



What have we learned? Assessing the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies in Pakistan[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This paper empirically examines the effectiveness of various counterinsurgency policies employed in Pakistan. The literature suggests that any counterinsurgency strategy can have three effects: *deterrence*, *incapacitation*, and *vengeance*. Violence will increase if the vengeance effect outweighs the deterrence and incapacitation effects; if the deterrence and incapacitation effects are dominant, the reverse is true. Pakistan has used three types of counterinsurgency measures to curb violence: peace accords, military operations, and a combination of military assaults (operation Zarb-e-Azb) and the National Action Plan (NAP). Using data for the period 1974m1–2015m12, the results from Negative Binomial Regression models suggest that peace accords have no significant effect on violence, whereas military operations increase violence, suggesting the dominance of the vengeance effect. On the other hand, operation Zarb-e-Azb, complemented by the National Action Plan, generated a strong incapacitation effect, leading to a significant reduction in violence. The results are robust, and even stronger, for a subsample of the post-9/11 period. These findings support the notion that an effective counterterrorism strategy requires a well-executed military operation backed by strong political support.

1. Introduction

Pakistan has experienced several episodes of political and sectarian violence since the 1970 s.¹ However, the intensity of terrorist attacks significantly increased after the unfortunate events of September 11, 2001 (9/11). Since 9/11, terrorism and counterterrorism policies exacted a public cost of more than 50,000 casualties, including 15,700 security personnel, and a monetary cost of 118.32 billion dollars to Pakistan's economy (Pakistan Economic Survey 2015–2016). In 2011, Pakistan was ranked second among the countries most affected by asymmetric violence and conflict (Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2012). Despite the pervasiveness of conflict and violence over the last four decades, few studies have quantitatively assessed the counterterrorism policies pursued by the government of Pakistan.²

Pakistan's government has introduced various defensive and offensive counterterrorism measures to deter and incapacitate militant groups.³ Insurgents have responded with a quit-and-reprisal strategy over time and across geographic space. The need to scrutinize the effectiveness of these counterinsurgencies is highlighted by the unprecedented rise in violence during the post-9/11 period. A significant structural difference between the pre- and post-9/11 regimes in Pakistan is reflected in the number of military operations conducted against terrorist hideouts. Before 9/11, Pakistan had launched only two counterinsurgency operations against ethnic and separatist militants. Since 9/11, a number of military operations have been conducted against ideological militants.⁴ The simultaneous rise in terrorist incidents and counterinsurgency operations in the country necessitate a careful examination of the conflict management strategies adopted by the government to curtail violence.

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¹ The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) indicates that the first terrorist attack in Pakistan was carried out in 1974.

² We will use “counterterrorism policies”, “counterterrorism strategies”, and “conflict management actions” interchangeably.

³ Offensive or proactive anti-terrorism actions aim to destroy perpetrators' safe havens, training facilities, infrastructure, and human resources, whereas defensive strategies include counterterrorism legislation, negotiation processes, and fortification of official buildings to reduce the probability of success of a terrorist incident.

⁴ During the same period, US military aid to Pakistan increased significantly. Nasir et al. (2012) discussed the implications of the nexus between foreign aid and the war on terror in Pakistan.

The literature on crime and punishment and counterinsurgency measures presents three propositions regarding the effectiveness of counterterrorism policies that demand empirical analysis. The first proposition discusses the *deterrence effect* of anti-terrorism measures, which is related to the price (cost) of executing a violent attack. Hence, measures that help increase the probability of apprehension and conviction can reduce violent attacks (Landes, 1978). Similarly, anti-terrorism laws can deter attacks by imposing severe punishments on convicted terrorists. Such laws increase the cost of an attack relative to labor market activities. The second proposition discusses the *vengeance effect*, whereby some counterterrorism policies may increase the number of future terrorist acts. For instance, a military operation may result in collateral damage in the form of the loss of innocent lives, destruction of property, and repression (e.g., a ban on legitimate protests), which could increase the unit cost of non-terrorist activities. This could, in turn, generate feelings of revenge and provide the opportunity for the militants to recruit more foot soldiers. Measures that increase the cost of non-terrorist activities can stimulate violence and result in what is termed *vengeance* or the *backlash effect* (Schelling, 1980; Siqueira and Sandler, 2007; Rosendorff and Sandler, 2010). A counterinsurgency policy may also affect the capacity of a militant group to launch future attacks. This is achieved by targeting the resource endowments of the group. For example, preemptive strategies like a government's deployment of its military to destroy terrorists' bases of operation or break down their networks across different regions decrease the resource endowment of the insurgent group. Any strategy that decreases terrorist incidents by lowering the group's resources results in what is called as *incapacitation effect*. Conflict management strategies may increase or decrease violence depending on which effect is dominant. If the vengeance effect outweighs the deterrence and incapacitation effects, violence will increase; if the deterrence and incapacitation effects are dominant, the reverse—a decrease in violence—will occur.

