



Consortium for
Development
Policy Research

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Political Violence in Pakistan: Myths vs. Realities

About the project

Funded by: International Growth Center (IGC)

Key Counterpart:

Impact: This was a pioneer effort to document and quantify political violence trends in Pakistan, and the national and sub-national level.

This policy brief was prepared by Dr. Jacob Shapiro (Princeton University) and Saad Gulzar (IGC) based on research conducted by Dr. Jacob Shapiro and Dr. Rasul Baksh Rais (LUMS) which aims to understand and present empirical evidence of subnational patterns of violence in Pakistan.

In brief

- Despite a long history of political violence, there have been no systematic efforts to study the scale, scope, or geographic distribution of the problem.
- The researchers look at political violence through two critical questions: i) why have some regions at some periods been more peaceful than at other times, and ii) why has violent political activity suddenly taken off in places that had been peaceful for decades?
- To do this, incident-level data was developed from 1988 to the present, which included a range of details on 27,555 incidents in order to identify broad patterns of violence across multiple actors and types of events for each district and province of Pakistan.

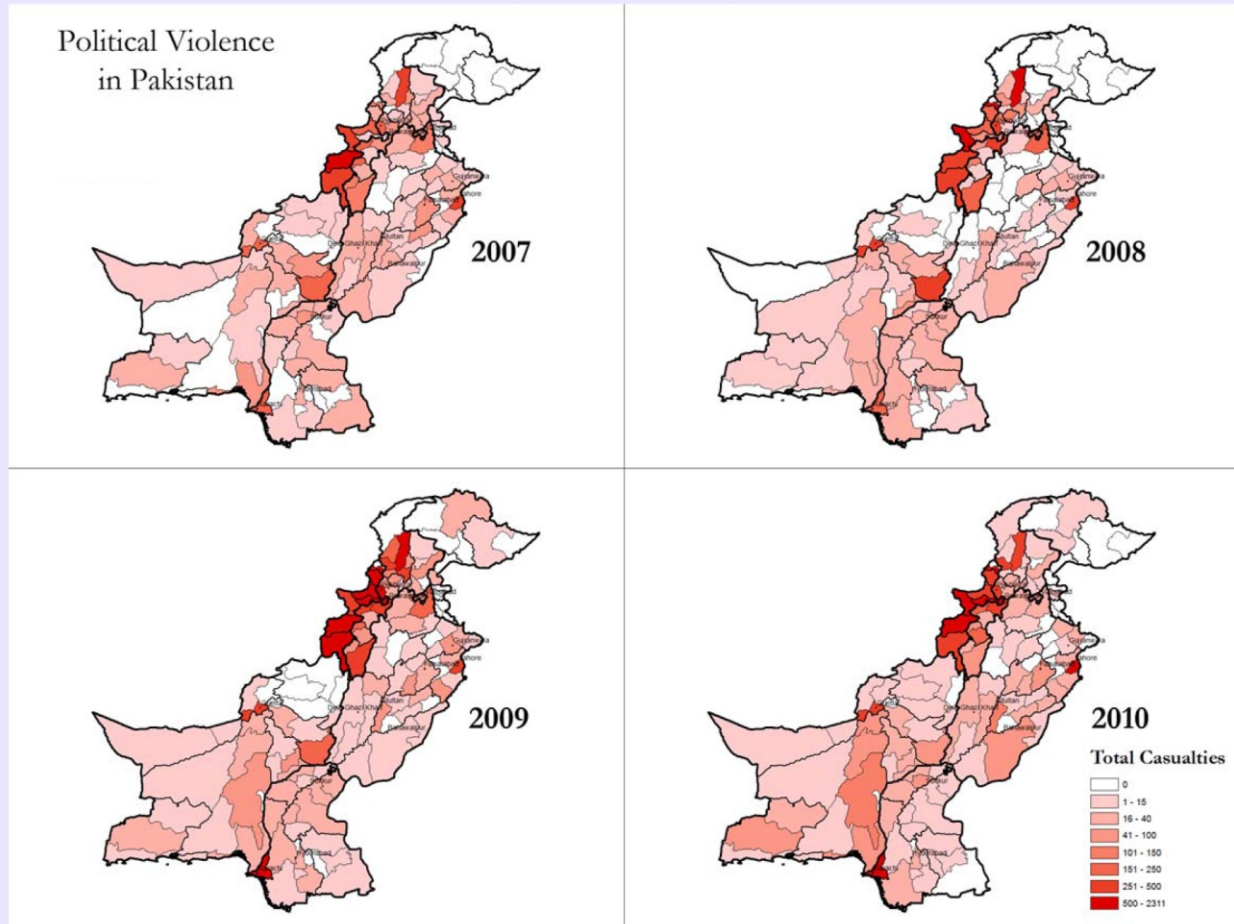
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Jacob Shapiro (Princeton) and Rasul Baksh Rais (LUMS) aim to understand and present empirical evidence of subnational patterns of violence in Pakistan. They have developed a database of approximately 28,000 incidents of political violence in Pakistan reported in major newspapers from 1988 to the present. This policy brief presents preliminary evidence and argues for a data-driven approach in answering challenges posed by political violence.

