

In the Shadow of Conflict: The War on Terror Redefined Pakistan's Social Fabric (2001-2017)

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Abstract

This article critically examines the profound transformation of Pakistan's social fabric in the wake of the War on Terror, spanning the years 2001 to 2017. As a frontline state in the global campaign against terrorism, Pakistan became both a strategic ally and a battleground, enduring far-reaching political, economic, and social repercussions. Beyond the visible consequences of military operations and security crises, this study focuses on the deep and often overlooked societal shifts that emerged during this turbulent period. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, the article explores how the conflict redefined national identity, strained ethnic and sectarian cohesion, reshaped political institutions, and fostered new patterns of civic behavior. Special attention is given to the role of constitutional reforms most notably the 18th Amendment as a response to regional grievances and a catalyst for decentralization. Through an analysis of governance structures, public discourse, religious dynamics, and media representation, the article reveals how prolonged exposure to conflict reconfigured the everyday lives of Pakistani citizens and altered the nation's path toward democratic consolidation and social stability. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for inclusive policymaking and resilient institutions in navigating the post-conflict recovery and preserving Pakistan's pluralistic identity.

Key Words: National Identity, Terrorism, Transformation, Public Discourse, Sectarian Cohesion

Introduction

The sunrise of the twenty first century introduced with it a seismic shift in international politics, protection paradigms, and international alliances. at the middle of this transformation changed into the struggle on terror an international marketing campaign released with the aid of the united states and its allies in reaction to the 11th of September, 2001 assaults. For Pakistan, a key frontline country in this international struggle, the consequences have been profound, some distance-accomplishing, and deeply embedded within the country's political, cultural, and social foundations. Pakistan's selection to sign up for the US led coalition in opposition to terrorism marked the beginning of a complicated and frequently contradictory bankruptcy in its history (Javed et al., 2022). At the same time as the states sought to comfortable strategic and financial advantages through international alliances, it additionally has become the epicenter of militant backlash, internal protection threats, and social upheaval (Javed et al., 2025). The struggle no longer most effective redefined Pakistan's overseas and protection regulations however additionally introduced approximately sweeping modifications within the manner Pakistanis lived,

concept, and interacted with the country and one another. The consequences of the struggle on terror in Pakistan have been no longer constrained to bombings, drone strikes, or military operations within the tribal regions. At a deeper degree, it brought about a reconfiguration of the state social material the complicated weave of relationships, values, traditions, and establishments that maintain a society collectively. The as soon as- colorful diversity of non secular, ethnic, and regional identities started out to pressure underneath the weight of extremism, intolerance, and distrust Establishments which includes education, media, and neighborhood governance, already struggling with pre- existing weaknesses, got here underneath additional pressure because the state confronted internal struggle and external pressures. One of the maximum considerable political milestones for the duration of this period changed into the 18th Constitutional amendment in 2010, which emerged as a reaction to lengthy- standing demands for decentralization and provincial autonomy. This modification— a part of the broader 18th amendment deal sought to devolve electricity from the federal to the provincial governments, reshaping the governance structure of the state (Yusuf, 2013). In doing so, it in a roundabout way addressed a number of the grievances exacerbated with the aid of the struggle on terror, in particular in regions like Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the erstwhile FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Area). The modification's timing, textual content, and implementation display the deep hyperlink between internal struggle and evolving political structures. In parallel, Pakistan's society witnessed a transformation in public discourse, civic engagement, and media representation. The struggle spread out new spaces for conversations around nationalism, extremism, democracy, and human rights, even because it narrowed others because of country surveillance, censorship, and worry (Saigol, 2012). Non secular and ethnic groups discovered themselves an increasing number of marginalized, and the upward thrust of sectarian violence tore through communities that had coexisted for many years education structures, in particular in struggle-hit regions, suffered both from physical destruction and ideological capture, restricting get right of entry to important concept and pluralistic values (Jalalzai, 1993). consequently, objectives to significantly have a look at how the struggle on terror, from 2001 to 2017, redefined the social material of Pakistan with the aid of social material, no longer most effective to the interpersonal relationships and cultural norms however additionally to the institutional frameworks and public attitudes that shape ordinary lifestyles. Through an interdisciplinary lens drawing from political technological know-how, sociology, anthropology, and media research this have a look at explores the multifaceted influences of the struggle on Pakistan's identification, brotherly love, governance, and public lifestyles (Hashmi, 2019).

