

The Interplay of Religious and Ethnic Conflicts in Pakistan: Implications for National Peace and Economic Prosperity (2013-2015)



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Abstract: *From 2013 to 2015, Pakistan experienced a pronounced intensification of religious and ethnic conflicts, significantly impacting its national peace and economic prosperity. This period saw an escalation in sectarian violence, particularly targeting the Shia community, and an increase in militant activities led by groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). High-profile attacks, including those on Quetta's Hazara community and the Army Public School in Peshawar, underscored the pervasive insecurity. Ethnic tensions also surged, particularly in Karachi, where clashes between Mohajirs, Peshawar and Sindhis disrupted economic unabated, with frequent confrontations between separatists and state forces, contributing to human rights abuses and underdevelopment in the region. These conflicts eroded social cohesion, fostered an environment of fear, and impeded collective national efforts towards development. Economically, the violence deterred foreign investment, disrupted trade, and increased military expenditure, diverting resources from essential development projects. The government's response, including Operation Zarb-e-Azab launched in 2014, achieved some success in dismantling militant networks but also resulted in significant civilian displacement and humanitarian challenges. This study examines the multifaceted impacts of these conflicts, analyzing how the interplay of religious and ethnic strife during this period undermined political stability and economic growth. It highlights the necessity for comprehensive policy reforms aimed at promoting inclusive governance, enhancing socio-economic development, and fostering inter-community dialogue to mitigate these conflicts and pave the way for a more peaceful and prosperous Pakistan.*

Keywords: *Pakistan, Religious conflicts, Ethnic tensions, Sectarian violence, Economic impact, Operation Zarb-e-Azb, Baloch insurancv. 2013-2015*

Introduction

Pakistan's sociopolitical landscape, marked by its religious and ethnic diversity, has experienced significant strain from internal conflicts. The country's demographic composition includes a Sunni Muslim majority and notable Shia, Christian, Hindu and Ahmadi minorities, alongside ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, and

Mohajirs. From 2013 to 2015, this diversity was a source of increased tension and conflict. During this period, sectarian violence surged, with extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) targeting Shia communities, notably the Hazara Shia in Quetta. High-profile attacks and the Peshawar School massacre in 2014 underscored the severity of these conflicts, further

compounded by the state's failure to protect minorities and ensure justice (Abbas, 2014; Fair, 2015).

Ethnic tensions also intensified, particularly in Karachi, where clashes between Mohajirs, Pashtuns, and Sindhis disrupted economic activities and led to significant loss of life and property. The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) frequently clashed with other groups over political and economic issues. Meanwhile, the Baloch insurgency persisted, driven by grievances over political marginalization and resource exploitation, leading to frequent confrontations and human rights abuses (Yusuf, 2014; Baloch 2015). These ethnic conflicts significantly hindered development in affected regions.

The economic impact of these conflicts was severe. Persistent violence discouraged foreign investment, disrupted trade, and increased military expenditure, diverting funds from critical development projects. Karachi, as the commercial capital, experienced economic disruptions that affected business operations and investor confidence. Operations like Zarb-e-Azb, while targeting militant networks, also caused civilian displacement humanitarian challenges. Politically, the conflicts undermined governance, with political manipulation exacerbating divisions and hindering effective governance. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms focused on inclusive governance, socio-economic development, and inter-community dialogue, alongside strengthening law enforcement and judicial systems to ensure justice and accountability (Rashid, 2016; Shaikh, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2016).

Literature Review

Between 2013 and 2015, Pakistan experienced a significant surge in sectarian violence, particularly targeting the Shia community. Abbas (2014) notes the resurgence of sectarian militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba, whose roots trace back to the sectarian conflicts of the 1980s and 1980s. These

groups exploited sectarian divisions to justify their violent campaigns, with the Hazara Shia community in Quetta facing severe and systematic attacks. The state's failure to protect minorities or bring perpetrators to justice has exacerbated feelings of insecurity and alienation among the Shia population (Abbas, 2014).

