



# Religious Extremism in the Sindh Province of Pakistan

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When evaluating the rising instances of religious extremism in the province of Sindh, one must consider the education that children are receiving. Both state and religious education are contributing to the rise of extremism; in order to combat this, the state must strengthen their school system to make public education more appealing than madrasas run by extremist organizations. Furthermore, the public school curriculum needs to be altered to stop the promotion of Islam and perpetuate the hatred towards other religions, specifically Hinduism. With education reform, the state can combat extremism at its most crucial level and can slow the flow of individuals into extremist networks.

From January 1 to June 24 of 2016 there were 178 terror related incidents in Sindh alone. This includes attacks and killings, but also arrests and weapon seizures. There are 176 days in that period, indicating an incidence frequency of more than one per day.<sup>1</sup> There have been strong civil society responses to many of these occurrences, and the government must continue to support civil society to show its condemnation for these attacks. Civil society is the best way to encourage government response, so civil society must remain active and diligent in the fight against religious extremism.

### ***Public School Education and Religious Extremism***

The cycle that perpetuates religious extremism begins with the failures of state education. Public education does not provide students with adequate skills to navigate the job market as adults. This has led to an increased drop out rate. Public schools are under funded and lack the infrastructure to support the amount of children that need education.<sup>2</sup> For the children that do receive a public education, the textbooks they are provided with are bias towards Islam. While Islam is the dominant faith, there are significant Christian and Hindu minorities. Many textbooks provided to public schools in Sindh promote the idea that Hindus are inferior and violent.

“Hindus have tried all their means to harm Muslims of the Indian Sub-continent and killed millions of Muslims. They were deprived of their assets and properties.<sup>3</sup>”

This excerpt, from a 2011 textbook, clearly advances fear and hatred towards Hindus. While there have historically been fighting between Hindus and Muslims on the Indian subcontinent, this excerpt is framed in a subjective way that is ignominious towards Hindus. This perpetuates aggression and hostility between Muslims and Hindus and discourages Hindus from attending public schools.

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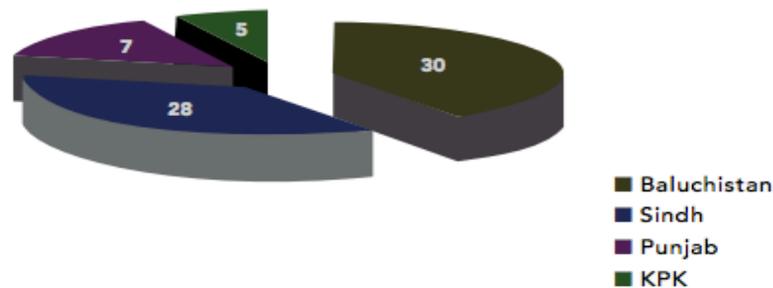
<sup>1</sup>“Sindh Assessment- 2015,” last modified 2001,  
<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/sindh/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> The British Council. “Paving the way for improved education in Sindh, Pakistan,” last modified 2016, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/news-and-events/paving-way-improved-education-sindh-pakistan>

<sup>3</sup> Safiq, Irsa. *Teaching Intolerance in Pakistan: Religious Bias in Public School Textbooks*. Islamabad: Peace and Education Foundation, 2016. June, 2016.  
[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Pakistan\\_FINALonline.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Pakistan_FINALonline.pdf)

After a review of the textbooks in 2011 and 2015, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom published a report that detailed the comparison of findings between 2011 and 2015 in each province of Pakistan.

#### NEW EXAMPLES OF OBJECTIONABLE CONTENT



<sup>2</sup> A total of 78 books from all four provinces have been studied. The books included Urdu, Islamic Studies, Pakistan Studies, and Social Studies/History from grade 5 to 10 of all four provinces of Pakistan. 24 out of 78 books were found to contain biases.

[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Pakistan\\_FINALonline.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Pakistan_FINALonline.pdf)

As the chart clearly indicates, Sindh had one of the highest occurrences of objectionable content in public school textbooks in 2015.<sup>4</sup> This feeds into the occurrence of religious extremism because children are taught inaccurate information that perpetuates hateful stereotypes.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF NEW INTOLERANT PASSAGES BY SUBJECT IN SINDH								
Subject	Grade							Total
	5	6	7	8	9	9/10	10	
Urdu	1	-	7	-	-	4	-	12
Social Studies	0	3	2	5	-	-	-	10
Pakistan Studies	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Islamic Studies	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>28</b>

[http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF\\_Pakistan\\_FINALonline.pdf](http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Pakistan_FINALonline.pdf)

The chart above details which textbooks contain the most bias content. Without adjustment to the information in the textbooks, hateful content will continue to circulate, adding to a culture of increasing extremism.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

