

About ICAN: Formed in 2006, the International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) aims to strengthen women's participation and influence in conflict prevention, social justice, coexistence, and peacebuilding efforts, in situations of closed political space and conflict affected states. ICAN's MENA program seeks to elevate the voices and impact of women's civil society groups on issues of rights, security and peace in countries undergoing transitions, affected by rising militarism and extremism targeting women.

This brief is written and published in collaboration with partner organizations and on-the-ground activists inside Pakistan. Go to www.icanpeacework.org for more information.

What the Women Say

Reclaiming the Progressive Past: Pakistani women's struggle against violence & extremism

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Key Findings

- *Pakistan was founded with a progressive vision, but pluralism has been eroded by the rise of fundamentalism, extremism, and violence.*
- *The status of women in Pakistan is a key indicator of social cohesion and tolerance in the country. Peace and security, especially for women, has declined with regressive laws, conservative education, political violence, displacement, and economic hardship.*
- *Despite rising insecurity and militancy, women have continued to struggle for equal rights, protection from violence, and public participation.*
- *Women are taking increasingly active roles as leaders in politics and civil society, where they are countering extremist ideology and promoting an alternative vision for Pakistan based on peace, security, and development.*

2013 was another year of contradictions for Pakistan. On May 11, 2013 the General Elections were held successfully. Despite fears of violence, low voter turnout, and lack of transport, millions of people --including women -- came to the polls across the country, even at polling stations that had had a paltry turnout in the 2008 elections.¹ Even in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), despite voter intimidation and other coercive tactics, women came to vote, albeit in smaller numbers.² There were a number of fatal incidents, but the elections took place with far less violence than anticipated.

The run-up to the elections was indicative of the vibrancy and diversity of Pakistani society. Political activists, including many women, were out in force, mobilizing voters through house calls and social media. In addition to female candidates, there were transgender candidates as well.³ The elections demonstrated Pakistanis' desire for change. "They sent a strong message to anti-democratic forces that people do want to have voice," said one political activist.⁴ Even though most women did not win seats, their public presence in

¹ (a) Voter turnout was reported at 60 percent. See Laura Smith-Spark et al. "Despite Violence, Pakistanis Vote in Landmark Election." CNN (May 11, 2013). (b) The number of registered women increased, yet there were 11 million more registered male voters than female. See European Union Election Observer Mission, Final Report, Pakistan 2013 available at www.eueom.eu.

² Sherazi, Zahir Shah. "More agreements surface barring women from voting." *Dawn*, 16 May 2013.

³ In the May 2013 elections, 150 women filed nomination papers for the National Assembly and 313 women ran for provincial assembly positions - almost double the number the candidates in 2008. See Palash Gosh. "Pakistani Women in Politics: Slow Progress, Mighty Obstacles." *International Business Times* (Sept. 28, 2013).

⁴ Interview, London, June 2013.

conservative communities challenged the notion of Pakistan as a closed, conservative society.

Yet the relative peaceful transfer of power between civilian governments in 2013 occurred against a backdrop of increasing violence and a rising undercurrent of extremism that has gradually eroded security and is challenging the very fabric of Pakistani society. In June 2013, militants, including a female suicide bomber in Quetta, killed eleven female students on a bus, and then attacked the hospital where survivors and relatives had gathered. In September 2013, 82 people were killed when two suicide bombers attacked the All Saints Church in Peshawar. In December 2013, gunman killed yet another polio vaccination team and Pakistani police who were providing security in northwest Pakistan. The growing list of incidents is symptomatic of the escalation and spread of violence during the past decade.

Today Pakistan stands at the juncture of an intense battle between two opposing visions of the country's future: one enforces a narrow and radical interpretation of Sharia law and Islam; the other seeks to preserve the modern, liberal, and tolerant face of Pakistan that was the vision of the country at the dawn of independence in 1947. Women and minority groups -- notably Shias and Christians --are in the crosshairs of this battle. And as the attack on Malala Joya and other young girls demonstrate, the militants have a clear and particularly regressive agenda regarding the status of women and girls in society.

In recent years, pervasive repression and violence, often perpetrated with impunity, literally pushed women back into their homes for fear of reprisals. An emerging alternative narrative and history of Pakistani women is erasing the past. In 1947, the vision of the new Pakistani state included women as equal citizens. Today, the dominant narrative is of a socially conservative society where the marginalization and silencing of women is depicted as "normal."

Women are proverbial bellwethers of Pakistani society. How they fare -- their status and mobility within society, their treatment by authorities (state, religious or local), their legal protections, and their participation in the social, political, economic and cultural spaces -- is indicative of the direction in which the country is heading. Even while coping with the continuous threat violence, many women in both urban and rural areas are actively working to assert their rights and develop strategies to counter the spread of violence and modern-day extremism.