Fair (2015) emphasizes that state policies have played a role in perpetuating sectarian violence. The Islamization policies of the Zia-ul-Haq era promoted Sunni orthodoxy while marginalizing Shia practices, creating a foundation for institutionalized sectarianism. This legacy continued into the 2013-2015 period, with the state's perceived complicity and ineffectiveness in addressing sectarian violence allowing militant groups to operate with impunity, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence (Fair, 2015).

The spread of extremist ideologies through madrassas and militant networks has also contributed to the sectarian violence of this period. Shaikh (2015) discusses how these ideologies, propagated through educational and militant institutions, foster a culture of intolerance and violence. The failure of state authorities to regulate these institutions has allowed sectarian violence to persist, impacting national peace and security (Shaikh, 2015).

Ethnic conflicts in Karachi and Balochistan further complicated the socio-political landscape. Yusuf (2014) examines ethnic violence in Karachi, driven by tensions between Mohajirs, Pashtuns, and Sindhis, with the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) playing a central role. In Balochistan, longstanding grievances over political marginalization and resource exploitation have fueled an ongoing insurgency (Baloch, 2015). Siddiq (2014) attributes the insurgency to economic underdevelopment and socio-political marginalization, exacerbated by resource exploitation and lack of local decision-making involvement. These conflicts have significantly disrupted economic activities and governance, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms to address underlying inequalities and promote national stability.

Overview of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Pakistan

Pakistan is a nation characterized by significant religious and ethnic diversity, which plays a crucial role in shaping its sociopolitical landscape. The country's religious composition is predominantly Sunni Muslims, with Sunni Muslims constituting around 75-80% of the population. However, Pakistan also has substantial minority communities, including Shia Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis. The Shia Muslim population, though smaller compared to the Sunni majority, is a significant demographic, with notable communities in cities such as Quetta and Karachi. Christians and Hindus, though smaller in number, also contribute to the country's rich cultural and religious tapestry. These diverse religious groups often coexist peacefully but have faced periods of tension and violence, particularly when extremist elements exploit sectarian differences (Mubarak, 2017; Fair, 2015).

Ethnically, Pakistan is equally diverse, comprising several major groups, including Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, and Mohajirs. Punjabis are the largest ethnic group, primarily inhabiting the Punjab province, while Pashtuns are concentrated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and tribal areas. Sindhis predominantly reside in Sindh, and Baloch are mainly found in Balochistan. Mohajirs, who are Urdu-speaking migrants from India, are primarily settled in Karachi. This ethnic diversity has contributed to a rich cultural mosaic but has also been a source of friction, especially when political actors manipulate ethnic identities for their own ends. The interplay of these religious and ethnic diversities often results in complex social dynamics, which can lead to conflict and instability. While the diversity contributes to the cultural richness of Pakistan, it also poses challenges for national unity and cohesion. The political and social exploitation of these diversities has been evident in various conflicts and tensions that have plagued the country, particularly during the periods of heightened violence and political instability (Abbas, 2014; Rashid, 2016).

Historical Background of Sectarian and Ethnic Conflicts

Sectarian conflicts in Pakistan have deep historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial era and the post-independence period. The seeds of sectarianism were sown during the British Raj, when the colonial administration implemented policies that often exacerbated religious divisions among Indian communities. The partition of British India in 1947, which created Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims, intensified these sectarian tensions. The newly formed state of Pakistan was envisioned as a homeland for Sunni Muslims, yet it inherited a significant Shia minority, particularly in regions like Balochistan and parts of Punjab. This demographic mix laid the groundwork for future sectarian strife (Khan, 2016).

