Pakistani Media and the Radicals:
The Symbiotic Relationship and Its Impacts on Society and Free Speech

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Abstract:

In Pakistan, radicalization constitutes a principal challenge confronting both the government and its citizenry. The interplay between media and radicalization phenomena in the country remains insufficiently explored. This research scrutinizes their reciprocal influences, particularly examining the extent to which radical organizations exert pressure on the media and the extent to which contemporary media facilitates the radicalization process. The overarching conclusion of this study indicates that the media has contributed to the proliferation of radicalism in Pakistan, at times deliberately and at times inadvertently. The recently more dynamic Pakistani media has consistently played a role in radicalizing individuals, groups, and organizations. Moreover, the media displays a tendency towards sympathy for radical elements. Radicals apply pressure on the media through various strategies. As evidenced in the survey conducted for this study, an overwhelming majority of Pakistani journalists perceive that the radicalization phenomenon has impacted the country's media. A majority of respondents (57%) believe that the media has been suppressing information about radicalization phenomena. According to the survey, (69%) of respondents assert that radicalization has impaired the nation's capacity to exercise free speech. Furthermore, (77%) of respondents acknowledge that radical groups exert pressure on the media.

Keywords: Pakistan, radicalization, media, militancy, extremism, society, sympathy

INTRODUCTION

Radicalism remains a principal challenge confronting the government and populace of Pakistan. The origins of radicalism in the region precede Pakistan's independence in 1947, and it has continually expanded throughout the nation's history, driven by a multitude of actors and factors. The Pakistani media, which has recently exhibited increased dynamism, has historically facilitated the radicalization of individuals, groups, and organizations. Paradoxically, these radicalized segments of society have also targeted the media. The reciprocal impact between Pakistan's media and the issue of radicalization is significant. This study, conducted in 2008 during the apex of

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radical militancy in Pakistan under the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) banner, examines this dynamic. The TTP was established in 2007 following a military operation initiated by General Musharraf's government against vigilante students of Jamia Hafsa and clerics at the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque).[4] The study investigates the mechanisms of this impact, the extent of pressure exerted by radical groups on the media, and the media's contribution to the radicalization process.

This study aims to address the following questions: How did radical groups exert pressure on the media? What types of threats were issued against the media by radicals? Were radicals exalted by the media, and if so, in what manner? What were the coverage and reporting shortcomings of the media concerning radicals and related events? Was the mainstream media influenced by radical media, or did it exert influence over radical media? What specific challenges did the media in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa encounter?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the connection between radicalization and the media is still in its infancy. There are very few studies available worldwide. For example, Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2009) provide an analysis of radicalization as a discursive phenomenon transmitted and generated by news media, with a focus on the British media. Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin (2011) investigate the dissemination and impacts of radical discourse by evaluating how mass media coverage generally facilitates or impedes radicalization. The Camacho et al. (2016) is locate radicalization sources on the internet. Bradbury, Bossomaier, and Kernot (2017) examine how social media contributes to the self-radicalization phenomenon.

Only a small number of research have looked into Pakistan's radicalization phenomenon thus far. In her books *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (2008) and *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (2001), Ayesha Jalal has tackled the subject matter within the South Asian setting. The country's radical organizations and actions are covered in *Gateway to Terrorism* (Rana, 2003). *The Seeds of Terrorism* (Rana, 2005) examines the pervasiveness and prevalence of extremism in Pakistan. "Jihadi Print Media in Pakistan" offers instances of how the jihadi media spreads radicalism (Rana, 2008). Radical South Asian jihadi groups' ideology has been documented by Haqqani (2005). Hassan Abbas's 2004 book *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism* discusses a number of topics related to radicalization in Pakistan, such as the effects of 9/11 and the function of radical Pakistani organizations.

In her 2008 study, Christine Fair looked at the social components of radicalization in Pakistan. In another study "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan: Implications for Al Qaeda and Other Organizations," she went into expressions of radicalization in Pakistan, and their global connections (Fair, 2004). In his 2002 work "Role of Religion in Politics," Kaul discusses how Pakistan's military and civil society have been impacted by Islamic radicalization. Educational institutions and curriculum in Pakistan and Afghanistan are factors in people becoming radicalized, claims Davis (2007). The relationship between radicalization and poverty in Pakistan is examined by Safiya Aftab (2008). Shabana Fayyaz (2017; 2019) investigates how child militancy and violent extremism

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[4] Lal Masjid was founded by Maulana Abdullah, the father of Abdul Aziz and Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who enjoyed the patronage of Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq (Syed, 2007).

affect young people in Pakistan. Nonetheless, there has not been a specific discussion of the connection between media and radicalization in Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research project, a combination of surveys, interviews, and media monitoring techniques were employed. Interviews were conducted in Peshawar, Islamabad, and Lahore in 2008, with sixteen journalists and media professionals, including editors of newspapers and magazines. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. An opinion survey, based on a structured questionnaire, was administered to 68 journalists to collect responses to 13 specific questions. Additionally, customized Likert scales were used to measure the impact of radicalization on the right to free speech, the degree of sympathy the mainstream media had for radicals, and the overall sentiment of the mainstream media towards radicals. The survey included respondents from various regions: eleven from Rawalpindi and Islamabad, ten from Lahore, eight from Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and 39 from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, which included the former FATA. Efforts were made to maintain gender balance in the survey and interviews; however, there is a notable underrepresentation of women in the Pakistani media. Furthermore, since female journalists predominantly cover topics such as women's rights, sports, and culture, few possess extensive knowledge of the subject of radicalization. Among the respondents, 59 (87%) were men and nine (13%) were women. The survey was conducted by a three-person research team between July 1 and September 10, 2008. The data collected through the questionnaire were codified and tabulated for analysis.

