

The Psychological Roots of Public Opinion toward a Militant Group: The Case of Pakistani Lashkar-e-Tayyaba

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EXISTING THEORIES OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MILITANTS have used relative deprivation arguments, the ideological affinity an individual may have with militants, or co-ethnicity with the militants.¹ Here, we put forward a new perspective from which to understand the lineaments of public support for militant groups that is moored in social psychology. In this article, we argue that the most common and widely

¹For a prominent example of a relative deprivation argument about public opinion toward insurgents, see M. Najeeb Shafiq and Abdulkader H. Sinno, "Education, Income, and Support for Suicide Bombings: Evidence from Six Muslim Countries," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54 (February 2010): 146–178. For a good example of the ideological explanation for support for insurgents, see C. Christine Fair, Neal Malhotra, and Jacob Shapiro, "Faith or Doctrine? Religion and Support for Political Violence in Pakistan," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (Winter 2012): 688–720. Perhaps the most prominent work on co-ethnic bias in influencing views on insurgents is found in Jason Lyall, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai, "Explaining Support for Combatants during Wartime: A Survey Experiment in Afghanistan," *American Political Science Review* 107 (November 2013): 679–705.

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distributed factor influencing individual sympathy with a militant group is the expectation that the militant group will bestow a sense of personal significance on that individual.² This means that individuals are more likely to look positively on a militant group if they expect that militant group to enhance their sense that they are respected, cared about, and have some control over their destiny. Here, we put forward a new theory of public support for and opposition to militant groups rooted in social psychology, using the specific case of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), one of the most lethal and competent militant organizations based in Pakistan that conducts militant operations in India and Afghanistan.

In this article, we test this argument's utility in explaining individual sympathy for and opposition to the Pakistan-based and Pakistan-backed LeT using data collected from a 2013 novel survey of 7,656 respondents representative of Pakistan's four main provinces. We employ positivity indexing to assess attitudes toward sensitive issues that might otherwise illicit high nonresponse rates or answers that are influenced by social desirability or other kinds of bias. Our empirical results support our posited contention that the respondents who are most likely to see LeT sympathetically are Pakistanis who support the political status quo, Punjabis, Ahl-e-Hadith adherents, and women. As we argue, these are individuals who are likely to view LeT as a means of preserving or improving their social significance. Respondents who are likely to see LeT as a threat to their sense of significance, such as Shia, Deobandis, Sufis, and ethnic Baloch, are more likely to view LeT negatively. Understanding the factors that condition individual perceptions of a militant group such as LeT is likely germane to the efforts of those who are committed to countering the allure of such violent extremist groups.

We first provide a brief overview of LeT. Next, we review the extant explanations for public support for militant groups. In the third section, we explain what we refer to as the significance quest explanation for militant support and posit specific hypotheses. Fourth, we formally test these hypotheses using ordered probit models, after which we calculate the marginal effects of the independent variables using first differences analysis. We conclude the article by assessing what the findings mean for our understanding of the sources of public sympathy for militants.

²Arie Kruglanski, Michele Gelfand, Jocelyn Belanger, Ana Sheveland, Malkanthi Hetiarachchi, and Rohan Gunaratna, "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Political Violence," *Advances in Political Psychology* 35 (2014): 69–93; and Arie Kruglanski, Jocelyn Belanger, and Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization: Needs, Narratives, and Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF LASHKAR-E-TAYYABA

Pakistan has employed proxy militant groups since its founding in 1947, when it dispatched guerillas to seize Kashmir.³ Since then, Pakistan has relied upon proxy militant groups to prosecute its foreign policy goals in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the rest of India. Given this long history of using proxies, LeT is a relative latecomer. It coalesced when Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi assembled a small group of Pakistani Ahl-e-Hadith adherents to wage so-called jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the mid-1980s.⁴ In about 1985, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and Zafar Iqbal, two professors from the Islamic Studies Department of Lahore Engineering University, established the Jamaat ul Dawah (JuD), which initially focused upon *tabligh* (proselytization) and *dawah* (missionary work) to propagate the tenants of the Ahl-e-Hadith interpretative tradition of Islam. In 1986, Lakhvi's militia merged with the JuD to form the Markaz al-Dawah Irshad (Center for Preaching and Guidance).

