



RESEARCH PAPER

Socioeconomic and Political Inequalities as Factors of Youth Militancy

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the main variables related to inequality that drive recruitment into militant organisations. The study is focused on economic and income inequality. Young people are pushed by several causes to join militant groups. Qualitative in nature, the study finds several potential causes of militancy, including variations in opportunity and gender, and discrepancies in the educational system. Disgruntled youth are drawn to militant agendas, while inequality feeds hatred and rage. One can also include variations in household income or per capita income across populations within a country or between countries as a factor for militancy. The disparity between rural and urban areas is also related to inequality of opportunity. Facilities for health, education, and other needs are either nonexistent or in disarray in rural communities. The state cannot solve this massive problem single-handedly. Society also bears a responsibility.

KEYWORDS

Income Inequality, Inequality of Opportunity, Militancy and Inequality, Militancy, Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan has been plagued by several forms of militancy for many years, including separatist and religious militancy. There have been periods in the nation's history when militant attacks on civilians and members of the armed forces have peaked. The year 2022 saw 643 fatal militant strikes, a 120% increase over the 292 fatalities in 2021 (Gul, 2023). In 2023, the country was the target of 586 terrorist incidents, which claimed 979 lives. In counter-insurgency actions, 545 more people died (Junaidi, 2024). The militants employ a range of strategies and techniques, such as suicide strikes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ambushes, hostage-taking, and the seizure of public and government facilities.

Here, a fundamental question is raised: What causes people to become members of militant groups? The reasons behind militancy are varied and typically involve more than one element. However, young individuals are typically the ones drawn to extremist organisations due to a confluence of variables. The main causes that are usually mentioned are poverty and inequality. When there is already a supportive climate, poverty can play a role in people's decision to become militants (Safiya, 2008). The local economy's dearth of job prospects, the existence of militant group members in a town, the area's proximity to a combat zone, and/or ongoing exposure to extremist media and literature are characteristics of this enabling environment. In regions where militancy poses a significant threat, the majority of these variables are frequently found. However, one of the potential elements impacting recruitment into militant organisations is inequality, which is the subject of this paper's analysis. The relationship between militancy and various forms of inequality is the primary focus of the study.

The wealthiest one percent held nine percent of the \$314 billion national income in 2018-19, while the poorest one percent only held 0.15 percent. Twenty-two percent of all

arable farmland is owned by the 1.1 percent of the population that belongs to the feudal land-owning class. The wealthiest 20 percent of Pakistanis own 49.6 percent of the country's GDP overall, while the poorest 20 percent only have access to 7%. The UNDP's data indicates that the proportion of middle-class people has decreased from 42% in 2009 to 36% in 2019, which is cause for more concern (Hashim, 2021).

Literature Review

Numerous scholars have examined different facets of inequality in Pakistan, including Anwar (2005), Kemal (2007), and Griffin and Khan (cited in Parkinson 1973). Anwar (2005) provides an overview of the development of economic inequality in Pakistan historically. He looks at estimates of Gini coefficients that were found in a number of studies that used the Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) conducted by the Federal Bureau of Statistics as a basis. Kemal (2007) concentrated on legislative strategies to reduce income inequality. Griffin and Khan discuss growth and inequality in Pakistan as well, pointing out that the difference in per capita wealth between the two areas of Pakistan contributed to the militant movement in East Pakistan against the West (Parkinson, 1973, p. 320). In the 1970s, Sigelman and Simpson (1977) noted that a wide range of writings, both theoretical and ideological, ancient and modern, came to concur that economic inequality was a contributing factor to political violence.

Martinez looked into the patterns and causes of violent deaths carried out by Latinos in the United States. He used data from 111 US localities to do a regression analysis that lends credence to the theory that violence is caused by economic inequality (Martinez, Jr. 1996). In one study, Kramer concludes that economic disparity is one of the three causal variables producing juvenile violence in the US after looking at theory and data. From Weede's (1981) point of view, economic inequality is likely one of the root causes of relative deprivation. Uneven and unequal land distribution is a significant factor contributing to rural income disparity in emerging countries (Adams, Jr, 1995). Amartya Sen (2001) enumerates gender disparities in several categories. Rashida Patel discusses judicial-legal inequity, or the misapplication and distortion of the law (Patel, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The unfair difference that exists in society between groups of people when some have more income, position, or opportunities than others is known as inequality. Unfair disparities like these have the ability to fuel polarisation, a feeling of relative deprivation, bias, prejudice, and discrimination within a community. Relative deprivation, or discontent, has been proposed as a key factor influencing political protest and violence (Weede, 1981).