Radical media encompasses newspapers and magazines that advocate for radical organizations and groups. In July 2008, a total of eighteen radical and mainstream newspapers and periodicals (as detailed in Table 1) were monitored to assess the extent of radical content coverage. The relevant items were categorized into three analytical groups: (a) headlines highlighting important issues; (b) headlines highlighting organizational actions; and (c) article titles and editorials. From the mainstream Pakistani media, fourteen publications were monitored, including eleven dailies - eight in Urdu (Ummat, Nawa-e-Waqt, Islam, Jinnah, Aaj, Mashriq, Khabrain, and Express) and three in English (The News, The Post, and Daily Times) - and three weeklies - two in Urdu (Akhbar-e-Jehan, and Takbeer) and one in English (Friday Times). A total of twenty-eight entries were collected from these papers. Among these entries, six were classified under "articles and editorials," one under "organizational activities," and twenty-one under "highlighted issues." Four newspapers and magazines representing the radical Pakistani media were monitored (Zarb-e-Momin (Weekly), al-Qalam (Weekly), Ghazwa (Weekly), and al-Jamiah). From these, fifty-nine items were collected: thirty-eight related to "highlighted issues," nine to "organizational activities," and twelve to "articles and editorials" (as detailed in Table 2). The objective of this media monitoring was to determine (a) how the media perceived the phenomenon of radicalization and (b) how the mainstream and radical media approached the subject differently.

Table 1: Monitored newspapers and magazines

Type of media	Number of newspapers and magazines
1. Mainstream media	14
2. Radical media	04
Total	18

IMPACT OF RADICALIZATION AND MEDIA ON EACH OTHER

Since the inception of Pakistan's radicalization process, the media has played a significant role. In the early 1950s, the Punjab government utilized the media to propagate radical ideologies. Newspapers that conducted anti-Ahmadi campaigns received financial support from the government's Directorate of Information. This practice was reported to an inquiry committee and corroborated by Hameed Nizami of the Nawa-e-Waqt Group (Hussein Naqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008). When asked whether radicalization is impacting Pakistani media, an overwhelming majority of journalists (87%) affirmed this influence (Figure 1).

Zia-Ul-Haq and the Media

Veteran journalist and director of GEO English, Mubashir Bokhari, elucidates that the government under General Zia-ul-Haq implemented strategies to control the media. Bokhari explains that General Zia, who leveraged Jamaat-i-Islami in the Afghan War against the Soviet Union, exhibited sympathy towards the party. Consequently, a significant number of Jamaat-i-Islami supporters gained media influence. According to Hussein Naqi (Personal communication, 21 January 2008), Jamaat-i-Islami employs nearly the entire workforce of *Al-Hilal*. Furthermore, the founders of the Punjab Union of Journalists (Dastur) were affiliated with Jamaat-i-Islami (Mubashir Bokhari, personal communication, 21 January 2008). By 2008, the Union comprised over 300 members, indicating that at least 300 individuals in the media had been promoted and supported by religious parties up to that point. Moreover, members of violently radicalized militant groups, such as Sipah-i-Sahaba and Sipah-e-Muhammad, infiltrated the media. They employed mainstream media personnel and exploited them for their own purposes. Individuals working in newsrooms or reporting sections with particular ideological leanings have the potential to disproportionately emphasize or downplay certain news items, even if they do not directly influence media policy (Mubashir Bokhari, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Encouragement

Radicals also receive subtle encouragement from Pakistan's mainstream media. For instance, Mehdi Hassan (1937–2022), a professor and former head of Beaconhouse University's Department of Mass Communication in Lahore, highlighted the biased coverage of the 2007 Lal Masjid standoff. He observed that numerous other issues are similarly covered in an unbalanced manner (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008). News articles regularly featured the positions of outlawed religious and violent groups, merely prefacing their names with the term "banned." Hassan noted that these organizations received extensive media coverage and that their statements were either intentionally or inadvertently amplified.

Table 2: Data (news reports, articles and editorials) collected from mainstream and radical media

Category	Number of items	
	Mainstream media	Radical media
a) News reports	22	47
i. Highlighted issues	21	38
ii. Organisational activities	1	9
b) Articles and editorials	6	12
Total	28	59

Shaheen Buneri, a reporter from Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province working for Khyber News TV, observed that the media tends to sensationalize minor incidents. For instance, even if a firecracker explodes, the media often reports it as a bomb explosion, claiming authorities are attempting to locate the source. This practice encourages radicals. Buneri noted that spokesmen for the radical groups have received substantial media coverage. There have been instances where groups based in Bajaur and other areas, who were not involved in certain activities, claimed responsibility for bomb blasts, expressing pride in these acts. Occasionally, small groups of four or five individuals would organize under an Islamic or jihadi identity and boast about committing such deeds (Shaheen Buneri, personal communication, 29 January 2008).

