

Socio-Political and Economic Challenges of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan after 9/11: A Study of Lahore

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Abstract

Sectarian violence refers to a clash of or animosity out of religious beliefs or divisions within the same religion. In Pakistan, it mostly happens between Sunni and Shia Muslims plus their little offshoots whereby violence keeps happening. Over the time, these sectarian conflicts have become worse, and instability has increased. It became a centre in the war on terrorism after the 9/11 attacks hence facilitating and fighting against religiously motivated violence. The country has violent threats everywhere, terrorism separatist insurgencies and interfaith conflicts. Post 9/11 change of security environment in Pakistan gave rise to conditions that nurtured sectarian violence. Internal factors, particularly long-standing sectarian divisions and extremist ideologies, overlaid with external political manipulation and regional dynamics, have again amplified the crisis. This paper tried to identify the socio-political and economic challenges that sectarian violence raises in Pakistan along with an overview of how religious intolerance, political interests, and outside influences are perpetuating these conflicts.

1. Introduction

Violence can be considered as any act or behaviour, intentional or unintentional, that causes physical or psychological harm to someone else – crime, discrimination, abuse or violence in all sorts of contexts. (WHO, 2023) While some centre their attention on direct interpersonal violence, others broaden the perspective to include harmful consequences as an outcome of social, political and economic practices. Sectarian violence is the violence of a religious or sectarian nature. It is mostly seen between different groups within the same religion. In Pakistan Sunni and Shia Muslim sectarian ideologies have expressed violence with such extremes of targeted killing and bombing besides attacks on religious congregations (Rafiq, 2014). Despite having their roots in theological disagreements, these conflicts are made worse by social, political, and outside forces that widen societal gaps. The Zia era (1977–1988), which imposed state-sponsored Islamization policies that favoured Sunni versions, especially the Deobandi School, deepened Pakistan's long-standing sectarian tensions (Alvi, 2023). Sectarian conflict was sped up by this institutional injustice as well as geopolitical events like the Iranian Revolution (1979) and the Afghan War (1980s), which further divided the Sunni and Shia communities (Nasr, 2020).

By overflowing Pakistan with militant ideologies, weapons, and outside funding, the Afghan war created new undercurrents. During this time, fundamental Sunni groups like SSP (*Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan*) and its branch, LeJ (*Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*), came into being. They clearly targeted Shia

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communities and assisted the idea of Pakistan becoming a Sunni-dominated state (Rafiq, 2014). Shia groups in Pakistan improved strength as a result of the Iranian Revolution, which improved political engagement through organizations like the TNFJ (*Threek Nifaz Fiqah-e -Jafria*)³. Sectarian splits were worsened when Saudi-backed Sunni factions reacted unpleasantly to these Shia initiatives.

The use of sectarian violence made Pakistanis situation more vulnerable after (9/11)⁴, and Pakistan's following strategic alliance in the US-led war on terror. Radical organizations in Pakistan found new opportunities to increase their power, Pakistan's involvement in the war on terror changed the whole dynamics of sectarianism (Abbas, 2012). The situation of Sectarian violence in Pakistan became more complex as a result of various religious parties joined alliances with Al Qaeda. This diffusion of extremist ideologies, and the growing of global jihadism further intensifies the environment. TTP with clear jihadist agenda joined other sect prone groups like LeJ to launch attacks against Shia Muslims especially in holy days like Muharram (Irfani, 2004). These networks became more lethal as foreign warriors joined them with resources like weapons and money. State of Pakistan has been facing serious challenges in dealing with these unholy alliance (Majeed, 2021).

