in mobilizing street power, its ability to influence court cases, and its adeptness at using Pakistan's Islamic identity to pressure governments to adopt aspects of its Islamist agenda.⁴² In the 2002 elections, the JI formed an alliance with five other religious political parties. The coalition garnered over 11 percent of the national vote. The resulting coalition of Islamist parties grabbed enough votes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to form the government, marking the first time Islamists were charged with running a provincial government (see below).

The other major Islamist movement in South Asia is the Deobandi movement. This movement originated in 1866 in the city of Deoband in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh with the establishment of the Dur ul-Ulum *madrassa*, (a Muslim religious school), which is still the largest operating Deobandi *madrassa*. Deobandism was a reformist movement developed in reaction to British colonialism and based on the belief among Muslim theologians that British influence was corrupting the religion of Islam. The Deobandis offered a puritanical perspective for South Asian Muslims, much as the Wahhabis have done in present-day Saudi Arabia.⁴³

Three wars and several military crises with India have also bolstered the influence of religious extremists with the backing of the Pakistani state. During the 1990s, the JI focused its agenda on supporting Kashmiri militants, while the Jamaat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI) turned most of its attention to supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan. More recently, both the JUI and JI have rallied their political supporters against U.S. policies in the region, taking advantage of high levels of anti-American sentiment fueled by the post 9/11 American and NATO military presence in Afghanistan and U.S. pressure on Pakistan to manage terrorists on its own soil. Most Pakistanis blame their country's counterterrorism cooperation with the U.S. for the incessant suicide bombings and attacks across the nation that have claimed more than 9,000 civilian lives

since 2012.

The 2007 Red Mosque siege and the events that followed play a significant role in Pakistani society's current perception of Islamist movements. Students of the notorious Red Mosque in Islamabad and an adjacent *madrassa* for women launched a vigilante-like campaign to force their view of Islam on the local population. They burned CD and video shops, took over a local children's library, and kidnapped women whom they accused of running a brothel, as well as several policemen. In July 2007, military troops stormed the buildings. After two days of fierce fighting, the military gained control of the premises, but only after 19 soldiers and 62 militants were killed.

The Pakistani public reacted negatively to the military operation, with Islamist circles questioning the use of force against the country's own citizens and mosques. More liberal commentators faulted the government for allowing the situation to get out of hand in the first place, noting shared ties between Pakistani intelligence and the mosque. Some Islamist political parties faced a dilemma; they largely agreed with the policies of the Red Mosque leaders, but did not support the idea of violent confrontation with the government to meet these goals.⁴⁴ Following the military operation that ended the siege, then-JI leader Qazi Hussain held the state "wholly responsible" for the confrontation. Two Islamist parties hailed the Red Mosque militants as "mujahideen who fought for enforcing Islam in its true spirit."⁴⁵

The incident's impact on Islamist extremism cannot be overstated. Numerous *jihadi* organizations, including al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, have staged attacks on the Pakistani military. The terrorist violence in Pakistan from 2007 until 2014 can be traced back to the Red Mosque offensive and the retaliatory attacks that followed it. The Pakistani Taliban – the most potent of Pakistan's anti-state terror actors during that period – was formally launched after the Red Mosque offensive. Before the offensive, it had been an umbrella group of anti-state forces but it was galvanized by the Red Mosque offensive and established a more unified movement against the Pakistani state.⁴⁶

Tensions came to a head in April 2009, when pro-Taliban forces moved from the Swat Valley into the neighboring district of Buner. On April 24, 2009, under both Pakistani public and U.S. pressure, the Pakistan Army deployed paramilitary troops to the region, and then-Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Kayani sent a warning to the militants that the Army would not allow them to "impose their way of life on the civil society of Pakistan."⁴⁷ The statement was a positive first step in clarifying Pakistani policy toward the militants and was followed by aggressive military operations.⁴⁸ By mid-summer, the Pakistani military had cleared the militants from the Swat Valley.