Another contributing factor is the appeal of madrasa education in comparison to public school education. Public school education in Sindh is not necessarily underfunded, however the funding is wrongly appropriated; 70% of the budget goes towards paying teacher salaries, while only 18% goes towards maintenance of primary and secondary schools. Of the 43,000 government run schools, 20,000 have one room, 8,000 schools lack shelter and 27,000 have no electricity. The final 12% of the budget is for maintenance and development of new schools, but so little money is allocated towards this that millions of children are left without access to education.<sup>5</sup>

The largest portion of the budget funds the salaries of teachers, however, teacher absenteeism is prevalent. Educators are a part of the bureaucratic system, leaving them vulnerable to corruption. Teachers are appointed by the education department, making bribery and salary sharing with higher up education officials a common practice. While some are appointed off of their merit and passion, many work the bureaucratic chain and receive wide spread benefits with few actual appearances in the classroom.<sup>6</sup> This leaves students with the inability to receive an education at a public school, increasing the appeal of a madrasa.

### ***Madrasa Education and Religious Extremism***

This is where the shortcomings of public education are truly exposed. Because a high majority of the schools in Sindh do not provide proper shelter and other necessary facilities, families turn to religious education at a madrasa. The state created a Pakistan Madrasa Education Board (PMEB) to establish a network of “model madrasas” and to regulate others. The board encouraged madrasas to provide both religious and secular education, however, many madrasas resist registering in order to keep their autonomy. To incentivize registration, the government promised funding to those that complied. Extremist groups opposed this effort and eventually the government backed down on their initiative.<sup>7</sup> The extremist groups that run many of these madrasas have the capital to appeal to a significant portion of the population. With schools that provide proper shelter, electricity and often have more than one classroom, extremist madrasas pull in children and families with the promise of a safe and fulfilling education. Their facilities are often better than a typical madrasa because a larger network funds them.

The madrasas have a strong following among the less fortunate sections of both rural and urban Pakistan. With the spread of radical Islam into the hinterland of the country the madrasas have started to behave like a center of power and politics. Therefore, the construction of madrasas generally receives more funds and donations in comparison to schools.<sup>8</sup>

Although most madrasas are not linked to any terrorist organization, they tend to teach an exclusionary worldview, denouncing other sects of Islam and other religions more generally.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group, *Education Reform in Pakistan*. Islamabad:Brussels. June 2014. Pg. 16

<sup>6</sup> Ibid pg. 20

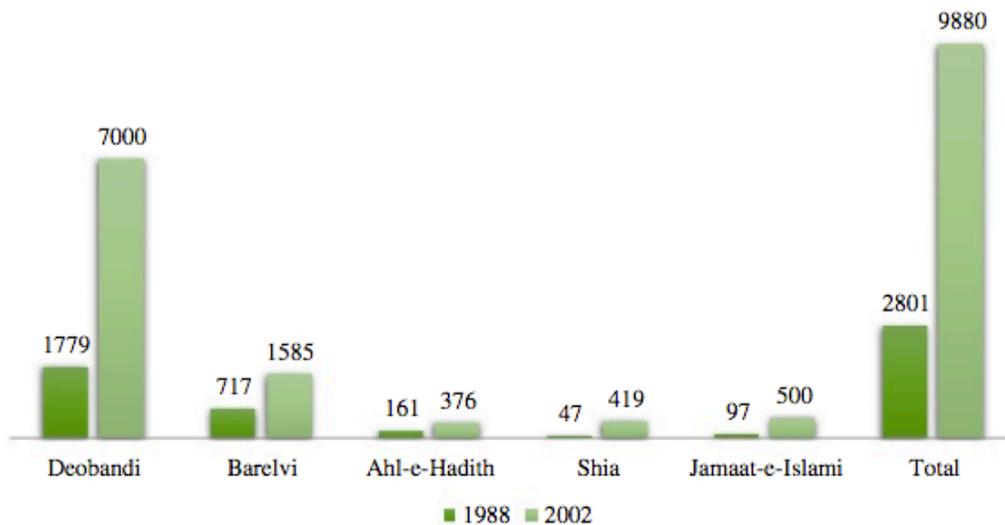
<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharya, Sanchita. Madrasa Education in Pakistan: In the Context of Government Policy, Global Education Magazine. <http://www.globaleducationmagazine.com/madrasa-education-pakistan-context-government-policy/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ali, Saleem H. “Pakistan’s Madrasas: The Need for International Reform and the Role of International Assistance,” Brookings Doha Center. August 2009.

However, the madrasas that are run by terrorist or extremist organizations tend to funnel students deeper into their groups.