The sectarian conflicts in Pakistan escalated significantly during the late 20th century. The 1980s, under General Zia-ul-Haq's rule, were particularly formative. Zia's Islamization policies promoted Sunni orthodoxy and marginalized Shia practices, leading to institutionalized sectarianism. His regime's efforts to align Pakistan's legal and educational systems with Sunni interpretations of Islam further deepened sectarian divides. This period saw the rise of militant sectarian groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba, which perpetuated violence against Shia communities and set the stage for ongoing sectarian conflicts. Ethnic conflicts in Pakistan have similarly deep historical roots, shaped by colonial legacies and post-independence political dynamics. The British colonial policy of divide and rule had created and solidified ethnic divisions among Indian communities, which were inherited by Pakistan. The political and economic disparities among ethnic groups began to surface more prominently after Pakistan's independence. For instance, the Mohajirs, who migrated from India during partition, found themselves in conflict with local ethnic groups in Karachi. Their struggle for political and economic dominance often led to clashes with Sindhis and Pashtuns (Yusuf, 2014).

The Balochistan region, home to the Baloch ethnic group, has experienced longstanding

grievances related to political marginalization and resource exploitation. The Baloch insurgency, which began in the early years of Pakistan's independence, was driven by demands for greater autonomy and control over natural resources. The state's heavy-handed response to Baloch demands and the exploitation of the region's resources further fueled insurgency and ethnic conflict. These tensions were exacerbated by central government policies that marginalized the Baloch people and ignored their demands for political and economic rights. The interplay of political and economic factors has further complicated sectarian and ethnic conflicts. Political actors have often manipulated religious and ethnic identities to consolidate power and control, exacerbating existing tensions. In Karachi, for instance, political parties like the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) have played a central role in ethnic politics, often leading to violence and instability. Similarly, economic disparities and uneven resource distribution have fueled discontent among various ethnic groups, contributing to ongoing conflicts and instability (Yusuf, 2014; Rashid, 2016).

Economic factors have also played a significant role in exacerbating sectarian and ethnic conflicts. The uneven distribution of resources and economic opportunities has led to feelings of marginalization among various ethnic groups. In Balochistan, for example, despite its rich natural resources, the region remains economically underdeveloped, leading to grievances and insurgency. Similarly, ethnic violence in Karachi has disrupted economic activities, affecting business operations and investor confidence. The economic impacts of these conflicts have further strained the country's stability and development efforts (World Bank, 2015; Siddiq, 2014).

The following are the aims and objectives of this study:-

1. To Examine the Historical and Sociopolitical Factors Driving Sectarian and Ethnic Conflicts in Pakistan (2013-2015). This objective aims to identify the key historical and sociopolitical elements that have fueled sectarian and

ethnic tensions during this period.

2. To evaluate the Impact of Conflicts on National Peace and Economic Prosperity: This objective focuses on assessing how the sectarian and ethnic conflicts have influenced national stability, social cohesion, and economic development in Pakistan.

The following are the research questions of this study:-

3. What are the primary historical and sociopolitical factors contributing to sectarian and ethnic conflicts in Pakistan between 2013 and 2015?
4. How have the sectarian and ethnic conflicts from 2013 to 2015 affected Pakistan's national peace and economic prosperity?

Rise in Sectarian Violence

The period from 2013 to 2015 witnessed a significant escalation in sectarian violence in Pakistan, marked by a dramatic increase in attacks targeting the Shia Muslim community. This surge in sectarian violence was driven by the activities of militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which capitalized on sectarian divides to further their extremist agendas. High-profile attacks, including bombings and targeted killings, became increasingly common during this period. Notably, the Hazara Shia community in Quetta was subjected to a series of brutal attacks, which included bombings and shootings that resulted in substantial loss of life and widespread fear. These incidents not only highlighted the severity of sectarian violence but also underscored the state's failure to effectively protect minority communities and bring perpetrators to justice (Abbas, 2014; Fair, 2015).