This report highlights the impact of the prevailing security environment on Pakistani women, especially in conflict-stricken areas. It also reflects the positive strides women are making for participation and voice in the country. Drawing on the expertise and insight of practitioners in women's rights, peace and security, ICAN puts current trends into context and offers recommendations for action by national and international actors to alleviate the conditions that foster extremism.

I. From Tolerant Vision to Radical Reality

Few countries in the world match Pakistan in its political, social and economic complexities and security-related challenges. It is a country of 187 million, including more than a dozen ethnic groups and myriad tribes, as well as speakers of Urdu, English and many other languages and dialects. Islam is the dominant religion, but there are followers of many branches of the faith, including Sunnis, Shias, Agha Khanis, Ismailees, Bohras, and Sufis, alongside other religions, notably Christianity, Hinduism, and Parsism.

"If we want to make this great State of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people... you are free- you are free to go to your temples, mosques or any other place of worship in this state of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state... in due course of time Hindus will cease to be Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Muslims- not in a religious sense for that is the personal faith of an individual- but in a political sense as citizens of one state."

-Address of Quaide Azam, Father of the Nation, to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Karachi (August 11, 1947)

At independence, Pakistan's leaders envisioned a tolerant society grounded in Islamic principles. The economic, social, and political empowerment of women was integral to the political vision of the nascent Pakistan. Despite age-old local customs and cultural traditions, a spirit of tolerance and ethnic diversity prevailed. Founding political leaders such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah re-enforced a spirit of coexistence across ethnic and religious groups, cultural pluralism, and gender equality. Dr. Fatima Jinnah, a dentist by profession and Jinnah's younger sister, was an influential figure in the independence movement. Known as the "Mother of the Nation," she was a strong advocate for women's rights.

Pakistani women claim their rights

As in many other countries, elite women were the first to lead the fight for women's rights in Pakistan. During the struggle for independence, they joined across professional and political lines to draw on Islamic laws that promoted women's rights. These laws were in clear contrast to Hindu practices that stratified society and British colonial laws which excluded women from inheritance and other rights. Muslim women advocated for women's rights through legal reforms. In 1948, they succeeded in passing the Islamic Sharia-based Personal Law, which was progressive for its time in advancing women's rights. They successfully pushed for the passage of the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, covering marriage, divorce, and critical socio-legal reforms. This is still widely regarded as a key tool for addressing discrimination and empowering women in Pakistan.

"I have always maintained that no nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen... There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women."

-Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Speech at Islamia College for Women (March 25, 1940)

An infusion of fundamentalist religious ideology

By the late 1970's and early 1980's, political Islamist ideology was on the rise in Pakistan. Zia-Al-Haq, who assumed power in 1978, strengthened his grip by riding the wave of political Islam. Regionally, he aligned himself with popular sentiments in Iran, where an Islamic state replaced a secular monarchy. Internationally, he offered assistance to the U.S. in support of the Afghan Mujahidin against the Soviets. The label of "jihad" cloaked the fight against the Soviet occupation as an Islamic duty, attracted Muslims to its cause, and further Islamified Pakistani politics. The movement was accelerated by an influx of funds, weapons, and fighters from the U.S. and Arab nations, and Pakistan's own fostering of Islamist militias, including the creation of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Al Haq's military government redefined Pakistan's identity by invoking Arabian -- often Wahhabi -- interpretations of Islam and introducing "Nizam-e-Mustafa," the notion that laws and society should be governed according to the "Prophet's system."⁵ Al Haq also instituted the "Qanoun a-Shahadat", which relegated women to inferior legal status and provided that women's testimony in court carried less weight than men's.⁶ These policies and laws set the country's trajectory away from the tolerant, syncretic, and peaceful strands of Islam and towards a harsh, literalist, and limited version of Islamic values.

The installation of Taliban rule in Afghanistan in the 1990's gave new impetus to factions within the Pakistani political and military elite who subscribed to and benefitted from the enforcement of local customs and rigid

⁵ (a) Wahhabism is a Sunni Islamic movement that "seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from 7th Century teachings of the Prophet Mohammed and his companions." See Blanchard, Christopher. "The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafism." *Congressional Research Service*, 24 Jan 2008. (b) Most Pakistanis are Sunni, but a substantial Shia minority interprets Islamic law (religious taxes, punishments, finances) differently, causing Nizam-e-Mustafa to be problematic. See "Zia Ul-Haq and Military Domination, 1977-88." *Defense Journal*. April 1994.

⁶ "Pakistan: Proposed Reforms to Hudood Laws Fall Short." *Human Rights Watch*, 7 Sep 2006.

interpretations of Islam. The situation was worsened by the competing Islamic schools of thought that used Pakistan as their battleground.

