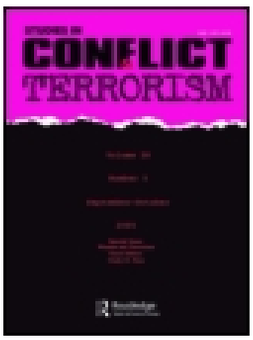

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Research Note

Can Knowledge of Islam Explain Lack of Support for Terrorism? Evidence from Pakistan

C. Christine Fair, Jacob S. Goldstein and Ali Hamza

Abstract: In this research-note we employ the work of Wiktorowicz (2005) who suggests that persons who are knowledgeable of Islam may be more capable of critically evaluating the claims of militant recruiters and ideologues and thus be more resistant to their appeals than those who are not knowledgeable. This gives rise to an interesting research question: does knowledge of Islam reduce support for Islamist militancy? To evaluate this research question, we employ data derived from of nationally representative survey fielded among 16,279 Pakistanis in 2011. Using several survey items, we construct a "knowledge index" to measure respondents' basic knowledge of Islam which is our principal independent variable. To operationalize support for militancy we use two survey items which query respondents about their support for two prominent Islamist militant groups based in and from Pakistan: the Afghan Taliban as well the sectarian group, Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan (also known as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat). We use ordinary least squares regression to evaluate the impact of our independent variables upon support for these two groups, controlling for other relevant factors. We find that knowledge of Islam does predict less support for these two groups; however, other variables such as sectarian organization and ethnicity have greater predictive power.

Key words: Islamist militancy/terrorism, Pakistan, public opinion, Afghan Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan, Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat.

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Introduction

The popular movie *Four Lions* narrates the efforts of four bungling British Islamist terrorists plotting coordinated suicide bombings in London, as well as the incompetence of the British law enforcement authorities who were trying to identify and apprehend the real culprits to preempt the attack.[i] At one level, the movie is a tale of two brothers: Omar and Ahmed. Omar is a clever, clean-shaven, cosmopolitan, aspiring martyr (played by Riz Ahmed). Ahmed is his Salafi, non-violent brother, who only wears traditional dress (played by Wasim Zakir). One is struck by the numerous contrasts between the two brothers and their social circles. Whereas Omar and his (exclusively male) associates study the Quran and endeavor to live in accordance with its teachings; neither Ahmed nor his fellow aspiring terrorists seem terribly pious or even knowledgeable about Islam, the faith in whose name they plan a mass casualty attack. Whereas Omar has a loving, respectful relationship with his wife Sofia, who is a nurse and who does not wear niqab or hejab; Ahmed's wife wears the black burqa and face covering popularly associated with Salafi Islam. Despite her ostensible modernity and integration with British society, Sofia fully supports her husband's quest for martyrdom and encourages him when he feels discouraged about the plan's prospects. The interplay between these two brothers and their differing lives comprise a key mechanism by which the film interrogates fundamental—if misguided—questions that persist across British society and beyond: What does it mean to be a radical or an extremist Muslim? Can a Muslim be radical or fundamentalist, but not violent? How does clothing (hijab, niqab, traditional versus western attire) differentiate "good Muslims" from "bad

Muslims"? Can "terrorists" be cosmopolitan and integrated or can they be identified by their adherence to Muslim practice and traditions?

One exchange between the siblings characterizes the flawed premises of these questions. One day, Ahmed comes to the home of Omar and his wife to tell Omar that his terrorist plot is wrong and un-Islamic. While Sofia donned a head scarf to greet him, she refuses to leave the room when Ahmed insisted that she do so. Omar supported her. Flabbergasted, Ahmed scolds Omar for his out of control wife while Omar and Sofia mock Ahmed and his associates for locking their beshrouded "wives in a cupboard." The film cleverly critiques the myriad of conflicting ways in which non-Muslims and Muslims alike identify "dangerous" Muslims who are intent upon committing violence in Allah's name and undermines the popular belief that Salafis are somehow more inherently violent than others. Women's status in British Muslim societies has garnered ever-more salience given Prime Minister David Cameron's demands that British Muslim women integrate into British society and learn English. Cameron, while announcing a new initiative for English education, drew the ire of Muslims and non-Muslims alike when he explained that even though there is no causal link between radicalisation and language skills, non-English speakers could be "more susceptible" to extremism. "If you're not able to speak English, not able to integrate, you may find therefore you have challenges understanding what your identity is and therefore you could be more susceptible to the extremist message coming from Daesh."[ii]

Four Lions also dilates upon the dangerous consequences of these fundamental misunderstandings such as those typified by Prime Minister's Cameron's plans detailed above.