Although the literature on the topic covers a variety of kinds of inequality, Jasso and Kotz (2008) suggest that the term can be simply classified into two categories: inequality between individuals (such as income disparity) and inequality between subgroups (such as racial inequality). It is challenging to determine which type of inequality contributes most to militancy in a given community. Marxist theorists would rank economic inequality highest among their concerns. However, in Pakistan, political and income inequality has played a significant role in pushing society to a point where citizen insecurity and militancy pose a real challenge. Systematic disparities in the allocation and acquisition of political resources are referred to as political inequality ("Political Inequality: Defining and Measuring Political Resources," 2008). In this research, many types of inequality (Figure 1) and their relationship to militancy are examined. What has been prioritised, nevertheless, is "economic and income inequality."

Material and Methods

Both primary and secondary sources of information are used in the research study. Official government records and interviews were among the major sources used, and they were crucial in determining how Pakistan's socioeconomic and political inequality affected youth militancy in the country. An understanding of the disparities was attained by looking through the official documents. The research was also greatly aided by secondary materials, which included books, scholarly journals, booklets, periodicals, and pertinent internet articles from websites, magazines, and newspapers. The study uses the information to analyse the complex relationship between militancy and inequality.

Inequality and Militancy

The Gini coefficient has a value between 0 and 1, where 0 denotes perfect equality and 1 denotes absolute disparity. Therefore, greater inequality is shown by a higher coefficient. The World Bank evaluated data from HIES for 1998-1999 in 2003 and discovered that the estimated value of the Gini coefficient for urban regions was 0.35, but it was 0.25 for rural areas. For the same data set, estimates from Pakistan's Federal Bureau of Statistics were extremely similar: 0.25 for rural areas and 0.36 for urban areas. Based on the HIES data for 2001-2002, Anwar's (2005) estimations of inequality demonstrated that the Gini coefficient stayed constant during the relevant years. He calculated the coefficients to be 0.36 in urban areas and 0.25 in rural regions, which is in line with the World Bank's 1998-1999 estimates.

Table 1
Income Share Accruing to Different Groups

Year	Poor class (20 percent)	Middle class (60 percent)	Rich class (20 percent)
<i>National</i>			
1990-91	6.07	46.40	47.53
1992-93	6.59	46.97	46.44
1993-94	6.57	47.75	45.69
1996-97	7.11	47.75	45.69
1998-99	6.57	44.76	48.67
2001-02	6.66	45.26	48.08
<i>Rural</i>			
1990-91	6.00	45.35	48.65
1992-93	7.12	48.65	44.23
1993-94	7.14	48.82	44.04
1996-97	7.24	49.99	42.77
1998-99	7.14	47.41	45.45
2001-02	7.21	47.69	45.11
<i>Urban</i>			
1990-91	6.76	48.20	45.05
1992-93	6.59	46.71	46.70
1993-94	7.04	48.67	44.29
1996-97	7.52	47.82	44.29
1998-99	6.62	41.73	51.65
2001-02	6.77	40.42	52.81

Source: Talat Anwar, *Long-Term Changes in Income Distribution in Pakistan: Evidence Based on Consistent Series of Estimates*, (CRPRID, Aug. 2005).

Anwar agrees that the Gini coefficient is not a perfect indicator of income inequality since it misses some subtle differences at the extremes of the income distribution range. As a result, he also considers the percentage of total income that goes to the bottom 20% of the population, the middle 60%, and the top 20% of the population. According to income share research, Pakistan's income inequality grew during the 1990s (Table 1).

Urban inequality exhibits the most pronounced downward tendency; by 2001–2002, the richest 20% of the population accounted for more than half of all income. Disturbing patterns are also seen in the data across groupings. In urban regions, where this income group's share of total income fell from 48.2 percent to 40.4 percent during the relevant decade, there was a particularly steep loss in the income share accruing to the middle 60 percent of the population. The data indicates that the poorest 20 percent received a negligible portion of the total income and that their assets stayed mostly unaltered. However, the middle classes suffered a severe loss of income, especially in cities.

A breakdown of the Gini coefficient or household income shares by district is not provided by the studies that are currently available on income inequality in Pakistan. On the other hand, several studies on land distribution in Pakistan's rural areas have been conducted, and these studies offer some insight into regional patterns of income distribution. Anwar, Qureshi, and Ali (2004) conducted a study that examined the relationship between landlessness and rural poverty in Pakistan by utilising data from the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey (PIHS) 2001–02. Based on the report, 75% of households in the nation are landless. Twenty-four percent more hold less than one hectare. Five hectares or more of land are owned by just 0.02 percent of families. The survey also discovered that landless households had extraordinarily high rates of poverty. In Punjab, households without a hectare of land experienced poverty at a rate of 44%, compared to 26.2 percent for those with a hectare or less. In Sindh and the erstwhile North Western Frontier Province (NWFP, now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), things were far worse. In the former, 59 percent of landless households lived in poverty; in the NWFP, that number was 65 percent.