However, vestiges of extremism remain. The Pakistani public was outraged when Malala Yousafzai—a fifteen-year-old girl who openly advocated for the education of girls in the Swat Valley—was shot by Taliban militants in early October 2012 as she boarded a school bus. Yousafzai survived the assassination attempt and continues to advocate for female empowerment and education from the United Kingdom, where she graduated from high school in 2017.⁴⁹ She is the youngest person ever to have won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Army's resolve in fighting militants in the Swat Valley, and more recently in North Waziristan, signals greater understanding about the threat posed by the Pakistani Taliban. However, there are few signs that the Pakistani Army leadership is ready to accommodate U.S. requests to crack down on other groups that target U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan. The Pakistani state has also done little to combat India-focused militant groups on its soil.

The most troubling development involving Islam and Pakistani society in 2018 was the establishment of several new hardline religious political parties. One of them, known as the Milli Muslim League, is tied to the LeT. These groups were formed before the country's 2018 parliamentary elections, and credible evidence indicates that the Pakistani military supported their formation.⁵⁰ The idea was to give hardliners an opportunity to join the political mainstream in an effort to reduce the likelihood of violence. Some observers speculated that another reason the military supported these groups was their ability to cut into

the vote bank of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, the ruling party that had sparred with the army since taking office in 2013. These hardline religious parties contested the 2018 elections and some of them fared respectably. While the total number of votes for religious parties—less than 10 percent—was low, several performed well in a country where religious parties are typically more successful at mobilizing in the street than at the ballot box.⁵¹ For example, the *Tehreek-e-Labbaik* party placed sixth in the national vote count and fourth in Punjab—Pakistan’s most populous province.⁵²

Unfortunately, efforts to “mainstream” these groups backfired when these new parties, emboldened by their newfound legitimacy, tried to impose their radical and extremist views on society. The most effective group in this regard is the *Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP), which has called for the execution of religious minorities. It has staged several extended protests that blocked traffic for days.⁵³ In the fall of 2018, Asia Bibi, a Christian woman on death row on charges of blasphemy, was acquitted by the Pakistani Supreme Court. The TLP took to the streets, calling on the judges who freed her to be executed and—in an unusual move for Islamist hardliners—threatened to attack the Pakistani military for the acquittal. To its credit, the Imran Khan-led government, facing an early test, quietly staged a series of arrests. Still, the TLP’s ability to mobilize and to pressure the government with hardline Islamist demands is a troubling development to monitor in the months ahead. Equally concerning is the fact that the TLP earned more than two million votes in the 2018 parliamentary elections.⁵⁴ Admittedly, this represented only about 4 percent of the total number of votes, but it was still an impressive showing for a hardline religious party in Pakistan.

The erosion of respect for religious pluralism in Pakistan has also been facilitated by exclusionary laws and the proliferation of minority-hate material in public and private school curriculums. Several studies have documented a broad-based connection between *madrassa* education and the propensity toward gender, religious, and sectarian intolerance as well as militant violence in Pakistan.⁵⁵ *Madaris* (Islamic seminaries) are spread throughout Pakistan, but most analysts believe that only about 5–10 percent of Pakistani school children attend these institutions. A number of these schools are financed and operated by Pakistani Islamist parties, Pakistani expatriates, and other foreign entities, including many in Saudi Arabia. In a seminal study entitled “Islamic Education in Pakistan,” South Asia scholar Christine Fair notes that while there is little evidence that *madaris* contribute substantially to direct recruitment of terrorists, they do create conditions that are conducive to supporting militancy.⁵⁶ Though Pakistan’s National Action Plan—the strategy unveiled in early 2015 to combat extremism—highlights the importance of eliminating speech and literature deemed hateful, successful efforts to amend textbooks and other educational sources of extremist material largely remain elusive.⁵⁷