This study helped us in deepen our understanding of sectarian violence impacts on political, social, and economic dimensions in Pakistan after 9/11. This study clears how extremist organizations are responsible in weakening social cohesiveness and also breeding sect-based revenge seeking culture. Sectarian identities have been used for political and ideological ends. This article demonstrates how sectarianism impact communities in many ways other than assaults, by using the Comprehensive Conception of Violence (CCV) framework, which broadens the definition of violence to encompass psychological, economic, and structural harm. The study emphasizes the role of domestic and international actors in fostering sectarianism, underscoring how political manipulation, historical grievances, and geopolitical rivalries continue to shape Pakistan's sectarian landscape. By analysing these interconnected issues, the article aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors driving sectarian violence in Pakistan and the long-term implications for its society and governance.

2. Research Question

What are the core tenets and narratives of Shia and Sunni in Pakistan, and how do they contribute to or challenge sectarian divides?

Did the "War on Terror" discourse and rhetoric contribute to sectarian tensions within Pakistan?

Do social, political, and economic factors have impact on sectarian violence in Pakistan?

3. Objectives

Investigate the influence of extremist organizations in fuelling and exploiting sectarian violence.

Analyse how the post-9/11 environment, particularly the "War on Terror," reshaped the nature and targets of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

To explore the impact of social, political, and economic factors of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

4. Methodology

This research employs historical, descriptive analytical and quantitative methods to analyse the factors influencing sectarian violence in Pakistan post-9/11. Data was collected through **convenient sampling**, analysed using **regression analysis** to examine the effect of social, political, and economic aspects on sectarian violence. Additionally, **Principal Component Analysis (PCA)** was utilized for

³ The Pahlavi dynasty was overthrown by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which turned Iran into an Islamic republic. Iran then began importing Shia ideology into its neighbours.

⁴ According to reports, Al Qaeda's commanders were in Afghanistan when terrorists attacked the United States' twin towers and the Pentagon. The United States then attacked Afghanistan in the name of the war on terror.

dimension reduction, leading to the growth of indices related to social, political, and economic factors. The reliability and validity of the constructs were ensured through **Cronbach Alpha** and **Average Variance Explained (AVE)** tests, while **factor loadings** were used to measure the relevance of the variables. Data collection through secondary sources like books, journals and reports whereas primary data collected through survey. To further support the results, the study assimilates historical case studies of sectarian incidents, providing an inclusive understanding of how these factors contribute to the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

5. Literature Review

Carter & Caton (2022), Interreligious conflicts that occur within the same religious group are determined by the social and political environment in which the sectarian group operates. These conflicts go beyond theological disagreements and often arise out of competition for political and communicative resources. When groups lack access to these resources, it fosters negative attitudes toward one another, even among members of the same religious identity. Sectarian violence is no longer simply rooted in ancient religious teachings; instead, it is increasingly shaped by contemporary political factors shaped by the interaction of the state with religious groups. Such conflicts often arise when groups compete for limited political and religious resources controlled by the state, reinforcing their divisions and identities.

Palicka (2021), the focus is on understanding sectarianism, particularly within the context of Sunni Muslims and Alawites. To establish a common understanding, the term 'sect' is defined as a group of individuals with distinct beliefs and practices, often within or separated from a larger religious group. Sectarianism, however, is a complex concept with no universally accepted definition, often carrying negative connotations. It can encompass violent conflicts between sects, but also extends to broader notions like bias, prejudice, or stereotypes. Such variability in its definition can hinder effective analysis by simplifying cause-and-effect relationships. Sectarian identity is framed as the sense of belonging to a collective marked by major, institutionalized, intra-religious divisions. It is crucial to note that mere affiliation with a group is insufficient; individuals must actively identify themselves as Sunni. Identity is not static; it is shaped by social and political processes from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Analysing these processes will be fundamental in exploring sectarian violence.

Holtmann (2014), traditionally sectarian violence within Islam's sects has been uncommon, often orchestrated by way of clerics or political leaders instead of spontaneous outbreaks. Today, extremist organizations, regularly supported with the aid of states, are the principle drivers of sectarian killings. Al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, whilst outstanding, do not outline their actions in sectarian phrases, alternatively using anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist, and anti-American narratives for his or her jihad. Sectarian identification has surged due to battle and chaos. Extremist groups have leveraged satellite television and the internet for propaganda and recruitment.