Inequality under the law

The Hudood Ordinance, combined with the spread of Wahhabi influences, was a turning point for women's rights, promoting a particularly circumscribed and subservient role for women.⁷ This version of Islam gained prominence, particularly within rural areas where historic cultural practices (many unrelated to Islam) often perpetuated regressive and highly discriminatory practices towards women. For instance, "sawara" is a customary practice of resolving feuds in which the perpetrator's family gives away a female family member (of any age) in marriage to the victim's family. Other traditional practices include barring women and girls from seeking education or leaving the home without a male chaperone. These are not Islamic rules - Islam explicitly calls for education of men and women - but Wahhabi theology resonates with these populations and reinforces that the subservience of women is in line with Islamic doctrine.

Women fought against the Hudood Ordinance, arguing that many aspects of the laws were intrinsically misogynistic. In 1981, a group of activists formed the Women's Action Forum (WAF) in reaction to the harsh penalties under the Hudood Ordinance laws and the sentencing of a Pakistani woman to stoning. The WAF created space for Pakistani women to challenge their treatment under the military government, and the organization received Pakistani and Western media attention for reporting on previously-ignored women's rights issues.⁸ WAF's media storm paved the way for the formation of other women's initiatives such as the Pakistani Commission on the Status of Women (1983).⁹ Women's legal activism achieved other successes in subsequent decades, among them a law declaring a mandatory death penalty for perpetrators of gang rape (1997) and harsher punishments for 'honor' killings (2005).

In 2006, activists and women parliamentarians succeeded in passing the Protection of Women Act, which amended the Hudood adultery and rape laws to define rape as a crime, allowed convictions based on evidence rather than the testimony of four men, and prevented women who have been raped from being charged with fornication.¹⁰ But the law has not been effectively implemented, and there is little awareness of the provision among law enforcement or even Pakistani women. Despite legal protections, violence against women continues, often with impunity.

The blasphemy laws: fueling intolerance, not diversity

The manipulation and enforcement of the blasphemy laws has also contributed to the tide of intolerance and violence in recent years. The laws date back to British colonial rule in 1860 and prescribe punishment for willful defiling or destruction of a place or object of worship or disrupting religious gatherings. They are applicable to all religions and have been in force since Pakistan's independence in 1947.¹¹

In the 1980s, the military government of Zia Al Haq revised the blasphemy laws so that insults to Islam *alone* would be punishable. In November 2010, tensions boiled over when Asia Bibi, a Christian woman and mother of five, was sentenced to death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Mohammed. Today, she is languishing in a squalid jail awaiting an appeal. Also in 2010, Punjab's Governor, Salman Taseer, a critic of the laws, was assassinated. The incident divided the country, with some hailing the assassin (his bodyguard) as a hero. Sherry Rehman, a member of parliament, drafted a bill to reform the blasphemy laws, but was later

⁷ The Hudood Ordinance (1979) included criminal law provisions that severely circumscribed the rights of women. For example, if women reported a rape case, they could be convicted of adultery or fornication because their report was considered to be tantamount to a confession. The laws also allowed impunity for honor killings.

⁸ Yusuf, Zohra. "My Years with WAF." 13 Feb 2013. Available at beenasarwar.wordpress.com.

⁹ Mustafa, Zubeida. "Pakistan: Hudood Laws Must Go." *Dawn*, 25 Feb 2006.

¹⁰ "Pakistan: The Protection of Women Act, 2006 and Its Implementation." *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, 3 Dec 2007. Available at www.refworld.org.

¹¹ In 1973 Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto declared the minority Ahmadi community as non-Muslim, creating a wedge between them and the majority Muslim population.

pressured to withdraw the bill. She was subjected to death threats, and investigated by Pakistani authorities for blasphemy herself (since 2011, she has served as Pakistan's ambassador to the U.S.). In March 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, the Minister for Minorities, was shot to death in Islamabad. In August 2012, a cleric accused a young Christian girl of burning the Koran, setting off yet another maelstrom of anger.