Discrimination against religious minorities—including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadis, and Shia—has led to a threefold increase in religious and sectarian violence in the country over the last 30 years. The rising violence against the Shi’ite community (which makes up about 25 percent of Pakistan’s total population) correlates with an upward trend in sectarian attacks. Between 2013 and 2015 attacks directed at the Shia population killed over 300 people. Many of the perpetrators of these attacks remain elusive. In an indication of the impunity that sectarian-minded hardliners enjoy in Pakistan, a group of religious protestors calling for the executions of Ahmadis—another vulnerable religious minority in Pakistan—held a two-week sit-in on a major highway outside of Islamabad in November 2017, snarling traffic for days. In May 2018, a young man with links to a religious political party that organized the November sit-in tried to assassinate Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan’s Interior Minister.⁵⁸ However, the Imran Khan-led government that took office in August 2018 arrested several top leaders from these religious groups after some of their members protested in Islamabad in October 2018 and called for the assassination of Supreme Court judges. Protestors took to the streets after the court ordered the acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who had been on death row for eight years since being convicted on the bogus charge of blasphemy. In Pakistan, hardliners often exploit the country’s far-reaching blasphemy laws and target religious minorities.⁵⁹

In recent years, most of the attacks against Pakistani Shia have been carried out by the Lashkar-e-

Jhangvi (LJ), a Sunni militant organization inspired and supported by al-Qaeda. The Pakistani government has begun to crack down, albeit modestly, on LJ and target its leadership. In July 2015, one week after his arrest, LJ Founder and Supreme Leader Malik Ishaq was killed in an encounter with police, alongside over a dozen of his followers.⁶⁰ At the same time, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi al-Alami, a particularly virulent faction of LJ, linked up with ISIS. Since then, the group has claimed several attacks in Pakistan.⁶¹ Like ISIS, LJ is a sectarian-focused organization that seeks to eliminate Shia and members of any non-Sunni Muslim communities.

The minority Ahmadi community has also suffered severely from the growing culture of religious intolerance in Pakistan. In late May 2010, militants armed with hand grenades, suicide vests, and assault rifles attacked two Ahmadi mosques, killing nearly 100 worshippers.⁶² Human rights groups in Pakistan criticized local authorities for their weak response to the attacks and for their failure to condemn the growing number of kidnappings and murders of members of the Ahmadi community. In December 2014, a member of the Ahmadi community in Gujranwala was shot and killed five days after an extremist cleric called Ahmadis “the enemy” in a rant on a popular Pakistani television show.⁶³ Ahmadis have been targeted in additional attacks in the period since.⁶⁴

Christians likewise are increasingly bearing the brunt of rising Islamist extremism in Pakistan. There have been numerous incidents of violence against Christians and their worship areas. On September 22, 2013, 85 people were killed during Sunday services when dual suicide bombers attacked a church in Peshawar, Pakistan. The group responsible for the attack, a faction of the TTP said they were retaliating against U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan’s tribal border areas.⁶⁵

A TTP splinter group carried out a suicide attack against Christians celebrating the Easter holiday at a park in Lahore in March 2016.⁶⁶ In December 2017, nine were killed in an attack on a Methodist church in Quetta.⁶⁷ In April 2018, ISIS claimed an attack on a Christian family in Quetta that killed four people,⁶⁸ and, a few days earlier, a drive-by shooting that killed two Christians as they were leaving their church.⁶⁹ There were no reported terror attacks on Christians in Pakistan in 2019 and through June 2020.

There are some signs that the Pakistani government is slowly seeking to reverse extremist trends in society. The most notable was the government’s follow-through with the execution of Mumtaz Qadri, the murderer of reformist politician Salman Taseer. Despite street protests in all of Pakistan’s major cities, the government resisted intervention against the Supreme Court’s decision; the death sentence for the 2011 killing was carried out on February 29, 2016.⁷⁰ The government further defended religious minorities in mid-December 2016 by belatedly renaming the National Center for Physics of Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad after Nobel Prize-winning physicist Abdus Salam, a member of the Ahmadi community.