Social Fragmentation and Regional Tensions

The effect of terrorism on Pakistani society through the years of the struggle on terror cannot be measured completely with the aid of information or strategic consequences underneath the overt political and military developments lies an deeper, psychological transformation that affected the ordinary lives of thousands and thousands of Pakistanis. With the upward thrust of suicide bombings, targeted killings, and mass-casualty assaults, in particular in urban facilities like Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, and Lahore, and pervasive experience of worry and lack of confidence took root in public consciousness. The psychological toll changed into obtrusive in heightened degrees of hysteria, social withdrawal, and collective trauma. Civilians lived underneath the consistent danger of indiscriminate violence at marketplaces, mosques, faculties, and even funerals resulting in a sustained weather of worry that altered public behavior. Many households started out restricting children's out of doors activities, community gatherings have become sparse, and accept as true with in public spaces diminished significantly. The struggle normalized an extraordinary country of vigilance and lack of confidence, reshaping societal norms and interpersonal members of the family (Lieven, 2011). This considerable worry, however, changed into no longer just a reaction to physical threats. It additionally strengthened underlying sectarian

and ethnic fissures that had lengthy existed however have been now amplified with the aid of the politicization of identification. Extremist clothing like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, and others exploited the electricity vacuum created with the aid of struggle and country fragility, actively inciting violence in opposition to Shia communities and different minorities. Excessive-profile assassinations, which include that of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, served as grim reminders of the dangers confronted with the aid of individuals who challenged dominant narratives (Rana, 2013). In most important urban facilities, Shia neighborhoods have become objectives of repeated assaults, leading to residential segregation, financial marginalization, and the deepening of communal divides. Even in regions traditionally acknowledged for non secular harmony, which includes Gilgit-Baltistan and southern Punjab, radicalization took root, turning previously non violent regions into hotbeds of sectarian tension. Alongside sectarianism, the struggle on terror fueled internal conflicts and social unrest throughout Pakistan. Public demonstrations, student protests, take a seat-ins, and hard work strikes have become not unusual as numerous segments of society voiced frustration over the country's perceived complicity in overseas wars, its failure to maintain regulation and order, and the shortage of responsibility in instances of extrajudicial killings or disappearances (Rana, 2013). The Lal Masjid operation in 2007, as an instance, sparked nationwide outrage, as many considered it as emblematic of the authorities' heavy-handedness and ethical hypocrisy. Protests in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in particular, contemplated lengthy- standing grievances approximately financial exclusion and political disenfranchisement grievances that have been magnified with the aid of the struggle's consequences. The developing distrust within the authorities' capability to protect its residents without violating their rights brought about an erosion of public self-assurance in establishments (Javed & Shafiq, 2022). As terrorism intensified and counterterrorism measures have become greater competitive, civic engagement additionally underwent a considerable transformation. To begin with, many residents supported the military's crackdown on militants, in particular after excessive-profile incidents just like the APS Peshawar assault in 2014. However through the years, public support has become conditional and fragmented. human beings started out questioning no longer most effective the competence of protection establishments however additionally their intentions have been those operations without a doubt concentrated on extremists, or have been the political equipment to suppress dissent have been a few organizations being selectively targeted at the same time as others have been tolerated or maybe protected for strategic reasons those questions fueled an wave of political disillusionment, in particular a number of the young people and concrete middle magnificence, who had as soon as positioned their hopes in reformist or democratic transitions at the same time as elections persevered and parliaments functioned, the experience of authentic representation waned (Javed et al., 2025).