Subsequent analysis by the province revealed that whilst 78 percent of households in Balochistan, 74 percent in Punjab, and 65 percent in the NWFP did not own any land, this percentage was 85 percent in Sindh. The following findings were obtained from the calculation of the Gini coefficient in the provinces for both landholdings and income.

Table 2
Gini Coefficients by Region

	<i>Punjab</i>	<i>Sindh</i>	<i>NWFP</i>	<i>Balochistan</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>
Gini (Land owned)	0.64	0.51	0.59	0.38	0.61
Gini (Expenditure)	0.31	0.31	0.27	0.23	0.31

Source: Talat Anwar, *Long-Term Changes in Income Distribution in Pakistan: Evidence Based on Consistent Series of Estimates*, (CRPRID, Aug. 2005).

In contrast to the Gini for income/expenditure, the land ownership Gini revealed noticeably more disparity in all three provinces except Balochistan. The authors came to the conclusion that this might indicate that higher-income households underreported their income, which distorted the value of the income/expenditure Gini coefficient downward. The data shows that Punjab has the greatest land ownership Gini, followed by Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The available research indicates that income inequality in Pakistan rose during the 1990s and peaked in metropolitan areas in 2001–2002.

As Kemal (2007) states, there are four main factors that determine how income is distributed: the government's tax and spending structure; income transfers (both domestic and international); functional income distribution (i.e., wage income inequality in urban areas and the disparity between farm and non-farm income in rural areas); and asset distribution (primarily, the inequality in the distribution of agricultural land). In order to address the growing issue of income disparity, Kemal proposes four main policy measures: increased spending on essential social services and infrastructure, the creation of jobs, the supply of basic social services, and cash and food handouts.

Between 1964–65 and 1967–68, East Pakistan saw a true capital inflow ratio of just 16 percent of true investment, while West Pakistan experienced a matching ratio of 75 percent. Parkinson (1973, 322) noted that there was little room to grow Pakistani wage earners' actual income in the early 1970s. The majority of research on the topic points to a positive correlation between militancy and inequality.

However, it is not possible to get a firm conclusion regarding the relationship between inequality and militancy in Pakistan on the basis of regional dispersion. While land ownership inequality is highest in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, both of which saw a high level of militant activity, income and expenditure distribution inequality is highest in Punjab and Sindh, with the latter province not serving as a major hub for militant recruitment. However, less obvious connections cannot be discounted. Disgruntled youth are drawn to militant agendas, while inequality feeds hatred and rage. Some of the characteristics of militants—discussed by Safiya Aftab (2008), for instance—indicate a strong representation of young, educated, lower-middle-class people who are fed up with Pakistan's political and economic systems. Anwar's (2005) documentation of the decline in the middle 60% of households' income share is instructive in this regard.

Given the existence of other conditions, the possibility of power exercise and resource control that comes with joining a militant organisation is arguably the most significant way that inequality may encourage militancy. Social mobility is severely constrained in economic systems such as the one in Pakistan, where access to high-quality education is scarce and the allocation of land is very unequal. The allure of a militant organisation that offers a means of subsistence, chances to exercise financial influence over the economy, and even insurance for the extended family grow in the absence of money or chances for personal development through higher education. Therefore, unequal distribution of resources at the outset may cause a rigid class structure to evolve, which may serve as a fertile foundation for militancy. Such inflexible mechanisms are undoubtedly in place and continue to be so in Pakistan's rural areas, as indicated by the country's Gini index for land distribution.

Sigelman and Simpson (1977) quote Aristotle, Madison, Engels, Coser, and Davis. As explained by Aristotle, revolutions have inequality as their universal and chief cause. Aristotle claimed in *The Politics* that inferiors revolt so that they may be equal, and equals that they may be superior. Aristotle believed that when the political order did not match the distribution of property, tensions within the class structure would eventually lead to revolutions. Put differently, inequality is the root cause of unrest (Mondal, n.d.).

Madison explains that the most common and durable root of political violence is inequality in the distribution of property (cited in Kaur 2006). In Engel's view, political violence occurs when political systems fail to meet the demands of the prevailing socioeconomic conditions. Coser maintained that persistent socioeconomic disparities are a major cause of conflict. Based on Aristotle's theory of revolution, Davis believed that an

unequal distribution of wealth creates a groundswell of dissatisfaction and facilitates settlement (cited in Sigelman and Simpson 1977).