Glorification

During a media workshop focused on this issue, Waseem Ahmed Shah (personal communication, 29 January 2008), resident editor of the English daily *Dawn* in Peshawar, underscored the unintentional glorification of militants by the Pakistani media. He posited that a significant portion of journalists lacks adequate training, particularly in navigating hazardous environments characterized by widespread militancy. This deficiency extends to their reporting practices, as they are not equipped with the necessary skills to avoid inadvertently glorifying militants. According to Shah, there exists a delicate balance between reporting on issues related to militancy and inadvertently elevating the militants. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Pakistani media outlets alone. He pointed out that foreign media organizations, such as BBC Urdu and BBC Pashto, have also contributed to the glorification of militants, if not to a greater extent. He elucidated that television networks aired footage featuring militant leaders and their spokespersons' statements, perceiving it as a privilege to do so (Waseem Ahmed Shah, personal communication, 29 January 2008). Imtiaz Alam, Chairman of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA), elaborated on this trend, explaining how the portrayal of radicals as heroes by the media serves as a tool for their propaganda efforts (Imtiaz Alam, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Factors Behind Favourable Coverage

The media perceives radicalization as a salient issue and often prioritizes coverage of violent conflicts over peaceful resolutions, frequently focusing on explosions and violent attacks. Imtiaz Alam remarked that the media's stance fluctuated like a pendulum during the Lal Masjid conflict. Initially, it spurred civil society to vocally demand that the state assert its authority. However, after the state took action, the media shifted blame towards the state. Alam criticized the media for its lack of thoughtful, critical analysis of issues, noting that this tendency contributes to instability, possibly due to the relatively newfound freedom enjoyed by the media. Moreover, Alam highlighted the absence of appropriate guidelines governing media coverage. If any guidelines exist, they tend to lean strongly towards populism. Despite the potential negative implications for the future viability of freedom of expression, media outlets believe that providing extensive coverage to radicals will increase their popularity. Alam regarded this as a risky trend (Imtiaz Alam, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Figure 1

Responses to questions/statements by the media persons (percentage)
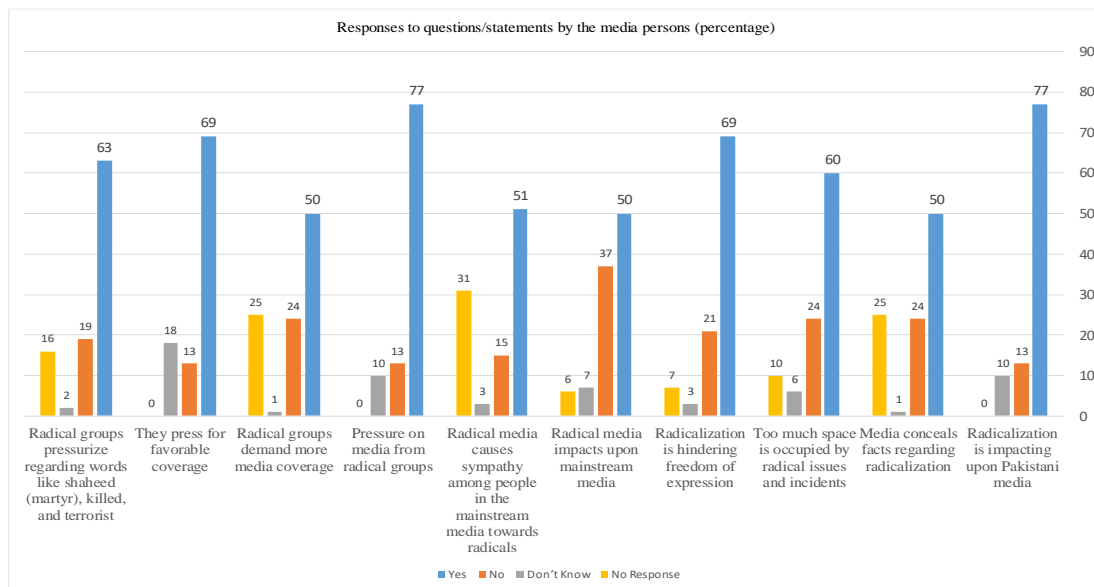
I.A. Rahman, former Secretary General of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, observed that the Pakistani media has been supporting the phenomenon of militancy. According to Rahman, the media endorses militancy because it perceives conservatives as the majority in society and believes that they prefer this type of content. Radical groups actively seek to amplify their message by garnering increased media attention. In response to this, the media has been providing extensive coverage to these groups in an attempt to appease them and mitigate potential backlash (I. A. Rahman, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Despite the existence of numerous articles criticising militant ideology and actions, there has been a degree of sympathy towards them within certain media circles (Imtiaz Alam, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

The Media Generally Encourages Violence

I.A. Rehman posited that the media, particularly the Urdu media in general, had been proactively inciting violence in Pakistan. Rehman asserted that the English media had also played a role, albeit to a lesser extent. In Pakistan's paternalistic society, it is perceived as a mark of valor to physically assault or kill someone. The manner in which these acts are depicted in the media serves to motivate others to replicate such behaviors (I. A. Rahman, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Infancy and Process

Khalid Farooqi, editor of the Urdu daily *Awaz* in Lahore, underscored the criticism faced by the media for purportedly failing to provide radical groups with "proper space" (2008). He lamented that another issue plaguing Pakistani electronic media is its relative youthfulness and the inadequate training of its personnel, which he deemed a serious concern. Farooqi highlighted a significant distinction between print and electronic media: while journalists writing for print media

typically have the opportunity to reflect and revise their work, with subsequent editing and assessment processes in place, electronic media reporters often lack such constraints. Consequently, Farooqi argued, this lack of oversight contributes to the inaccurate portrayal of extreme subjects by Pakistani TV outlets because the reporters have too much room at their disposal. Moreover, he noted that unlike the print media, which benefits from over 150 years of accumulated expertise, the electronic media in Pakistan lacks a comparable depth of experience Khalid Farooqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Commercial Orientation

As highlighted by Naqi, the presence of radical content in nearly every newspaper and magazine can be attributed to the media's reliance on audience engagement. Reportedly, only a small fraction of the media maintains an enlightened perspective, with the majority of print and electronic media owners primarily functioning as investors. Additionally, some owners have backgrounds as smugglers, involved in the illicit trade of weapons, gold, and drugs, who have infiltrated the media sector. Their influence appears most pronounced within the Urdu press, where they exercise considerable control (Hussein Naqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Moreover, radical topics tend to receive disproportionate coverage due to the competitive nature of newspapers and TV networks, as noted by Buneri (personal communication, 21 January 2008). This competitive dynamic further contributes to the prevalence of radical content in the media landscape.