Ultimately, misled by their perceptions that pious Muslims—attired in traditional dress and engaging in the study of the Quran and Islam—are the source of danger, the security forces arrested Ahmed and his Quran-studying associates while the actual terrorists, led by Omar, managed to execute the attack despite numerous setbacks which comprise the tragically comedic content of the film. One is struck by the simple fact that neither Ahmed nor any of his associates seem terribly pious or engaged in the study of Islam. Even though the film was marketed as fiction, it was based upon information collected by British intelligence[iii], underscoring the realities that undergird this tragicomedy.

These concerns about "dangerous Muslims" may seem most evident in western societies where Muslims are important minority populations, yet they are also present and salient in Muslim majority, terror-riven countries like Pakistan where more secular-inclined citizens fear their more observant citizens while the latter view the former as traitors to the faith and nation.[iv] A Pakistani film entitled *Khuda Ke* Liye (2007) wrestles with many of these same questions as *Four Lions,* albeit in a more Pakistan-specific set of contexts. Editorials in Pakistani newspapers frequently malign madaris (pl. of madrassah, Islamic seminaries) as the source of Pakistan's violent fundamentalism and Pakistan's National Internal Security Policy[v] specifically identifies madrassah reform as an element of the state's strategy to combat terrorism in the country.[vi] These views of madaris persist even though a minute minority of Pakistani students attend a madrassah full-time[vii] and the majority of students who do attend a madrassah also attend public or private schools.[viii]

Inherent in this securitization of a person's pursuit of Islamic education is the assumption that those who engage in the acquisition of knowledge are security risks. However, there has been no empirical support for the contention that the pursuit of knowledge of Islam correlates with support for Islamist political violence. In contrast, other scholars have argued that the biggest problem is the quality of Islamic education that Pakistanis receive regardless of whether they attend madaris or Pakistan's public schools.[ix] This suggests that Islamic education is not the problem per se but rather the low quality, bias-ridden, sectarian content of religious studies curriculum in Pakistan is at fault.

In this paper, we evaluate aspects of this public-policy puzzle using the particular case of Pakistan. The international community has long worried about the threat that Islamist militants operating in Pakistan pose to international security, as well as to the security of Pakistan itself. Numerous scholars have sought to exposit the determinants of supply of militant manpower for Islamist militant organizations in addition to the determinants of public support for the same using a wide array of explanatory and empirical frameworks, often with conflicted or ambiguous findings. Some scholars have examined socio-economic explanations while others have put forward various arguments derived from the "clash of civilizations" thesis in which they argue that there is something about Islam itself that promotes the kind of violence seen in Pakistan. Others have focused upon state-based arguments in which scholars argue that the Pakistani state has instrumentalized Islamist militant groups to service its domestic and external goals and this instrumentalization is more important than anything inherent in Islam generally or Pakistani practice of it specifically. A few scholars have examined ethnicity as a potential explanatory framework for support for violence in Pakistan, while others have focused upon Pakistan's

sectarian diversity as an explanatory factor. Another cluster of researchers has examined the relationship between support for democracy and support for Islamist militancy.

In this research note we take another approach inspired by the work of Wiktorowicz who suggests that persons who are less knowledgeable about Islam may be more susceptible to the appeals of recruiters and ideologues because they lack the knowledge of Islam to contradict their arguments in support of violence committed by non-state actors.[x] This gives rise to an interesting research question: can knowledge of Islam reduce support for Islamist militancy? To evaluate this question, we employ data derived from a nationally representative survey of Pakistanis fielded by Fair et al. in 2011.[xi] We first create an index of knowledge derived from several survey items. This index comprises our key independent variable. We use ordinary least squares regression to estimate respondent support for two important Islamist militant groups operating in and from Pakistan: the Afghan Taliban and the sectarian group, Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan (SSP, which also operates under the name of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ)). In addition to our independent variable, we include several control variables consistent with previously published studies of this kind. We find, contrary to popular stereotypes, that Pakistanis who are more knowledgeable about Islam are indeed significantly less likely to support these groups. However, there are other predictors that are larger in magnitude such as the respondent's sectarian affiliation. These findings howsoever modest may inform public policy debates over secular versus Islamic education.

The remainder of this research note is organized as follows. We provide a brief overview of the extant and germane literature on the determinants of support for Islamist militancy in

Pakistan. Next we discuss the data and methods employed herein. We then present the results of our data analysis and conclude with a discussion of the policy relevance of this work.

