

Susceptibility to Radicalization and Violence among the Youth in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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Abstract

Radicalization, sectarianism, and violence have affected the youth more than any other age groups in district Dera Ismail Khan. The district had a peaceful and diverse community until late 1990s. Its residents came from diverse ethnic, religious, and sectarian backgrounds. Sectarianism and later terrorism disturbed the much-cherished peace and diversity of the district. The War on Terror, the operations in Waziristan, the arrival of IDPs, and local politics based on religious and sectarian lines increased youth's susceptibility to radicalization and marred the peace and diversity in the district. The government's counter radicalization strategy was largely based in panel law enforcement. On the other hand, there is considerable scope for community level involvement for countering radicalization among the youth. There is need to empower the youth as active participants to counter the radical narratives, and to check their susceptibility to violence. Accordingly, there is need for investments in their institutional capacity building.

Key words: Radicalization, Sectarianism, violence, youth, War on Terror, DIKhan.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to understand the conditioning factors of youth's susceptibility to radicalization and violence in the district Dera Ismail Khan (D.I.Khan), Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study was designed with a view to understand the problem at hand from the point of view of subjects i.e., the people of D.I.Khan, and further to enhance policy guidance. To this aim the study a) focuses on uncovering the triggers/conditions that make youth (of different backgrounds and profiles) at-risk of becoming radicalized and; b) explores grievances of the youth about their current social, political, economic and cultural status, and how to addressing and redressing these grievances.

It needs to be mentioned at the outset that the scope of the study is limited. Academically it is a brief ethnographic study. Its target area was one district and selected sub-divisions. However, because no empirical literature was available as a prior vantage ground, this study has tried to break the ground by exploring the broader contours of youth's susceptibility to radicalization in D.I.Khan.

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Geographically, D.I. Khan enjoys a unique position as it abuts on the Punjab province to the east, and South Waziristan tribal agency and Tank district in the west. In the north it borders with Bannu and Laki Marwat districts, and in the south it shares border with Balochistan province. However, its strategic location has lately become a challenge to peace in the society. (Raza, Rafi, & Shah, 2016, p. 34)

In the wake of the War on Terror, especially since the first drone attack in 2004 on Nek Mohammad and his commanders in South Waziristan after which the Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) began to form, D.I. Khan became one of the most geo-strategically and security-wise crucial districts of Pakistan. Its very geography made it crucial to national and local security plans. Moreover, its diverse demography but troubled socio-economic conditions ostensibly made D.I. Khan a crucial ground to fight the War on Terror. Accordingly, D.I. Khan comes to host a large encampment of army that is tasked to ensure peace in southern tribal agencies and frontier region as well as to maintain communication with Balochistan's army encampments.

As the War on Terror prolonged, its violent effects began to emerge in both the tribal areas and settled districts of KP. For D.I. Khan the violent effects become visible by 2007, and by next year, D.I. Khan became one of the most violence-torn districts in KP. Although much of this violence took place on religious-sectarian and ethnic fault lines, there were many other factors that directly and indirectly fed into the tensed environment and violence. Many peaceful and affluent families, as well as non-Muslim minorities, began to move out to the Punjab. Later with the South Waziristan operation (2009) hundreds of thousands of IDPs began to pour into DIKhan. At the end of the operation many chose not to return to their homes, thus causing impact on the already tensed demographic fault lines of the district. In other words, the predominantly Pushtun IDPs added to district's Pushtun population, while causing alarm among Seraikis and Urdu speakers.

With violence on the rise, the government began to implement a massive securitization plan for the urban areas of D.I. Khan. Army and FC check posts were set up on all routes leading in and out of the city. The security check-posts along with patrolling armored vehicle, in a way, posed an ominous challenge to the fundamental right of freely moving about in the city. As a part of the security plan, the cantonment area, with all its recreational facilities was closed down to the general public, and especially to

young men. Because the cantonment area lies between the city and the river Indus, the recreational facilities on the riverbank also went closed down.

Moreover, the security plan also cast adverse impact on district level sports and recreational activities. For instance, the famous Polo Ground, which for a long time remained one of the central play grounds for youth, as well as host to big circuses and festivals every year, was taken over by the army and closed down to civil recreation activities. Moreover, due to fear of bomb attacks on public gatherings, government discouraged sports events. Later with a suicide bomb attack on a volleyball match in neighboring Laki Marwat district, in which more than hundred persons were killed, bore out government conviction. Sports activities gradually began to dwindle.

Interestingly, not everyone in the society was on the loss regarding securitization, reduction of recreation, and limitation of sports. These measures had indirect but consequential impact on the local political stage. For instance, the Islamic political parties, especially the Jamiat Ulema e Islam-Fazlur Rehman (JUI-F), benefited from these conditions. JUI-F draws its support base from conservative religious sections of the society of DIKhan. Much of its young stalwarts come from *madrasas*, which have not only increased but also strengthened over the past decade. Its political and religious support base lies in the rural areas of DIKhan. However, its urban support base is not as strong, partly because the urban youth get attracted to liberal and secular parties like Pakistan Tehrik e Insaf (PTI) and People's Party (PPP). They are well educated, thanks to Gomal University, and they know well about their fundamental freedoms. They also have the potential to organize political activism for their rights and freedoms. However, now that a securitized environment is in place in the city, the youth seem frustrated about their freedoms. While on the other hand, the religious political parties like JUI-F see it as favorable condition to attract youth supporters. We know that during Zia ulHaq's regime, when freedoms and rights were limited, the religious political parties benefited the most and drew the youth to their offices.