Fear and Appeasement Policy

Pakistani society experienced a pervasive sense of fear, which also had a profound impact on the media landscape. Waseem Ahmed Shah observed that during periods marked by heightened militant activity in the country, reports were generated within an atmosphere of fear (Waseem Ahmed Shah, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Media representatives and reporters found themselves constrained from reporting what they knew due to this prevailing fear, resulting in a lack of essential information for viewers and readers. The level of fear among reporters intensified particularly when covering major incidents. For example, media coverage of the death and funeral of a militant commander was always accompanied by apprehension about potential reactions from militants to their presence and coverage (Abbas, 2008). However, Khaled Ahmed argued that certain media figures, who have managed to avoid violent attacks, prefer to maintain this status quo. He asserted that they have been reporting in alignment with the viewpoints of radicals, which has become ingrained in the mindset and actions of the media. By championing the right to free speech, these figures hope to distinguish themselves from the threat of violent attacks (Khaled Ahmed, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Planted Journalists

As maintained by Rauf Sheikh (personal communication, 21 January 2008), radical organizations have strategically placed their representatives within the media with the aim of influencing the perspectives of both audiences and colleagues alike. Their ideologies have significantly influenced the editorial policies of numerous newspapers, resulting in opposition to cultural and social activities. Sheikh asserts that these radical elements were instrumental in the prohibition of the Basant kite flying festival, a prominent cultural event in Punjab.

Pressure

The media has long grappled with pressure from radical elements. Despite heightened threats in regions such as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and former FATA, Khawar Naeem Hashmi, a seasoned journalist since 1970, asserts that the pressure faced by journalists in cities like Lahore or Karachi is comparable to that experienced by media professionals in the former FATA (Khawar Naeem Hashmi, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Abbas (2008) highlights the constraints on media freedom, suggesting that journalists are unable to report freely and may face repercussions if they publish content critical of radicals, often being accused of disseminating "anti-Islamic" material. Echoing this sentiment, Khaled Ahmed, Consultant Editor of the *Daily Times* and *Friday Times*, contends that there are severe limitations on what can be published regarding radical elements (2008). This pervasive atmosphere of intimidation poses significant challenges to media autonomy and freedom of expression.

Radical groups exert significant influence over newspapers, often dictating headlines and the prominence given to certain stories. They employ threats of violence to ensure compliance, with publications only proceeding if they accede to these demands. Newspapers do not dare to defy the radicals' directives. Consequently, Pakistani journalists face severe restrictions when it comes to criticizing religious radicals, whereas they retain the freedom to criticize the government (Ahmed 1997, 44).

During the Lal Masjid standoff, Umm-e-Hasaan, wife of Abdul Aziz Ghazi (the main cleric of the mosque), became a notable figure and the subject of a cartoon published in the Urdu daily *Aajkal*. The newspaper faced open intimidation and was warned to prepare for repercussions. Following Friday prayers, members of Lal Masjid chanted slogans disparaging the publication, threatened to "teach them a lesson," and labeled the newspaper as anti-Jihad. The threats were also prompted by the newspaper's editorial stance on radicalization. Representative media entities, such as the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), condemned the threats issued by the Lal Masjid clerics. The PFUJ described these threats as an attempt to silence dissenting voices. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also expressed concern (Dawn, 2008). These threats were made despite that PFUJ member Javed Khan was killed in July 2007 and another journalist was gravely injured while documenting the military operation against militants at Lal Masjid in Islamabad. Between 1977 and 2008, there were 163 attacks on Pakistani TV stations and newspapers, and by 2008, militants had claimed the lives of at least 28 journalists (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Media and Radicals in Khyber Paktunkhwa Province

Parts of the province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, particularly the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), experienced severe impacts from violence and militancy, placing the media under immense pressure. Sailab Mehsud, the chief editor of the monthly *Karwan-e-Qabail* and founder president Tribal Union of Journalists, reported that in the two and a half years leading up to 2008, six journalists were kidnapped and killed in FATA, with several others sustaining serious injuries. Mehsud recounted that one of his colleagues narrowly escaped abduction just days before the interview but was shot three times. Another colleague, who had been missing for about six months, managed to escape captivity but was shot and injured while attempting to return home

(Sailab Mehsud, personal communication, 29 January 2008). Abdullah, the vice president of the Tribal Union of Journalists, was killed in a bombing, and journalist Naseer Afridi was caught in the crossfire between two factions and lost his life. Mehsud noted that tribal journalism was at the mercy of militants and radicals, with journalists frequently receiving threats. He himself received letters threatening kidnapping and death if he continued his journalistic endeavors. Due to these threats, numerous FATA journalists, especially those from the South Waziristan Agency, were forced to relocate across the country for their safety (Sailab Mehsud, personal communication, 29 January 2008).

A cleric proclaimed on FM radio that all journalists must be executed when it was disclosed in the media that certain Taliban members had defected to another group in Bajaur Agency. This pronouncement caused considerable alarm within the local media community. Jirgas were convened, and efforts were made to convince the clerics that journalists, obligated to adhere to the directives of their respective media organizations, should be excused and not held culpable for reporting such developments (Waseem Ahmed Shah, personal communication, 29 January 2008). During the zenith of militant activity in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in the late 2000s and early 2010s, state authority was deficient in certain areas of Bajaur and Mohmand agencies. In these regions, administrative affairs were managed by Taliban factions, rendering journalistic endeavors exceedingly perilous (Waseem Ahmed Shah, personal communication, 29 January 2008).