Adhering to the minority Ahl-e-Hadith tradition, the group maintains a close financial and ideological relationship with the Saudi government and private backers.⁵ While it draws from the Ahl-e-Hadith interpretative tradition, the organization is at odds with mainstream religious scholars (*ulema*) of this tradition because most of the ulema reject LeT's contention that "jihad" can be waged by nonstate actors. Instead, these ulema generally assert that jihad can only be waged by an Islamic state.⁶

The group grew to preeminence in Pakistan's proxy war in Indian-administered Kashmir in the mid-1990s, making its name as a fearsome force on the battlefield and a loyal servant of the Pakistani state. LeT's headquarters (*markaz*) is in Muridke, outside Lahore (Punjab); however, it has offices throughout the Punjab, in every city and district, and maintains ties with militants and groups across Pakistan. Even though LeT claims to be a "Kashmiri" organization, the vast majority of its recruits come from the Punjab.⁷ (Notably, the Pakistan Army also draws

³Shuja Nawaz, "The First Kashmir War Revisited," *India Review* 7 (April–June 2008): 115–154.

⁴The Geneva Accord, which brought the conflict to a close, was signed in 1988. See David B. Ottaway, "Agreement on Afghanistan Signed in Geneva," *Washington Post*, 15 April 1988, accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/04/15/agreement-on-afghanistan-signed-in-geneva/c7288c64-6764-4e73-9bc5-7eeb48f7827d/>, 21 July 2021.

⁵Syed Manzar Abbas Zaidi, "Profiling the Lashkar-e-Taiba," *South Asian Survey* 16 (July–December 2009): 315–334, at 318.

⁶C. Christine Fair, *In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁷C. Christine Fair, "Insights from a Database of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen Militants," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2014): 259–290.

heavily from the Punjab for its officer corps.⁸) In more recent years, proselytization by the group has seen increased growth in Sindh and the Southern Punjab, particularly in the northern industrial cities of Nawanshahr, Shahdadpur, and Hyderabad.⁹

The American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 opened a new front for LeT-linked militants who operated against International Stabilization and Assistance Force forces from their bases in the Kunar and Paktia Provinces of Afghanistan.¹⁰ The importance of LeT to the Pakistani security establishment derives from its efficacy on the battlefield and ability to conduct ambitious terrorist attacks as well domestic political support for peace at home.¹¹

Despite this history, few people outside of India paid much attention to the group before 26 November 2008, when 10 of its Pakistani militants departed Karachi in a dinghy, then violently commandeered an Indian ship, which it used to stealthily disembark on the shores of Mumbai. Once ashore, the men engaged in an attack on Mumbai that resulted in 168 people killed and hundreds wounded. For the first time, their victims included non-Indian citizens, including Americans and Israelis.¹² While it is true that the United States proscribed the organization as well as the Deobandi Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) on 26 December 2001, following JeM's 13 December 2001 assault on India's Parliament, it did so to dissuade India from attacking Pakistan, which was supposed to be supporting American efforts in Afghanistan by capturing Taliban and al Qaeda fighters as American forces pushed them south and east from Afghanistan and into Pakistan. American concerns were salient: after the attack, India mobilized the largest force package since the 1971 war. Consequently, Pakistan moved its forces from the west, where they were supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan, to the eastern border with India. While U.S. efforts ostensibly helped prevent a war, India remained mobilized along the border until after the October 2002 elections in Kashmir were held.

As a result of Pakistani attention to its border with India, many members of al Qaeda and the Taliban escaped into Pakistan's tribal areas

⁸C. Christine Fair, "Using Manpower Policies to Transform the Force and Society: The Case of the Pakistan Army," *Security Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 74–112.

⁹Zaidi, "Profiling the Lashkar-e-Taiba," 323.

¹⁰Zaidi, "Profiling the Lashkar-e-Taiba," 318.