It is worth emphasizing again that the War on Terror led to adverse impact on the sectarian and ethnic fault lines of the district. Although D.I. Khan is a diverse district, with Seraikis, Pushtuns, and Urdu speakers living together with cross-cutting religious-sectarian affiliations, its diversity, however, has become a bane to peace and abundance, leading to violent

conflicts. In these conflicts youth have been one of the most affected age groups. And they are affected in different ways: physically, psychologically, morally, and financially or employment-wise. This study will focus, directly and at times indirectly, on these different ways in which the youth of D.I. Khan has suffered.

Research Methodology

The study is based in an ethnographic research methodology. We aim to observe the given problem—the susceptibility to radicalization and violence among youth in Dera Ismail Khan—from the point of view of the subject of the study. In more explanatory words, the method involves an engagement in the community to read the culture of the problem and what conditions it. We use expert observation and semi-structured interviews as our tool to study the culture or setting of the problem. We are also interested in figuring people's perception about the problem, i.e., youth's susceptibility to radicalization and violence. In other words, we approach the problem through the understanding of subjects, before we put the problem to our own analysis.

This ethnographic method suits the larger aim of the study, which is to make sense of *the conditions of susceptibility* rather than measure the levels of youth radicalization. The study endeavors to understand the nature of drivers of youth radicalization. The study does not claim to show how far radicalized are the youth in district D.I.Khan. Measuring empirical value of the level of radicalization is beyond the scope of this study, just as it is inadvisable to do in the present security-sensitive time.

What is Radicalization?

This study gives a broader definition of the socio-political phenomenon of radicalization. This definition is based on our understanding of radicalization in the context of field research in D.I.Khan. Radicalization is a socio-political attitude that involves group identity formation and unwillingness to negotiate discursive public space or simply political space with others. It is an attitude that potentially leads to violent imposition of ones beliefs and thoughts on others. (Raza et al., 2016)

Based on this definition we identify and analyze the following triggers/drivers of radicalization in D.I.Khan: geographic proximity to the

war-torn Waziristan, fragmented ethnic diversity, securitization and shrinking of democratic public space, closing down of sports and recreating facilities, religiosity and sectarianism, unemployment and the arrival of IDPs, and religious symbolism in local politics.

Susceptibility to Radicalization and Violence Among the Youth in D.I.Khan

I. “DeraPhulaanDaSehra”: The Nostalgia for Peace

D.I.Khan has been a peaceful district up until 1990s. Peace was disturbed, though partially, with the outburst of sectarian violence. Although sectarian violence began to take its roots in this decade (1990s), the society had not yet fallen victim to the form of violence we see today. It is in the next decade with the War on Terror, and the resulting military operations in the neighboring federal agency of South Waziristan, that the conditions and triggers of radicalization and violence increase. Today the people of D.I. Khan complain about an ever-present existential fear in their everyday life. In our interviews we heard, especially from parents and the elderly, who recalled and longed for the bygone days of peace. Moreover, they expressed their concern about the young generation that is growing up in an environment of fear and violence.

Many residents recalled the peace in past with the famous slogan or catchphrase attached to the name of the district, “*Dera Phulaan Da Sehra*” (Dera, The Garland of Flowers). For many residents, the catchphrase highlights peace as the self-evident and most-notable characteristic of the district, a truism in fact. In Pakistan many districts are famous for one or other characteristic of their social life. D.I.Khan has been famous for its peaceful, diverse, and accommodative society, especially while taking into account its geographical proximity to the restive Pakistan-Afghanistan borderland. It had also been famous for the sociable nature of its inhabitants, once again when compared to the rough and unruly tribes of the neighboring borderland. A local senior social activist, commenting on the notably characteristics of the district, proudly described the people “sociable, good-humored, and compassionate, who felt for others.” Since these qualities had been related for a long time they began to be perceived as generalized qualities of the local people.

However, residents agree that the contemporary society does not enjoy the blessing of peace anymore. Sectarianism, religiosity, and terrorism have eclipsed the peaceful life. It is worth emphasizing that the disturbance of peace is not an ordinary one. It is rather critical one because it has caused existential threat to the fundamental human right of life. A local resident, for instance, said, "Now no one's life is safe." Similarly, a local college teacher said, "There used to be food parties, other programs, and festivities, but now everybody is fearful of everybody else. We are scared for our lives." These descriptions remind us of Hobbesian state of nature, which we see today in its modern form. What is more worrisome about the disturbance of peace is that the most affected are the youth. Many local parents express their basic fear for the safety of their children when the latter are sent to educational institutions or recreation and sports. One parent for instance said, "When my child goes outside of house I pray that he return home safely."