Militant groups with sectarian agendas played a central role in escalating violence. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, an offshoot of Sipah-e-Sahaba, emerged as a prominent force behind sectarian attacks, targeting Shia Muslims and other religious minorities. The group's ideological drive, combined with its operational capabilities, enabled it to orchestrate a series of high-casualty

attacks. Similarly, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), while primarily known for its broader insurgency against the Pakistani state, also engaged in sectarian violence as part of its broader strategy. The increasing frequency and intensity of attacks from these groups during 2013-2015 contributed significantly to the overall rise in sectarian violence, creating a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity and fear among minority communities. The Shia Muslim community, particularly in areas like Quetta and Karachi, bore the brunt of sectarian violence. In Quetta, the Hazara Shia community faced systematic violence that included bombings and targeted killings. The government's inability to provide adequate security or address the root causes of this violence exacerbated the sense of alienation and insecurity among Shia Muslims. The violence led to significant loss of life, forced displacement, and heightened sectarian divisions within Pakistani society. The failure of law enforcement agencies to effectively counter these threats further underscored the challenges faced by the state in addressing sectarian violence and protecting minority communities (Abbas, 2014; Fair, 2015).

The Pakistani government's response to the rising sectarian violence during this period was marked by both efforts and shortcomings. Various security operations were launched, including the notable Operation Zarb-e-Azb, aimed at dismantling militant networks and restoring order. While these operations achieved some success in targeting militant groups, they were often criticized for their heavy-handed approach and insufficient focus on addressing the underlying causes of sectarian violence. The lack of a comprehensive strategy to deal with sectarian extremism and the ongoing challenges in law enforcement and justice delivery continued to hinder effective management of the violence and its impacts on affected communities (Rashid, 2016; Shaikh, 2015).

During the period from 2013 to 2015, several high-profile incidents of sectarian violence significantly impacted Pakistan. One of the most devastating events was the 2013 Quetta bombings, targeting the Hazara Shia community. These attacks, including a suicide

bombing in February 2013 that killed over 80 people, exemplified the extreme violence faced by this minority group. Another significant incident was the September 2013 attack on a church in Peshawar, where over 80 Christians were killed by a double suicide bombing. This attack was part of a broader pattern of violence targeting religious minorities in Pakistan. These incidents not only highlighted the severity of sectarian violence but also demonstrated the broader implications for societal stability and communal harmony. The rise in sectarian violence during this period was largely driven by militant groups with extremist agendas. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) emerged as one of the most prominent sectarian militant groups, responsible for numerous attacks against Shia Muslims. Founded in the early 1990s, LeJ had established itself as a major force in sectarian violence by 2013, orchestrating attacks such as the April 2015 bombing of a Shia mosque in Karachi, which resulted in multiple casualties. Another significant player was the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which, although primarily focused on anti-state activities, also engaged in sectarian violence to further its extremist goals. Both groups exploited sectarian divisions to recruit and radicalize followers, thereby exacerbating the overall violence (Fair, 2015; Shaikh, 2015).

In response to the escalating sectarian violence, the Pakistani government and security forces undertook several measures aimed at curbing militant activities. One of the major operations was Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched in June 2014, which aimed to target militant strongholds in North Waziristan and other conflict zones. This operation was part of a broader strategy to dismantle militant networks and restore stability. While the operation achieved some success in reducing militant activities, it faced criticism for its limited impact on addressing sectarian violence specifically. The lack of a targeted approach to deal with sectarian extremism and the ongoing challenges in law enforcement and judicial processes remained significant obstacles in effectively managing the violence (Rashid, 2016; Shaikh, 2015).

The sectarian violence of 2013-2015 had

profound impacts on the affected communities, particularly the Shia Hazara population in Quetta. The constant threat of violence led to a state of fear and insecurity, prompting many to relocate or live in highly secured enclaves. The economic and social disruptions caused by the violence further exacerbated the hardships faced by these communities. Similarly, the Christian community in Peshawar, targeted by the September 2013 church bombing, experienced severe trauma and loss, affecting their sense of safety and community cohesion. The ongoing violence also contributed to broader societal divisions, hindering efforts towards national reconciliation and development (Abbas, 2014; Fair, 2015).