¹¹Fair, *In Their Own Words*.

¹²Angel Rabasa, Robert D. Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C. Christine Fair, Brian A. Jackson, Brian Michael Jenkins, Seth G. Jones, Nathaniel Shestak, Ashley J. Tellis, *The Lessons of Mumbai* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009), accessed at https://www.rand.org/pubs/occasional_papers/OP249.html, 21 July 2021; Stephen Tankel, *Storming the World Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Fair, *In Their Own Words*.

as American forces chased them from Afghanistan.¹³ Under U.S. pressure, Pakistan subsequently banned LeT and JeM. However, these bans were a feint: Pakistani intelligence had forewarned the groups, which allowed them to rebrand under different names and transfer their assets accordingly.¹⁴ While Washington has banned all LeT subsidiaries, such as the JuD and the Filah Insaniat Foundation (FIF), they remain openly active in Pakistan.

Unlike many Pakistan-based and Pakistan-backed militant groups, LeT remains loyal to the Pakistani state and has never attacked any target within Pakistan. While the Deobandi militant group JeM may appear to share this distinction with LeT, in fact, JeM members defected in December 2001 after President Pervez Musharraf ostensibly began supporting U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. JeM has long been a collaborator with al Qaeda, which targeted the U.S. Consulate in Karachi in June 2002, and JeM members have also been involved with Deobandi sectarian groups (such as Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi). JeM cadres and leaders formed much of the Pakistani Taliban. Because Masood Azhar remained loyal to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the ISI invested in recuperating the organization under his control as a means of encouraging the Pakistani Taliban to stop fighting the state with some success.¹⁵

Along with JeM, LeT retains significant operational capability in India and beyond, and it is well poised to precipitate the next conflict between India and Pakistan.¹⁶ Not only is LeT a potent militant entity, it conducts substantial philanthropic and social work under the guise of JuD and the FIF. It also formed a political party known as the Milli Muslim League (MML) in August 2017 to contest the July 2018 Pakistani general election. While the party fared abysmally, the MML enjoyed the support of

¹³See Polly Nayak and Michael Krepon, “US Crisis Management in South Asia’s Twin Peaks” (Crisis Report 57, Stimson Center, September 2006), accessed at https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Twin_Peaks_Crisis.pdf, 21 July 2021.

¹⁴*The Guardian*, “US Embassy Cables: Lashkar-e-Taiba Terrorists Raise Funds in Saudi Arabia,” 10 August 2009, accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/220186>, 21 July 2021.

¹⁵See Milos Popovic, “The Perils of Weak Organization: Explaining Loyalty and Defection of Militant Organizations toward Pakistan,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (2015): 919–937; Shehzad H. Qazi, “Rebels of the Frontier: Origins, Organization, and Recruitment of the Pakistani Taliban,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 4 (2011): 574–602; and C. Christine Fair, “Bringing Back the Dead: Why Pakistan Used the Jaish-e-Mohammad to Attack an Indian Airbase,” *Huffington Post*, 7 January 2015, accessed at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/bringing-back-the-dead-wh_b_8955224, 21 July 2021.

¹⁶Popovic, “The Perils of Weak Organization”; C. Christine Fair, “Lashkar-e-Tayiba and the Pakistani State,” *Survival* 53 (August 2011): 29–52; and Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, “The Terrorist Who Got Away,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 March 2020, accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/magazine/masood-azhar-jaish.html>, 21 July 2021.

Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies as part of a canvas of groups cultivated by Pakistan's deep state to secure the election of Imran Khan as prime minister.¹⁷ These various activities have garnered MML considerable publicity, which has been enabled and amplified by Pakistani intelligence and the media it has commandeered.¹⁸ Despite being officially banned in Pakistan and designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations, its leadership operates in the open; it is protected by Pakistani police and intelligence agencies and allowed free access to the media. Even when its leaders have been imprisoned, those leaders continue to operate from the safe confines of their unusually luxurious "cells."¹⁹ Its charitable and religious functions and rallies draw hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis annually and its political party freely campaigned.²⁰

LeT's organizational goals pertain to Pakistan's internal and external affairs, which the organization sees as deeply intertwined.²¹ While most observers are conversant with the latter, in which LeT faithfully prosecutes Pakistan's violent agenda in India and, since the mid-2000s, in Afghanistan, fewer understand that it also partners with the Pakistani state to combat sectarian and communal violence and works to undermine the political aspirations of Pakistan's ethnic Baloch.