Key Insights from Data...



Number of Casualties per Year from Political Violence by District

...by Geographical Area.

Broadly, patterns in political violence vary over time across the four provinces of the country.

- **Until 2004-5, Balochistan, FATA, and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, suffered fewer total incidents than the rest of Pakistan.** On a per capita basis FATA has long been the most violent province, but before 2005 Sindh was the second most violent, followed by Balochistan, and then Punjab. KPK was the least violent part of the country until 2005.
- **Levels of sectarian violence in Punjab have been relatively consistent for the last 20 years,** there is no recent increase.
- **Most of Sindh has been quite peaceful;** violence in that province is almost entirely concentrated in Karachi.

...on Type of Violence.

While rates of violence change little within provinces before 2005, there are consistent differences between provinces in the forms political violence took.

- **Assassinations are relatively rare in all provinces except for Sindh** where the per capita rate is three times as high as in Punjab and more than five times as high as in Balochistan or the FATA.
- Even before the increase in violence since 2005, **attacks against security forces took place at a much higher per-capita rate in FATA** than anywhere else, three times as often as in Balochistan and 10 times as often as in the other three provinces.
- **Violent riots and demonstrations are an endemic fact of political life in Sindh,** averaging 122 violent political demonstrations per year since 1988.

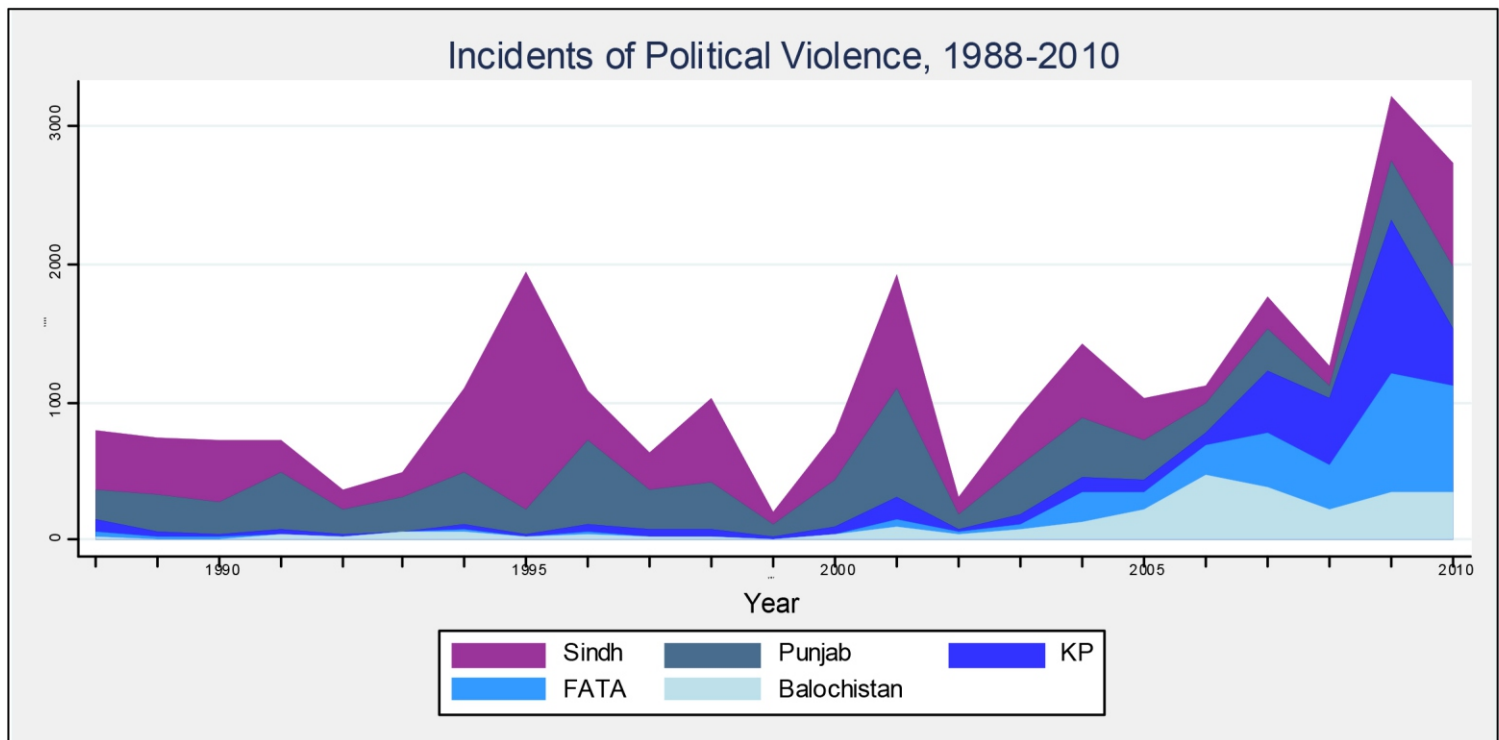
Data as Evidence

Political violence has long been endemic in Pakistan, but the scale, scope, and geographic distribution of the problem has not been systematically studied. On the policy side, decision makers lack credible quantitative data with which to weigh the relative costs of politically-motivated violence against the many other challenges facing Pakistan. On the academic side, scholars lack the ability to quantitatively assess the role of violence in Pakistani's political and economic development.