Case Study: Hazara Shia Community

The Hazara Shia community, primarily residing in Quetta, Balochistan represents a significant ethnic and religious minority within Pakistan. The Hazara people are of Mongoloid descent and predominantly follow Shia Islam, making them distinct in a region where Sunni Islam is more prevalent. Historically, the Hazara community has faced various forms of discrimination and marginalization, both socio-politically and economically. Their unique ethnic and religious identity has often positioned them as targets for sectarian violence, particularly by militant groups with sectarian agendas. This long-standing marginalization has exacerbated their vulnerability to sectarian attacks and has significantly shaped their socio-political experience in Pakistan. During the period from 2013 to 2015, the Hazara Shia community in Quetta experienced a dramatic increase in sectarian violence. Notable incidents include the January 2013 bombing of a Hazara-dominated area in Quetta, which resulted in the deaths of over 80 people. In February 2013, another attack targeted a Hazara neighborhood, killing 89 individuals and injuring many more. These attacks were perpetrated by militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which sought to exploit sectarian divisions to further their extremist agendas. The persistent violence not only led to substantial loss of life but also created an environment of fear and insecurity

within the community (Fair, 2015; Shaikh, 2015).

The response from the Pakistani government and security forces to the violence against the Hazara Shia community has been criticized for its inadequacy. While various security operations were conducted to curb militant activities, they often lacked a specific focus on addressing the sectarian violence targeting the Hazara community. The government's inability to effectively protect the Hazara Shia from continued attacks led to a heightened sense of insecurity and alienation among its members. The violence also resulted in forced migration, as many Hazara families relocated to more secure areas or lived in highly fortified enclaves within Quetta. This displacement and ongoing threat have had severe impacts on the community's economic and social well-being, contributing to their isolation and marginalization (Rashid, 2016; Siddiqua, 2014).

The socio-economic impacts on the Hazara Shia community have been profound. The continuous violence disrupted local economic activities, leading to loss of livelihoods and increased economic hardship. The community's psychological trauma has also been significant, with repeated exposure to violence contributing to a pervasive sense of fear and psychological distress. The violence has hindered educational and economic opportunities, further entrenching the community's marginalization. Additionally, the broader societal divisions and communal tensions exacerbated by these attacks have impeded efforts towards reconciliation and inclusive development within the region (Abbas, 2014; World Bank, 2015)

Ethnic Tension in Pakistan

Pakistan's ethnic diversity is a defining feature of its sociopolitical landscape, comprising Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, and Mohajirs, among others. This diversity, while a source of cultural richness, has also been a catalyst for ethnic tensions. The historical context of these tensions includes colonial-era policies, post-independence state-building challenges, and the legacy of ethnic politics. The period between 2013 and 2015 saw significant

ethnic tensions, particularly in Karachi and Balochistan, driven by competition for resources, political dominance, and historical grievances. These tensions have often resulted in violence and unrest, impacting both local communities and national stability. Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and economic hub, experienced intense ethnic violence during this period. Clashes between the Mohajir community, represented by the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), and other ethnic groups such as Pashtuns and Sindhis were frequent. The MQM, which advocates for the rights of Urdu-speaking migrants from India, found itself in conflict with Pashtuns over political influence and economic resources. This conflict was marked by violent confrontations, targeted killings, and disruptions to daily life. The ethnic violence in Karachi not only resulted in significant loss of life but also severely disrupted the city's economic activities, affecting businesses and investor confidence (Yusuf, 2014).