In LeT's widely circulated pamphlet *Hum Kyon Jihad Kar Rahen Hain?* (Why Are We Waging Jihad?), author Abdussalam Bin Muhammad explains that the only way to end infighting and oppression in Pakistan is to

¹⁷Ishaan Tharoor, "Pakistan's Military Has Its Fingerprints All Over the Elections," *New York Times*, 25 July 2018, accessed at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/25/pakistans-military-has-its-fingerprints-all-over-the-elections/?utm_term=.32911b33f96b, 21 July 2021; and C. Christine Fair, "The Milli Muslim League: The Domestic Politics of Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 23 (July 2018): 33–44.

¹⁸Tahir Andrabi and Jishnu Das, "In Aid We Trust: Hearts and Minds and the Pakistan Earthquake of 2005," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 99 (July 2017): 371–386; C. Christine Fair, "Not at the Forefront of Flood Relief," *Foreign Policy*, 20 September 2010, accessed at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/09/20/not-at-the-forefront-of-flood-relief/>, 21 July 2021; Ayesha Siddiqi, "How Pakistan's Military Manages the Media," *The Wire*, 15 March 2017, accessed at <https://thewire.in/books/managing-media-pakistan-military>, 21 July 2021; and Human Yusuf, "Conspiracy Fever: The US, Pakistan and Its Media," *Survival* 53, no. 4 (2011): 95–118.

¹⁹BBC News, "Bailed Mumbai Suspect Lakhvi's Luxury Jail Time," 10 April 2015, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31606798>, 21 July 2021.

²⁰Daud Khattak, "Pakistan's Election: Unique for All the Wrong Reasons," *The Diplomat*, 25 July 2018, accessed at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/pakistans-election-unique-for-all-the-wrong-reasons/>, 21 July 2021; Sohail Chaudhry, "Govt Lifts Ban on ASWJ, Unfreezes Assets of Its Chief Ahmed Ludhianvi," *Express Tribune*, 27 June 2018, accessed at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1744294/1-govt-lifts-ban-aswj-unfreezes-assets-chief-ahmed-ludhianvi/>, 21 July 2021; and Asid Hashim, "Despite Sanctions, Pakistan's Terrorists Thrive," *Al Jazeera*, 20 May 2015.

²¹Ubaidurrahman Muhammadi, *Difa-i-Jihad* [Defense of jihad], trans. Mustafa Samdani (Lahore: Dar-ul-Andulus, 2003); and Abdussalam Bin Muhammad, *Hum Kyon Jihad Kar Rahen Hain?* [Why are we waging jihad?], trans. C. Christine Fair and Mustafa Samdani (Lahore: Dar-ul-Andulus, 2004).

begin fighting infidels, opining that “If we do not fight infidels, we will never stop fighting amongst ourselves, neither will we stop oppressing one another.”²² LeT believes that the Muslim world generally and Pakistan specifically will experience a political resurgence through jihad. Bin Muhammad explains to his questioner that “it is through jihad against the enemy that we can strengthen ourselves from within.”²³ For LeT, jihad against external foes is the only way to save Pakistan from within, but it is also the only means by which the global *ummat* can restore its past glory. LeT’s literature is equally adamant that no matter how wayward Pakistan’s leadership may appear, confrontation is never the appropriate response; rather, it should be rehabilitated through religious education and proselytization to embrace the organization’s interpretations of Islam and its complusions.²⁴