Being a journalist in the former FATA was exceedingly difficult, with local journalists facing unparalleled challenges. Reporting the truth was often impossible, and only reporters with deep connections in the area could summon the courage to attempt it. Under such conditions, journalists were unable to perform their duties as they wished. Fear of abduction and execution loomed if they published anything contrary to the radicals' desires. One journalist from a tribal community was fined 150,000 Rupees for breaking news and had to pay the remaining "fine" after 50,000 Rupees were waived (Sailab Mehsud, personal communication, 29 January 2008). Furthermore, some media outlets received letters demanding that they refrain from reporting any foreigner's death in the tribal belt (Shaheen Buneri, personal communication, 29 January 2008).

Due to apprehensions of being attacked, abducted, or killed, journalists refrained from carrying their media credentials. A significant number of radicals perceived numerous journalists as American spies. Nonetheless, in a press conference, Baitullah Mehsud, the inaugural commander of TTP, proclaimed that he had mandated his members to assume responsibility for the protection of journalists and urged the Taliban to accord them respect, as reported by Sailab Mehsud. Incrementally, under Baitullah's leadership, conditions improved. Despite Baitullah's assurances, Sailab Mehsud emphasized that tribal journalists remained vulnerable and insecure. For any given reason, a journalist operating in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) could be murdered, abducted, or assaulted.

Methods, Tools and Techniques Employed by the Radicals to Pressurize the Media

Numerous media professionals who were surveyed and interviewed asserted that radicals have been exerting pressure on the media, employing a myriad of tactics (Rauf Sheikh, personal communication, 21 January 2008). These radicals have, at times, issued explicit threats against

media outlets, journalists, and publications, while at other times, they have done so covertly (Rauf, 2008). In 1981, the Urdu Daily *Jang* published a critique of a student group affiliated with a religious political party. In retaliation, students arrived in two buses at the newspaper's office and set it on fire. Since this incident, the newspaper has refrained from publishing articles critical of the organization (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008). The radicals have employed emails, phone calls, and anonymous letters to convey their threats. As a result, reporters and news editors have been intimidated into avoiding critical coverage of these radicals. Consequently, the threats have had a tangible effect, allowing the radicals to achieve their objectives (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008). One prominent journalist based in Lahore recounted how, during the peak of terrorist violence following the formation of TTP, they frequently had to request police protection to safely return home.

Several radical groups maintained regular communication with the media, insisting on more frequent publication and discussion of their viewpoints. Despite writing critically about these groups, some journalists managed to maintain positive relationships with them, due to their integrity in professional dealings. It is likely that radical organizations recognized and appreciated this integrity. However, when these groups suspected a journalist of being affiliated with a government organization, they created problems (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Radicals would sometimes demand that journalists resign to ensure their survival. According to Hashmi (2008), the gravity of the challenges faced by the media community becomes evident when extremist groups threaten journalists, instructing them to quit their positions to save their lives. He asserts that Pakistani journalists exhibit considerable bravery and that the media serves as a voice for the people. The media in Pakistan has played a significant role in combating extremism and those who propagate it (Khawar Naeem Hashmi, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Numerous journalists refrained from criticizing the Lal Masjid due to threats from the organization, leading to a sense of apologetic submission. On occasion, journalists were explicitly warned, "We will bomb you next time if you write against us" (Khaled Ahmed, personal communication, 21 January 21). Radicals have extended their threats beyond commentators and reporters to include the families of journalists, with warnings of kidnapping or physical assaults on children during their commute to or from school. These threats have not only targeted individuals but also encompassed proprietors of media outlets, spanning from TV stations to entire media conglomerates. This pressure tactic is exerted on journalists and the upper echelons of media organizations (Rauf Sheikh, personal communication, 21 January 2008)). The prominent critics of radical groups often required the support of a faction or were compelled to provide financial contributions to certain organizations for protection. The majority of newspapers found themselves obliged to provide protection jobs and pay extortion money (Hussein Naqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Additionally, radical factions have resorted to bribery as a means of influencing press coverage (Rauf Sheikh, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

As elucidated by Imtiaz Alam, the media resorted to self-censorship in response to considerable pressure from radical elements. Consequently, instead of engaging in discourse pertaining to the phenomenon of radicalization, journalists opted to direct their attention towards alternative subjects, such as economic conditions, or to produce reports and commentaries on global affairs

(Imtiaz Alam, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Controversial Terminology

Certain media professionals, including Mayed Ali, Chief Reporter at the Daily *The News*, express opposition to the term "radicalization," citing its Western origin as the primary reason for objection (Mayed Ali, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Similarly, I.A. Rahman preferred the term "militant sectarianism" over "radicalization" (I. A. Rahman, personal communication, 21 January 2008)). Radical organizations and leaders closely monitor the language used by reporters, with Khaled Ahmed suggesting that terms such as "terrorists" or "extremists" may provoke offense, whereas referring to them as "fighters" or "militants" could mitigate hostility (Khaled Ahmed, personal communication, 21 January 2008,). Instances have occurred where media outlets received anonymous inquiries questioning why individuals were described as "killed" rather than "martyred." Imtiaz Alam highlighted that certain newspapers consistently use terms like "Shuhada-e-Lal Masjid" (the Red Mosque martyrs), and failure to conform to this narrative could invite criticism and threats (Imtiaz Alam, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Sheikh asserts that such discrepancies in language usage have elicited severe objections from radical groups, citing incidents where publications' offices in Waziristan were targeted and set ablaze due to perceived inadequacies in describing Taliban casualties (Waseem Ahmed Shah, personal communication, 29 January 2008).