Explaining Support for Islamist Violent Actors

Here we briefly review the prominent arguments and empirical frameworks that scholars have used to explain support for Islamist violence and its purveyors generally and in Pakistan particularly. We conclude this section with an exposition of the arguments put forward by Wiktorowicz that motivate this current effort.[xii]

Economic Arguments for Respondent Support for Islamist Violence

While the body of literature examining support for violent groups has traditionally focused on grievances,[xiii] ethnic conflicts,[xiv] and state repression,[xv] the decision to support political violence is fundamentally deeply personal and must be understood at the individual level.[xvi] One sort of personal motivation derives from poverty or perceived poverty. Scholars have studied these two dimensions of the interaction between poverty and support for violent politics and come to varying conclusions.

One cluster of studies examines actual poverty and support for violent politics. Several scholars have argued that low-income individuals are more likely to support militant organizations due to feelings of powerlessness and general dissatisfaction with the current political system.[xvii] These ideas rest on the underlying logic that if the existing governance

paradigm is not meeting the needs of those in poverty then they will turn to violent groups who offer the prospect of changing the status quo.

Another proposed mechanism for the relationship between poverty and support for violence focuses on opportunity costs. Individuals living in poverty have lower opportunity costs associated with supporting political violence than their wealthier counterparts, making them more likely to do so *ceteris parabis*.[xviii] However, the empirical evidence on the relationship between poverty and support for political violence is mixed.[xix] Less well-studied is the interaction between perceived poverty and support for militant violence. One empirical study of perceived poverty and support for Islamist militant groups in Pakistan finds that "feelings of relative poverty decreased support for militant political organizations." Not only was the direction of the relationship the opposite of what is commonly assumed, but the critical variable was relative, not actual, poverty.[xx]

Do Piety and Islamism Explain Support for Islamist Violence?

Another framework that some scholars have used is the "clash of civilizations" thesis outlined by Huntington[xxi] which asserts that there is a fundamental conflict between the Christian West and the so-called Islamic World. As a result of this dynamic, several scholars posit that support for terrorism and/or militancy may derive from adherence to Islam itself.[xxii] Some anecdotal evidence supports the narrative that there is a link between Islamic piety and political violence.[xxiii] While one analysis of a 2003-2004 survey of Palestinian Muslims found a link between attendance at religious services and support for suicide attacks,[xxiv] the majority of analytic studies find little association between simply believing in Islam and supporting violent

politics.[xxv] When a correlation between embracing Islam and violence does exist, the linkage is limited to a specific and narrow understanding of Islam, for example beliefs about the efficacy or compulsory nature of individual militarized jihad.[xxvi]

Perhaps the most discussed contributing factor in determining support for militancy in the Muslim world is support for political Islam or Islamism, terms which are often used interchangeably. Scholars exploring this angle posit that support for political violence may derive from an affinity with political positions self-identified as Islamist. Analysts typically understand such positions as those which privilege the role of Islamic law (sharia) in political life or in the functioning of the state. Islamist politics have been extremely important in Pakistan (and elsewhere) because major Islamist parties have frequently and publically backed violent action.[xxvii] For example, the political group Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) supports militant groups such as Hizbol Mujahideen and al Badr.[xxviii] Another Islamist political party, the Jamiat ul Ulema (JUI) has long supported Deobandi groups such as the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban organizations and sectarian militant groups, as well as Deobandi organizations operating in India.[xxix] Support for these political parties is commonly used as a proxy for measuring support for militancy, the rationale behind this being that if an individual supports a group that supports militancy, they themselves must support militancy as well. While transitive logic may suggest that support for Islamist parties (especially those that espouse and even organize violence) should co-vary with support for Islamist violence, the data do not consistently bear this out.[xxx]

Understanding the link between Islamist politics and militancy is further clouded by a tendency of scholars to measure support for political Islam only partially, largely because

scholars generally rely upon extant datasets and the less-than-ideal questions they include on support for political Islam and related concepts. For example, scholars often operationalize support for "Islamism" as support for the implementation of sharia.[xxxi] This has yielded contradictory results in the literature. Fair, Littman and Nugent contend that these conflicted results likely stem from the fact that there is no universally held understanding of what the application of sharia looks like.[xxxii] Some individuals may conceptualize an Islamic government as a transparent regime that provides services while others may understand sharia in the context of *hudood* punishments and restrictions on female participation in public life.[xxxiii] In other words, the imperfect questions that analysts use to instrument support for "political Islam" drive the results in their quantitative studies, in part because the questions were never intended to comprehensively assess support for "political Islam" in the first instance. Using the same data employed in this study, Fair, Littman, and Nugent found that liberal understandings of sharia, such as a government that provides security and public services, are correlated with opposition to jihadi organizations.[xxxiv] Conversely, they also found that conceptualizing sharia as hudood punishments and restricting women's roles was correlated with positive support for jihadi organizations. Therefore, it is important to note that there is no generalization to be made about the interaction of support for Islamist politics and support for political violence, as the definition of Islamist politics is context dependent.