It is important to notice that the local youth have suffered the most in incidents of violence. This suffering is evident from figures of casualties (deaths and injuries) in different incidents of violence. Let us see a few examples. In July 2007 a suicide bombing attack took place on the local police recruitment center at the Police Line. This bombing killed more than two dozen young men and injuring many more who had come for recruitment screening test (Roberts, 2011). In 2008 a suicide bomber targeted a group of protesters who had gathered outside the District Headquarter hospital. They were protesting against a targeted sectarian killing of a young man at a local Utility store. In the incident 32 young men were killed and 55 more injured ("Suicide bomber hits D.I. Khan hospital," 2008). Some of the survivors we met during our fieldwork were have either amputated limbs or other major disabilities. One brave young man lost both of his arms, but he did not lose heart and today he works with Associated Press. It is also worth making a point that the suicide bomber was also a young man. He is report to be 20 years old. Hence we can see how both the aggressor and the victims were all young men. The incident also highlights that young men have been at the forefront of the agitation politics (i.e., protests against targeted killings).

Today the residents of D.I. Khan recall the bygone days of peace with a sigh of nostalgia. A local psychiatrist, for instance, recalled:

A decade ago D.I. Khan was quite peaceful. Bazaars would remain open till mid-night, and the famous Topaan Wala bazaar would

remain open throughout night. Cantonment would remain open and its parks would remain open. There were also a number of sports grounds that would be open.

Similarly, a student of a local degree college said, “There was a time that Topaanwala bazaar remained open until mid-night. We would return on our bicycles safely. But now parents advise us to return home by sunset.

The environment of insecurity in the district grew with the military operation (2009) in neighboring South Waziristan. Given its geographic location D.I.Khan was one of the major strategic gateways to South Waziristan agency for army transportation and communication. On the other hand, a large number of IDPs from South Waziristan also arrived in D.I. Khan because it was the first major city-stops for them. Here they either stayed in government camps or moved on to their next destinations. The rich among them rented houses, purchased agricultural land, and/or started small businesses.

With the War on Terror, and especially after the arrival of IDPs, a public debate began about poverty, unemployment, ethnic nationalism, and sectarianism. The debate strengthened as the security conditions deteriorated. Even though it is difficult to prove empirically how far IDPs really cast negative impact on the local economy, the people believe that IDPs considerably did. A number of our local interviewees even blamed the perceived increase in crimes in the society on IDPs. They also complained about the disturbance of ethnic and sectarian demographic equation with the arrival of IDPs. One interviewee said that the arrival of IDPs negatively impacted on the “Derawal” identity. We’ll return to this aspect soon.

II. Educational Institutions: The Lack of Creative Learning Environment

Indeed educational institutions have considerable role in enhancing the quality of social life of a society, especially by providing creative learning environments. Modern teaching methods encourage interactive and creative learning. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) also encourages modern teaching methods in a number of ways by introducing semester system, new syllabi, enhanced attention to extra-curricular activities, and the best teacher awards. Over the past decade, with efforts of HEC to improve quality of higher education, the teaching environment is fast transforming across the country. Accordingly, we endeavored to know

whether this change is taking place in D.I.Khan's educational institutions as well, and to what extent this change helps to reduce youth's susceptibility to radicalization and violence.

Even though it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between creative learning environment and reduction of susceptibility to radicalization with the data we collected, however, we can know people's perception and lived-experience about the relationship of creative learning environment with the susceptibility to radicalization. In other words, we can give a rough co-relation, especially in the backdrop of our definition of radicalization as unwillingness to negotiate discursive public space or simply political space with other members of society. We can find this co-relation in an incisive statement of a local psychiatrist. While explaining how the youth of D.I. Khan are faced with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) he said: "Extra-curricular activities are significant for mental and personality development...It reduces students' depressions and deprivations."

Although the numbers of educational institutions in D.I. Khan have increased over the past decade, there is hardly any educational institution that provides opportunity of creative learning environments for its students. It is interesting to notice that a majority of our interviewees both students and parents said that the quality of education has not improved over the past decade, rather has further deteriorated. Most of the students informed us (both male and female student in degree colleges and Gomal University) that they couldn't take part in extra-curricular activities because such activities are not encouraged anymore. Teachers and administration excused that the security situation did not allow carrying out extra-curricular activities and community service. Although there hasn't been much attention paid to extra-curricular activities in colleges and Gomal University for long time, the two attacks on educational institutions in KP (at APS, 2014, and Abdul Wali Khan University, 2015) led to formally stopping of all extracurricular activities that involve students' gatherings. Similarly, Peshawar University, the leading oldest university in the province, issued a formal letter to all departments to stop extracurricular activities like study tours, parties, Meena Bazaars, stage dramas, sports events, and various other activities. Other universities in the province followed suit.

Insecurity is the single most crucial factor resulting in the shrinking of creative learning environment in higher educational institutions. This factor

is affecting educational institutional all over the country, but in D.I. Khan due to its proximity to South Waziristan agency, insecurity looms large as an existential threat. During the red alert time period the local government requires the educational institutions to provide enhanced security or remain closed off. For instance after the attack at Abdul Wali Khan University a number of higher education institutions in the district chose to close off because they couldn't meet the security requirements. On the other hand due to insecurity parents choose not to send their children to far away educational institutions. For instance, one parent said, "Distance of school or college from home is crucial. We see which institution is the closest. Unless its education standard is poor, we'd prefer to send our children there." Similarly a local doctor said: "When we choose an institution for our child we first see how much secure is that institution. What is its security plan? We don't want to send our children to a place where they are not safe. The qualifications of teachers and merit scores of a school are now secondary."