Figure 2
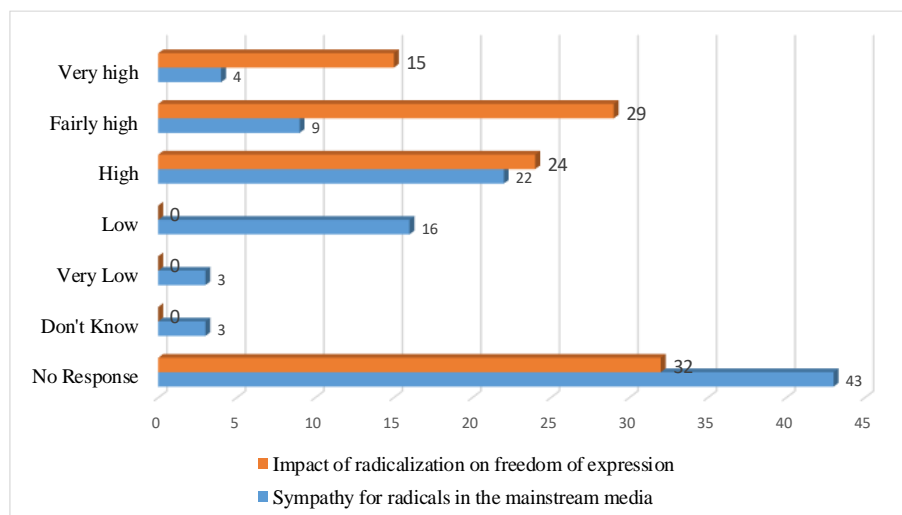
Shaheen Buneri revealed a personal anecdote wherein extremists would contact him to contest the portrayal of their comrades' deaths as "killed," insisting on the term "martyred" instead. Buneri and other journalists faced similar pressure from government agencies, which staunchly maintained the "martyr" status for personnel slain in fight against the radical groups (Shaheen Buneri, personal communication, 29 January 2008). The radical media commonly refers to militants who die in combat as "martyrs," while the government bestows the same status upon soldiers who perish in

anti-radical operations. This dichotomy leaves mainstream media perplexed regarding who is deemed "killed" versus "martyred." The resultant pressure exerted by radical organizations upon the media underscores the intense scrutiny faced by mainstream outlets (Shaheen Buneri, personal communication, 29 January 2008). However, Mazhar Abbas, secretary general of the Pakistan Union of Journalists and deputy director of ARY News TV channel, contends that while radicals may attach importance to media language, they do not universally consider it seriously (Abbas, 2008).

Urdu and English Media

Policies regarding radicalization within Pakistani publications span a wide spectrum, ranging from staunch opposition to outright support. Notably, The *Daily Times* maintains an anti-radicalization stance, while publications like the Urdu daily *Nawa-e-Waqt* exhibit a pro-radicalization agenda, evidenced by an entire page it devoted to militant coverage. Additionally, the chief editor of another Urdu daily newspaper has participated as a keynote speaker at gatherings hosted by Tablighi Jamaat and Jamaat ud-Da'awa, further indicating varying degrees of alignment with radical ideologies across different media outlets (Mubashir Bokhari, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Regional media outlets often represent local or regional languages, while the national media, typically segmented into Urdu and English mediums, lacks a unified identity. Both Urdu and English media exhibit significant disparities in various aspects, including the breadth and style of their coverage. According to I.A. Rahman, the Urdu media has historically aligned with the conservative viewpoints prevalent among the majority of Pakistanis, perpetuating rather than challenging conservatism among its readership. Thus, whether intentionally or inadvertently, our media contributes to the propagation of militancy (I. A. Rahman, personal communication, 21 January 2008). A substantial portion of the Urdu media tends to support radical elements due to their profitability, aiming to enhance newspaper circulation and popularity. Occasionally, both non-state and state entities encourage media outlets to sensationalize events or cultivate specific perceptions (Shaheen Buneri, personal communication, 29 January 2008). While the Urdu media demonstrates some sympathy towards radicals, the English media in Pakistan exhibits a greater level of maturity in this regard (Khalid Farooqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Mainstream and Radical Media

In the monitored mainstream newspapers and magazines, Hanif Qureshi's[5] assertion in 2008 regarding the perceived encroachment of Western and Indian culture upon Muslim culture garnered headline attention. A spokesperson for Lashkar-e-Islam reiterated the group's commitment to regional presence and the implementation of Islamic Shariah, as articulated by their leader, Mangal Bagh, who affirmed his determination to persist in the struggle, as reported in the Urdu daily *Khabrain* (2008). Additionally, Mangal Bagh reaffirmed Lashkar-e-Islam's resolve to maintain patrols in Bara (Lashkar-e-Islam Spokesperson, 2008). Cleric Zaman Chishti underscored in the Urdu daily *Mashriq* (2008) the resistance against any perceived threat to madrassas (seminaries), emphasizing their role in combating social ills through jihad. On July 18, 2008,

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[5] Hanif Qureshi is leader of Shabab-e-Islami Pakistan.

numerous newspapers prominently featured a statement by Baitullah Mehsud, wherein he issued threats and demanded the resignation of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa administration within a five-day ultimatum.