Haqqani (2023), within the overdue 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan went via a duration of Islamization underneath well-known Zia-ul-Haq's army rule. Throughout this time, tensions between extraordinary non secular corporations increased. The Ahmadis had been the primary to be focused, as the authorities, influenced via Sunni Islamists, declared them a non-Muslim minority in 1974. The authorities additionally brought regulations like the imposition of zakat (charitable donations) and the growth of spiritual faculties that favoured Sunni companies. This caused protests by means of the Shi'a minority. The *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-Fiqh-e-Jaafariya* (TNFJ), a Shi'a set, emerged and demanded the right to comply with their very own non secular laws. Matters escalated when the authorities tried to forcefully deduct zakat from Shi'a money owed, main to huge-scale protests in Islamabad in 1980. Ultimately, the authorities exempted the Shi'a from this policy. The demands of the TNFJ for multiple interpretations of Islamic law and the formation of an Islamic navy have been considered with suspicion by way of the Sunni-led nation. This era marked the start of sectarian conflicts and confrontations in Pakistan.

Fair (2015), the rise of Sunni and Shia Islamist moves, in conjunction with local dynamics related to Iran and Iraq, further contributed to sectarian violence. Inside the Nineteen Eighties, Pakistan have become a battleground for militant agencies involved within the Afghan Jihad, and the Kashmir struggle furnished any other area for their sports. The events of Sep 11 considerably modified the situation, as Pakistan was compelled to cooperate with America against terrorism. This cooperation additionally uncovered inner militant dynamics within Pakistan. One first-rate organization that emerged throughout this time was the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP), which had robust Deobandi influences and operated especially in Punjab. This highlighted the complexity of Pakistan's militant panorama. All through its stormy records, sectarian violence and the continued battle to define Pakistan's identity have remained great issues.

Abbas(2011), after the September 11 attacks, the Pakistani government briefly debarred both Sunni & Shia sectarian militant groups under President Musharraf. However, concerns have arisen about the revival of anti-Shia militant groups, like SSP, since Musharraf's withdrawal. The Shia tribes in Pakistan's FATA are mostly vulnerable, as the Taliban and al-Qaida have been gaining ground there and targeting Shia communities, particularly in Parachinar (Kurram Agency). Regardless of these attacks, Shia replies have been comparatively controlled, with sporadic reactive attacks against the native Taliban. Furthermore, a debarred Shia radical group termed SMP seemingly reappeared in the years 2008 & 2009. Shia in Pakistan has an assessment that the growing sectarian attacks are threat to their existence, which has effected Shia's political activities. Attacks on Pakistan's Shia population can also strain relations with Iran, a Shia-majority country, and worsen regional tensions.

6. Research Gap

Lots has been investigated on the topic of sectarian violence but this study focused on the contextual gap in the field in the context of global war on terror after 9/11. The topic is carefully selected to measure the socio-political and economic, impact of sectarian violence after 9/11. Lahore was selected since it has long been home to a variety of sectarian groupings due to its sacred sites. After 9/11, a number of violent incidents occurred in the city, prompting a survey to assess the effects of sectarian violence in the Lahore region. This study enables us to generalize the impact of sectarian violence in other urban areas as well.

7. Political, Social, and Economic Impacts of Sectarianism in Pakistan after 9/11

Sectarianism in Pakistan, historically rooted in religious differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims, was largely influenced by the events of 9/11. The war on terror not only deepened the existing sectarian conflict but also presented new dynamics. Political actors manipulated sectarian identities for personal and electoral gain, non-state actors gained unparalleled power, and the country's economy suffered as violence upset daily life. This section unfolds post 9/11 political, social, and economic concerns of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

7.1 Political Consequences of Sectarian Violence

7.1.1 Weakening of Democratic Institutions

Politicians used to exploit sect-based identities to meet their political goals which damages the democratic institutions in Pakistan (Rafiq, 2014). Combining sect with political agenda became common in Post 9/11 years to earn the support of voters and bag votes during elections. The government put half-hearted efforts to address sectarianism which ends up in affecting good governance, weakening national unity with sharpening deep polarization (Bhattacharya, 2019).

