

## The Impacts of Terrorism on the People of Former FATA (Pakistan)

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### Abstract

This study examines the multidimensional impacts of terrorism on the people of former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, focusing on social, economic, psychological, and governance-related consequences. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on primary data collected through 380 structured questionnaires and 10 in-depth interviews conducted across Waziristan (North & South), Bajaur, Kurram, and Orakzai districts. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and inferential tests, while qualitative interviews were thematically analyzed. Findings reveal that terrorism has produced long-term socio-economic disruption, widespread psychological trauma, erosion of trust in institutions, and altered community dynamics. The study concludes with extensive policy-oriented recommendations aimed at rehabilitation, governance reform, and sustainable peace-building. The paper contributes empirically and theoretically to terrorism studies and criminological literature in the Pakistani context.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Former FATA, Socio-Economic Impact, Psychological Trauma, Pakistan, Criminology

### Introduction

Terrorism has been one of the most significant internal security challenges faced by Pakistan since the early 2000s. Among the most affected regions is the former Federally Administered Tribal

Areas (FATA), which remained the epicenter of militancy, counter-terrorism operations, and prolonged conflict for nearly two decades. The geographical proximity of FATA to Afghanistan, its historical governance structure, and socio-economic marginalization made it particularly vulnerable to terrorist networks.

The people of FATA endured targeted killings, suicide bombings, forced displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and prolonged military operations. Beyond physical violence, terrorism deeply reshaped social relations, economic activities, psychological well-being, and perceptions of the state. While military operations have reduced militant presence, the long-term human consequences remain insufficiently addressed in empirical research.

This study aims to systematically analyze the impacts of terrorism on the daily lives of the people of former FATA by integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence from all major districts of the region. By doing so, it seeks to fill an important gap in Pakistan-focused terrorism and criminology literature.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the decline in terrorist incidents, communities in former FATA continue to suffer from poverty, trauma, disrupted education, and weak institutional trust. Existing studies often focus on security and counter-terrorism strategies, while insufficient attention is given to the lived experiences of affected populations. There is a need for district-wide empirical research that captures the social and psychological aftermath of terrorism on ordinary citizens.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the social impacts of terrorism on families and community life in former FATA.
- To analyze the economic consequences of terrorism on livelihoods and employment.
- To assess the psychological effects of prolonged exposure to violence.
- To evaluate public perceptions of governance and state institutions after terrorism.
- To propose evidence-based policy recommendations for rehabilitation and peace-building.

### **Research Questions**

- How has terrorism affected social cohesion in former FATA?
- What are the major economic losses experienced by the population due to terrorism?
- What psychological problems are prevalent among terrorism-affected communities?

- How do people perceive state institutions in the post-terrorism period?

### **Literature Review**

The literature on terrorism in Pakistan highlights FATA as a critical conflict zone. Fair (2014) argues that militancy in FATA was driven by regional geopolitics and governance deficits. According to Ahmed (2013), prolonged violence led to social disintegration and displacement. Studies by Khan and Yousaf (2018) document the economic devastation caused by terrorism, including loss of markets and livelihoods.

Psychological impacts have been widely discussed in global terrorism literature. According to Hobfoll et al. (2007), continuous exposure to violence leads to collective trauma and PTSD. In the Pakistani context, Sulaiman (2016) reports high levels of anxiety and depression among IDPs from FATA. Additionally, Weiss (2011) emphasizes that terrorism weakens trust in state institutions, particularly where governance structures are fragile.

However, most existing studies rely on secondary data or focus on single districts. This study advances the literature by providing primary, district-wide empirical evidence using a mixed-methods design.

The phenomenon of terrorism has been extensively examined in global and regional scholarship; however, its localized and long-term human impacts remain underexplored, particularly in peripheral and conflict-affected regions such as Pakistan's former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Existing literature broadly situates terrorism within political violence, insurgency, and state fragility frameworks, yet often prioritizes security-centric narratives over societal consequences.