Thus, while LeT may be an important disruptor abroad, at home, it is an explicitly status quo power. This means that while LeT advocates killing *kuffar* (nonbelievers) in India, within Pakistan, it insists upon converting them through the provision of social services, humanitarian relief, and lived examples of pious Muslims. LeT’s staunch opposition to sectarian violence pits it against the Islamic State and many of the Deobandi militant groups, such as the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ, which also operates under the names Sipah-e-Sahaba-e-Pakistan and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat) or the Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP, Pakistani Taliban), which draws many of its commanders and cadres from the LeJ. In fact, LeT specifically proscribes violence against Muslims if they recognize the supremacy of Allah. (LeT’s literature and leadership are studiously silent on the issue of Ahmadis: while they have not publicly called for violence against them, the organization has stated that they should be able to live out their lives peacefully as non-Muslims.²⁵)

Pakistan’s unrelenting support of LeT is a major irritant in Pakistan’s relationship with both India and the United States. Washington has pressured Islamabad to go beyond its heretofore empty gestures by arresting and prosecuting those in its ranks responsible for terrorist attacks. The U.S. government is concerned about LeT’s capacity to draw India into an armed conflict with Pakistan while also wanting LeT to

²²Bin Muhammad, *Hum Kyon Jihad Kar Rahen Hain?*, 24.

²³Bin Muhammad, *Hum Kyon Jihad Kar Rahen Hain?*, 35.

²⁴Bin Muhammad, *Hum Kyon Jihad Kar Rahen Hain?*, 35.

²⁵C. Christine Fair, “Jamaat-ud-Dawa: Converting Kuffar at Home, Killing Them Abroad,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 22 (November 2017): 58–79.

cease its attacks in Afghanistan. In recent years, access to lending under the International Monetary Fund has been tied to the findings of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Pakistan, seeking to provide evidence that it is complying with FATF standards, has jailed LeT's leader, Hafez Saeed. Few are convinced that he will stay in jail.²⁶

PUBLIC SYMPATHY FOR LASHKAR-E-TAYYABA IN PAKISTAN

To determine the level and sources of public sympathy toward LeT in Pakistan, we use data from the Pakistani Media and Muslim Communities: Identifying and Supporting Critical Thinking data project. The survey was conducted in 2013 by SEDCO and supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of State. The survey team drew a random sample of 7,656 adult Pakistani men and women from the four "normal" provinces of the country using the Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics sample frame. The respondents were selected randomly within 479 primary sampling units, 285 in rural areas and 194 in urban ones (following the rural-urban breakdown in the Pakistan census). We substantially oversampled in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) to ensure that we could generate valid estimates in these provinces, which have small populations in spatially concentrated ethnic enclaves because of their rugged terrain. We calculated poststratification survey weights based on population figures from the 1998 census, the most recent available.

The face-to-face questionnaire was fielded by seven mixed-gender teams between 28 August 2013 and 30 October 2013. Females surveyed females and males surveyed males, consistent with Pakistani social and cultural norms. The overall response rate for the survey was 64 percent (67 percent in Balochistan, 63 percent in KPK, 65 percent in Punjab, and 61 percent in Sindh Province), which is lower than the 70 percent obtained in the General Social Survey in recent years but higher than the 59.5 percent achieved by the American National Election Studies and other high-quality academic studies.²⁷

Assessing public support for militant groups in any context can be challenging because survey respondents may be loath to give sincere responses to questions about militant support and because enumerators may feel uncomfortable asking such questions. This may be because

²⁶M. Ilyas Khan, "Hafiz Saeed: Will Pakistan's 'Terror Cleric' Stay in Jail?," BBC News, 13 February 2020, accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51486346>, 21 July 2021.

²⁷American National Election Studies, "2008 Time Series Study" [data file], 2008, accessed at <http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/2008prepost/2008prepost.htm>.

respondents fear being targeted by the government or its supporters for signs of militant sympathy, or they may simply be concerned that a survey enumerator will look at them unfavorably for showing sympathy for a militant group. Enumerators may not want to ask the same questions because they may fear respondents will be wary of their organizational affiliation or their motivations in asking.