Creative learning environment inside and outside the classroom is increasingly diminishing. Responding to a question regarding extra-curricular activities in his institution, a college teacher made a curious remark, "You ask about extracurricular activities. I think if we could carry out our regular classes, that will be enough." In each male and female public degree colleges and Gomal University teachers lamented that extra-curricular activities were not taking place for quite some time. Some nostalgically recalled the extra-curricular activities of their time. For instance a female teacher recalled several events like Meena Bazaar, Parents Days, Annual Day or Pakistan Day, Women's Day, Study excursions, and Sports Day that would take place when she was a student. She further said that now college administration does not take interest in extra-curricular and creative activities, even though students wish to organize such activities. A local social activist remarked, "Extracurricular activities are passing through bad times. Parents feel suspect of any such activities. They want their children to take classes and come back home." A local lawyer pointed to another important aspect of the lack of extra-curricular activities: "Nowadays there are institutions housed in small rented houses. So what do we expect from them in terms of extracurricular and sports activities." Moreover, a number of teachers also admitted that their institutions don't have arts and science clubs/societies. And there are also no teacher-student centers for outside-the-class interaction.

In order to reduce youth's tendency to radicalization and violence through educational institutions, some society members provided interesting suggestions as well. For instance, a local lawyer commenting on why parents have to send their children to the neighborhood *madrassa* for learning Islamic precepts and reading Islamic texts is that there is no arrangement at their regular schools: "I say it with regret that there is no teaching in morals and ethics in our institutions or their curriculum. I would stress that there is need for introducing a chapter on ethics in curriculum." A local teacher suggested that there should also be community-volunteering credit hours in the institutions. Another teacher suggested that just like HEC's program that sends PhD candidates to developed countries for six months, there should be a similar program for college teachers to learn more about new teaching methods as well as advanced administration skills.

Creative learning environment is also missing in *madrassas*. The local *madrassas* have more or less similar monotonous daily routine—waking up early in the morning for prayer, doing recitation exercises, breakfast, regular classes, lunch, afternoon rest, sports time, dinner and more study exercise, and finally lights turned off. Even though these *madrassas* also have some extra-curricular activities, but those are extensions of what they do in their curriculum, for instance, competitions in *Qirat*, *hamd*, and *Naat*. While *madrassa* teachers think that both extra-curricular activities are important for the intellectual growth of students, they didn't believe that new technological gadgets giving access to Internet and social media can be introduced to assist in these activities. All *madrassas* strictly prohibited mobile phones and other gadgets. In this way, the access to their families, friends, and the outside world in general remains restricted. Because these *madrassas* are boarding schools, the students are exposed to only one style of education. It is also interesting to mention that at a number of *madrassas* our interviewees suspected the meaning of extra-curricular activities. They thought we wanted to know their training for armed *jihad* or terrorism. Accordingly we have to give further explanations of what we meant by extra-curricular activities (or *Ghair Nisabi Sargarmian*).

III. The Decline of Sport

Recent research studies on radicalization suggest that sport is one of the healthy alternatives for young men and women to focus their energies on. A study by Schanzer *et al*, for instance, suggests that youth centers providing

opportunities of sports, creative arts, and community volunteering help build a strong community that can cope with radicalization and provide guidance and positive experiences for youth (Schanzer, Kurzman, & Moosa, 2010). Similarly a local psychiatrist in D.I. Khan emphasized on the significance of sports for improving physical and mental health of the youth by saying, "There is no alternative to sports for improving the overall health." It is worth mentioning that Pakistani government in its radicalization efforts has considered sports as one of the de-radicalization tools. For instance, the government once offered the Taliban to play cricket match with it. The latter, however, declined the offer by saying that cricket was unIslamic ("Taliban FefuseNisar's Cricket Match Offer," 2014).

While sport is crucial to improving health as well as a way to cope with radicalization, the conditions of sport in the district are not encouraging. About a decade ago, there were as many as 14 sport grounds in the urban area. And in the villages there were more grounds made in open fields. Now there are only three functioning grounds in the urban area. The reasons for the reduction of sport grounds are many. First, the Army has closed down the cantonment area and its sport grounds. With the closure of the cantonment the civilian Officers' Club has also become difficult to access. Second, local colleges and schools have closed down their grounds to the general public out of concern for security. Third, a few other grounds that were made on privately owned land have also been closed down because the owners built markets there.

Out of the three grounds that are functioning, one is in a sport complex at the outskirts of the city. It was built a couple of decades ago for holding national level sports events, which never happened. Now the complex has run out of funds and stands neglected. Its ground and other sports facilities like a body-building gym, indoor badminton court, and swimming pool are all in dilapidated conditions. Local people also complain about its membership fee and its distance from the city. It is about 15 kilometers away from the main city area, which means transport cost. Other two large grounds have only limited access. Visakhi ground is a football ground and mostly open to professional teams who have membership. Haq Nawaz Park's ground is often the site for political activities. A local journalist for instance said: "Haq Nawaz Park is more a political ground than sport ground; it is used for political mass gatherings and other events." It is not well maintained even

though it is in the center of the city and attracts a large number of young men for sport.