In elections JI formed an alliance with SSP and LeJ to create its political influence. In 2002 *Jammat-Islami*, extended its alliance by joining another religious alliance MMA, which helped it gain more political power in KPK (Majeed, 2021). In 2010s TLP, another extremist group which draws its

support from the *Barelvi* Sunnis group, and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) emerged as major players in sectarian politics (Haqqani, 2023).

Electoral violence is a byproduct of sectarian division, undermines the democratic process in Pakistan. In the 2008 elections, representatives from Shia community were often targeted by religious extremist groups. Representatives were facing threats, pressure, and even assassination attempts from the above-mentioned groups. Elections legitimacy was questioned due to widespread violence, compromising freedom and fairness in the election process (Irfani, 2012). General elections 2013 reflects how sectarian violence effects the voting process in the cities of Balochistan and Karachi, which further divides the political landscape (Rafiq, 2014).

7.1.2 Erosion of State Legitimacy

Incapability of state to deal with sectarian violence in the cities of Balochistan and Karachi has weakened its legitimacy. Hazara Shias were targeted in Quetta, this incidence exposed performance of law enforcement agencies. These incidences broke the trust of marginalized communities on state institutions (Bhattacharya, 2019)

Almost 100 people were killed in bombing in January 2013 in Quetta, illustrate the state's failure to protect defenceless populations (Chandran, 2003). These types of events disappoint people with the government and raised questions about the state's claim in providing peaceful environment free from sectarian violence. Allegations of complicity and prejudice within the security apparatus have further eroded public trust. Many have faith that elements within the state selectively target or protect few sectarian groups based on political or ideological reflections, undermining the state's authority and its ability to govern efficiently (Majeed, 2021).

7.1.3 Strengthening of Non-State Actors

One of the most disturbing consequences of sectarian violence has been the authorization of non-state actors, particularly militant groups that flourish on sectarian conflict. Organizations like LeJ, ASWJ, and TLP have added significant influence in local and national politics. These groups challenge the state's claim over use of mean of violence, they have created parallel governance structures in those regions where state presence is weak (Fair, 2015).

In Waziristan & tribal areas, sectarian militant groups have set up their own Sharia courts and indigenous administrations, which provides security and basic services to local populations. In the bog city like Karachi, few areas are controlled by sectarian groups who provide security and infrastructure, henceforth they establish no go areas that are difficult to govern (Haqqani, 2023). These parallel state groups damaged the state's power, further confusing efforts to restore law and order.

7.1.4 Impact on Regional and Global Relations

Neighbouring countries of Pakistan i.e. Iran and Afghanistan are responsible in exporting sectarian violence in Pakistan. Cross-border extremist ideologies sectarian networks have stressed Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Iran, which has frequently expressed concern over the security of Shia communities. The participation of Pakistani militants in exporting sectarian violence in Afghanistan has also complex Pakistan's relations with its neighbour, contributing to regional uncertainty (Fair, 2015).

Globally, Pakistan's image has suffered due to continued sectarian violence. Pakistan being recognized as sectarian militancy hub, its efforts to attract foreign investment, secure international aid, and build strategic alliances are all in vain. Pakistan's fight against sectarian violence often questioned

in its communications with global powers, particularly the United States, as the country navigates its role in the war on terror (Amara Tul Kubra, 2022).