To remedy these gaps Shapiro and Rais developed incident-level data on political violence in Pakistan from 1988 to the present. These data include a range of details on 27, 555 incidents and are helping to:

- Identify broad patterns of violence across multiple actors and types of events for each district and province of Pakistan.
- Bring clarity to policy debates over who suffered which kinds of violence, where, and when.

Sub-national Patterns



Levels of Political Violence were Stable in Pakistan until 2005

a. Political Violence pre-2005

In Sindh and Punjab violent activity took a fairly consistent toll over the last twenty years, with notable spikes in some years. Three types of violent activities—assassinations, terrorist attacks (attacks targeting civilians), and riots/demonstrations have occurred in Punjab and Sindh regularly since 1988.

Overall levels of violence between 1988-2005 in Balochistan, FATA, and KPK were low in absolute numbers. In per capita terms, given their smaller populations, per-capita violence from 1988-2005 was highest in FATA, followed by Sindh, then Balochistan, and then Punjab. Rates of political violence in KPK were lower than in any other province until 2005.

b. Changes in Balochistan, FATA, and KP

In Balochistan, militant and terrorist attacks start to pick up in 2002-03, pre-dating the increase in FATA and KPK by three years. The timing of the change in trends in Balochistan and the nature of the violence, suggest that it represents a different political dynamic.

From 2006 onwards, FATA saw a massive increase in violence, suffering a 20-fold increase in annual casualties to a shocking 100 per 100,000 per year. This increase reflects the outright war between the state and militants in FATA, with the rates of state-initiated and militant attacks both rising more than 12-fold.

Before 2005 KPK was the least violent part of Pakistan, suffering only 0.9 casualties per 100,000 per year from political violence, compared to 3.3 per 100,000 per year in the rest of the country.