The closing down of cantonment has had adverse impact on the district sport and athletics. It led not only to the closure of parks and grounds, but also the jogging opportunity along the roads. Because cantonment is green and beautiful, and its roads and side-walks well-maintained, it provided healthy environment for jogging (for men) and brisk-walking (for women). The riverside in the cantonment has also been closed down, and with it the sporting opportunity of swimming and other local improvised games on the banks have also disappeared. A local resident remarked, "The Army is on its own defense. For the purpose of its own safety, the Army has closed down the cantonment...There were different recreations facilities in the cantonment, now they are all closed."

Local *madrasa* students are also faced with the lack of sport infrastructure. While *madrasa* administration and teachers admit the significance of sports for health of students, they blame local government for not providing them with sport grounds and equipment. A number of teachers demanded funds and land for making sport centers for their students. They said although students are provided sport time in their daily routine, they cannot play any game because of lack of sport ground. Some of them play on local streets. Similarly, administration of female *madrasas* stressed on the necessity of sport for health of female students. However they also complained that they lacked space for grounds. They also said they lacked sports equipment.

While sports opportunities for young men are gradually decreasing, there is hardly any sports center for women in the district. The only opportunity of sports for them is in their schools and colleges, but that is obviously a limited opportunity because it is available only in morning school time and for a period or two. These sports grounds and indoor infrastructure remain closed in the evening. A social activist suggested in an interview that there is need to bring to use the sports grounds at schools and colleges for local women in the evening. He said that local government has now been elected and it should make some efforts in this line.

IV. The lack of Recreational Facilities

At one time up until late 1990s, there were eight public parks in the urban D.I.Khan—Gahwara park, Hathi park, Captain Atif Shaheed park, LacoziSurahi park, Aisha Bibi park, Liaqat park, National park, and Haq Nawaz park. Today there is only one park that is open to or easily accessible by the public, the Haq Nawaz park. The park is however not open to or accessible by women. The first five parks mentioned above are beautiful parks, but in the Army cantonment. These parks have been closed to civilians. Liaqat park is in civilian urban area, but it also remains closed much of the time. This park has however some week timings for women. In New Dera Township there is a large park called the National Park, which was built some two decades ago. This park is virtually closed because of maintenance issue. One local resident for instance remarked on the reason of its closure, “It looks more like a jungle than a park. This dismal condition of the park is due to the neglect by our local government and politicians.”

However, some recent efforts have been put to create new parks. In the last year (2015) the phase I of a new wildlife park was completed. This park is situated near Saddar police station in the city. The park is expected to create awareness about wildlife among local people. Another small park, Bagh-e-Sakoon Family Park, is a makeshift park, and is under construction. It is near riverside. While many local interviewees blamed the government for lack of recreational facilities, we noticed that there was hardly any local initiative on the part of local people for taking care of already available recreational facilities. There is need for social activism to engage young men and women to think of and take part in new creative ways to develop and maintain their neighborhood public parks and community spaces.

In a large city with population in millions, D.I.Khan has only two public libraries—a municipal committee’s library and Mufti Mahmood Library. The former is an old library. It is run by the local government, but actually hardly run in any real meaning of the term. It is based in public Town Hall. It has small lawns to walk around or play games. However, it has an old and run-down building. It has not purchased or received any new books, journals, or periodicals. The only attraction for the members of the library is daily newspapers. Mostly one finds elderly sitting around reading newspapers or chatting with each other. There is no reference books section or audio-visual section. The library has not organized any seminars or talks on any subject including local politics over the past decade. The library administration could not recall any such events that were organized in the

past. In short there is not much attraction for the youth in the library, except that they should take interest in its renovation and improvement.

Mufti Mahmood library is a new public library. It was inaugurated in 2008. It claims to have around 23,000 books, copies of journals, and periodicals. It also orders a number of national daily newspapers. The library has membership fee and other requirements. However, the local young men, especially students, we interviewed complain about the need for having these requirements. They especially complain about the requirement for a guarantor. According to them, many young men and women cannot get membership because of these requirements. Moreover, we found out that the daily visitors of the library are not big in number. Students we interviewed said they come to make their assignments. They pointed out that the library is open in the morning and on working days, which makes it difficult for them visit library because they have classes during the same time.

There is no youth community center in the district. However, there is a Town Hall, under the supervision of local government. It can be transformed into a community center, but hitherto no such idea has been given or work done on it. Community centers are considered as important resource to counter radicalization. For instance, one study says:

“For at-risk and formerly radicalized youth who have felt they have nowhere else to go, community centers can foster a sense of belonging and help build a positive self-identity...” (Mirahmadi & Farooq, 2010).

At one time there were five private cinemas in the city’s Topaanwala Bazaar and one run by the Army in the cantonment area. All the cinemas today are closed, including the one run by the Army. The buildings of four private cinemas have been demolished, while one still remains there, but in dilapidated condition. The Army has commissioned the building of its cinema for other purposes. There are many reasons for the closure of these cinemas, but the most believed ones (by our interviewees) are: a) decline in the quality of Pakistani movies, b) growing debate in the society over the Islamic sanction of cinemas,¹ and b) security threats given by the Taliban who believe

¹ This aspect of the debate on the Islamic nature of a cinema should be placed in the backdrop of the strong hold of a religious political party (Jamiat Ulema e Islam, Fazl

cinemas as un-Islamic. One of our interviewee, a young college male lecturer nostalgically recalled the cinemas, "I watched my first movie, Terminator, there in one of these cinemas. Now they are no more."