Support Democratic Politics and Support Islamist Violence?

Another area of academic inquiry probes the relationship between support for democratic values on the one hand and support for militant politics on the other. Presumably, support for democratic values such as free speech, civilian control of the military, and rule by elected

representatives leads to the opposition of violent forms of political expression. There is a considerable scholarly literature that outlines the ostensible relationships between supporting ideas associated with liberal democracy and resistance to autocracy,[xxxv] more durable democratic institutions,[xxxvi] effective governance,[xxxvii] and economic expansion.[xxxviii] Belief in the ability of democracy to reduce support for political violence, especially terrorism, remains a key tenet of U.S. foreign policy and the underlying logic behind international democracy promotion.[xxxix]

A more nuanced examination of the topic provides varied examples of political movements that have advocated violence in hopes of achieving democratic outcomes. Especially in the Muslim world, there exist multitudes of violent political groups that claim to fight for freedom and political representation against oppressive governments. In Pakistan in particular, Islamist militant groups often espouse the concept of *azadi*, an Urdu word that means freedom and self-determination, as their *casus belli*. In fact, Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro, using a provincially representative 6,000-person survey of Pakistanis, find that support for a set of core democratic values is correlated with increased support for militant organizations.[xl]

Sectarian Orientation

Sectarianism may promote political violence by entrenching ethnic and religious identities presented as inherently opposed to one another. Within Pakistan, four interpretative traditions of Sunni Islam exist. These masalik (pl. of maslak) are Ahl-e-Hadith, Deobandi, Barelvi, and Jamaat-e-Islami. All of the Pakistani masalik are part of the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) with the exception of Ahl-e-Hadith adherents, who do not follow

any fiqh. A fifth maslak encompasses Shia Islam. All masalik, madaris, and religious scholars affiliated with an interpretive tradition espouse the supremacy of their particular orientation. Although only a small percentage of children in Pakistan are enrolled in a madrasah full-time, many attend religious schools in addition to other educational institutions.[xli] As a result, many young people in Pakistan are exposed to potentially divisive rhetoric. Additionally, madaris train ulema (pl. of alim, scholar) and other religious figures who preach and deliver sermons, further spreading the ideas of each maslak. Due to their influence on Pakistani society, these madaris are often accused of promoting sectarianism by fostering the belief in the primacy of particular maslak.[xlii] However, madaris are not the only pathway by which sectarian identities can be spread. Existing literature points to the role of family and social networks,[xliii] public schools,[xliv] Islamist-influenced civil society groups,[xlv] and religious television, radio, internet, and print content[xlvi] in this process as well. These pathways, especially madaris, are resistant to change pushed by outside actors, making it difficult to envision a scenario in which their role in spreading sectarianism changes in the near future.

Fair finds that "a person's maslak is a far more stable predictor of support for various aspects of sharia or evidenced piety… even those who simply identify as 'Sunni'- in contrast to 'Deobandi' or 'Ahl-e-Hadith'- are more inclined to support sectarian militancy."[xlvii] The significant and positive relationship between self-identification with a maslak and support for militancy is persistent across districts. Notably, effects were consistent when controlling for all relevant variables (marital status, education, income, and age) with the exception that those 50 years of age and older were found to be significantly less likely to support sectarian violence. Therefore, maslak affiliation as spread via Pakistani institutions, such as madaris, generates

support for militant groups among parts of the population that embrace the primacy of specific sectarian identities.

Does Respondent Ethnicity Explain Support for Islamist Violence?

Less studied is the role of ethnicity in explaining support for militancy. Kaltenthaler, Miller and Fair, using data derived from a nationally-represented survey of 7,656 respondents fielded in late 2013, explore the connections between respondent ethnicity and support for the Pakistani Taliban, which is a network of Pashtun and Punjabi militant groups operating in Pakistan against the Pakistani state.[xlviii] Citing the historically important role that ethnic identity has played in intra-state conflict in the country, they hypothesized that ethnicity should have greatest importance in low-information environments, like Pakistan, because persons may have little else on which to base their political support.[xlix] They find evidence that ethnicity is indeed an important predictor for popular support of the Pakistani Taliban.

Knowledge of Islam and Support for Islamist Violence: Putting Forth an Alternative Explanation

Wiktorowicz proffers a different mechanism for personal commitment to and support of Islamist violent politics.[l] Wiktorowicz sought to understand what motivated individuals to join "radical Islamic" groups such as al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom. He collected and analyzed the group's publications and conducted ethnographic work among members of this organization to trace how persons are "drawn to socialization environments where movements can expose them to religious education in the first place?"[li] One of his important starting points is the claim that the "vast majority of Muslims are not trained in the complexities" of Islamic jurisprudence.[lii]

This suggests that potential recruits for Islamist militant organizations are generally not equipped to evaluate the claims offered by recruiters and/or ideologues and the evidence they employ to buttress their arguments in defense of non-state actors perpetrating violence in the name of Islam.