### **Terrorism and Structural Vulnerability in FATA**

Several scholars argue that FATA's historical governance structure under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), political marginalization, and economic underdevelopment created fertile ground for militancy. Malik (2010) and Fair (2014) emphasize that weak state penetration, absence of democratic institutions, and informal justice mechanisms limited social resilience against extremist infiltration. Rashid (2008) further links militancy in FATA to regional geopolitics following the Afghan conflict, arguing that cross-border dynamics transformed tribal areas into strategic spaces for non-state armed groups. Ahmed (2013) conceptualizes FATA as a site where global counter-terrorism intersected with local tribal society, producing unintended consequences

for civilians. According to him, military operations and drone warfare intensified insecurity, displacement, and civilian suffering, thereby blurring the distinction between militants and non-combatants in everyday life.

### **Socio-Economic Impacts of Terrorism**

The socio-economic costs of terrorism in Pakistan have been well-documented at the macro level, but fewer studies provide micro-level insights from affected communities. Hassan (2017) highlights that terrorism significantly reduced economic growth, destroyed markets, and disrupted trade routes, particularly in conflict zones like FATA. Khan and Yousaf (2018) observe that prolonged violence dismantled traditional livelihood systems, increased unemployment, and pushed families into chronic poverty. Barakat and Zyck (2009) argue that in post-conflict societies, economic recovery is closely tied to social stability; however, in FATA, reconstruction efforts remained uneven and delayed. UNDP (2015) similarly reports that lack of infrastructure, limited access to credit, and insufficient livelihood programs hindered sustainable recovery in merged districts.

### **Psychological Trauma and Collective Suffering**

A substantial body of literature highlights the psychological consequences of terrorism. Hobfoll et al. (2007) propose that continuous exposure to violence leads to collective trauma characterized by fear, anxiety, depression, and loss of social trust. Nordstrom (2004) argues that war-related trauma extends beyond individual pathology and becomes embedded in social memory and everyday practices. In the Pakistani context, Sulaiman (2016) documents high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and emotional distress among internally displaced persons (IDPs) from FATA. Khan (2016) further notes that children exposed to terrorism and school closures exhibit long-term cognitive and emotional difficulties. These findings suggest that terrorism in FATA generated intergenerational psychological harm that persists even after the decline in violent incidents.

### **Terrorism, Governance, and Institutional Trust**

Governance-related literature consistently shows that terrorism undermines state legitimacy, particularly in regions with fragile institutions. Weiss (2011) argues that terrorism weakens public trust when states fail to provide security, justice, and post-conflict rehabilitation. Shah (2017)

highlights that governance deficits in FATA—such as limited access to courts, lack of political representation, and bureaucratic inefficiency—deepened alienation among local populations. OECD (2010) and World Bank (2016) reports emphasize that post-conflict governance reforms must be inclusive and people-centered; otherwise, security gains remain temporary. Nawaz (2011) observes that while military operations restored territorial control in FATA, civilian governance and service delivery lagged behind, creating a trust gap between citizens and the state.

### **Criminological and Theoretical Perspectives**

From a criminological standpoint, terrorism-related violence in FATA can be analyzed through strain theory, social disorganization theory, and radicalization frameworks. Moghaddam's (2005) "staircase to terrorism" model explains how socio-economic deprivation, perceived injustice, and blocked opportunities increase susceptibility to extremist narratives. Similarly, Borum (2011) and Sageman (2004) argue that social marginalization and group-based grievances play a critical role in radicalization processes. Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence is particularly relevant to FATA, where long-standing deprivation intersected with direct violence to produce enduring harm. The erosion of informal social controls due to displacement and community fragmentation aligns with social disorganization theory, as discussed in criminological literature.

### **Research Gap**

Despite the breadth of existing literature, several gaps remain evident. Most studies rely on secondary data, focus on security outcomes, or examine isolated districts. There is limited district-wide empirical research that integrates socio-economic, psychological, and governance dimensions using primary data from affected populations. Moreover, few studies adopt an explicitly criminological lens to understand terrorism's long-term social consequences in former FATA. This study addresses these gaps by providing mixed-methods, district-level empirical evidence and situating findings within criminological and terrorism studies literature, thereby contributing to a more people-centered understanding of terrorism in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

A mixed-methods research design was adopted, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.