Scholars have used indirect ways to assess how a respondent thinks about a militant group, such as endorsement experiments and list experiments. In an endorsement experiment, the sample is divided randomly into two groups: one will not receive the endorsement treatment, while the other will. For example, those in the untreated group may be asked whether they support a particular policy, while those in the treatment group will be asked whether they support the policy that is supported by a particular person or group. The mean difference in favorable responses to the policy between the control and treatment groups indicates the level of indirect support for the group. In a list experiment, the sample is divided into two subsamples, the control and the treatment group, which are chosen randomly. The control group is given a list of nonsensitive, likely favorable items and asked the total number of items they agree with. The treatment group is given the same list but with a militant group added to the list. The analysis then determines what the difference of means between the two indicates in terms of support for the militant group.²⁸

While these strategies have merits, they also have drawbacks. Both survey strategies require large sample sizes to divide the samples for the experiments. Second, endorsement experiments depend upon the enumerator reading the entire question, including the endorsement, before eliciting or recording the answer. One of the authors of this article has done considerable enumerator training in Pakistan on this survey technique and found that many enumerators simply did not understand the experiment and recorded the response prior to reading the endorsement. Such enumerator error diminishes the differences observed in treated and untreated groups. Finally, the results of these surveys experiments can be difficult to interpret in

²⁸For a discussion of the endorsement experiment technique and its application, see Graeme Blair, C. Christine Fair, Neil Malhotra, and Jacob Shapiro, "Poverty and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan," *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (January 2013): 30–48. For a discussion of list experiments, see Adam M. Glynn, "What Can We Learn with Statistical Truth Serum? Design and Analysis of the List Experiment," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 7, Suppl. 1 (2013): 159–172; and Graeme Blair and Kosuke Imai, "Statistical Analysis of List Experiments," *Political Analysis* 20 (Winter 2012): 47–77.

statistical models, particularly because it can be difficult to calibrate the extent to which opinions fluctuate as a result of the endorsement or the additions to the list.²⁹

This study employs a nonexperimental survey strategy that indirectly queries respondents' views toward militant groups and does not break the sample into control and treatment groups. We refer to this as an *indirect positivity measure*. The entire sample is asked the several questions. First, we queried respondents about an array of actions that they are likely to view positively: (1) try to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule; (2) provide social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools; (3) try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan; (4) try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant; (5) rid Pakistan of apostates and *munafiqin*; and (6) *dawah* to spread correct Islam. In Table 1, we depict the popularity of each goal. Next, we asked respondents, "Now we are going to discuss some potential political goals you may have. Please tell me how much you support these goals; a great deal (1), a lot (2), somewhat (3), a little (4), not at all (5)."

Second, we asked participants a series of queries to discern whether they believe a particular militant group does the things detailed in that list. Specifically, we asked, "What do you think the following groups do? Tell us all that apply to each group." The possible groups included LeT, the Deobandi Pakistani Taliban (TTP), the Deobandi sectarian group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and the Deobandi Afghan Taliban. In Table 2, we present data on respondents' beliefs about these groups' goals and their favorability toward the same. (In the appendices, we break down positivity toward LeT based on ethnicity and by Islamic tradition followed by the respondent.)

This methodology permits us to assess respondents' level of positivity toward a militant group without asking them directly whether they sympathize with the group. This method reduces the likelihood of non-response as well as responses influenced by social desirability or other biases while requiring a moderate-sized, and thus more cost-effective, sample.

The data in Table 2 show that among the militant groups in our survey, respondents were most positive toward LeT. We calculated the positivity average for each group by taking the average percentage for

²⁹For a discussion of the relative merits of list and endorsement survey experiment techniques, see Graeme Blair, Kosuke Imai, and Jason Lyall, "Comparing and Combining List and Endorsement Experiments: Evidence from Afghanistan," *American Journal of Political Science* 107 (October 2014): 679–705.

TABLE 1
Support for Political Goals

| <i>Political Goal</i> | <i>Great Deal/A Lot</i> |
|---|-------------------------|
| Liberating Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule | 94% |
| Provide social services, like clinics and schools | 93% |
| Try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan | 77% |
| Try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant | 87% |
| Rid Pakistan of apostates and hypocrites | 87% |
| Preaching to spread correct Islam | 93% |

Source: Pakistani Media and Muslim Communities: Identifying and Supporting Critical Thinking Survey 2013.