Insecurity, Terrorism, and the Breakdown of Social Cohesion

The increasing power of the military in public lifestyles starting from commercial enterprise interests to media manipulate in addition blurred the line between civilian and authoritarian governance. This disillusionment changed into contemplated and magnified in Pakistan's media landscape, which underwent a dramatic transformation for the duration of the struggle on terror within the early 2000s, the deregulation of broadcast media created space for non-public information channels to flourish to begin with, this explosion of electronic media changed into celebrated as an step in the direction of greater transparency and pluralism information anchors, investigative journalists, and communicate display hosts started out pushing limitations, questioning authority, and giving voice to previously marginalized narratives. however, because the struggle stepped forward, the identical media retailers an increasing number of got here underneath pressure both direct and covert to toe the professional line reports on military

operations, drone strikes, and civilian casualties have been automatically censored or sanitized to align with country- accredited narratives. Media blackouts have become not unusual for the duration of military campaigns in erstwhile FATA or Baluchistan, and important journalists confronted harassment, abduction, or worse. The country's censorship apparatus operated through a combination of regulatory our bodies, which includes PEMRA, and informal networks of intimidation. Numerous distinguished journalists have been attacked, threatened, or pressured into exile, leading to surroundings of worry within newsrooms. Through the years, this pressure translated into self-censorship. Even without explicit directives, editors and journalists started out warding off sensitive subjects are it enforced disappearances, sectarian violence, or institutional corruption (Rumi, 2016).

The Transformation of Media and Public Discourse

The line between country wide protection and narrative manipulate have become an increasing number of blurred. Amid this clampdown, social media emerged as an opportunity arena for political expression structures like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube gave voice to independent bloggers, citizen journalists, activists, and ordinary customers who challenged mainstream discourse. Hash tags disturbing justice, exposing abuses, or rallying support for reasons received momentum, every now and then even pressuring authorities into movement however, this virtual freedom changed into additionally met with backlash. Surveillance, on-line harassment, cybercrime legal guidelines, and the deployment of virtual armies to drown dissenting voices have become fashionable equipment of manipulate. The Prevention of electronic Crimes Act of 2016, even though framed as a cyber security measure, changed into frequently used to target political activists, journalists, and minorities (Shackle, 2015). Notwithstanding those pressures, social media additionally fostered new varieties of political engagement, in particular amongst more youthful demographics. Hash tag campaigns, on-line petitions, and live-streamed protests have become a manner for the young people to bypass conventional hierarchies and make their voices heard (Shackle, 2015). Meanwhile, non-secular extremism, ethnic rights, gender equality discovered constrained however developing space on-line. The discourse around country wide protection additionally started out to shift no longer changed into terrorism considered in in simple terms external phrases; an increasing number of, human beings recognized internal systemic screw ups financial disparity, ideological indoctrination, susceptible governance—as contributing elements (Zaman, 2012). As media and public discourse developed, so too did the broader understanding of the struggle on terror's legacy in Pakistan greater than two a long time for the reason that struggle's onset, it's miles obtrusive that the struggle has left an deep and lasting imprint at the country's social material (UNDP Pakistan, 2017). However, it uncovered the vulnerabilities of the Pakistani country its fragile establishments, its susceptibility to ideological manipulation, and its choppy commitment to democratic values on the other hand, it sparked new conversations approximately identification, belonging, and rights. The struggle redefined how Pakistanis relate to one another, how they view authority, and the way they consider their destiny. Societal, the struggle brought about the militarization of public spaces, the erosion of inter-sectarian accept as true with, and the normalization of emergency rule at the same time as the security state of affairs has stepped forward in current years with fewer most important terrorist assaults and the formal integration of erstwhile FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the psychological and structural scars continue to be. Internally displaced men and women (IDPs) nevertheless struggle with reintegration education and fitness structures in former struggle zones continue to be underneath-resourced (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2009–2017). Financial disparity persists, fueling resentment and alienation in peripheral regions in the meantime, extremist ideologies, even though temporarily suppressed, have no longer been absolutely eliminated and frequently

resurface underneath new banners. One of the key instructions drawn from the struggle on terror is the need for holistic protection that is going beyond military solutions. Counter-terrorism cannot be triumphant without addressing root reasons poverty, exclusion, ideological indoctrination, and political repression. Governance ought to be transparent, inclusive, and responsible. Constitutional reforms, just like the twenty sixth modification, are important however insufficient without authentic implementation and public participation. The struggle discovered that after the country sidelines democratic strategies in prefer of militarized responses, it dangers alienating its personal residents and deepening the very insecurities it seeks to combat searching in advance, the destiny of Pakistan's social material hinges on its capability to reconcile beyond traumas with present demanding situations (Fair, 2014).