V. Ethnicity and Religion: The Fragmentation of a Diverse Society

D.I.Khan has been a diverse district, both ethnically and religiously. A local teacher gave a logical reason for its diversity. He said, "Because it is on the border of so many regions in Pakistan, diversity is natural to D.I. Khan." As we explained above D.I. Khan is located on the juncture of at least four different regions or administrative geographic divisions—K-P, the Punjab, Baluchistan, and Waziristan. It has various ethnic groups that include Seraikis, Pushtuns, Urdu speakers, and Punjabis. On the other hand, its various religious groups include Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs. Within Muslims there are further sectarian groups, including Sunni-Barailvi, Sunni-Deobandi, Sunni-Alh-al-Hidith, and Shiite. All these various groups have lived peacefully up until late 1990s, and freely intermingled in each other's cultural as well as religious events.

Today in the wake of the War on Terror when this diversity is at stake the local people long for it ever more. A local senior professor, for instance, remarked about cultural and religious diversity in D.I. Khan in the following words:

Multi-culturalism was Dera Ismail Khan's beauty. It has Seraiki, Pushto, and Urdu speakers all living together. The Pushto speakers were though of nearby areas; they were Marwat, Bhattani, Gandapurs, MianKhels, and others. When they came to Dera they became 'Derawal' just like everybody else already here. They all became part of this culture. Similarly, Mohajirs (immigrant from India at the time of partition) and others also became permanent part of this culture.

Moreover, he explained how this diversity of the Derawal identity began to fall apart,

ur Rehman, JUI-F) in D.I.Khan. The party has hardly ever lost in elections in the district.

“When did the difference arise? It is when the Waziristan operations began. There was a huge influx of people from the mountains. They have caused immense impact on the social, cultural, and economic setup of the district. These new people are quite conservative. They are finding it difficult to mix up in the local culture. They have so far been maintaining their individual status.

a. Ethnic Fragmentation

The Derawal identity, which was representative of diversity and peace, is clearly on the decline. The gap between individual ethnic identities is increasing and their rough edges colliding with each other. This process has been further catalyzed by the recent operation in Waziristan, which has brought a large number of Mehsud and WazirIDPs. Another catalyst in the process has been the ethnic political movement for creating separate provinces based on ethnicity. However, this latter catalyst has not been able to grow strong by attracting young men and women to its platform.

While it is difficult to measure empirically how far the influx of IDPs has harmed the diversity of the district, people believe that it has done considerably. One local lawyer described that it has led to a kind of clash of cultures: “The second major dilemma D.I.Khan faces is the immigration of people from South and North Waziristans. This had led to a clash of cultures. This immigration has negatively impacted the peaceful environment of D.I. Khan.” He tried to instantiate it through a recent example: “For instance, Wensam college, which is one of the oldest and best colleges in D.I. Khan, was closed down for several days due to clashes between students of different ethnic groups.” We heard similar incidents about male Degree College No. 1. Here too Pushtun and Urdu speaking students engaged in physical aggression a few times. In interviews with the police we came to know that some similar incidents have also taken place in food shops in Topaanwala bazaar.

On the other hand, ethnic movements like Pushtunistan and Seraikistan, which have been under slow political debate over the past two decades, have cast some centrifugal force on the diversity in the district. The debate caught strength in 2008 through 2010 when the erstwhile Pushtun ethnic political party, Awami National Party, ANP, in government brought the issue of renaming the province on the basis of Pushtun ethnicity. This led to a demand of dividing KP, as well as other three provinces in the country, to

make a large Seraiki province. In 2010 a constitutional amendment was introduced and ANP was successful in renaming the province from North West Frontier to Khyber-Pukhtunkwa, KP. Just as ANP celebrated its victory in ethnic politics, they did not see how they left long-lasting grievance among other ethnic communities, especially among the Seraiki and Hindko speakers. In our interviews a number of Seraiki respondents registered their grievances with us. A local social activist, for instance, registered his grievance in the following words, “The Seraiki youth are unhappy.” A local teacher said, “If we make provinces on ethnic basis then it will have negative effects on the youth...There should be unity out of diversity and that will be permanent unity.” And interestingly, a Hindu Seraiki speaking resident voiced his note of despair in the following words: “We are dispersing.”

b. Religiosity:

Like many other districts in KP, D.I. Khan is home to four major religions—Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism. The latter three religions are in minority. However, their presence has mattered much for the peaceful and diverse identity, the Derawal identity, of the district, which the people feel proud of and cherish.

Even though a minority, the followers of these religions have enjoyed greater freedom in the public discursive space for a long time. In other words, they have enjoyed greater freedom to perform their religious rites and celebrate religious festivals without fear or threat of terrorism and violence. A local lawyer for instance said, “My father would tell us that there was a big population of Hindus in Commissionaire Bazaar. They had a number of shops as well. During Moharram these Hindu shopkeepers would put up *Sabeels* (stalls of food and drink offerings).” Now the distance between minorities and Muslims has increased. One Hindu parent described how his children face difficulty to participation and intermingling with other children at school, “When our children participate in any extra-curricular activity, for instance in a singing, poetry, or debate, they are first seen as minority kids.”