A Chronology of Gender Sensitive Legislation and Policy in Pakistan

1948	Muslim Personal Law: Muslim women given right to inherit property, incl. farmland.
1954	The Constituent Assembly adopted a Charter giving equal status and opportunities to women, equal wages for equal work, and protection of women's rights in the Muslim Personal Law; They rejected a 10% women's quota of seats and agreed to only 3%.
1956	Women were given the right to a double vote: general seats & women's reserved seats.
1961	The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance passes, allowing polygamy, requiring registration of marriage and divorce, inheritance of children of predeceased parents, standard <i>nikahnama</i> (marriage form) and raising girls' minimum age of marriage from 14 to 16.
1967	The West Pakistan Assembly passed the Prohibition on Exhibition of Dowry Bill, moved by a female member of the assembly, Sahibzadi Mahmooda Begum.
1969	The Martial Regime of General Yahya Khan declared the kidnapping of women and children a crime punished by death.
1973	The 1973 Constitution provided 10% quota in National Assembly, and 5% in provincial assemblies for two general elections. State services (exc. police) opened to women.
1975	The first Women's Rights Committee established.
1979	Women's Division (and cells) created in federal and provincial government.
1983	Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women created.
1984	The Majlis-e-Shoora doubled women's quota from 10 to 20 seats.
1988	Benazir Bhutto becomes the first women Prime Minister
1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Women's Division upgraded to Ministry of Women's Development (MoWD). • First Women's Bank Limited established by the govt. • First Women Police Stations with all women staff established by the govt.
1994	Commission of Inquiry on Women (COIW) established. Justice Majida Rizvi (Sindh) and Justice Khalida Rasheed (Peshawar) became the first women High Court judges.
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Islamic Ideology Council declares marrying girls to the Quran as un-Islamic /immoral. • The Punjab government passes 1/3 women's quota law for all local council seats
1996	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is ratified.
1997	The Parliament passes law declaring the death penalty mandatory for gang-rape.
2000	General Musharraf declares 'honor' killing as pre-mediated murder.
2001	33% quota for women in districts, town and Tehsil councils is mandated by law.
2003	The Supreme Court declares Muslim girls can marry without guardians' permission.
2005	The Criminal Law amended: death penalty or 25 years jail for 'honor' crimes.
2006	'Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendments) Bill' made into law, amending much of the 1979 Hudood Ordinance
2008	Women's cross-party Parliamentary Caucus formed.
2009	National Assembly passes Domestic Violence (Prevention & Protection) Bill.
2010	'Protection against Harassment of women at the Workplace Act is passed.
2011	The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill passed.
2013	Senate passes the Domestic Violence Bill, which has not yet been implemented.

II. Rejecting Tolerance and Promoting Women's Subservience in Education

Historically, Pakistan's tribal belts were conservative yet tolerant regions. Minorities such as Sikhs and Hindus enjoyed religious and economic freedoms. Clerics admonished people for not coming to prayers regularly, but rarely preached sectarianism or politics. But Zia-Al-Haq's 1979 education policy, which prioritized the teaching of Islamic thought and ideology, signaled a shift.¹² Reinforced by an influx of Saudi funds and clerics, the policy gave rise to the extremist breed of Islamism found today in the tribal areas.

Since then, the state's promotion of Islamic orthodoxy and militancy has seeped deep into society. Religious political parties and a large section of the Pakistan Muslim clergy increasingly espouse radical perspectives. Prayer leaders affiliated with Islamic parties or militant groups preach anti-Western sermons to further political goals. They make selective and out-of-context inferences to the Holy Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) while ignoring verses that support tolerance and social justice. While these radical teachings are not synonymous with violence, they discourage acceptance of diverse communities and gender equality.

Girls' schools have become frequent targets of radicalism and militancy. The Taliban has used radio broadcasts to threaten girls with acid attacks and death, causing many parents in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to withdraw their daughters from school.¹³ The targeting of girls and women is part of a deliberate, well thought-out strategy to generate fear and prevent an open and inclusive society.

The role of *madrassahs* and the new "feminism"

There are varying estimates of the number, influence, and growth of *madrassahs* in Pakistan.¹⁴ Most *madrassahs* are funded by philanthropists, Pakistani expatriates, a few Middle Eastern countries, and *zakat* money collected from the rich. They offer a basic curriculum of literacy, numeracy and religious education, and feed, clothe and educate children for free (unlike state schools) -- an attractive option for poor families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that parents are offered incentives to enroll their children, such as free trips to Mecca. But *madrassahs* provide little, if any, scientific education and English skills, and the social values they espouse reflect conservative social mores, particularly in terms of gender relations.

Recognizing the power of women to convey values to their children, radical Islamists use all-female *madrassahs* as a mechanism to spread fundamentalist ideology. For example, at the Jamia Hafsa seminary attached to the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad, the students are renowned for their militancy and strict black head-to-toe dress code. In July 2007, students and leaders in the Red Mosque confronted government forces in a violent week-long siege that killed more than 60 people.¹⁵

The curricula in all-female *madrassahs* are designed by men with three key goals: to educate girls to be ideal mothers, train them to perform their domestic chores, and ensure women preserve and transmit conservative Islamic traditions and beliefs to their off-spring. "The purpose of educating girls is not developing independent and autonomous selves among them or enhancing their intellectual capacities,"

"Never think of [your husband] as your equal, never let him do any work for you... If he comes to you and begins to massage your hands or feet, stop him; you would not let your father do this services, and your husband's rank is higher than your father's."