**Table 1: Sect-wise increase in the number of madrassas**



**Source: (Rahman 2008: 64)**

[http://www.academia.edu/17631134/The\\_Madrassa\\_Conundrum\\_State\\_of\\_Religious\\_Education\\_in\\_Pakistan](http://www.academia.edu/17631134/The_Madrassa_Conundrum_State_of_Religious_Education_in_Pakistan)

As the graph above details, there was almost a 400% increase in the number of madrasas across Pakistan between 1988 and 2002. These madrasas fall under different sects, which increases the amount of sectarian conflict between citizens. Even if the majority of these madrasas do not preach violent messages, they are adding to the level of sectarian unrest.

Another issue surrounding madrasa education is the lack of applicable skills that students learn. The curriculum is almost entirely religious which leaves students with little scientific or mathematic education. This is especially problematic for after students graduate, they are unlikely to find a job due to their lack of skills and knowledge in core subjects.<sup>10</sup> This has the potential to lead students into a cycle of extremism; if they are unable to get jobs they may find themselves back in the hands of extremist organizations.

This is not to denounce madrasas or Islamic teachings, as there are a high number of registered madrasas that provide many children with quality education. Rather, this is an evaluation of the madrasas that are resistive to state regulation—clearly indicating a curriculum that is conflicting with what the states believes should be taught. Although state curriculum also needs to be updated and reevaluated, the state has an interest in combating extremist organizations and their teachings.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

### *Policy Recommendations*

1. Pakistan needs to have stronger restrictions on the education madrasas can provide. They need to require registration and investigate madrasas that do not comply. The state needs to ensure that students are not being taught extremist messages, but also that they are learning skills that will be applicable later in life.
2. In Sindh, more funding needs to be allocated to maintenance and expansion of schools. Salaries of absentee teachers need to be reduced and teachers must become accountable through random checks on schools by the Department of Education.
3. The curriculum in public schools needs to be altered through the provision of new textbooks. These new books must be objective in their discussion of religion and ethnicity.
4. The Department of Education must have more rigorous standards for teachers who should be subject to checks in the classroom to ensure that absentee teachers are no longer hired.
5. Rather than the United States giving USAID money towards the expansion of education in Pakistan, the US should foster relationships between madrasas in Sindh and in places like West Bengal, where religious education is of such a high quality that many non-Muslims are actively enrolled. These madrasas teach a pluralist message and provide children with both a secular and religious education. 64% of Bengali madrasas provide vocational training, ensuring that their students will have applicable skills in the job market.<sup>11</sup> This program could be of great influence to registered madrasas in Sindh. This is not to undermine the Islamic teachings that madrasas seek to project, but rather to institute a more complete education that many Islamic principles call for and to foster the idea of civilization that Islam calls for.
6. Civil society must demand government accountability on this front; both in education reform and in the overall fight against extremist groups.

### *Conclusions*

With adjustments to how teachers are hired and monitored, the state of Pakistan can make public school more appealing and more suitable for children. Hiring teachers that are passionate and accountable could change the educational system. In addition to hiring procedures, funding needs to be adjusted. Teacher's salaries are a massive proportion of budget, which should only be given if the teacher comes to school. Absentee teachers should not receive their pay and should immediately be reprimanded. This way, the state is ensuring that the educational budget is not feeding into corruption. The rest of the budget needs to be spent on school maintenance and construction, as well as keeping the textbooks up to date. Although that is the first step, removing textbook bias is no less important. This way, marginalization of religious minorities does not become engrained into society. Although textbook bias many not be a deterrent for most Muslims, it teaches children that they are better or worse than someone else, potentially leading to hostility and violence between religious groups.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

As the appeal of public school education increases, the threat of extremist madrasas decreases. Pakistan must keep pursuing registration of all madrasas to ensure that the curriculum is suitable. According to the Interior Ministry, 167 suspicious madrasas have been closed.<sup>12</sup> While this is a step to stop recruitment to extremist organizations, the state must also ensure that the education in these seminaries is beneficial to children. It must give children skills that will assist them in the job market; so some aspects of secularism must be taught.

The government of Pakistan must be accountable, and that means providing reliable, effective education to children ages 5-16. Starting with vulnerable, impressionable children will be the most effective way to combat extremism, however, in order for results to be immediately evident the government must be strict on extremist groups in areas outside of education. Their funds, meetings and members need to be monitored to ensure that they are unable to spread their messages.

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<sup>12</sup> Sindh Province has Become the Haven for Terror Groups, The Pak Tea House, 2016.  
<http://pakteahouse.net/2016/01/25/sindh-province-has-become-the-haven-for-terror-groups/>