Due to the interpretive pluralism of Islam and the multiplicity of heterodox and orthodox practices throughout the Muslim world, Wikotrowicz persuasively argues that most Muslims rely upon the reputations of religious authorities as a cognitive heuristic to discern the credibility, validity, and authenticity of the information they provide. Wikotrowicz opines that seekers are more vulnerable to such cognitive shortcuts when they have had little theological guidance about how to practice Islam. He notes that religious seekers drawn to organizations such as al-Muhajiroun generally "are not in a position to objectively evaluate whether al-Muhajiroun represents an accurate understanding of Islam."[liii]

Implicit in this argument is the possibility that persons who are more knowledgeable about Islam will be less reliant upon these heuristics in assessing the credibility of the leader and their arguments about foundational questions such as: who can wage jihad and under what circumstances and for whom is jihad obligatory and what kind of obligation is it? Recruiters and ideologues of militant organizations shrewdly offer their own answers to these questions as well as those of other notable scholars who share their view. They are also effective at undermining the arguments of those who object to their interpretations. Presumably, knowledgeable persons can engage these arguments and may be less likely to rely upon the reputation of the recruiter or ideologue and more likely to make their own judgments. While Wiktorowicz makes this claim in

the context of Muslims in the United Kingdom and the ability of al-Muhajiroun to sell its militant message to Muslims in the United Kingdom, this may well apply to Pakistan as well. As noted above, both the quantity and quality of religious education available to Pakistanis is decried as nationalist and motivated to serve the agenda of state-sponsored Islamism rather than valuable knowledge production about Islam and its practice.[liv] Wiktorowicz' work gives rise to the central testable hypothesis of this essay:

H1: Persons with more knowledge about Islam will be less likely to support Islamist miltant groups in Pakistan.

Data and Analytical Methods

To understand the relationship between knowledge of Islam and support for political violence (if any), we employ a dataset collected in 2011 and 2012.[lv] This survey effort featured the first large-scale, agency-representative survey with extended interviews on the topics of support for militancy and knowledge of Islam in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), as well as within the four normal provinces of Pakistan (Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). The FATA is afflicted by multiple active militant groups, providing an especially relevant region to study individuals' views of violent political groups. In conjunction with SEDCO, a major survey firm in Pakistan, the research team administered a face-to-face survey with a sample of 16,279 individuals. Pakistanis from the four main provinces accounted for 13,282 of the interviews, while 2,997 interviews were conducted in six of the seven agencies

in the FATA (Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram, Mohmand, Orakzai, and South Waziristan). Fieldwork in the four main provinces was done in January and February 2012, and in the FATA in April 2012.

The data drawn from Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhuntkhwa include district-representative samples of between 155 and 675 households in 61 districts. SEDCO sampled the two largest districts within each province and then proceeded to select a random sample of additional districts. In the FATA, the data consists of agency-representative samples of 270-675 people in each of the six agencies where the survey could be administered. The total response rate for the survey was 71%. Of the households that were not interviewed, 14.5% refused to take the survey, and 14.5% had no one home when contacted. Here we employ data for Muslim respondents only, yielding a final sample size of 14,508.

We test support for two militant groups operating in and from Pakistan. The first group is an Islamist organization known variously as Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ). SSP is rooted in Pakistan's Deobandi interpretive tradition. While it is most known for its attacks against Ahmedis and Shias, it has also launched a sanguinary war against Pakistan's Barelvis and has long attacked Hindus, Christians, and other non-Muslims in the country. It is tightly allied with other Deobandi militant groups operating against India as well as the Afghan Taliban and even al Qaeda.[lvi] The second group for which we estimate support is the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan Taliban also draws from Pakistan's Deobandi tradition. Formed in the early 1990s, the Afghan Taliban uses its base in Pakistan to engage in insurgency against the Afghan government and international backers.[lvii] Both the SSP

and the Afghan Taliban have ties to the Pakistani Taliban through overlapping networks and a shared infrastructure of Deobandi institutions and religious scholars.[lviii]

We therefore derive two dependent variables which measure respondent support for both of these organizations taken from answers to two questions. One asked respondents "How much do you support Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan (SSP) and their actions?" while the other queried "How much do you support the Afghan Taliban and their actions?" Respondents answered both questions on a five-point scale ("not at all", "a little", "a moderate amount", "a lot", or a "great deal"), with higher numeric values indicating higher support for these groups.