-Text book,
Deobandi Islamic School of Thought

¹² The 1979 National Education Policy and Implementation Program outlines the educational priorities and the role of Islam. See Talbani, Aziz. "Pedagogy, Power and Discourse: Transformation of Islamic Education." *Comparative Education Review*, v. 40, n. 1.

¹³ "Education in the Line of Fire." *UNICEF*, 8 May 2009. Available at educationandtransition.org.

¹⁴ 6% of Pakistani students attend madrasas, an increase of 2.1 percent from previous years. USAID estimated that 1.7 million were enrolled in madrasas in 2011. More information: "Madrasa fill education gap in Karachi hotspot." *IRIN*, 24 Oct 2012. Available at www.irinnews.org. Scholars debate whether the number of madrasas has drastically expanded. "The Madrasa Myth." *Foreign Policy*, 15 March 2012. Available at foreignpolicy.com.

¹⁵ Griff, Witte. "Raid at Islamabad Mosque Turns Long and Deadly." *The Washington Post*, 11 July 2007.

writes the scholar Muhammad Farooq. “[T]he Muslim girls serve an effective instrument in fulfilling the ‘*ulama*’s mission of reconstructing the Muslim society in accordance with the Islamic ideals using selective and out of context religious texts for the classrooms... girls’ *madaris* of Pakistan are disciplining feminism, creating personalities, which are easy to be molded, by constant indoctrination of ideals of Islamic womanhood.”¹⁶ A common theme is female subordination to men. The Deobandi School, for example, teaches a text that advises women on how to treat their husbands.

Parents send their girls to female *madrassahs* to complement the state-based education, to avoid the more dangerous public schools in tribal areas, to enhance marriage prospects, and to increase social status. Female graduates can join men in preaching and teaching, and often generate income for themselves (through sponsorships) by opening new *madrassahs* or teaching the Quran to young women. The number of women attending these *madrassahs* is increasing as more facilities and incentives are offered. In the 1970’s such schools were rare. By 2009 for example, there were 1,900 registered all-female *madrassahs*, 15 percent of *madrassahs* in the country.¹⁷

III. Foreign Intervention and Economic Fall-out as Causes of Radicalization

In addition to the political and socio-cultural challenges, poverty, lack of access to justice, poor governance, corruption, and lack of opportunity have caused frustration and anger among the youth. These problems have been profoundly exacerbated by foreign intervention and conflict since 2001, leading to the deaths of over 35,000 civilians and an estimated national revenue loss of \$17.8 billion by 2010-11.¹⁸

“The recruitment process of extremists varies across groups. Common tactics in the beginning include offering money or other incentives. They also build friendships to try to lure boys. In some cases, Quranic verses are used to convince boys to join the Jihad. Some believe that their actions will lead them to heaven. It can take approximately six months to transform the mindset of an education 20-year-old boy.”

-Pakistani woman activist

Many people – particularly among the educated classes - are leaving the country. The industrialists and businessmen in KPK have migrated to Islamabad or other cities in Punjab. Thousands have lost jobs due to reduced investment and the downturn in tourism, and there is lack of support for displaced populations. The resultant increase in unemployment and poverty has made young men more vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by militias and criminal gangs.

Rising inflation and cost of living has increasingly transformed women’s roles from housewives to participants in the national economy. Most women are self-employed as home-based workers, such as rural farm managers. They often lack access to basic skills training, and face legal, economic, and social barriers to financial resources and decision-making positions. Women also face workplace harassment despite legal protections such as the Protection against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Act (2010).

The situation is most dire in the conflict zones and areas affected by natural disasters where the threat of violence keeps women isolated. The few micro-finance ventures that exist often have cumbersome registration processes. Government and relief

Drones in Numbers, 2004-2013

368 attacks
411-884 civilians killed
168-197 children killed
1,173-1,472 injured

-Estimates by the Bureau of
Investigative Journalism

¹⁶ Farooq, M. “Disciplining the Feminism: Girls’ Madrasa Education in Pakistan.” Available at www.gcu.edu.pk.

¹⁷ Butt, Riazat. “All Female Madrasa Expanding Rapidly in Pakistan.” *OneWorld South Asia*, 15 May 2009. Available at southasia.oneworld.net.

¹⁸ “Cost of War on Terror for Pakistan Economy.” Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-2011, p. 219 (*Pakistan Ministry of Finance*, 2011). Available at: www.finance.gov.pk.

agencies, including the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and the Zakat Fund, offer handouts. These policies are self-defeating in the long run, however, as they promote dependency. Nonetheless, there is one silver lining: to access the funds, women are required to register for national identity cards. With formal identification papers, women automatically become voters and can claim rights such as land ownership.