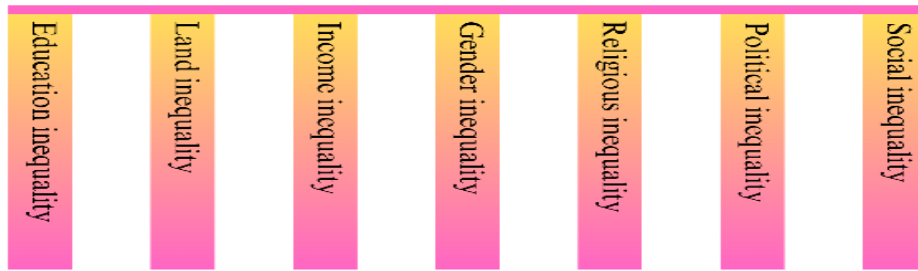


Figure 1: Dimensions of inequality

Martinez, Jr. (1996) highlighted Blau & Blau's argument that increased economic inequality serves as a catalyst for conflict and antagonism to manifest themselves in violent acts. Martinez investigated the trends and reasons behind fatal acts of violence committed by Latinos in the US. A regression study, which he conducted using data gathered from 111 US communities, supports the idea that economic inequality explains violence (Martinez, Jr. 1996). After examining theory and evidence, Kramer comes to the conclusion in one study that one of the three causal agents causing youth violence in the US is economic disparity. He contends that "predatory economic" violence happens when people use any methods required to achieve materialistic or financial objectives. Economically deprived adolescents who are prevented from pursuing the American Dream by less successful, legal methods are frequently influenced to choose more successful, illegal ways due to the strong societal demands for financial success in America (C. Kramer, 2000). The case can be made for a society with significant economic disparity. The aforementioned is also true in Pakistan, as evidenced by militant criminal groups in many regions, most notably Karachi.

Weede (1981) noted that high average wages have a rather strong anti-violence effect. Weede came to the conclusion that lower levels of violence, particularly low number of deaths resulting from such acts, are closely associated with higher average incomes. He goes on to say that although the results cannot prove the relative deprivation theory of violence, they also cannot refute it. In a different study, however, Weede (1987) came to the conclusion that inequality does not cause violence after analysing a collection of data gathered across 47 countries in the middle of the 1960s.

One possible explanation for militancy is variations in family income or per capita income among populations within a nation or between nations. There are significant differences between the global North and South. Kegley (2008) highlights that these differences are a significant concern on the global agenda and present significant challenges for the international community. Numerous theorists attribute the Third World countries' predicament to wealthy nations. One such theory is dependency theory and another is World Systems Theory. Russett asserts that some indicators of political violence and land ownership disparity are positively correlated (cited in Weede 1981, 641).

Despite the fact that everyone has equal access to political opportunities under the constitution, this is not the reality in everyday life (Azam, 2009). With very few exceptions, power can only come to the wealthy and powerful. The majority of people in Pakistan remain disempowered due to this systemic but deeply ingrained inequality in the country's political framework. Inequality of opportunity quickly brings to mind disparities in Pakistan's educational systems. The only choice available to the brightest children from low-income families is to attend public sector schools, where Urdu or another regional

language has been the medium of teaching until recently. Private schools offering instruction in English are costly and inaccessible to the underprivileged. These establishments serve the aristocratic and affluent classes. Graduates from these English-medium schools are significantly more prepared to do well on competitive examinations for administrative top posts. All of the competitive exams give preference to applicants who can express and communicate in English more fluently. As a result, there is essentially no equality of opportunity for students who attend schools where English is not the primary language of teaching.

The rural-urban inequality that is often associated with inequality of opportunity is also a factor. Pakistan's rural and urban lifestyles are completely different. Facilities for health, education, and other needs are either nonexistent or in disarray in rural communities. Approximately 80% of the labour force is found in rural areas. The perception among the rural populace is that the urban population is reaping the rewards of their efforts. There is extreme inequality in most facets of life in rural communities. A large portion of the villagers are envious of the money, attitudes, and ways of life of city dwellers. Youths in rural areas who are unemployed or underemployed are easily enticed to join militant organisations.