One week after the government’s gesture, however, Pakistani police raided an Ahmadiyya central office in Rabwah, where they beat up staffers, looted the office, and made arrests without a warrant.⁷¹ That same week, a mob of more than 1,000 people descended on an Ahmadi place of worship in Chakwal, Punjab.⁷² In a May 2018 decision that enraged Pakistani liberals and other supporters of minority rights, Pakistan’s National Assembly passed a resolution to remove Salam’s name from the National Center for Physics.⁷³ In September 2018, the brand new Imran Khan-led government ordered a prominent Pakistani economist, the Princeton-based Atif Mian, to step down from the Economic Advisory Council due to his Ahmadi identity. And in May 2020, Islamabad established a new National Commission for Minorities, but it forbids Ahmadis from serving as members (Hindus, Christians, and other religious minorities are represented on it).⁷⁴ These episodes highlight how small, recent gestures by Islamabad to demonstrate more tolerance are often overshadowed by the power and influence of religious hardliners.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

The Pakistani Army’s support for militancy as a foreign policy instrument has eroded religious tolerance

and created strong links between the country's Islamist political parties and militant groups.⁷⁵ Pakistan has long relied on violent Islamist groups to accomplish its strategic objectives in Afghanistan and India. Pakistan's support for these groups remains undiminished, even as it has increased military operations in the tribal border areas against the TTP. There are around 150,000 Pakistani troops deployed along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Since 2002, the U.S. has provided nearly \$14 billion to Pakistan in the form of Coalition Support Fund (CSF) reimbursements for Pakistan's military border deployments and operations.⁷⁶

Following the 9/11 attacks, former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf broke official ties with the Taliban, supported the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, granted over-flight and landing rights for U.S. military and intelligence units, facilitated logistical supply to military forces in Afghanistan, and contributed substantially to breaking up the regional al-Qaeda network. Pakistan helped capture scores of senior al-Qaeda leaders, most notably 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. However, the government's various relationships with Islamist groups were not entirely severed, and progress has been mixed. In addition to sporadic military operations, the Pakistani government in the past pursued several peace deals with the militants that further destabilized the Pakistani state and facilitated insurgent attacks against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

The first peace deal in March 2004, referred to as the Shakai Agreement, was interpreted by locals as a military surrender.⁷⁷ A February 2005 peace agreement with now-deceased TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud also backfired, emboldening Mehsud later to form the TTP. Mehsud directed a string of suicide attacks against both Pakistani security forces and civilians in 2008-2009. He was killed by a U.S. drone strike in August 2009 and was replaced by Hakimullah Mehsud, who was also killed by a drone strike in November 2013.⁷⁸ His successor, Mullah Fazlullah, met the same fate in June 2018. Fazlullah, unlike his predecessors, was killed in Afghanistan.⁷⁹ The TTP waged a horrific campaign of violence between 2007 (when it was formally established) and 2014. In more recent years, following a major Pakistani counterterrorism offensive in the North Waziristan tribal agency, it has been much quieter. The group has been badly degraded, and its main remaining vestiges—which include several splinter groups—are based in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Islamist political parties performed poorly in the country's February 2008 and May 2013 elections. In 2008, the JI boycotted the election, and the other Islamist parties garnered only 2% of the national vote. In 2013, the JUI/F won 10 seats, and the JI only three seats in the National Assembly. Several new religious political parties—including one with ties to LeT – were established in 2017 as part of the political “mainstreaming” effort.

During its time in office, the Obama administration challenged the Pakistani government for its inconsistency in countering regional terrorist groups that threaten the U.S. and coalition mission in Afghanistan. The Kerry-Lugar bill passed by the Senate in September 2009 (formally known as the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009) authorized \$7.5 billion in civilian aid to Pakistan over a five-year period, but it also conditioned military assistance on Pakistani measures to address terrorist threats. Former U.S. Director of National Intelligence Admiral Dennis Blair testified before Congress on February 2, 2010, “Pakistan's conviction that militant groups are strategically useful to counter India are hampering the fight against terrorism and helping al-Qaeda sustain its safe haven.”⁸⁰

Additionally, the U.S. Congress has used its authority to block U.S. military aid for Pakistan in recent years. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2015 stipulated that \$300 million of the \$1 billion in CSF funding appropriated for Pakistan could no longer be subject to Presidential waiver authority. Thus, when the Obama Administration failed to certify that the Pakistan military's operations in the tribal areas included attacking Haqqani Network bases, Congress blocked the transfer of \$300 million in CSF payments to Pakistan. The NDAA for FY2016 authorized another \$900 million in CSF funding for Pakistan, with \$350 million being ineligible for waiver.