Fueling jihad: geopolitics, sanctions and anti-western sentiments

The tail end of the 1990's brought heavily imposed U.S.-led sanctions as punishment for Pakistan's nuclear weapon program. The harsh economic impact on the lives of the poor and middle class, combined with a sense that the U.S. and India-led international community was seeking to destroy Pakistan, gave rise to new anti-Western sentiments and revival of the jihadi spirit.

Many Pakistanis believe that military action against the Taliban and other militants is unjustified, arguing that suicide attacks in Pakistan are undertaken either by the agents of foreign powers or by the Taliban to retaliate against Pakistan's actions in the tribal areas or its alignment with the U.S. They believe that Pan-Islamism is the means of countering foreign influence and intervention.

"If you are fortunate to survive violent extremism, you may become a target of a drone attack... The drones kill innocent civilians along with some most wanted extremists. It's not the killing by drone but the constant fear of drone attacks that keeps the people traumatized... resulting not only in psychological confusion among the citizens but also in a burgeoning hatred towards NATO countries, especially the U.S."

-Swat Valley based woman (interviewed in 2012)

The number of displaced individuals continues to rise as people in FATA leave their homes and livelihoods for fear of the violence, drone attacks and other security-related issues. In addition, the 2009 floods exacerbated the situation, leading to the mass exodus of three million people from the Swat Valley.¹⁹ This event became one of the world's most dramatic displacement crises since the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The trauma and long-term impact of this exposure to violence, death, disability, and loss of property, in addition to the perpetual fear of insecurity, is immeasurable.

Today in KPK and FATA where the conflict is most prevalent, women are literally at the frontlines of warfare, as widows, victims and survivors of suicide bomb blasts, and displaced persons. Often, male relatives are absent, so women become de facto household heads, shouldering the responsibility of feeding, nursing, and

"[Among youth] the concept of the nation-state and their notion of citizenship has been greatly undermined... their affiliation ladder starts from a person being a Muslim with religious obligations. It moves on to Islamic movements (non-state organizations) that uphold the primacy of Islam and moves on to an Islamic 'ummah' – universal Islamic community or brotherhood. It is a transnational religion-based identity..."

-Hasan Ashkari Rizvi, "At the Brink?"
The Future of Pakistan (Brookings, 2011, p.191)

sheltering the old, the young, and the injured.²⁰ Yet *fatwas* have been issued to bar them from leaving their homes without a male family member, severely limiting their mobility, access to education and health facilities, and ability to fully care for their families. Women whose sons are among the militias worry for their children's lives, yet often live in communities that shun, isolate, and even attack them for their familial associations. They have little recourse or protection from the state.

¹⁹ The Swat Valley is in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan, near the border with Afghanistan.

²⁰ Khaliq, Bushra. "Rising Extremism, War on Terrorism and Women's Lives in Pakistan." *International Viewpoint*, 16 Feb 2010.

IV. Women Reclaiming their Space: Making Political Gains to Change Ground Realities

Women have been in Pakistan's legislative assemblies since 1947. The February 2008 general elections brought over 22 percent women to the parliament in both general and reserved seats, including the first female speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza. Mirza convened the first Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), which became a model of cross-party collaboration and brought gender perspectives and issues into parliamentary discussions. It also strengthened relationships with national and international civil society organizations working on women's rights and increased women's participation in parliamentary debates. The WPC has successfully passed legislation for the protection of women, including The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), and passage of the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill (2011) and The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill.²¹ WPC has also pressed for increased female representation in special committees dealing with constitutional amendments, electoral reform, and peace and security, including space in the peace *jirgas* and other national structures.

Although the increased presence of women challenges conservative ideology and social attitudes, women's political representation will signify little more than window dressing if women and girls become absent from public spaces for fear of being attacked. Evidence suggests that women, particularly in Balochistan and KPK, have been discouraged from voting by male community members and the Taliban who say that female political participation violates culture, religion, and tradition.²² In 2013, female candidates were the targets of implied and overt threats, leading some candidates to withdraw.²³ Only six national and ten provincial assembly seats were won by women, although there were 150 female candidates for the National Assembly and 313 for the Provincial Assembly.²⁴ Based on observations of over 20 polling stations in one KPK district, "female participation in elections was negligible" due to a lack of transportation, voter intimidation, cultural restraints, insufficient numbers of female polling staff, and agreements between political parties to prevent women from voting.²⁵

Women offer an alternative to extremism: a vision of co-existence and human security

Despite these challenges to participation, women in government, civil society organizations, and at the grassroots levels are leading efforts to counter extremist attitudes in Pakistan, to address the roots of radicalization, and to respond to the needs of families and communities that are most affected by violence.

