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## Issue Brief

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*

# On Campus Extremists

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**The failed attempt to kill an important MQM leader in Karachi on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha, September 2, 2017, attracted much media attention partly because the planners and attackers had an association with an Al-Qaeda inspired group Ansarul Sharia Pakistan (ASP).<sup>1</sup> The exact date of formation of this militant outfit in Pakistan is not known, but this outfit is comprised of thirteen highly educated and technologically equipped militants which shows that it organized itself in the past few months.<sup>2</sup>**

The phenomenon of extremism on campus is far more complex and deep-rooted in Pakistan than it is usually perceived. The hype created by media about the educated terrorists of the Ansarul Sharia group in Karachi give the impression that the universities in Pakistan are one of the soft breeding grounds to promote violent extremism. This interpretation by media is simplistic in nature as it ignores the complexity of the situation. The extremist elements in any society are common in all segments of society irrespective of their socioeconomic status and educational backgrounds.

The cause of violent extremism amongst educated and skilled youth is a worrisome situation as this technically skilled and academically strong youth is an asset of a nation. In addition to this, these skilled individual can inject new blood in terrorists groups and will allow them to damage the society in many other non-traditional ways. The role of our educational institutions in creating social resilience is debatable, but the presence of certain religious political narrative in our country is a definite reality and is also the basic cause of promoting violence in the society.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of religious political parties and their political wings in universities is a major challenge for Pakistan. The religious political parties construct their identities on the basis of religion to justify their actions. To counter this threat, young individuals need to understand the complexity of religion and politics. This is one of the main reason that all the educated radicalised individuals appeared to be students of natural sciences rather than social sciences.<sup>4</sup> The presence of religious political parties in

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<sup>1</sup> "MQM-P's Khawaja Izhar comes under gun attack; two killed", *SAMAA News*, September 02, 2017

<https://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2017/09/mqm-ps-khawaja-izhar-comes-gun-attack/>

<sup>2</sup> "The rise and 'fall' of Ansarul Sharia Pakistan", *DAWN News*, September 09, 2017

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1356467>

<sup>3</sup> "Extremist minds on campus", *DAWN News*, September 10, 2017

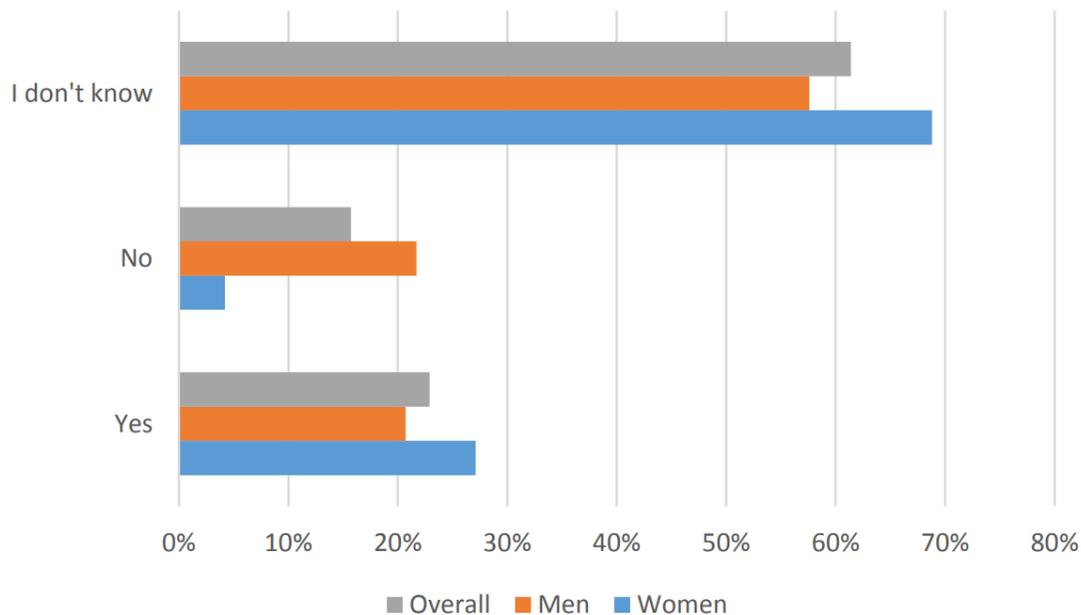
<https://www.dawn.com/news/1356677/extremist-minds-on-campus>

<sup>4</sup> Jamil Jivani, "Why are young men prone to radicalization?", *The Globe and Mail*, May 30, 2017

<https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/why-are-young-men-prone-to-radicalization/article35164423/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>

universities needs to be understood: it is not a matter of religion, it is only about achieving political objectives through injecting religious ideologies in young and vulnerable minds on campus.

Research in universities plays an extremely important role in innovation and ensuring the availability of updated knowledge. The minds of vulnerable youth in the university can be changed by providing them the atmosphere and necessary resources for performing quality research. According to Higher Education Commission assessment report, the universities in Pakistan either do not have any research policy, nor is the faculty aware of even its presence; only 22.9 per cent of the overall respondents reported that their universities had a research policy.<sup>5</sup> Without applying proper research tools and techniques, universities will produce only fanatic minds. In a religiously, socially and culturally diverse state like Pakistan, higher education institutions and universities, imparting the education and conducting the research are the central mechanisms that can raise the declining social infrastructure of the state.



**Figure**

**Whether the university has its research policy**

*Source: HEC-Overall Assessment of the Higher Education Sector<sup>6</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> "Overall Assessment of Higher Education Sector in Pakistan", June 29, 2017

<http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/projects/TESP/Documents/FR-Assessment%20HE%20Sector.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The problem of violent extremism in Pakistan requires to accommodate an innovative and unconventional approach in its counter terrorism strategy. Drafting such an approach is a challenge having many dimensions ranging from national interests to implementation of such policy discourse. It is also an intellectual challenge for policy makers to think beyond the use of conventional power to control minds and individuals of society. Therefore, there is a dire need to draw a strategy that can target audience irrespective of their social status, economic strength and educational background.