In Balochistan, ethnic tensions were primarily fueled by longstanding grievances related to political marginalization and resource exploitation. The Baloch insurgency, which gained momentum in the early 2000s, continued with heightened intensity during 2013-2015. The Baloch nationalist movement demands greater autonomy and control over natural resources, which has led to periodic uprisings and clashes with state forces. The insurgency has been marked by violent confrontations, human rights abuses, and military operations. These dynamics have had severe consequences for regional stability and development, contributing to a cycle of violence and underdevelopment in Balochistan. The impact of ethnic tensions in Karachi and Balochistan has been substantial, affecting both social cohesion and economic stability. In Karachi, the violence led to a strained communal atmosphere, disrupted economic activities, and heightened insecurity. The state's response, including targeted operations and political interventions, aimed to address the violence but often lacked effectiveness in resolving the underlying issues. In Balochistan, the heavy-handed military

response to insurgency exacerbated local grievances and hindered long-term peace efforts. Both regions have struggled with the challenges of addressing ethnic tensions while pursuing development and stability (Rashid, 2016; Siddiq, 2014).

Economic and Social Implications

The ethnic tensions in Karachi and Balochistan from 2013 to 2015 had significant economic repercussions. In Karachi, the city's role as Pakistan's economic hub meant that ethnic violence had a profound impact on its economic stability. Frequent clashes between ethnic groups disrupted business operations, led to the destruction of property, and decreased investor confidence. The instability also affected trade and industry, contributing to economic stagnation. For Balochistan, the ongoing insurgency and frequent militant operations resulted in economic underdevelopment. The region, despite its rich natural resources, struggled with inadequate infrastructure and investment due to the ongoing conflict and insecurity. The violence deterred both domestic and foreign investment, exacerbating poverty and hindering economic growth (World Bank, 2015; Yusuf, 2014).

The social implications of ethnic tensions were equally severe. In Karachi, the violence exacerbated ethnic divisions and fostered an environment of fear and distrust among communities. This social fragmentation hindered efforts towards communal harmony and integration, leading to a pervasive sense of insecurity among residents. In Balochistan, the insurgency and state responses resulted in significant human suffering. The conflict led to displacement, loss of life, and widespread trauma among the local population. The heavy-handed military approach and human rights abuses further alienated the Baloch people, fueling resentment and perpetuating the cycle of violence. Both regions experienced a breakdown in social cohesion, which impeded efforts to build a unified national identity and achieve social stability (Rashid, 2016; Siddiq, 2014).

The ethnic tensions also strained governance and public services in the affected regions. In

Karachi, the government's inability to effectively address the violence led to a decline in public trust and the perceived effectiveness of law enforcement. The political manipulation of ethnic sentiments further complicated governance, leading to inefficiencies and corruption. In Balochistan, the ongoing conflict strained administrative capacities and diverted resources from essential public services. The focus on security operations over development initiatives resulted in neglected infrastructure and social services, exacerbating the hardships faced by the local population. These governance challenges further hindered efforts towards achieving long-term stability and development in both regions. The long-term consequences of the ethnic tensions are still being felt. In Karachi, the legacy of violence and disruption continues to affect the city's economic and social fabric. The persistent insecurity and ethnic divisions pose ongoing challenges to achieving sustainable development and social cohesion. In Balochistan, the unresolved conflict and economic underdevelopment have long-term implications for regional stability and growth. The continuation of violence and the slow pace of reconciliation efforts suggest that addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions remains a critical challenge for Pakistan. Effective policies and interventions are needed to address these issues and promote lasting peace and prosperity (Baloch, 2015; World Bank, 2015)

Impact on Foreign Investment, Trade, and Development Disruptions

The ethnic tensions and violence in Karachi and Balochistan from 2013 to 2015 had a detrimental impact on foreign investment in Pakistan. Karachi, being the country's economic hub, was particularly affected by the instability caused by ethnic violence. The ongoing conflict and security concerns made Pakistan a less attractive destination for foreign investors. Companies and investors faced increased risks and uncertainties, leading to a decrease in foreign direct investment (FDI).