Within parliament, the WPC has focused on women, peace, and security in recent years. In 2010, the WPC convened the first Convention of Women Parliamentarians for "*The Role of Women Parliamentarians in Peace, Security & Reconciliation*," which included women legislators across federal and provincial assemblies.

"Peace is the condition for the fullness of life but it has vanished from my soil... I haven't witnessed a single day of peace for 10 years and I fear for my 18-year-old son who grew up witnessing violence and death, trauma and bloodshed, fear and horror."

-Swat Valley based mother
(interviewed in 2012)

Participants focused on the following issues during the gathering: 1) strengthening the role of women parliamentarians in geo-politics; 2) creating a community of female leaders across party lines; 3) raising a strong and united voice for peace and stability; 4) creating a network of women parliamentarians with a common agenda for women's empowerment and participation at all levels of decision-making; and 5) involving civil society for progress of Pakistani women. Legislators emphasized the need to end violence and provide a sustainable base for development, with special consideration for vulnerable populations,

²¹ "Domestic violence, including effectiveness of the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006." *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, 2013. Available at: www.refworld.org.

²² "Only 6 of 150 women candidates win NA seats." *International Herald Tribune*. 16 May 2013.

²³ "Women Face Bars to Voting in Landmark Pakistan Poll," UP, 18 Feb 2013.

²⁴ "Pakistani Women Withdraws from Political Race After Taliban Threats." *Voice of America*, 17 April 2013.

²⁵ See F.N. 20 and "Ban ki-Moon Meets with Women Parliamentarians in Pakistan" *UN Women*, 21 Aug 2013.

²⁵ Sherazi, Zahir Shah. "More agreements surface barring women from voting." *Dawn*, 16 May 2013.

particularly women and children. Peace, they noted, is not merely the absence of disorder, war and unrest, but an environment that provides for quality of life and fundamental rights. The parliamentarians also called for a meaningful role of women at all levels of decision-making, including peace-building and security.

The WPC has also taken steps to expand the dialogue bilaterally and internationally. In 2011-12, the WPC met with female parliamentarians from Afghanistan twice to discuss the role of women in peace and security, progressive legislation for women, areas for increased collaboration to support women in parliaments in the two countries, women's full inclusion in security decisions, and women's roles in promoting a culture of peace. In August 2013, the WPC met with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in a meeting that was organized by UN Women, in collaboration with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, the National Commission on the Status of Women and UNDP. The meeting of approximately 70 parliamentarians and activists included a discussion of security for civilians in Pakistan, increasing women's political participation in the country, and health and education needs.

Pakistani women are also playing instrumental roles as civil society leaders, promoting common values based on peace, tolerance, and women's rights. Many women-led organizations work inside communities throughout Pakistan, where they are gradually transforming education, promoting economic and political empowerment, providing social services for those affected by displacement, and facilitating rehabilitation for both victims and former militants.

For example, an organization called the PAIMAN Alumni Trust is comprised of a network of women leaders throughout Pakistan. One of its projects, called "Communities Waging Peace; Piece by Piece" is conducted in 12 areas of Pakistan and sensitizes communities and government officials about the role of civil society, especially women and youth, in post conflict/disaster reconstruction, rehabilitation, and peacebuilding. PAIMAN conducts research, awareness-raising, and media campaigns, as well as capacity-building for parliamentarians, government officials, members of the judiciary, the media, and other NGO's throughout the country. PAIMAN coordinates community youth and mothers groups and trains them to identify signs of extremism and offers psycho-social support and economic alternatives to violence.²⁶

PAIMAN coordinates a coalition of women leaders called Amn-o-Nisa, which addresses extremism and supports peacebuilding at local levels. Since its formation in 2011, coalition members have engaged in counter-extremism efforts in the country, including: advocating for curriculum reform in the education system; conversing with influential religious leaders, political parties, and other women's and youth organizations; training female parliamentarians on women's roles in conflict and reconstruction; forming student "peace clubs" in schools; participating in television and radio broadcasts; and engaging youth and mothers in efforts to prevent extremism.²⁷ One member of the coalition, Bushra Qadim Hyder, runs a private intermediate and secondary school in Peshawar, where she has introduced peace education in the curriculum; her school is the first in Pakistan to incorporate peace education. As an educational professional and entrepreneur, she also provides skill-building for victims of extremism and links them female entrepreneurs to local markets.