7.2 Social Implications of Sectarian Violence

7.2.1 Decline in Social Harmony

Sectarian violence further deepens the existing divisions within Pakistani society, which ends up in the decay of social coherence and increased split along sectarian lines. In urban areas like Karachi and Quetta, societies have become gradually segregated, with Sunni and Shia groups living within their marked areas for safety. This demarcation highlights sectarian identities, limiting inter-sectarian interactions and establishing divisions within society (ICG, 2013).

7.2.2 Marginalization and Persecution of Minority Communities

The harassment of Shia minority has always been the most notable concerns of sectarian violence. The Hazara Shia community in Quetta has been frequently targeted by extremist groups like LeJ, facing bombings, shootings, and other forms of violence. In January 2013 bombings, which killed over 100 Hazaras, exemplify the vulnerability of this community and the continuing threats they face. Due to continue attacks Hazara community flee their homes, looking for refuge in safer areas and upsetting their livelihoods (AI, 2012).

7.2.3 Psychological Trauma

The psychological Impact of sectarian violence particularly among survivors and witnesses of attacks has been deep. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), nervousness, & hopelessness are consistent among those who were exposed to repeated violence. Women and children, in particular, are defenceless to the long-term psychological effects of living in conflict-affected areas. Save the Children organization data show that children in regions like Balochistan and KP suffer from cognitive and emotional growth issues due to their prolonged contact to violence (Siddiqui, 2023)

7.2.4 Disruption of Social Services and Infrastructure

Sectarian violence disturbed social services, in conflict-prone regions like KP and Balochistan. Educational institutions are often closed due to security issues, depriving thousands of students from attending their classes. This challenge has a long-term impact over the literacy rate in these regions (UNESCO, 2022). The health sector is no different than education, health facilities are often unavailable or lack staff, henceforth communities have no access to essential medical services. The stress on healthcare systems worsens existing health disparities pushing people in absolute poverty (WHO, 2013).

7.3 Economic Impact of Sectarian Violence

7.3.1 Disruption of Economic Activities

Pakistan's economic activities adversely effected due to sectarian violence particularly in major cities like Karachi. Karachi is taken as the country's economic hub, brutally exposed to sectarian violence. There has been reported regular violence in the city which leads to business disruptions, market closures, and property damage. Due to compromised law and order situation in Pakistan, investor were not interested to invest led slow economic growth and drop in trade activities (ICG, 2011).

7.3.2 Economic Hardships on Affected Communities

Reportedly communities suffering from sectarian violence were also facing severe economic challenges, including the destruction of property, loss of livelihoods, and displacement. Many families in violence-prone areas have been compelled to flee their homes, which effects their economic activities hence pushing them into poverty (AI, 2012). In agricultural regions like KP, it's difficult for farmers to access markets, and fear of violence has prohibited them from harvesting their fields. This trouble has had a significant impact on food security and local economies, contributing to extensive economic instability (UNESCO, 2022).

8. Al Qaeda and Sectarianism in Pakistan

8.1 Formation of Alliances with Local Militant Groups

Local militant groups with fundamental Sunni ideology in Pakistan built an alliance with Al-Qaeda after 9/11. Al Qaeda in alliance with local militant group LeJ and SSP carry out high-profile sectarian attacks, targeting Shia communities across Pakistan. In Pakistan complex sectarian environment this local alliance allows Al Qaeda to function more efficiently (Rafiq, 2014).

8.2 Increase in Sectarian Clashes

Sect base violence increased in Pakistan with the arrival of Al Qaeda's, usually bombings and other form of violent attacks on Shia communities were conduct by this organization. Al Qaeda and its alliance with LeJ and SSP came into limelight with high-profile incidents i-e-2013 Quetta bombings and the Ashura procession bombings in Karachi. In sect base violence attack not only people lost their life but this also deepens sectarian tensions, leading to reciprocal violence.