After 2005, KPK saw a 14-fold increase in casualties from political violence, becoming the second-most violent part of the country. This reversal, going from the least politically-violent region to the second most violent, was driven by the massive 46-fold increase in militant attacks (and concomitant state response) which largely reflects the campaign to contest Swat and Malakand.

c. Sectarian Violence in Punjab

Sectarian violence in Punjab, Pakistan's economic heartland and most-populous province, has been an increasing concern in policy circles since the Lal Masjid siege in July 3-11, 2007. **Contrary to much commentary, data suggest levels of violence in Punjab have not substantially increased in the last few years.** While riots and demonstrations have become more frequent in Punjab since 2005, **the average death toll per militant attack in Punjab has increased by more than 1000% since 2005**, and that for terrorist attacks has more than doubled.

Sectarian violence in Punjab has not been abnormally high in recent years in terms of the number of incidents. It was in fact higher in the late-1990s.

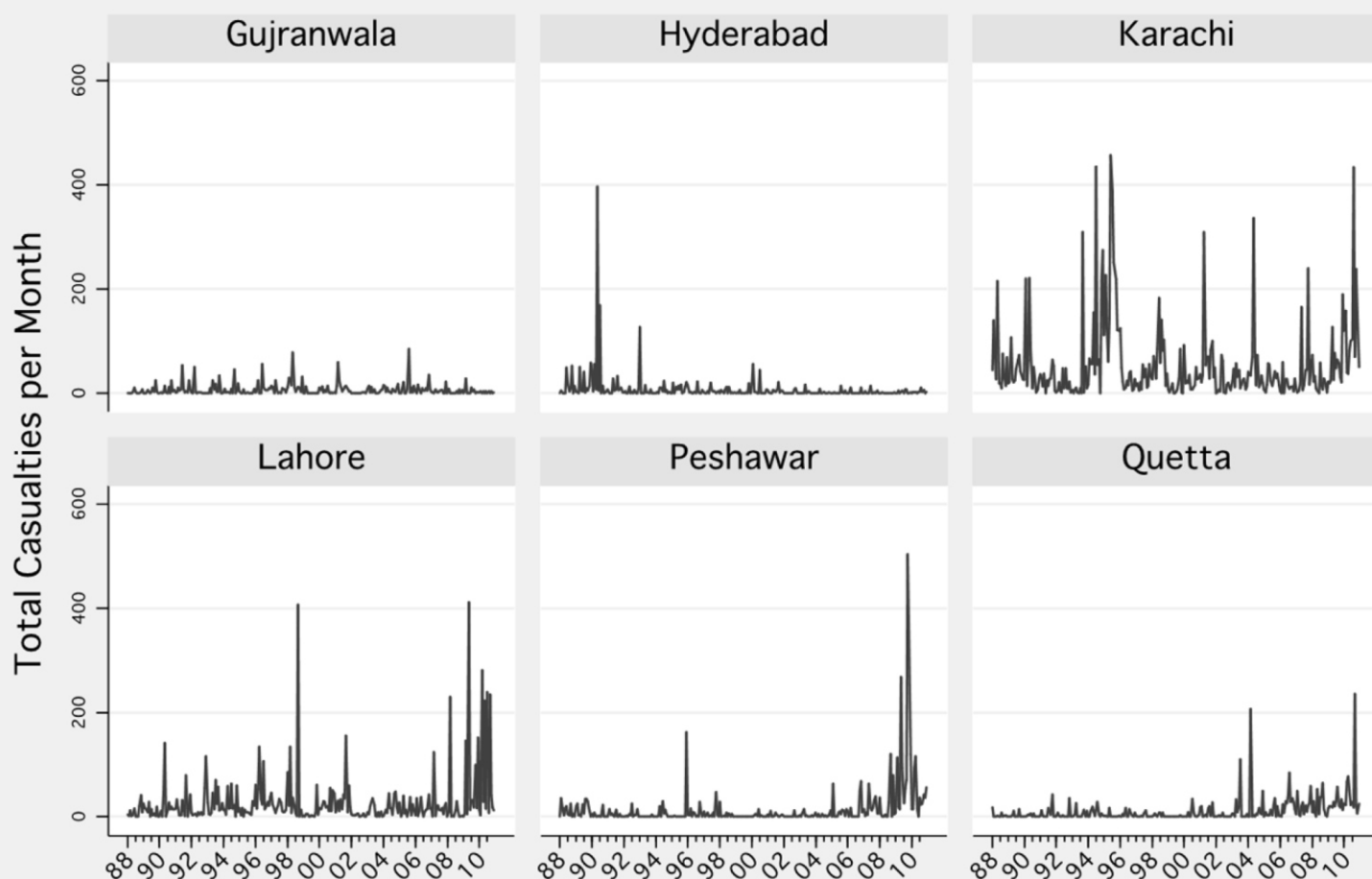