To test the central hypothesis of this essay, we constructed an additive knowledge index that measured the respondents' basic knowledge of Islam employing several questions for which there are no ambiguous responses. This knowledge index is our principal independent variable. The first survey item used to create this index asked respondents to "Name as many of the five pillars of Islam as you can," with score ranging from zero to 1, if the respondent could name all five. The second item we used asked respondents whether or not the way in which Muslims should pray namaz (salat or salah) is described in the Qu'ran. If they answered no (the correct answer), they received one point. Third, we used a question which asks respondents "What is the percentage amount required to be given as Zakat?" They received one point if they answered 2.5% percent, which is the correct answer. Fourth, we used a question that asked "How many months do you have to hold wealth for Zakat to be due on it?" If they answered "12 months," the correct answer, they received one point. The fifth and final question we used asked respondents "What is the first revealed verse in the Qu'ran?" If they indicated "al-Alaq," the correct answer,

they received one point. If the respondent provided an incorrect answer or refused to answer a particular item, they received zero points on the item in question.

To calculate the final index score for respondents, we summed the respondents' total score and divided it by five to produce an individual knowledge index that ranges from 0 to 1, with higher index value indicating greater knowledge of Islam. In addition to this independent variable, we included several control variables based upon previous the work of Shafiq and Sinno.[lix] These control variables included the respondent's maslak, ethnicity, gender, marital status, level of education, age group, and income. We provide descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent, and control variables in Table 1.[lx]

To conduct the analysis, we ran ordinary least squares regression using the above-mentioned dependent, independent, and control variables. To run the regression, we converted categorical variables (e.g. ethnicity, maslak, etc.) into dummy variables. We denote the reference group for each categorical variable by "*" in Table 1. We clustered standard errors at the Primary Sampling Unit (PSU) as the survey sample was drawn at the PSU level. To capture district level characteristics, we ran regressions for both militant groups with and without district fixed effects. We provide regression results in Tables 2 and 3.

Regression Results

Our regression results show that the knowledge index has a statistically significant (without district fixed effects) and negative impact upon support for the Afghan Taliban and SSP, although the result is larger and more significant in explaining decreased support for the SSP. These results do not remain statistically significant when we include district-level fixed

effects. This suggests that there are systematic district-level characteristics that help explain respondent-level knowledge of Islam. Examples of this may include the prevalence and/or quality of Islamic educational institutions at the district level. Alternatively, there may be other district-level explanations for variation in respondent knowledge about Islam, such as better education in public and or private schools and the presence or absence of organization such as Tabliqhi Jamaat that engage in grassroots education. This does not detract from the basic finding that persons who are more knowledgeable about Islam are less likely to support these two militant groups, controlling for other factors. This finding provides plausible evidence to support our null hypothesis derived from the work of Wictorowicz. This finding is fairly surprising given that our index assesses very rudimentary knowledge of Islam.

However, several control variables (gender, maslak, ethnicity, and income) are also statistically significant and often larger in magnitude than the knowledge index in explaining support for both the SSP and the Afghan Taliban. Turning to support for the SSP (Table 2), the effect of being male is also large (relative to the knowledge index) and significant with and without fixed effects. This means that males, all else equal, are less likely to support the SSP than are females. Perhaps the most important set of variables in predicting support for the SSP are those that capture the respondent's sectarian tradition. Relative to Shia Muslims, all of the respondents electing a Sunni maslak are significantly more likely to support the SSP and the magnitude of these coefficients are more than double that of the knowledge index. This finding supports the findings of Haqqani,[lxi] Rahman,[lxii] and Fair[lxiii] that the production of sectarian difference in Pakistan may explain the support for some kinds of Islamist militancy. We find that several ethnicity variables ("Baloch", "Sindhi" & "Muhajir") are also statistically significant and

their magnitude is greater than that of knowledge index. These variables remain significant even when we control for district fixed effects.

As with support for the SSP, several control variables are stronger and larger predictors of support for the Afghan Taliban (see Table 3) than the knowledge index. Males are statistically more likely to support the Afghan Taliban (when fixed effects are included). The Sunni maslak variables are all large positive predictors of support with and without fixed effects. Several ethnic variables are significant and larger in magnitude than the knowledge index with some ethnic groups predicting higher support, while Sindhis are less supportive. Some age ("50 years and older") and income variables ("fourth quartiles") are not only statistically significant but their coefficients are also larger than that of the knowledge index.

Implications and Conclusions

Taken together, our analyses show that even a basic knowledge of Islam has an impact on support for Islamist militant groups. It is possible that if we had an indicator for more sophisticated and refined knowledge of Islam and the different schools of jurisprudence (fiqh), we may have found a more –or possibly less—robust result. Nonetheless, this basic finding suggests that this is an important area of inquiry for future research in Pakistan and beyond. Scholars who field surveys of this kind may consider building more complex batteries to assess respondent knowledge of Islam to better exposit the impacts of greater knowledge and erudition in Islamic studies upon respondent support for Islamist violence.