Apart from these basic freedoms, they enjoyed freedom of speech and expression on matters of public importance. The War on Terror and the resulting debate on religion and the perceived clash of the (Christian) West

and the (Islamic) East have indirectly been affected these freedoms of minorities. We noticed this affect in our interviews with the minority residents. On questions relating to religion, state security, and the war in the Middle East almost all minority residents excused to comment. At times we noticed how they became speechless, giving a blank face to us. One Christian parent went beyond giving a blank face. Our female team was interviewing his son at his house, which he came to know. He came in and took away the notes and pleaded the team to leave. He also pleaded they were innocent and peaceful members of the society. He said this as if our interviewing could put them in danger. We assured him of the academic purpose of the interview, however, after his insistence on our leaving them alone, we had to excuse and leave.

Inasmuch as minority residents give blank faces on certain crucial societal issues, the religiosity in D.I. Khan has undoubtedly increased. Even though it is difficult to give the extent of this increase, the blank faces of minorities demonstrate that a crucial section of the population feel oppressed. From our definition of radicalization above, we take religiosity (and sectarianism) as the shrinking of ideological discursive public space. In other words, it is how followers of different religious communities negotiate space in relation to their ideological views. Religiosity affects the susceptibility of youth to radicalization in such a way that on the one hand it silences the minority youth and on the other it takes away the potential diversity of opinion from the majority youth. This phenomenon is evident in a remark by a young Hindu resident: "There is lack of tolerance in our society. Today no one is ready to listen to other's opinion." He further said, "There is no guidance, whichever religion you take."

c. Sectarianism:

Sectarianism—in this context, a violent conflict between Deobandi Sunnis and Shiites—is the single most-felt and debated problem of the district. So much so that D.I.Khan has become famous for it, just as it is famous for its *SohanHalwa* confection. One is "poison", according to a local psychiatrist, and another is a sweet. The psychiatrist lamented, "Sectarianism has reached its peak...It is a poison that has spread through out our society. It must be ended, before it ends us."

It is interesting to know how the resident of D.I. Khan narrate the history of sectarianism and its reasons. In other words, we'd take an

overview of people's history of sectarianism in the district. A senior lawyer, for instance, recalled from his personal lived experience the history of disturbance of peace in the following words:

The history of unrest in D.I. Khan goes back to 1988. It is in the election that the religious parties began to sow the seeds of sectarian divisions. For the first time we heard sectarian slogans in the main bazaars. This sectarian division slowly grew into violent form. Since then hundreds of youth have become victims of sectarianism.

The 1988 general election was the first democratic election after a decade long rule of the military dictator General Zia ulHaq. The clouds of sectarianism had slowly begun to gather in this decade. Soon after Haq's dictatorship fell the forces of sectarianism were let loose. The trigger point in history was the 30th September 1988 firing of FC on a Shiite procession, which resulted in the killing of more than a dozen people. Sectarian debate caught fire. About a month later people were to go for voting in the general election and choose a new democratic government. In the public sphere sectarian debate became one of the major issues for voting speculations for political parties. Religious ideologies of parties began to matter, and the territorial constituencies began to be thought along sectarian lines. Broadly speaking, it is during the campaign time of this general election that the debate began about the number of religious, sectarian, and ethnic communities living in the district and the differences among them.

Even though sectarianism took roots in urban D.I. Khan during the decade of 1990s it neither extended beyond electoral politics nor did it disturb the long cherished amity among the various religious and sectarian communities. During the second term of Nawaz Sharif in government in the second half of the 1990s few incidents of sectarian violence occurred. His second term ended up in a military coup and the new administration of General Pervez Musharraf effectively controlled the sectarian violence and restored peace.

It is worth mentioning that unlike the urban D.I. Khan (the D.I. Khan tehsil or the city) Kulachi and Paharpur did not face sectarianism as a major issue to their peace. Kulachitehsil located in the Damaan Valley of the Suleman Range, is the most underdeveloped tehsil of D.I. Khan district. The tehsil does not have diverse religious or sectarian groups. It has

predominantly Sunni (Hanafi School of jurisprudence) population. Therefore, sectarianism has not been an issue. However, it has faced another issue, violent family feuds, which have kept it equally violence torn. Gandapur family is locked in family or tribe feuds with Dotaani and Suleiman Khel tribes over the past three decades. One of our interviewee described that these family feuds have considerably disturbed the peace and affected market in Kulachi. On the other hand the pastoral and idyllic tehsil of Paharpur, even though diverse in its sectarian and ethnic population, has remained peaceful through out 1990s and even later. Some interviewee explained this peace in the context of its geography. According to them, Paharpur is peaceful because it is in the eastern part of the district and abuts on the province of Punjab, while Kulachi is in the western part of the district and abuts on South Waziristan Agency.

Toward the end of Musharraf regime, sectarianism began to surface in the district again. In the years 2007-2008 it reached its climax. Moreover, it soon mixed up with terrorism. The local sectarian violence transformed from targeted killings to suicide bombings, to large-scale killings. Initially, these suicide bombings targeted sectarian minorities, but soon it became a generalized tactic of causing fear and insecurity among the people. Accordingly, it was used indiscriminately against all kind of communities. For instance on July 15, 2007 a suicide bombing attack took place on police recruitment center, which resulted in killing of more than two dozen local people (Roberts, 2011). Again in September 2007 a suicide bomber killed 17 persons on a roadside after police tried to stop him (Roberts, 2011).