The military confrontation following the siege of the Red Mosque in 2007, the aggressive military operations in the Swat Valley in 2009, and the on-going Zarb-e-Azb operations in North Waziristan against the TTP all demonstrate that, in certain situations, the Pakistan military is prepared to confront extremists. The army's links to religious militants revolve more around regional strategic calculations than deep ideological sympathies with the ideology (though extremist views are known to be held by some within the Pakistani military, justifying concerns about sympathetic officers enabling infiltration of the military).

While it may take time to fully sever ties between elements of the military/ISI establishment and Islamist militant groups, this outcome is possible—albeit unlikely. So long as the Pakistani military projects India as an existential threat, the country will maintain its strategy of retaining links to terror groups—which at the end of the day is a strategy meant to target and intimidate India and to keep India at bay in Afghanistan (in the case of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network). There is little reason to believe that Pakistan will change its position toward India any time in the foreseeable future.

The Trump administration took office vowing to take a harder line on Pakistan until the country cracked down on all Islamist terror groups, especially those that target U.S. troops in Afghanistan. However, this has not happened. When Pakistan did not change its policy toward Islamist terror groups, the Trump administration did not engage in the punitive steps it had promised. The only exception was cutting all security assistance to Pakistan in January 2018. However, this was nothing particularly new. U.S. policy has done this before—and it did not prompt Pakistan to change its policies. The Trump White House has opted to aggressively pursue peace talks with the Taliban which began in 2018 and are facilitated by Pakistan. As such, Washington cannot afford a harsher policy toward Islamabad. Furthermore, the administration cannot afford to take draconian measures that risk Pakistan retaliating by shutting down the NATO supply routes on its soil—one of Islamabad's few powerful tools of leverage to deploy against the United States. This U.S. policy continued through 2019, as Washington sought Islamabad's cooperation in an effort to secure a U.S. troop withdrawal deal with the Taliban and to launch a formal peace process.

Initially, this process stalled as the Taliban continued to attack civilian and military targets in order to leverage a better negotiating position.⁸¹ However, momentum grew once the Trump administration agreed to hold formal talks with the Taliban that excluded the Afghan government. The present truce calls on the Taliban to begin formal peace talks with the Afghan government, and for the group to sever all ties to international terror groups on Afghan soil. If the Taliban upholds these commitments, according to the agreement, the United States will remove all its forces from Afghanistan by the end of April 2021.⁸²

Islamabad is one of the big winners from this agreement, which calls for a peace process between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and other key stakeholders known as an intra-Afghan dialogue that could (in theory) end the war. Any political settlement that emerges would entail the Taliban sharing power in a post-war administration - a major boon for the Pakistani government. At the same time, if the peace process fails, Pakistan would not necessarily be a loser. To be sure, if U.S. forces leave Afghanistan and the peace process falls apart, resulting in heavy destabilization in Afghanistan, Pakistan would not benefit from a destabilized western neighbor, and the spillover effects — refugee flows, a greater drug trade, an increase in Afghanistan-based sanctuaries for anti-Pakistan terror groups like ISIS — would be deeply problematic for Pakistan. However, an increasingly destabilized Afghanistan would only make the Taliban stronger—meaning that Pakistan's most powerful asset in Afghanistan would grow more potent.

Islamabad, meanwhile, continues to attempt to connect Islamic militancy to its longstanding struggle against regional rival India – and to reverse the narrative of itself as a sponsor of extremism. Thus, in November 2020, the Pakistani government accused India of running training camps in Afghanistan for militant groups to foment terrorism on Pakistani soil, claiming that it had “irrefutable evidence” of these activities.⁸³ And when in January 2021 nearly a dozen members of Balochistan's Hazara community were killed by militants linked to ISIS, Prime Minister Imran Khan used the opportunity to accuse India of backing the group as part of efforts to destabilize Pakistan.⁸⁴ Neither charge has been substantiated.

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