Admittedly, Pakistan may not be the best test case for this kind of study. Unlike countries where Islamist violence is *sui generis*, in Pakistan the state has done much to cultivate Islamist militants as tools of foreign policy. The Pakistani state has relied upon some maslaks more than others to develop these militant groups. Religious leaders associated with each maslak promulgate fatwa (pl. of fatawa, statements of Islamic jurisprudence), deliver sermons at mosques, galvanize large crowds to support or oppose particular developments, and actively recruit for militant organizations.[lxiv] The state-sponsorship of militant groups and the differential reliance upon maslaks may help explain the strong impacts upon these variables. But what is notable is that even controlling for maslak, we still find the residual moderating impact of knowledge of Islam upon support for these groups.

The policy implications of this research are potentially important. International actors such as the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as many Pakistani domestic critics of the madrassah system, have called for far-reaching overhaul of the madrassah system. Indeed, our own results suggest that sectarian identity is a very strong predictor of support for these militant groups even when the sectarian identity of the respondent is not Deobandi, the sectarian tradition of both militant groups examined here. What our work does suggest is that increasing even the basic knowledge of Islam among Pakistanis can have an important dampening effect for support for militancy. These modest findings should give a fillip to those seeking to reform the Pakistani religious, public, and private school sectors as a part of Pakistan's efforts to counter domestic support for and participation in violent extremism. This work also provides a cautionary tale against simply assuming that the pursuit of Islamic knowledge is a marker of potential danger. In fact, it is entirely possible that efforts to discourage religious knowledge

acquisition altogether may exacerbate the problem of popular support for violent extremism rather than mitigate the same.

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Table 1. Summary Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables (MUSLIM ONLY)

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
DEPENDENT VARIABLE			
How much do you support Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan (SSP) and their actions?	Not at all	5,621	38.74%
	A little	2,105	14.51%
	A moderate amount	2,338	16.12%
	A lot	1,146	7.9%
	A great deal	1,062	7.32%
	No answer	2,236	15.41%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
(q1012)How much do you support Afghan Taliban and their actions?	Not at all	7,129	**49.1%**
	A little	1,840	**12.7%**
	A moderate amount	2,024	**14%**
	A lot	934	**6.4%**
	A great deal	897	**6.2%**
	No answer	1,684	**11.6 %**
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES			
knowledge Index (0.00-1.00)	0.00	312	2.15%

	0.04	55	0.38%
	0.08	220	1.52%
	0.12	298	2.05%
	0.16	152	1.05%
	0.2	737	5.08%
	0.24	98	0.68%
	0.28	296	2.04%
	0.32	717	4.94%
	0.36	525	3.62%
	0.4	1,342	9.26%
	0.44	93	0.64%
	0.48	211	1.45%
	0.52	588	4.05%
	0.56	580	4%
	0.6	2,089	14.4%
	0.64	66	0.45%
	0.68	134	0.92%
	0.72	**470**	3.24%
	0.76	500	3.45%
	0.8	3,404	23.46%
	0.84	17	0.12%

	0.88	31	0.21%
	0.92	80	0.55%
	0.96	154	1.06%
	1.00	1,338	9.22%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
CONTROL VARIABLES			
Maslak: Type of Madrassah	Shia*	601	4.14%
	Sunni	7,394	50.96%
	Deobandi	5,928	40.86%
	Ahl-hadith	585	4.03%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Ethnicity	Other*	662	4.56%
	Punjabi	4,767	32.86%
	Muhajiir	1,024	7.06%
	Pashtun	5,051	34.82%
	Sindhi	1,401	9.66%
	Baloch	1,519	10.47%
	No response/don't know	84	0.58%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Gender	Female*	**5,994**	**41.32%**
	Male	**8,514**	**58.68%**

Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Marital Status	Married	**11,301**	**77.89%**
	Divorced	**30**	**0.21%**
	Widowed	**337**	**2.32%**
	Single/never married*	**2,806**	**19.34%**
	Don't know/ no answer	**34**	**0.23%**
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Level of Education	Less than Primary*	5,612	38.68%
	Primary	1,734	11.95%
	Middle	1,935	13.34%
	Matriculate	2,607	17.97%
	Higher Education	2,493	17.18%
	Don't know/no response	127	0.88%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Age Group	18-29*	5,199	35.84%
	30-49	7,212	49.71%
	50+	2,076	14.31%
	Don't know/no response	21	0.14%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**
Income Quartiles	First quartile*	5,185	35.74%
	Second quartile	3,940	27.16%

	Third quartile	1,804	12.43%
	Fourth quartile	2,766	19.07%
	Don’t know/no response	813	5.6%
Total		**14,508**	**100%**

Note: * denotes regression reference group

Table 2. Regression Results (How much do you support Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan (SSP) and their actions?)