TABLE 2
Pakistani Opinions of LeT Activities

| <i>Group</i> | <i>LeT</i> | <i>LeJ</i> | <i>TTP</i> | <i>Afghan Taliban</i> |
|--|------------|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Try to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule | 53% | 34% | 34% | 26% |
| Provide social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools | 39% | 22% | 21% | 17% |
| Try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan | 36% | 29% | 41% | 53% |
| Try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant | 39% | 31% | 32% | 23% |
| Rid Pakistan of apostates and <i>munafiqin</i> | 41% | 36% | 36% | 27% |
| <i>Dawah</i> to spread correct Islam | 43% | 38% | 38% | 31% |
| Positivity average | 42% | 32% | 34% | 30% |

Source: Pakistani Media and Muslim Communities: Identifying and Supporting Critical Thinking Survey 2013.

each political goal ascribed to the militant groups. Respondents tended to believe that LeT is doing more to achieve favorable political goals than the other groups. In all, 42 percent of survey respondents had an overall favorable view of LeT based on this methodology.

EXPLAINING SUPPORT FOR AND OPPOSITION TO ISLAMIST MILITANTS

The most common explanation for support for Islamist militancy in the media and in academic work is based on the logic of relative deprivation theory, developed by Ted Robert Gurr.³⁰ This theory of support for rebellion argues that those who believe there is a difference between what they *should* have in terms of economic, political, and social conditions and what they actually perceive they possess will harbor a sense of grievance with the status quo and a desire for change. If the sense of relative deprivation is great enough and the avenues for redress are

³⁰Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

politically limited, individuals may support political violence to bring about the change that they believe is necessary.

In the context of Islamic militancy, John Esposito and John Voll argue that poverty makes people less satisfied with the status quo and more susceptible to the arguments of violent Islamist extremist groups.³¹ Islamist militancy is a direct challenge to the status quo in Muslim communities and may represent a chance to achieve the political, economic, or social change that Muslims may believe is their due.

This relative deprivation logic has been used in influential studies of public support for Islamist militancy. M. Najeeb Shafiq and Abdulkader Sinno are prominent examples of scholars who fall into this school of thought.³² They argue that Muslims who are poorer and less educated are more likely to support Islamist violence than the better educated and those with greater wealth. Those at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder have more to gain by the supporting an Islamist uprising, which will, they believe, usher in a more equitable society.

Empirical studies of the relative deprivation arguments about support for Islamist militancy have found that it is unevenly supported by public opinion evidence. C. Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd find that an individual's wealth is not a consistent predictor of support for Islamist militancy across countries.³³ In a study of support for Islamist militancy in Pakistan, Jacob Shapiro and Fair find that poverty does not predict support for or opposition to terrorism.³⁴ Marc Tessler and Michael Robbins, using survey data from Algeria and Jordan, find that perceived personal economic hardship does not predict support for or opposition to Islamist militancy.³⁵

There is also debate about the role that Islamic values and ideology play in support for Islamist extremist violence. Scott Atran has argued in several studies that people will sympathize with militants who they believe are protecting their "sacred values."³⁶ Sacred values are religious

³¹John L. Esposito and John Obert Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³²Shafiq and Sinno, "Education, Income, and Support for Suicide Bombings."

³³C. Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, "Who Supports Terrorism? Evidence from Fourteen Muslim Countries," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29, no. 1 (2006): 51–74. See also Blair et al., "Poverty and Support for Militant Politics."

³⁴Jacob Shapiro and C. Christine Fair, "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy," *International Security* 34 (Winter 2009–2010): 79–118.

³⁵Mark Tessler and Michael D.H. Robbins, "What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts against the United States? Evidence from Survey Research in Algeria and Jordan," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (April 2007): 305–328.