d. Distribution of Violence in Sindh

Sindh leads the provinces in assassinations by a wide margin, reporting 4,182 assassinations and 6,357 casualties. It has the highest per-capita concentration of assassinations, even when drone strikes in FATA are accounted for.

Strikingly, these assassinations as well as other political violence in Sindh are heavily concentrated in Karachi. Of all the violent incidents in Sindh 63% of them took place in Karachi that includes 70% of assassinations, and 66% of terrorist attacks.

Incidents in Karachi are substantially more deadly than in the rest of Sindh; 93% of the casualties in Sindh take place in Karachi. This ethnically-diverse city has long been a centre of contestation among political groups maintaining militant wings.

Political Violence in Pakistani Cities 1988-2010



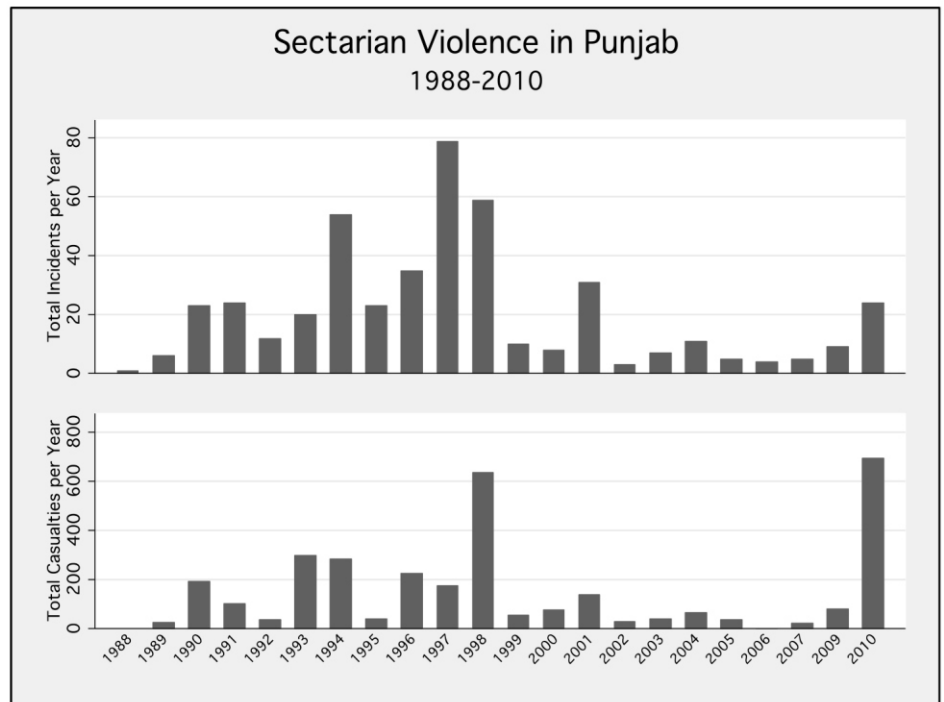
Karachi Leads Major Pakistani Cities in Casualties from Political Violence

Conclusions

Political violence has been part of the political culture of Punjab and Sindh for decades now. **There has not been a fundamental change in the patterns of political violence in the core population centres of Pakistan.**