8.3 Foreign Fighters and Sectarianism

In post 9/11 scenario militants from Afghanistan cross border and entered Pakistan these militants also involved in sect base violence due to which there was rise in sectarian violence. These fighters, many of whom were associated with Al Qaeda's radical ideology, brought with them resources and expertise that improved the abilities of local militant groups. This involvement of fighters from outside further complicate law and order situation in Pakistan, making it tougher for the state to contain sectarian violence (Rafiq, 2014).

9. TTP and Sectarian Violence

9.1 Targeting Shia Communities

TTP which draws its support from TTA , posed a considerable challenge to government of Pakistan after 9/11, it played a vital role in sectarian tensions in Pakistan. The TTP claims to draw its ideology from Sunni sect which allows them to target Shia communities, attacks comprise of bombings during religious processions. The aim of these attacks were to maximize casualties of Shia community led to deepen the divisions within Pakistani society (Sayed, 2021).

9.2 TTP's Collaboration with Other Groups

To operate more effectively TTP formed alliance with other sectarian organizations i.e. LeJ and SSP, this alliance aimed to carry out coordinated attacks on Shia communities. During the days of Muharram this alliance conducted a joint operations on Muharram processions and other gathering of Shia community led to mass fatalities. Operational capability of TTP increased due to its alliance with other group which led to the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

9.3 Impact on Social Cohesion and Community Relations

Militant organization TTP’s actions in under developing areas of KPK and Balochistan in Pakistan seriously effects the social consistency in Pakistan. By attacking Shia communities and public spaces related with Shia religious practices, the TTP has impaired mistrust and aggression between Sunni and Shia populations. This environment of fear and doubt has made it gradually difficult for communities to involve in fruitful dialogue or work towards compromise (Sayed, 2021).

10. Results and Analysis

This study intended to find out what were the key factors which impacted the sectarian violence in Pakistan. Sectarian violence dependent variable was studied under socio-political and economic independent variables. Principle component factor method is used for dimension reduction and developed index of social, political, economic and sectarian violence.

Cronbach Alpha and average variance explained is used to check the reliability and validity of construct. The results of Cronbach Alpha and AVE are reported in Table. Moreover, regression analysis is used to examine the impact of social, economic, and political factors on sectarian violence. The results of regression are reported in Table. The values of Factor loading indicate the relevance of each question with the main construct. Results of factor loading are reported in Table.1.1. Sample was selected through convenient sampling.

Table.1.1: Regression Analysis

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.012	.078		.147	.883
social factors	.037	.097	.036	.382	.703
Political	.246	.094	.244	2.624	.010
Economic	.030	.083	.030	.365	.716

a. Dependent Variable: sect Sig value should be less than **.05** means significant relationship between Independent and dependent Variable. Beta explains size of impact and it should be above.

Table:1.2:ANOVAa

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	12.671	3	4.224	4.302	.006 ^b
Residual	153.153	156	.982		
Total	165.825	159			

a. Dependent Variable: Sectarian Violence

b. Predictors: (Constant), economic, political, social factors

If value of F is greater than 3 model is good fit

Table1.3: Principle Component Analysis

Construct(Q)	KMO	Bartlett	Cronbach Alpha
Social factors	.651	66.9 (0.00)	.521
Political factor	.645	92.07	.628
Economic factor	.586	45.621	.692
Sectarian awareness	.539	10.26	.550

Bartlett and KMO two test reflect is dimension reduction is possible or not if its value is above .5 then dimension reduction is acceptable. Cronbach alpha value should be greater than .5

Table 1.4: Factor Loading

Items	Factor loadings	Average Explained	Variance
Soc	.760	58.63	
DISP	.747		
INTSECT	.789		
FI	.601	53.02	
PIP	.797		
TECO	.770		
POL	.719	61.93	
RL	.806		
LL	.832		
SECT	.734	42.64	
RSECT	.693		
PSECT	.510		

Each individual question should be 40 percent related to construct. As a rule of thumb average variance should be AVE 50. Here AVE indicates that 58 % variance has been explained by these three indicators (q).