## Universe and Sampling

The universe of the study consisted of residents of former FATA districts: North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bajaur, Kurram, and Orakzai. A stratified random sampling technique was used for questionnaires.

## Sample Size

Questionnaires: 380 respondents

Interviews: 10 key informants (community elders, teachers, social activists)

## Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale

Semi-structured interview guide

## Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), descriptive statistics, and Chi-square tests were applied. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

## Results and Analysis

### Reliability Analysis

| Scale                 | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Social Impact         | 0.82             |
| Economic Impact       | 0.79             |
| Psychological Impact  | 0.85             |
| Governance Perception | 0.81             |

(All values indicate acceptable reliability.)

### Descriptive Statistics

| Impact Area      | High Impact (%) | Moderate (%) |
|------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Social           | 22              | 10           |
| Economic         | 18              | 10           |
| Psychological    | 15              | 10           |
| Governance Trust | 21              | 15           |

### **Inferential Analysis (Chi-Square Test)**

Chi-square analysis showed a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) between exposure to terrorism and psychological distress across all districts, indicating that higher exposure resulted in greater trauma.

### **Qualitative Findings**

Interview data revealed recurring themes of fear, loss of education, displacement, and mistrust in institutions. Respondents emphasized that while security has improved, psychological scars and economic instability persist.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that terrorism has functioned not merely as a security threat in former FATA but as a transformative social force that reshaped everyday life. The high levels of psychological distress identified across all districts support trauma theory, which argues that prolonged exposure to violence produces collective and intergenerational trauma. Respondents consistently reported fear, sleep disturbances, anxiety, and emotional numbness, indicating that the effects of terrorism persist even after a decline in violent incidents.

From a criminological perspective, the results align with strain theory and social disorganization theory. Economic deprivation, unemployment, and the destruction of traditional livelihoods intensified social strain, particularly among youth. This strain increased vulnerability to deviant pathways, including crime and radicalization, a pattern noted in prior terrorism-affected regions. The weakening of informal social controls due to displacement and community fragmentation further contributed to social disorganization.

Governance-related findings reveal an erosion of trust in state institutions, especially during periods of military operations and displacement. Although respondents acknowledged improvements in security, many perceived governance reforms as slow and insufficient. This supports existing literature arguing that counter-terrorism strategies that prioritize force over social rehabilitation risk producing long-term legitimacy deficits.

Importantly, the district-wise similarities suggest that terrorism in former FATA produced a shared regional experience rather than isolated local crises. This highlights the necessity of region-wide rehabilitation and policy interventions instead of fragmented, district-specific responses.

## Conclusion

Terrorism has left deep and lasting impacts on the people of former FATA. While military operations reduced violence, social recovery, economic rehabilitation, and psychological healing remain incomplete. Sustainable peace requires people-centered policies rather than security-only approaches.

## Recommendations

1. Based on empirical findings and theoretical insights, the following comprehensive recommendations are proposed:
2. Establish permanent district-level trauma counseling and mental health centers staffed with trained professionals.
3. Integrate psychosocial support programs into primary healthcare systems.
4. Launch large-scale livelihood restoration and microfinance programs for terrorism-affected families.
5. Prioritize youth employment schemes to reduce economic strain and vulnerability to radicalization.
6. Rebuild and modernize schools destroyed during conflict, with special incentives for female education.
7. Strengthen local governance institutions through capacity-building and community participation.
8. Ensure transparent and timely compensation mechanisms for victims of terrorism.
9. Promote community-based peace and reconciliation committees involving elders, youth, and women.
10. Enhance access to justice by strengthening local courts and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.
11. Incorporate peace education and conflict resolution training into school curricula.
12. Encourage civil society organizations to actively participate in rehabilitation initiatives.
13. Conduct periodic impact assessments to monitor long-term recovery trends.
14. Improve coordination between federal, provincial, and district administrations.
15. Develop media guidelines to responsibly portray terrorism-affected communities.
16. Formulate people-centered counter-terrorism policies that balance security with human development.

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