The Shuhada-e-Lal Masjid (Martyrs of the Red Mosque) Conference emerged as a significant focal point for mainstream media coverage during the month. Daily Islam featured a report by Zahid-ur-Rashidi titled "Successfully held Shuhada-e-Lal Masjid Conference and new challenges" (Rashidi, 2008), while Daily *Jinnah* (Habib, 2008) presented a story penned by Hashmat Habib titled "Markaz Ghazi Shaheed" (Centre of Ghazi, the Martyr).[6] Hashmat Habib's narrative expressed empathy towards the madrassa students and the administration of Lal Masjid, concurrently critiquing the government and drawing parallels between the Lal Masjid operation and the historic Battle of Karbala, which pitted Imam Hussein and his soldiers against Yazid's forces.[7] The author also rebuked political parties for exploiting the Lal Masjid operation as a campaign slogan without subsequently condemning it post-elections. Furthermore, the report condemned NGOs for their alleged failure to support the rehabilitation efforts of individuals affected by the Lal Masjid operation. Notable contributions included Sajjad Satti's piece titled "If death sentence is abolished, pray for killers" (2008a), Asif Nisar Ghayathi's commentary "Will fate of NWFP not change?" (2008), and Sultan Siddiqui's analysis "Rumours and atmosphere of terror in NWFP" (2008). Weekly Friday Special included an article titled "A new hype of Talibanization in Karachi" authored by A. Q. Siddiqui (Siddiqui, 2008).

Through monitoring four newspapers and magazines representing the radical Pakistani media, a total of fifty-nine news stories, articles, and editorials pertaining to radical issues and occurrences were documented. Among the 38 items classified under highlighted issues, approximately one-fourth, constituting nine items, were centered on developments in Afghanistan. Additionally, six items were dedicated to discussions surrounding Kashmir. Notably, eight articles took a critical stance towards the United States, India, Israel, and Ahmadis, while five pieces focused on jihad, jihadis, and jihadi groups. Another five items addressed the Lal Masjid, Jamia Hafsa,[8] and madrassas. Furthermore, two articles delved into the political structure of Islam, while one item tackled subjects such as "un-Islamic" practices, Pakistan's foreign policy, and trade relations between Pakistan and Iran.

In the "organizational activities" category, nine items highlighted various events such as training workshops, conferences, conventions, seminars, and fundraisers. Among the training programs offered were the "Islamic Training Course" and the "Arabic and English Language Course." Twelve

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[6] Ghazi served as the deputy cleric of Lal Masjid (The Red Mosque) in Islamabad and met his demise while opposing the Pakistan Army during the military operation in 2007.
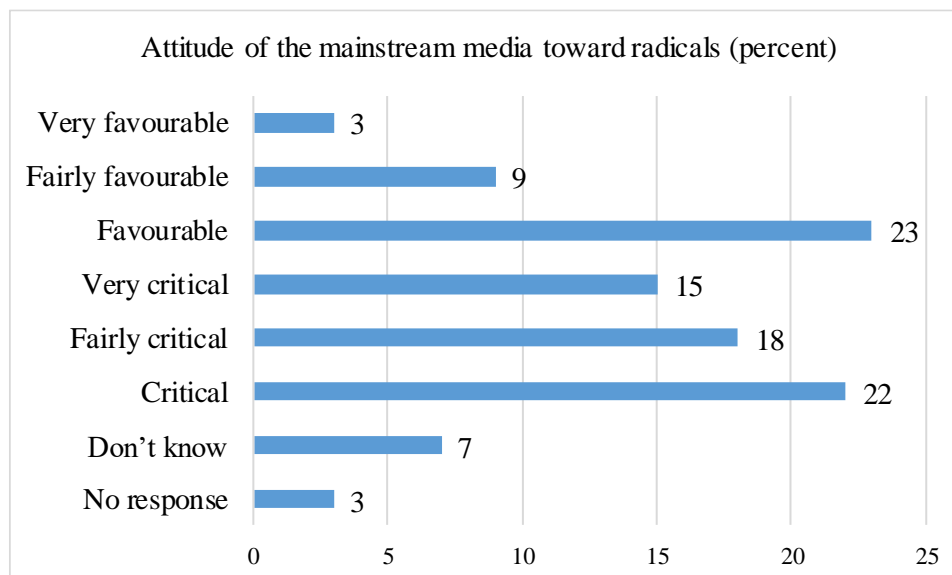
[7] In the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD, Imam Hussein and his family were martyred.

[8] The chief cleric of Lal Masjid, Abdul Aziz Ghazi, is married to Umme Hassan, the principal of Jamia Hafsa. Prior to the Lal Masjid Operation in 2007, approximately 20 students from Jamia Hafsa and Jamia Fareedia attacked a Chinese massage parlour in Islamabad. They abducted nine Chinese individuals, six of whom were women, and brought them to Lal Masjid. In June 2023, students from Jamia Hafsa, clad in burqas and wielding bamboo sticks, shut down highways in Islamabad in response to rumours of Abdul Aziz's arrest for allegedly violating the ban to lead prayers at the Lal Masjid. The administration has repeatedly flown the Afghan Taliban flag on the main building of Jamia Hafsa.

articles and editorials covered topics such as the US's perceived dominance over other countries, the Lal Masjid incident, honoring a former jihadist named Maqsood Shaheed, glorification of jihad and the Mujahideen, alleged American "conspiracies" against Islam and Muslims, the publication of blasphemous caricatures in the West, and discussions regarding the repeal of the death penalty. Several of these pieces denounced the Lal Masjid operation and condemned the publication of blasphemous cartoons. In one of the articles, Maulana Mansoor argued that the government was exploiting the presence of madrassas and the challenge posed by the Taliban to solicit funds from Western nations (Mansoor, 2008).