In Balochistan the insurgency and security issues further discouraged investment, particularly in resource-rich sectors such as mining and energy. The lack of investment in

these regions contributed to continued economic underdevelopment and limited growth opportunities. The ethnic conflicts had significant repercussions on trade activities, particularly in Karachi, which serves as Pakistan's primary commercial and port city. The frequent violence and unrest disrupted normal trade operations, causing delays in the movement of goods and affecting supply chains. Port operations were often hampered by security concerns, leading to inefficiencies and increased costs for businesses. In Balochistan, the insurgency and instability further disrupted trade, particularly in areas with strategic economic significance. The disruptions in trade not only affected local businesses but also had broader implications for Pakistan's trade relations and economic growth (Siddiqua, 2014; Rashid, 2016).

The ongoing violence in Karachi and Balochistan significantly disrupted development efforts in these regions. In Karachi, the focus on managing ethnic violence diverted attention and resources away from essential development projects. Infrastructure development, social services, and public welfare programs were often delayed or halted due to the security situation. In Balochistan, the insurgency further exacerbated development challenges. The focus on military operations and conflict management took precedence over developmental initiatives, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, poor public services, and hindered economic development. The lack of progress in these areas perpetuated cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. The ethnic tensions in Karachi and Balochistan had profound social implications. In Karachi, the violence exacerbated ethnic divisions and fostered an environment of fear and mistrust among different communities. The repeated outbreaks of violence disrupted daily life and strained communal relationships, creating long-lasting social rifts. In Balochistan, the ongoing conflict and heavy-handed military responses resulted in significant human suffering, including displacement, trauma, and loss of life. The social fabric of the region was severely affected, with communities experiencing deepened mistrust

and fragmentation as a result of the conflict (Abbas, 2014; Siddiq, 2014).

Politically, the ethnic tensions and violence in Karachi and Balochistan undermined governance and stability. In Karachi, the manipulation of ethnic sentiments by political actors contributed to the perpetuation of violence and instability. The government's inability to effectively address the root causes of the conflict led to a decline in public trust and perceived effectiveness. In Balochistan, the ongoing insurgency and the state's heavy-handed responses further alienated the local population and fueled separatist sentiments. The lack of political resolution to the grievances of the Baloch people hindered efforts towards achieving political stability and reconciliation. The political instability in these regions posed challenges to national governance and efforts towards unified policy implementation (Rashid, 2016; Yusuf, 2014).

Governance Challenges and Erosion of Social Trust

The period from 2013 to 2015 in Pakistan was marked by significant governance challenges, particularly in addressing ethnic and sectarian conflicts. The state's inability to effectively manage and mitigate violence in regions like Karachi and Balochistan exposed critical weaknesses in governance. In Karachi, political manipulation of ethnic sentiments by various political parties, such as the MQM, exacerbated tensions and hindered effective governance. The city's complex ethnic composition made it difficult for the government to implement cohesive policies, leading to a fragmented and often ineffective administrative approach. The frequent outbreaks of violence strained law enforcement agencies, which struggled with inadequate resources and political interference, further complicating efforts to restore order and stability. In Balochistan, the ongoing insurgency posed significant governance challenges. The region's long-standing grievances over political marginalization and resource exploitation were met with heavy-handed military responses rather than political dialogue and reconciliation efforts. This approach alienated the Baloch population, deepening mistrust towards the central

government. The focus on security operations diverted attention and resources away from essential governance functions, such as infrastructure development, health, and education services. The lack of effective governance and the perceived neglect by the state contributed to the persistence of the insurgency and the region's socio-economic underdevelopment (Baloch, 2015; Siddiq, 2014).

The persistent ethnic and sectarian violence during this period severely eroded social trust in Pakistan. In Karachi, the violence between different ethnic groups created an environment of fear and suspicion. The repeated clashes disrupted daily life and strained relationships among communities, leading to deep-seated mistrust. This erosion of social trust hindered efforts towards communal harmony and integration, as people became more segregated along ethnic lines. The lack of effective state intervention to address and resolve these conflicts further compounded the problem, as communities felt abandoned and unsupported by the government. In Balochistan, the erosion of social trust was even more pronounced due to the prolonged insurgency and the state's militarized response. The heavy-handed tactics employed by security forces, including human rights abuses and indiscriminate violence, fostered deep resentment among the Baloch people. The lack of political representation and meaningful participation in decision-making processes further alienated the population. This deep mistrust towards the state not only fueled the insurgency but also hindered efforts towards reconciliation and peace-building. The social fragmentation resulting from these conflicts made it challenging to foster a sense of national unity and collective identity (Rashid, 2016; Siddiq, 2014).