INSAN Foundation Trust is another organization that focuses on gender equality, women's empowerment, peace, diversity, and tolerance in Pakistan. Its programs throughout the country include awareness, capacity development and technical support on gender equality, including non-violence and women's inclusion in peacebuilding. One program called "Women Action for Peace and Nonviolence" builds civil society capacity to promote women's rights, peace and non-violence. The organization also conducts leadership training for women politicians and journalists in the country to support peacebuilding values.²⁸

²⁶ See PAIMAN website for further detail on these programs: www.paimantrust.org

²⁷ PAIMAN and The Institute for Inclusive Security facilitated workshops with women leaders with support from the United States Institute of Peace between August 2010 and August 2012 to establish the coalition. A report on the project is available at: www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/women-moderating-extremism-in-pakistan/

²⁸ See INSAN website for further detail on these programs: www.insanfoundationtrust.org

Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation (Aurat Foundation) focuses on women's empowerment, citizens' rights and good governance through information-sharing, capacity-building, and advocacy, and includes a network of citizens' groups and activists throughout Pakistan. Its programs are designed to address women's concerns and development in the country, increase women's participation in politics and government, and promote transparency and democracy in Pakistan. Aurat Foundation's programs have included a partnership with UN Women to increase understanding of women, peace, and security and mandates for women's participation in those processes in Pakistan.²⁹

These organizations are illustrative of the emergence of women-led initiatives in Pakistan that are challenging the tide of extremism within communities and providing new approaches to create a more inclusive, tolerant society. Civil society organizations are engaging many stakeholders – women, mothers, youth, political and religious leaders – in shaping an alternative, peaceful vision for the future of Pakistan.

Conclusions

Nearly 70 years after its founding, Pakistan is facing numerous crises. Decades of poor governance and increasing corruption have contributed to endemic poverty. Regional warfare, particularly in Afghanistan, has led to heightened militarization. Combined with persistent international intervention, these factors have fueled the religious extremism threatening the foundations of the state. Women are among the most affected.

Yet, Pakistani women have been a critical force in the struggle for peace and tolerance in the country. Despite numerous risks and threats, women are on the frontlines of this battle for national identity. They are a key bulwark against the rising tide of extremism, and they are essential actors in preserving the core values of tolerance and equality upon which the country was founded. Their experiences and perspectives can provide a better understanding of the current state of peace and security in Pakistan, and their inclusion can offer improved approaches to its most pressing political, economic, and social challenges now and in the future.

Recommendations

To Donor Countries and the United Nations:

- Recognize that Pakistan has a history of pluralism and tolerance, and support policies and socio-cultural programs that promote an inclusive national identity.
- In formulating counter-terrorism policies, shift from an over-reliance on force and incorporate an overarching development approach that addresses the root causes and drivers of extremism.
 - Focus on the needs of the local population, including women and other marginalized groups, when developing security and aid policies.
- Re-examine current country aid process that are consortium-based (U.S. and local) and short-term, as smaller NGO's in Pakistan have limited capacity to implement projects with these requirements.

²⁹ See Aurat Foundation website for further information: www.af.org.pk

To International NGOs:

- Devote more attention and resources to programs that provide rehabilitation, compensation, skills, and livelihood opportunities for victims and survivors of violent extremism and for former radicals re-entering their communities.
- Support successful indigenous and local models for preventing and eliminating violent extremism.
 - Understand the specific implications of violent extremism for women and youth and incorporate their needs and recommendations into policies and programs.

To the government of Pakistan:

- Recognize that extremism in the country is a growing problem, and support local, bottom-up solutions.
 - Prioritize policies and programs that support a Pakistani identity based on social cohesion and tolerance.
- Train and support Pakistan's security forces, especially police, in addressing violent extremism and developing community-centric security approaches.
 - Increase women's participation in the police and ensure gender sensitivity among both male and female members of the security forces.
- Develop a national education curriculum that incorporates peace education and promotes cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, human rights, and gender equity.
- Include FATA in the national identity of Pakistan, and integrate the region into the social, economic, and political life of the country.

To Civil Society:

- Increase engagement with local and national governments and officials; reach out to female officials and politicians.
 - Organize women parliamentarians to lobby and advocate for women's inclusion in peace, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction processes within their constituencies and at all policy-making levels.
- Provide strategic support to push for increased opportunities for women's participation in the public sphere in Pakistan.
 - Increase knowledge of women, peace and security frameworks and mandates.
 - Produce analysis and host training opportunities to mainstream gender perspectives in development, peacebuilding, and security policies.
 - Support a sustainable joint peace forum to promote women's civic and political activism and women's contributions in a pluralistic society.
- Build strong allies among civil society organizations and policymakers at the national, regional, and international levels in order to implement joint strategies to curb extremism.
- Evaluate the progress of civil society-led programs, and identify gaps to inform the development of future initiatives.

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