The contrast between the coverage of radical issues in mainstream and radical media is stark, with 28 articles appearing in 14 *mainstream* papers compared to 59 items in just four *radical* papers in one month. Beyond the sheer quantity, the language employed by the radical media is notably harsher and more rhetorical. However, the most fundamental disparity lies in the terminology utilized by each category. The choice of words with potent connotations, such as "jihadi," "militant," "killed," and "martyred," can profoundly alter the interpretation of a report or article.

Figure 3

Attitude of the mainstream media toward radicals (percent)

Category	Value
Very favourable	3
Fairly favourable	9
Favourable	23
Very critical	15
Fairly critical	18
Critical	22
Don't know	7
No response	3

The Influence of Radical Media on Mainstream Media

Opinions gathered from interviews and surveys with media professionals indicate that Pakistan's mainstream media generally operates independently from the radical media. However, there are instances where individuals from radical outlets may temporarily associate with mainstream publications before returning to their original positions. Bokhari (2008) observes that this phenomenon allows radical organizations to exploit the mainstream media as a "training ground," where individuals can secure positive coverage for their respective groups while employed in mainstream media (Mubashir Bokhari, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Additionally, there is a perspective suggesting that the influence of the radical media on mainstream outlets is

indirect, operating through societal channels rather than direct influence (Hussein Naqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

The Other Perspective

Despite the prevailing consensus among journalists regarding the detrimental impact of radicalization on the media, there are notable exceptions. Mayed Ali (2008) holds the belief that radicalization does not adversely affect the media in general. Similarly, Asim Hussein (Personal communication, 21 January 2008) disagrees with the notion that radical groups exert pressure on the media. However, Hussein (2008) acknowledges the importance for the media to provide background information on militant groups amid their daily coverage of violence. While these viewpoints represent a minority within the media landscape, they suggest a perspective that views government efforts to control media interactions with militants as an attempt to influence the narrative. From this viewpoint, government discourse on militants is perceived as being influenced by Western agendas, with limited communication between the media and the "community". Additionally, concerns are raised about the quality and reliability of information on radical issues and groups provided by inexperienced journalists (Mayed Ali, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

According to this minority of journalists, there has been no discernible threat posed by radical groups to the media. Radical groups exert negligible influence, particularly in the middle and lower regions of the country, with their impact limited primarily to areas proximate to the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), such as Peshawar (Asim Hussain, personal communication, 21 January 2008). This influence is not widespread beyond these areas. Moreover, the media's reluctance to extensively cover radical issues is not due to fear of reprisal from these groups, but rather stems from a tendency to criticize them instead of addressing the underlying causes of militancy. He suggests that the Pakistani media often mirrors the coverage patterns of Western media, resulting in a partial depiction of radical groups. Hussein (2008) further maintains that radical groups have not been afforded significant access to the media, with only a few statements from Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan members receiving coverage (Asim Hussain, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

Policy Matters

Mehdi Hassan highlighted a notable absence in Pakistan's print and electronic media: the institution of the "gatekeeper." This role, typically assumed by a member of the media, involves assessing whether the release of certain news items may cause more harm than good (Mehdi Hassan, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Saif-ul-Islam Saifi (personal communication, 29 January 2008) underscores the impact of social variables on media functioning, suggesting that the media cannot be viewed in isolation from broader societal influences (2008). Furthermore, there appears to be a failure on the part of both the media and successive governments to devise a viable strategy for maintaining balance in coverage and programming. As a consequence, radical and militant groups have gained increased prominence in society (Khalid Farooqi, personal communication, 21 January 2008). Despite the efforts of some mainstream Pakistani media members to uphold objectivity, their coverage inadvertently serves to promote radical organizations, individuals, and their actions.

CONCLUSION

While the prevailing sentiment among media professionals suggests that radicalization has had a detrimental impact on the media landscape, there exist a few outliers who hold contrary views. It is widely acknowledged that Pakistan's media has historically played a role in facilitating radicalization. Throughout its history, various governments, including the Zia Regime (1977–1988), have utilized the media to promote radical ideologies in pursuit of their objectives. Additionally, radical topics have often received disproportionate attention due to competitive pressures within the media industry.

Radical organizations and their leaders are keenly attuned to the language employed by the media, particularly terms such as "jihad," "shaheed," "militant," and "terrorist." The prevalence of violence and militancy has notably impacted certain regions of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province, particularly areas formerly designated as FATA and now integrated into the province. In the aftermath of the formation of the TTP, the media community in these areas faced considerable pressure. A notable disparity exists between the mainstream media and the radical media in terms of coverage and content. The mainstream media tends to adopt a less radical stance compared to its radical counterpart, which exhibits a significantly more rhetorical and aggressive language.

The survey results reveal a resounding consensus among journalists, with an overwhelming majority (87%) acknowledging the impact of extremism on the Pakistani media landscape. Moreover, a significant portion (57%) of respondents believe that the media has withheld information regarding radicalization. Sixty percent of media professionals express concern that the saturation of radicalism-related content has overshadowed coverage of other significant issues, while a majority (69%) contend that radicalization has impeded the nation's exercise of free speech rights. When queried about whether radical groups exert pressure on the media, a significant majority (77%) responded affirmatively. Many media professionals and journalists report experiencing pressure from radical entities, including pressure on media associations, houses, and individual journalists. This sustained pressure has severely constrained the ability of media practitioners to report freely and independently.

The data indicates that media professionals align with radical organizations and groups for primarily two reasons: fear of reprisal and empathy for their objectives. Some individuals hold the perspective that the government sought to restrict media interactions with militants, suggesting that radicals never posed a direct threat to the media.

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