Amartya Sen (2001) lists seven categories of gender disparity: ownership inequality, professional inequality, special opportunity inequality, basic facility inequality, and household inequality. He makes the observation that disparities of all kinds frequently reinforce one another. Similar to the majority of developing nations, Pakistan experiences significant gender inequality. In primary schools, the proportion of male pupils enrolled was thirty percent greater than that of female students even in the twenty-first century (Mumtaz, 2005). The 1979 Hudood Ordinances are regarded by feminists as the most discriminating legislation that Pakistani women have ever seen (Mumtaz, 2005).

In Pakistani society, women are not treated equally in any sector—education, employment, politics, business, or social spaces. Their opportunities to engage with society and social agents are limited. As a result, Pakistani women tend to be more conservative than men in general since they are essentially immune to the forces driving social change. Men who stay in touch with such women experience their conservatism as a source of more conservatism. People who are conservative are more likely to be violent and militant. Mothers, sisters, and wives of militants who have been killed frequently praise them as heroes. Rashida Patel talks on the misinterpretation and distortion of laws, or judicial-legal inequality (Patel, 2003). The Taliban's demand for the Nizam-i-Adl Regulation in Swat (*The Shariah Nizam-e-Adl Regulation, ([Khyber Pakhtunkhwa] Reg. No. 1)*, 2009), followed by an armed campaign, was granted by the government due to repeated calls for swift justice and grievances about the country's failing judicial and legal system.

It would be impossible to discuss the link between the two variables in the Pakistani context without mentioning its global component. The militants, who represent the biggest threat to the state, have a very "strong" belief that the West plots against Muslims and the Muslim world. They perceive these plots as operating on the political, economic, and cultural fronts. Their belief that the anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic policies of industrialised Western nations have resulted in disparity between Muslim and non-Muslim countries has played a significant role in the rise of militancy and bloodshed both inside and outside of Pakistan. These militants believe that the primary cause of the disparity between wealthy and impoverished states is the "anti-Islamic" policies of Western nations.

Western multinational businesses are perceived as disrupting and abusing the economic systems of emerging nations, in addition to their policies. Citing Bornschier and

Chase-Dunn, London and Robinson concur that corporate involvement increases income disparity in developing nations by changing specific structural conditions. Transnational companies pay significantly more than the average because they are based in underdeveloped nations. It causes a significant economic disparity between those who work for multinational companies and those who do not (London & Robinson, 1989). This is one of the reasons why nearly all militant leaders who condemn Western powers do so, at least in part, because of the exploitative international political and economic structure that these powers have built. How can one react to this kind of exploitation? The militant leaders and ideologues claim that we can only win by hurting those and their interests who have injured us. Thus, they instruct their activists to focus on the people and interests of Western powers.

Conclusion

The state and society of Pakistan have done a terrible job of addressing the different types of inequality that cause the poorest people to feel alienated and resentful of one another. One of the main causes of militancy in Pakistan is inequality. At some point, victims of inequality – economic, social, political, legal, or in any other form – begin to see the legal, political, and societal structures as faulty and biased towards one segment of society while marginalising the other. It incites people to consider overthrowing the government, which breeds militancy. The main reason peaceful societies are peaceful is because they have attained greater degrees of civic, legal, and political equality.

We are unable to get a firm conclusion regarding the relationship between inequality and militancy in Pakistan on the basis of regional dispersion. While land ownership inequality is highest in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, both of which saw a high level of militant activity, income and expenditure distribution inequality is highest in Punjab and Sindh, with the latter province not serving as a major hub for militant recruitment. However, less obvious connections cannot be discounted. Given the existence of other conditions, the possibility of power exercise and resource control that comes with joining a militant organisation is arguably the most significant way that inequality may encourage militancy.

Despite the fact that everyone has equal access to political possibilities under the constitution, this is not the reality. With very few exceptions, power can only come to the wealthy and powerful. The majority of people in Pakistan remain disempowered due to this systemic but deeply ingrained inequality in the country's political framework. The only choice available to the brightest children from low-income families is to attend public sector schools, where Urdu or a regional language has been the medium of teaching until recently. Private schools offering instruction in English are costly and inaccessible to the underprivileged. In Pakistani society, transgender people do not have equal standing in any sphere – be it politics, business, education, the workforce, or social spaces.

Recommendations

The government and people of Pakistan have to focus more intently on addressing the glaring disparities that now exist and are only getting worse. This enormous issue cannot be handled by the state alone. The onus of duty rests with society as well. Government policies may be reviewed on the one hand, and those that already exist may be implemented with fresh zeal on the other. The general public needs to understand how important the rule of law is to solving the major problems facing the country. In order to raise public awareness in this area, the NGO sector must step up. The challenges require more inquiry from the academic community. In addition to disseminating research

findings, they also need to draft and submit policy papers to relevant private and public entities.

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