The Legacy of the War on Terror and Pakistan's Social Fabric

The struggle on terror, which started out within the wake of the 11th of September assaults, changed into no longer simply an military marketing campaign—it developed into a protracted socio-political struggle that deeply impacted Pakistan's establishments, ideologies, communities, and collective consciousness (Javed et al., 2025). What started out as Pakistan's strategic alignment with the U.S. within the international combat in opposition to terrorism quickly transformed into an internal struggle that shook the foundations of the country and reshaped its society in fundamental approaches between 2000 and 2017, the legacy of this struggle left enduring marks a few visible, others woven into the psychological and structural material. As Pakistan attempts to emerge from the shadow of this struggle, the lengthy- time period legacy of the struggle maintains to shape debates around governance, country wide identification, non secular pluralism, civic rights, and the position of the military in civilian lifestyles one of the maximum considerable components of this legacy is the transformation of Pakistan's protection paradigm (Amnesty International, 2017). Previous to the struggle on terror, internal protection concerns in Pakistan have been in large part constrained to sectarian clashes, ethnic tensions, and criminal interest. However, after the 9/11 has become a frontline best friend of the U.S., it changed into drawn into a much broader ideological and strategic struggle within the technique, militant organizations that had as soon as been cultivated or tolerated for overseas coverage objectives grew to become their weapons inward organizations like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar started out concentrated on Pakistani civilians, protection forces, minorities, and even non secular establishments (Javed & Shafiq, 2022). The proliferation of terrorism brought about the militarization of ordinary lifestyles protection checkpoints, military operations in urban regions, and military courts have become normalized capabilities of society. The loss of civilian lifestyles for the duration of this period changed into extraordinary. Consistent with estimates from the South Asia terrorism Portal (SATP) and the Pakistan Institute for Peace research (PIPS), tens of thousands of civilians and thousands of infantrymen misplaced their lives in terrorist assaults and counterterrorism operations (PIPS, 2010–2017). Every assault no longer most effective introduced grief however additionally left at the back of an collective trauma that permeated society faculties, hospitals, mosques, and public gatherings have become objectives of worry, making ordinary lifestyles an calculated danger activities just like the 2014 Army Public School bloodbath in Peshawar are etched into the country wide reminiscence as symbols of the way deeply terror had penetrated society (Javed et al., 2025). These surroundings of worry had profound psychosocial consequences. Collective trauma, survivor's guilt, PTSD, and persistent tension have become not unusual amongst civilians, in particular in struggle zones which includes Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA (now merged with KP), and Baluchistan. The struggle fractured households and communities. Displacement changed into every other most important consequence: an anticipated three million human beings have been internally displaced for the duration of operations which includes Zarb-e-Azb and Rah-e-Rast a lot of those IDPs lived in camps for years,