Pakistan has used three types of counterinsurgency measures to curb violence: peace accords with militants, independent military operations, and military assaults accompanied by a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP). This paper empirically assesses the deterrence, incapacitation, and vengeance effects for these three counterterrorism policies in Pakistan. The paper examines which of these effects is dominant in each strategy. The study uses monthly data on terrorist incidents in Pakistan covering 1974m1 to 2015m12.

The results from the Negative Binomial Regression (NBR) models suggest that the vengeance effect was dominant in military operation and therefore led to an increase in violence. Moreover, the peace agreements were ineffective in influencing the capacity of militant groups. Since these agreements did not generate any vengeance or deterrence effect either, they had no significant impact on violence. On the other hand, operation Zarb-e-Azb, complemented by the National Action Plan, resulted in a strong incapacitation effect, leading to a significant reduction in violence.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a literature review. The theoretical background is discussed in Section 3. Section 4 describes the study's data and variables. The empirical methodology is explained in Section 5. The results are analyzed in Section 6, and Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Related literature

The rich and comprehensive literature on the (in)effectiveness of counterterrorism policies and strategies dates back to Landes (1978), who applied Becker's (1968) seminal contribution, *the economics of crime and punishment*, to study terrorist hijackings in the United States. Landes exploited the rational choice framework to explore the relationship between terrorism and counterterrorism measures. The study concluded that a potential terrorist compares the expected costs of hijacking an airplane with the benefits. Landes observed that the

installation of metal detectors at US airports in January 1973 had increased the probability of the apprehension and conviction of potential hijackers, thus successfully deterring future hijackings. Nevertheless, Enders and Sandler (1993) found that terrorists always substitute one mode of attack for another, depending on the deterrence level of the government's anti-terrorism strategies. Their study shows that the introduction of metal detectors led to a significant reduction in hijackings but also increased other types of terrorist incidents such as kidnappings and assassinations. A few other studies found that deterring one type of terrorist act directed terrorist resources to alternative lethal modes, resulting in harmful consequences (Enders et al. 1990). Analogously, Enders and Sandler (2011) observed that metal detectors inadvertently led to a higher number of alternative terrorist incidents with increased casualties. Terrorists also substitute soft targets for hard ones. If a counterterrorism strategy is designed to protect only state officials (e.g., military personnel, legislators, judges, and bureaucrats) and state institutions (e.g., parliament, supreme courts, police, and military installations), terrorists will shift their focus to soft targets such as schools, markets, places of worship, and other public gatherings (Brandt and Sandler, 2010).⁵

The second strand of the literature focuses on the suboptimal outcomes of counterterrorism policies. It explains that governments often use two strategies, offensive (or preemptive) and defensive, either as complements to or substitutions for each other. With offensive measures, the law enforcement authorities take aggressive steps to prevent potential attacks by destroying militants' infrastructure and training facilities and by eliminating their networks across different geographical regions. Preemptive actions intend to eradicate or at least reduce the capacity of militant groups to initiate terrorist attacks against the state. On the other hand, defensive measures aim to reduce not only the probability of an attack by making the target harder but also the potential damage if a perpetrator succeeds. Interestingly, Sandler and Lapan (1988); Rosendorff and Sandler (2004); Sandler and Siqueira (2006), and Siqueira and Sandler (2007) studied the same problem focusing on different dimensions and concluded that the proactive policy of one country against a transnational terrorist group (like Al-Qaida) becomes a public good for another country if that country is also exposed to the same radical group. On the other hand, the adoption of defensive strategies by one country can become costly for other countries because such strategies may divert attacks to targets in those countries. Consequently, we see fewer of the former kind of strategy and more of the latter.⁶

The third strand of anti-terrorism literature explores the direct and indirect adverse effects of preemptive measures. Proactive actions like military operations and counterinsurgencies may achieve the short-run objective of improving the security situation but may also reduce long-term security by fanning the flames of violence and conflict. Indiscriminate bombing, the shelling of innocent people, and destroying infrastructure (including agriculture, industry, business, commerce and trade, livestock, property, and houses) reduce legal earning opportunities for the inhabitants. Job scarcity decreases passive supporters' opportunity costs of joining a terrorist camp (Ismail and Amjad, 2014). Government military raids and crackdowns may change the level of violence depending on the opposing forces of reducing terrorists' resources and reinvigorating the grievances of potential supporters. Nevertheless, terrorists often induce governments' offensive actions through a surge in attacks in order to attract more recruitment (Rosendorff and Sandler, 2004, 2010; De Mesquita 2005). Siqueira and Sandler (2007) showed that governments usually face a trade-off between providing public goods, which expands

⁵ Concerning the policy-induced substitution of terrorist attacks, interested readers are referred to Anderton and Carton (2005), Bier et al. (2007); Enders and Sandler (2002, 2004); Enders (2007); Frey and Luechinger (2003), and Im et al. (1987).

⁶ For more on this topic, readers may consult Azam and Delacroix (2006); Bier et al. (2007), and De Mesquita (2007).

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