The governance challenges and erosion of social trust had a profound impact on public institutions in Pakistan. In Karachi, the constant violence and political manipulation weakened the credibility and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. The police and other security forces were often seen as biased or ineffective, leading to a decline in public trust.

This mistrust extended to other public institutions, such as the judiciary and local government, which were perceived as being unable to deliver justice and good governance. The lack of trust in these institutions undermined their ability to function effectively and address the needs of the population. In Balochistan, the impact on public institutions was equally severe. The focus on military solutions to the insurgency meant that civilian institutions were often sidelined or neglected. The lack of effective governance structures and the militarization of public administration led to a breakdown in the delivery of essential services. The local population, already distrustful of the state, became even more disillusioned with the failure of public institutions to address their needs and grievances. This breakdown in governance and public trust created a vicious cycle, where the lack of effective institutions further fueled the conflict and instability (Baloch, 2015; Rashid, 2016).

Conclusion

The period from 2013 to 2015 in Pakistan saw a significant escalation in both religious and ethnic conflicts, profoundly affecting national peace and economic prosperity. Sectarian violence, particularly targeting the Shia community, and ethnic tensions, especially in Karachi and Balochistan, underscored deep-rooted issues of political manipulation, socio-economic disparities, and governance challenges. Extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the TTP exploited religious sentiments, while political entities such as the MQM intensified ethnic divisions, leading to severe disruptions in social harmony and economic activities. The economic implications were substantial, with foreign investment deterred, trade disrupted, and development projects stalled. Heavy-handed military operations like Operation Zarb-e-Azb, though somewhat successful, often led to civilian displacement and humanitarian crises, further straining the economy. Socially, persistent violence eroded trust among communities, creating an environment of fear and suspicion that hindered national unity and progress. The manipulation of sectarian and ethnic identities for political gain deepened societal divisions,

making it challenging to foster a cohesive national identity. Addressing these complex issues requires comprehensive policy reforms aimed at promoting inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and inter-community dialogue. Strengthening law enforcement and judicial institutions to ensure justice and accountability is crucial for restoring public trust and fostering a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan. The interplay of religious and ethnic conflicts during this period highlighted the urgent need for holistic and inclusive approaches to governance and development.

Findings

1. The period from 2013 to 2015 saw a significant rise in sectarian violence, primarily targeting the Shia community, orchestrated by extremist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the TTP.
2. Ethnic tensions surged in Karachi and Balochistan driven by political manipulation and resource competition, resulting in violent clashes and heightened instability.
3. Persistent violence deterred foreign investment, disrupted trade, and diverted resources to military expenditure, significantly impacting Pakistan's economic stability.
4. The state's failure to mitigate conflicts and protect minorities exposed critical governance weaknesses, eroding public trust and hindering effective governance.
5. Persistent violence eroded social trust among communities, fostering an environment of fear and suspicion that hindered national unity.
6. Military operations led to significant civilian displacement and humanitarian crises, further straining the socio-economic fabric of affected regions.

Recommendations

1. Enhance law enforcement and judicial reforms to ensure justice and protection

for all communities.

2. Implement inclusive policies for fair representation and equitable resource distribution.
3. Regulate madrassas, promote inclusive education, and create economic opportunities in marginalized regions.
4. Foster inter-community dialogue and reconciliation through government and civil society collaboration.
5. Prioritize infrastructure, education, and healthcare investments to revive conflict-affected area.
6. Strengthen intelligence and counter-terrorism efforts with international cooperation.
7. Provide comprehensive humanitarian support and rehabilitation for displaced persons.

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