10.1 Analysis.

Results of regression analysis showed that political factor value .01 has a significant relation with sectarian violence. Which also means social and economic factors as showed in results has no significant impact on sectarian violence.

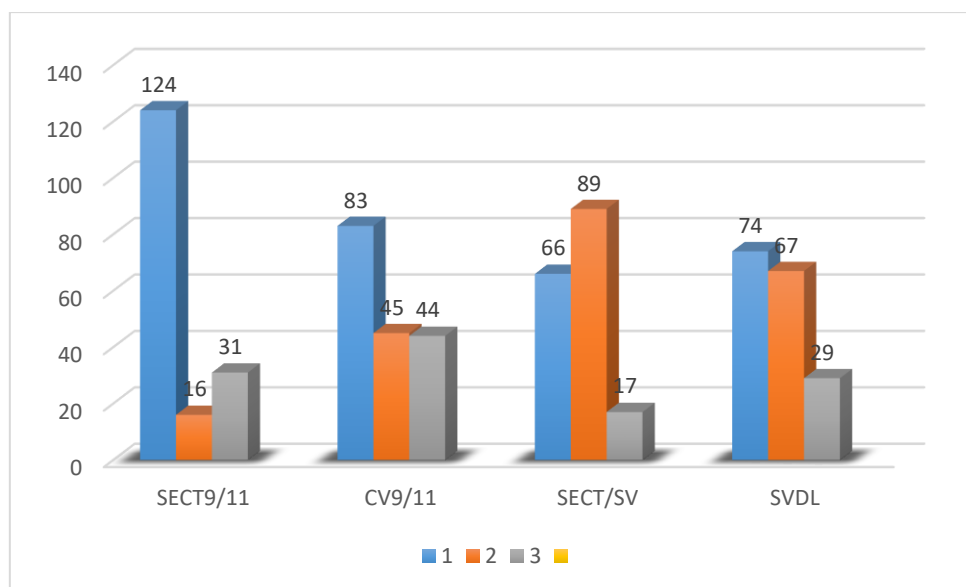


Figure 1.1 War on Terror after 9/11 and Its Impact on Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

*Sectarian violence after 9/11 *Causes of sectarian violence and 9/11.*Terrorism post /11 overshadowed sectarian violence. *Sectarian violence effect on daily life.

As per the 124 respondents sectarian violence increased after the incident of 9/11. 83 Respondents believe that causes of sectarian violence were increased external influence. 89 respondents agreed with the idea that 9/11 diverts focus of authorities from sectarian violence.74 of respondents agree that sectarian violence have effect on their daily life.