struggling with insufficient healthcare, education, and activity opportunities (UNDP Pakistan, 2017). Reintegration changed into sluggish and frequently incomplete, in particular in tribal regions in which infrastructure and governance had continually been susceptible. The disruption of conventional livelihoods and community structures in addition alienated already marginalized populations beyond the physical and psychological devastation; the struggle on terror fundamentally altered the social material of Pakistan in phrases of identification and accepts as true with. One key consequence changed into the upward thrust in sectarian and ethnic polarization. Militant violence frequently took the shape of sectarian assaults in particular in opposition to the Shia, Hazara, and Ahmadiyya communities. Sunni-Shia tensions, as soon as controlled through conventional mediation and localized compromise, now took on violent overtones, exacerbated with the aid of regional geopolitical rivalries (which includes the Iran-Saudi Arabia struggle). Minority non secular communities felt an increasing number of dangerous and excluded. The legacy of this struggle, consequently, consists of no longer most effective physical violence however additionally the erosion of inter-communal accept as true with and non secular tolerance at the identical time, ethnic tensions— in particular in Baluchistan and Karachi have been heightened with the aid of counterterrorism regulations and militarized governance. In Baluchistan, enforced disappearances, the concentrated on of activists, and the heavy presence of protection forces created a narrative of country oppression (Rumi, 2016). The Baloch nationalist movement, which had simmered for many years, received new gasoline as younger human beings an increasing number of considered the country as an occupying pressure in preference to a protector. Karachi, Pakistan's financial hub, additionally witnessed ethno-political violence exacerbated with the aid of the struggle's fallout. The urban-rural divide deepened, as did tensions between Pashtun communities (a lot of whom have been displaced with the aid of the struggle) and native Sindhi or Mohajir populations. The struggle additionally left a long-lasting imprint on country-citizen members of the family. The reliance on military solutions to internal conflicts contributed to the sluggish erosion of civilian governance. The military emerged no longer simply as protection provider however as a *de facto* policymaker in regions like overseas coverage, internal protection, and media regulation. The upward thrust of the military's have an effect on in civilian spheres which includes through the country wide movement Plan (NAP) and manipulate of the CPEC initiatives undermined the democratic technique. Civilian governments, whether or not underneath the PPP or PML-N, discovered their authority constrained. The legacy of the struggle as a consequence consists of the reconfiguration of Pakistan's electricity structure, in which the military enjoys considerable have an effect on over subjects traditionally reserved for elected officials. This reconfiguration had profound implications for governance and democracy (PIPS, 2010–2017). The enlargement of military courts, frequently justified as an important device to combat terrorism, set a troubling precedent for bypassing civilian judiciary responsibility mechanisms have been weakened within the call of country wide protection, legal guidelines have been surpassed that curtailed civil liberties, which includes freedom of expression and freedom of assembly (Javed et al., 2025). Non violent protests have been frequently dispersed, and activists have been detained underneath indistinct expenses. Through the years, the distinction between terrorism and dissent has become blurred, with political warring parties and important voices an increasing number of categorized as “threats to country wide protection.” The media landscape— as soon as a beacon of pluralism within the early 2000s— have become a casualty of the struggle's legacy. The preliminary explosion of personal information channels had created unprecedented space for public discourse and responsibility. However, underneath the weight of military pressure, criminal restrictions, and corporate coercion, the media progressively followed a greater sanitized tone important insurance of military operations, missing men and women instances, or extremist infiltration of country establishments have become uncommon. Investigative journalists have been