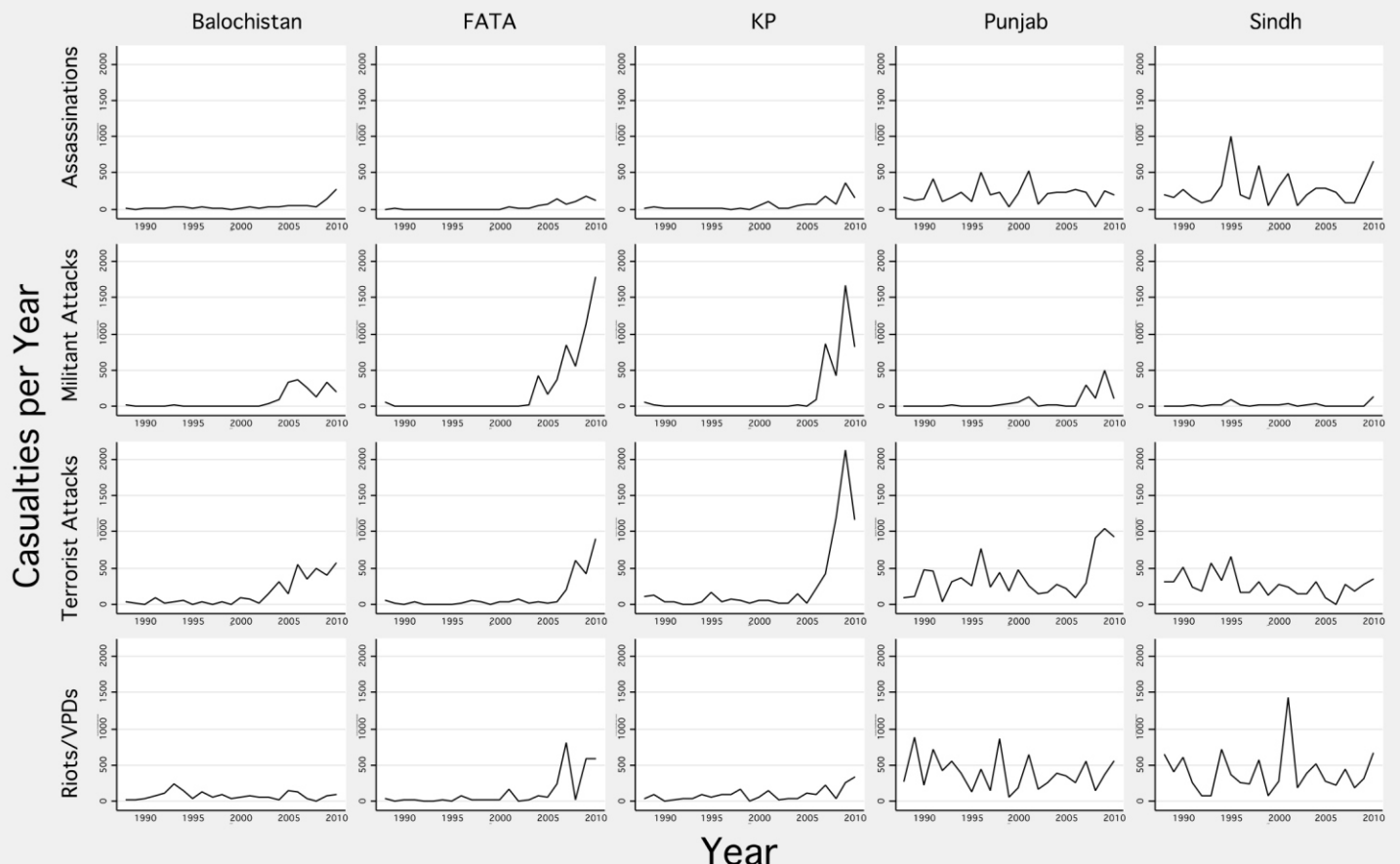
The recent increase in violence in FATA, KPK, and Balochistan, are uncharacteristic of their historical patterns. For the first 15 years of data, these regions did not exhibit the massive difference from other parts of the country that we see today.

It is useful to study trends in different types of violence. There are two critical questions that should be asked: why at some periods have some regions been more peaceful than at other times, and why has violent political activity suddenly taken off in places that had been peaceful for decades?



The number of deaths from sectarian violence has been higher in 2010 than in previous years – it reached similar levels in 1999.

Consequences of Non-State Violence 1988-2010



Political Violence Casualty Totals Vary by Type of Incident