There are a number of causes of sectarianism mixed with terrorism in the district. We give here the understanding of local people. Most of the *Madrasaalims* (teachers) believe that sectarianism is caused due to criticism of each other's *sfīqa* (jurisprudence). One resident said, "Terrorists have some sort of respect due to the power of creating fear in the society. They are empowered by our society and government. You see when our young generation notices the power of the terrorists they think to take to this road. But they don't know what is at the end of it." Second, at times political parties in local electoral politics draws lines of constituencies or polling stations in the district on sectarianism.

There is need for community based initiatives to empower Islamic scholars, educators, and social activists who constant keep in touch with the

youth through community centers and other community networks for promoting peace, pluralism, and social cohesion. A local *madrassa* head gave an insightful recommendation, “Youth need to be taught that although difference in jurisprudence cannot be done away with, there is need to engage with each other by way of academic reason. They should not engage in political sensationalism and disrespect.” A local lawyer further added that there is hope for improvement, even though it is coming at a high cost: “So much violence has taken place, that now everybody understands that violence is not the solution of our problems.”

VI. Local Politics: Political Participation and Activism

Local politics in D.I. Khan took interesting turn in the Election of 2013. Historically speaking, this was the first general election after the 1970 general election that not only focused on the youth, but also mobilized a large number of youth voters. This turn came with Imran Khan’s political party’s (PTI) focus on the youth. However, other parties, especially the JUI(F), follow suit and invested much energies on their own youth followers for getting large turn out. While PTI won provincial assembly seats, the JUI (F) won the national assembly seat by getting more votes in rural side.

While the youth political mobilization is one major change in the local politics, another major change, contributed by PTI, is the introduction of young politicians and community leaders. For instance, Ali Amin and (late) Israr Gandapur (killed in a suicide bomb attack) were brought forward to contest elections and later also made provincial ministers. This was a big encouragement for the youth of D.I. Khan. As one young male interview said, “When we see Ali Amin side by side with Imran Khan in Dharnas (Political Protest Sitings) in Islamabad on TV, we feel proud that D.I. Khan’s youth are supporting Khan Saab.”

Although PTI generated political mobilization, it could not last long. The mobilization began to end after the election. Much of the mobilization was thus related to election campaigning. As one young female student complained, “Once the election is over, politicians don’t care a damn about us.” After making a government in the province PTI failed to engage the youth in starting new developmental, recreational, and community-oriented initiatives. A teacher for instance pointed out an interesting aspect, “PTI’s MPA Ali Amin was one of the best squash player in the district. However, now

there is no attention to squash. There is only one very old and dilapidated squash court in entire district. Even he has not paid attention to his favorite sport.”

On the other hand, the War on Terror and the war in the Middle-East have been a negative influence on the youth. These two wars are two big triggers of youth’s susceptibility to radicalization and violence. While many residents of D.I. Khan, especially the minorities, would avoid to talk/interview about these wars, those who talked wished an end to these wars. A number of our respondents believed that the youth should not secretly go to participate in the Middle-East war. However, there were some who believed that it is a kind of responsibility on young Muslim men to participate. Interestingly, more women than men hold this view (See quantitative data in Appendix 1).

Recommendations

1. There is need for improving communication channel between the local government and the people. A local social activist narrated a fictional short story in this regard to emphasize on it: “Once there was a King. He had a Minister, who took care of the affairs of people. One day King asked him how are the people doing? Because the minister was himself happy on that day, he replied with confidence, “The people are very happy with your rule, My Lord.” Some times later the King again wanted to know about the people. This time because the minister was not himself happy with the King, he replied with despondence, “The people are fine, but somewhat concerned, My Lord.”” The social activist then explained that we have somewhat similar situation here in DIKhan. When our ministers, mayors, and landlords are themselves happy, they tell the government that everybody is happy, and vice versa. So he made a point that there is problem of communication between the government and the people. People are not well represented, and youth are least represented.
2. There is need to regularly carry out public opinion polls. Such polls will not only help policy makers and local governments, but also the people to see how their society is changing.
3. Local government, which is now functional, should initiate an outreach initiative to develop and build partnership-based relationship with the parents and social activists to make them the first line of defense against youth radicalization. This relationship can be built through creating

community centers and online community centers. In these centers regular constructive debates, social events could be organized to develop a community-based approach to radicalization.

4. Public-private partnerships should be based on and promote shared values. These partnerships can start off with the “Derawal” identity that local people cherish. The shared values of religious freedom, non-violent conflict resolution, and the rule of law should be promoted.

5. There is need for community-based interventions to address the growing issue of social alienation among the youth. This can be addressed by increasing sports, recreation, creative learning environments at educational institutions and mentoring for preaching socially responsible behavior.

6. Local government needs to prepare a directory of social activists, community leaders, and youth representatives. The government and public-private partnerships can utilize this resource for countering radicalization.

7. There is also need for community-led initiatives, supported by local government, that aim to create awareness about the local social values, and the necessity for unity and harmony in the society.

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