kidnapped, attacked, or driven into exile. Self-censorship has become the norm. In effect, the struggle created media surroundings in which narratives have been tightly controlled, and the distance for dissent narrowed. Notwithstanding those constraints, social media emerged as a battleground for public discourse. Activists, journalists, and ordinary residents grew to become to structures like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to percentage unfiltered information, explicit dissent, and organize resistance. However, the country quickly spoke back with a brand new virtual toolkit. Cybercrime legal guidelines, virtual surveillance, and the blocking off of web sites have become considerable. Troll armies and pretend money owed targeted dissenters with disinformation campaigns and on-line harassment. Economically, the struggle positioned a massive pressure on Pakistan's already fragile resources. Billions of greenbacks have been diverted in the direction of protection operations and protection infrastructure, at the same time as development indicators stagnated or declined in struggle-affected regions. overseas direct investment dropped significantly for the duration of the height years of violence (2007–2014), and tourism as soon as colorful in regions like Swat, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Chitral— got here to an halt (UNDP Pakistan, 2017). Instructional establishments suffered both direct assaults (just like the APS Peshawar tragedy) and declining attendance because of worry and lack of confidence. Many instructors and professionals fled struggle zones, leading to a brain drain that still influences regional development. Notwithstanding the dimensions of devastation, the struggle on terror additionally brought about moments of resilience and mirrored image within Pakistani society. Civil society organizations, even at the same time as underneath danger, documented human rights violations, supported sufferers of violence, and recommended for peace. The passage of the 18th amendment in 2010, which devolved electricity to the provinces, changed into visible as an attempt to give a boost to democratic governance young people movements, which includes the Pashtun Tahafuz movement (PTM), emerged to call for responsibility, justice, and dignity for communities suffering from struggle. Artists, poets, filmmakers, and musicians additionally started out attractive with subject matters of trauma, identification, and resistance— developing a cultural reaction to the struggle that deserves recognition as a part of its legacy. Every other noteworthy component of the struggle's legacy is its effect on non secular education and discourse. The authorities' attempts to reform the madrassa machine confronted constrained fulfillment, as maximum reforms have been either half of-hearted or resisted with the aid of non secular lobbies. However, public debate approximately non secular extremism and the politicization of Islam grew greater open. excessive-profile instances, which includes the assassination of Salman Taseer and the blasphemy trial of Asia Bibi, sparked country wide and international discussions approximately Pakistan's blasphemy legal guidelines, non secular tolerance, and country neutrality. At the same time as a lot of those discussions resulted in stalemates or backlash, they marked a sluggish however important shift in public consciousness searching beyond 2017, the struggle's legacy maintains to conform (UNDP Pakistan, 2017). Terrorist violence has significantly declined, however extremism remains embedded in components of society and the country. Many banned clothing maintain to function underneath new names or as “charitable” wings. The reminiscence of the struggle its casualties, its displacements, its betrayals continues to be sparkling in lots of communities accept as true within country establishments remains fragile, in particular in regions that bore the brunt of struggle. The actual undertaking for Pakistan lies in addressing the structural inequalities and ideological fissures that the struggle has either uncovered or exacerbated. To without a doubt heal, Pakistan ought to spend money on lengthy- time period peace building. this indicates no longer most effective rebuilding infrastructure however additionally reweaving the social material fostering inclusive education, promoting interfaith communicate, protective minorities, strengthening neighborhood governance, and maintaining perpetrators of violence responsible. Transitional justice, reality commissions, and reparations for struggle-affected

communities may want to play a position in this technique; however those steps require political will and societal consensus. In conclusion, the legacy of the struggle on terror in Pakistan is complicated, multifaceted, and deeply entrenched. It has reshaped the United States of America's politics, way of life, financial system, and identification in profound approaches. at the same time as Pakistan has made considerable strides in countering terrorism, the deeper wounds inflicted with the aid of the struggle on accept as true with, brotherly love, and democracy continue to be. The struggle may additionally have officially ended, however its legacy maintains to inform the prevailing and shape the destiny to transport forward, Pakistan ought to confront this legacy with honesty, humility, and a renewed commitment to justice, inclusion, and peace (PIPS, 2010–2017)..

Conclusion

The struggle on terror in Pakistan has led to psychological trauma, cultural shifts, ideological polarization, and institutional transformation. The country's entry into the conflict was marked by strategic ambiguity and geopolitical necessity, resulting in internal contradictions and securitization of daily life, particularly in the erstwhile FATA, Swat, and parts of Baluchistan. This has exacerbated longstanding structural inequalities and regional disparities, alienating marginalized populations. The struggle has also led to sectarian and ethnic fissures, with attacks on Shia processions, Hazara communities, and Ahmadi worshippers becoming more common. Extremist ideologies gained mainstream popularity through unchecked hate speech, biased curricula, and political opportunism. The military's position as the significant arbiter of national security and coverage has been cemented, leading to a democratic deficit in civil governments. The media landscape underwent significant transformation, with the rise of personal television channels providing new opportunities for responsibility, public discourse, and civic engagement. However, journalists faced intimidation, censorship, and physical violence as the conflict intensified. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become battlegrounds for virtual repression, with activists, bloggers, and dissidents being pressured, arrested, or silenced. The generation born between 2000 and 2017 in Pakistan experienced a period of disillusionment with formal politics due to military dominance and extremist violence. This disillusionment led to new forms of activism, such as human rights, environmental justice, education, and women's empowerment. Civil society played a crucial role in documenting abuses, advocating for reform, and presenting opportunity visions of Pakistani identity.

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