	No District Fixed Effects	With District Fixed Effects
Independent Variables		
Knowledge Index	-0.2928 (-3.80)***	-0.0496 (-0.69)
Control Variables		
Male	-0.4024 (-6.91)***	-0.4403 (-8.07)***
madrasa_sunni	0.7880 (9.55)***	0.5145 (4.25)***
madrasa_deobandi	0.9743 (11.13)***	0.7455 (5.76)***
madrasa_ahl_e_hadis	0.8383 (6.34)***	0.6471 (3.97)***
maritalstatus_married	0.0373 (0.83)	0.0391 (0.98)
maritalstatus_divorced	0.0216 (0.06)	0.0316 (0.10)
maritalstatus_widowed	0.0528	0.0176

	(0.48)	(0.17)
ethnicity_punjabi	-0.2652 (2.25)**	-0.312 (2.37)**
ethnicity_muhajir	-0.6189 (-4.77)***	-0.1763 (-1.04)
ethnicity_pashtun	-0.0146 (-0.12)	-0.1448 (-0.96)
ethnicity_sindhi	-0.7428 (-5.94)***	-0.4700 (-3.05)***
ethnicity_baloch	-0.4735 (-3.28)***	-0.3375 (-2.07)**
educ_primary	0.0198 (-0.42)	0.0268 (0.63)
educ_middle	0.0840 (1.76)*	0.0782 (1.80)*
educ_matric	0.0890 (1.80)*	0.0987 (2.12)**
educ_higher	0.0385 (0.72)	0.0467 (0.93)
age_30to49	-0.0216 (-0.58)	0.0030 (0.09)

age_50plus	-0.1248 (-2.45)**	-0.0758 (-1.69)*
quartile_second	0.0986 (2.72)***	0.0600 (1.82)*
quartile_third	0.1088 (2.15)**	0.0320 (0.68)
quartile_fourth	0.2066 (4.09)***	0.0528 (1.10)
_cons	0.9106 (5.99)***	1.044 (5.64)***
R2	0.0901	0.2178
N	11,601	11,601

Note 1: t-value in parenthesis

Note 2: *** p <0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Table 3. Regression Results (How much do you support Afghan Taliban and their actions?)

	No District Fixed Effects	With District Fixed Effects
Independent Variables		
Knowledge Index	-0.1663 (-2.20)**	-0.08873 (-1.35)
Control Variables		
Male	-0.0299 (0.51)	0.1736 (3.43)***
madrasa_sunni	0.6734 (7.37)***	0.4828 (3.49)***
madrasa_deobandi	0.7751 (8.07)***	0.7267 (5.01)***
madrasa_ahl_e_hadis	0.7530 (5.47)***	0.6138 (3.48)***
maritalstatus_married	0.0813 (1.84)*	0.0409 (1.08)
maritalstatus_divorced	0.0692 (0.24)	-0.0987 (-0.40)
maritalstatus_widowed	0.2367 (2.03)**	0.0457 (0.48)

ethnicity_punjabi	-0.0707 (-0.67)	-0.3450 (-3.39)***
ethnicity_muhajir	-0.1857 (-1.52)	-0.1338 (-1.37)
ethnicity_pashtun	0.3045 (2.74)***	-0.1441 (-1.37)
ethnicity_sindhi	-0.5282 (-4.88)***	-0.3625 (-2.83)***
ethnicity_baloch	-0.0630 (-0.50)	-0.1987 (-1.44)
educ_primary	-0.0049 (-0.11)	0.0577 (1.41)
educ_middle	-0.0364 (-0.74)	0.0373 (0.87)
educ_matric	-0.1020 (-2.07)**	0.0049 (0.12)
educ_higher	-0.0708 (-1.30)	0.0172 (0.37)
age_30to49	-0.0729 (-1.96)*	-0.0057 (-0.19)
age_50plus	-0.1729	-0.0617

	(-3.43)***	(-1.45)
quartile_second	0.1330 (3.68)***	0.0627 (2.02)**
quartile_third	0.1306 (2.64)***	0.0060 (0.14)
quartile_fourth	0.1682 (3.36)***	0.0223 (0.47)
_cons	0.3146 (2.21)*	0.7215 (4.18)***
R2	0.0660	0.2355
N	12,057	12,057

Note 1: t-value in parenthesis

Note 2: *** p <0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10

Notes

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