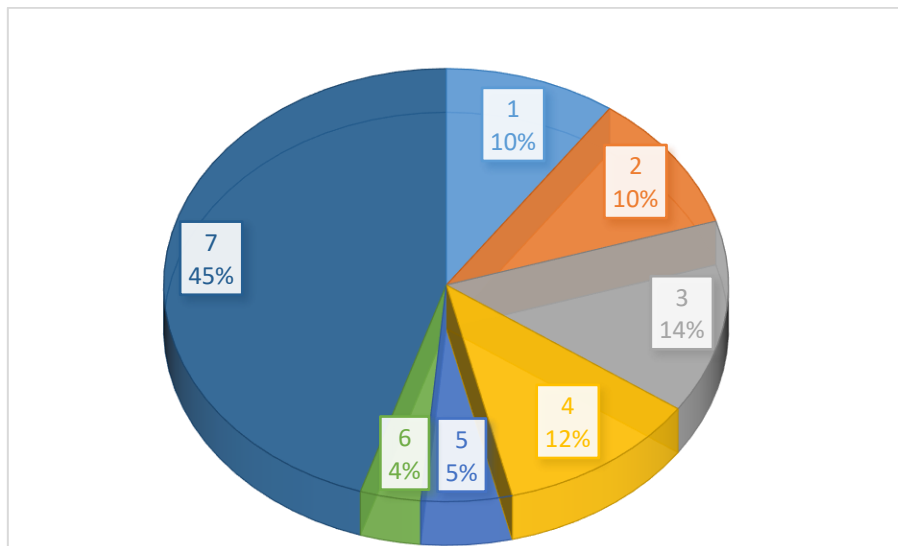


Figure1.2: Indicators of Inter Faith Harmony

Factors that shape interfaith harmony was media (10%), interfaith dialogue (10%), education (14%), religious leaders (12%), political leaders (5%), community program (6%) and all of above (45%). Hence it was established that 45% of respondents believe all these efforts are relevant in creating interfaith harmony among sectarian groups.

As per the assumptions that sectarian violence is linked with socio-economic and political factors regression analysis results showed people believe that political factor had positive impact with sectarian violence as compared to socio and economic factors in Pakistan. Hence government of Pakistan needs to work on political aspect engaging local, religious and political leadership in managing the sectarian violence in Pakistan.

10.2 Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Principal component analysis (PCA) was used to reduce the dimensionality of the information and identify key factors that contribute to sectarian violence. The analysis focused on three main categories: political, social, and economic factors. These categories were broken down into specific indicators, such as political manipulation, economic instability, and social fragmentation, which were then analysed to determine their impact on sectarian violence.

The results of the PCA showed that political factors, particularly political manipulation and instability, explained the majority of the variance in sectarian violence. Social and economic factors, while still relevant, contributed less to the overall variance.

10.3 Regression Analysis

A regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between sectarian violence and the independent variables of political, social, and economic factors. The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between political factors and sectarian violence ($p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that political manipulation, particularly during election periods, plays a crucial role in fuelling sectarian conflict. The social and economic factors, while important, did not exhibit the same level of significance.

10.4 Factor Loadings and Variance Explained

The factor loadings indicated that political factors explained 58% of the variance in sectarian violence, highlighting the central role of politics in shaping the conflict. Social factors explained 42% of the variance, while economic factors contributed only 30%. These results suggest that political dynamics, particularly the manipulation of sectarian identities for electoral gain, are the primary drivers of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

Sectarian violence is deeply rooted in Pakistan's historical, religious, and geopolitical dimensions. It has shaped the country's socio-political environment, through conflicts between Sunni and Shia communities, and other minority sects as well. Sectarian violence can be traced back to state policies, particularly under General Zia in the 1980s. Zia's Islamization actions deepened sectarian divides in Pakistan. His government endorsed Sunni-centric descriptions and madrassas that became centres for sectarian ideology.

Local militant groups in Pakistan draw financial and moral support from their foreign supporters like Saudi Arabia and Iran, who want to support their respective ideologies in Pakistan resulting in the spread of violence. The socio-economic situation of Shia Muslims is weak as they face discrimination, violence, and marginalization in comparison with other communities in Pakistan. The impact of sect-based violence not only erodes the social fabric of Pakistani society but also negatively affects the economic indicators of Pakistan, especially in underdeveloped areas of Pakistan like Parachinar and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The government of Pakistan banned extremist organizations like LeJ and SSP but it turned out that the ban has not reduced the intensity of sectarian violence. Furthermore, delays and inconsistent policy executions along with political challenges slow down the process. Ad-hoc solutions like security measures should be paired up with long-term measures like socio-economic growth, education transformations, and diplomatic initiatives.

- To address sectarian violence, the government of Pakistan must address the core issue i.e. political modifications in which religious and political leadership should come together to address the causes of violence.
- Electoral reforms are another aspect which could prevent political parties from using sectarian rhetoric.
- Law enforcement agencies should observe impartiality in contesting sectarian violence.
- Social cohesion via education and economic growth via investment are additional efforts in violence-affected regions to break the cycle of sectarian conflict.

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