³⁶Scott Atran, "A Question of Honour: Why the Taliban Fight and What to Do about It," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 38, no. 3 (2010): 341–361; Scott Atran and Robert Axelrod, "Reframing Sacred Values,"

or other types of societal values that people hold dear and find worth defending.

John Esposito argues that mainstream Islam has nothing to do with support for terrorism.³⁷ It is very narrowly supported extremist movements within Islam that support terrorism, according to Esposito. Fair, Neal Malhotra, and Shapiro find that personal Islamic religiosity does not predict support for Islamist terrorism.³⁸ Tessler and Robbins, in their study of Algeria and Jordan, find that those who are more religious or have greater levels of religious involvement are not more likely to support terrorist attacks against American targets.³⁹ Simon Haddad and Hilal Khashan, in a study of Lebanese Muslim opinion done shortly after the 11 September 2001 attacks, found that mainstream Muslim religious values did not predict favorable attitudes toward the attacks, but views considered consistent with militant Sunni Islamism did predict support.⁴⁰ Several studies focusing on particular strands of thought within Islam tend to have found that more fundamentalist or punitive ideas held by Muslims help predict support for Islamist violence.⁴¹ Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro find that certain types of doctrinal beliefs, such as beliefs that jihad is a military struggle and can be waged by an individual, are predictive of support for Islamist violence.⁴² Karl Kaltenthaler and colleagues also find that support for extremist Islamist religious precepts predicts support for terrorism in Pakistan.⁴³ Specifically, supporting a Taliban-style government for Pakistan predicts support for Islamist militant attacks in the country.

Negotiation Journal 24 (July 2008): 221–246; and Jeremy Ginges, Ian Hansen, and Ara Norenzayan, “Religion and Support for Suicide Attacks,” *Psychological Science* 20 (February 2009): 224–230.

³⁷John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁸Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro, “Faith or Doctrine?” See also Shapiro and Fair, “Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy”; and C. Christine Fair, “Explaining Support for Sectarian Terrorism in Pakistan: Piety, *Maslah*, and Sharia,” *Religions* 6, no. 4 (2015): 1137–1167.

³⁹Tessler and Robbins, “What Leads Some Ordinary Arab Men and Women to Approve of Terrorist Acts against the United States?”

⁴⁰Simon Haddad and Hilal Khashan, “Islam and Terrorism: Lebanese Muslim Views on September 11,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46 (December 2002): 812–828.

⁴¹Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Name of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Jessica Stern, *Terrorism in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco-HarperCollins, 2003).

⁴²Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro, “Faith or Doctrine?” See also C. Christine Fair and Elizabeth Nugent, “Conceptions of Sharia and Support for Militancy and Democratic Values,” *Political Science Research and Methods* 6 (July 2018): 429–448.

⁴³Karl Kaltenthaler, William J. Miller, Stephen Ceccoli, and Ron Gelleny, “The Sources of Pakistani Attitudes toward Religiously Motivated Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, no. 9 (2010): 815–835.

Studies of public support for Islamist militancy have begun to explore the role that ethnic identity may play in support for groups that carry out violence in the name of Islam.⁴⁴ Jason Lyall, Graeme Blair, and Kosuke Imai have found that co-ethnic bias is an important predictor of sympathy for Islamist militants. In the case of the Afghan Taliban, they found that Pashtuns were more willing to overlook harm done by the Taliban (a Pashtun-dominated organization) compared with non-Pashtun combatants. Kaltenthaler, William Miller, and Fair also observed that co-ethnic bias was a more important factor in Pakistani Pashtun support for the Pakistani Taliban than shared Islamist ideology.

While the literature cited here provides rich empirical evidence that certain values and ethnic identity are important factors in shaping attitudes toward Islamist militant organizations, we contend that to understand why some are sympathetic to and others are opposed to particular Islamist militant groups, it is necessary to understand the psychology of why they make that choice. Relative deprivation, ideological affinity, or co-ethnic bias arguments are incomplete because they do not tell us *why* someone is more likely to support a group that is like them in salient ways. This study offers that explanation for why individuals will view a militant group the way they do. The next section of this article offers a model of understanding attitudes toward militants that is grounded in social psychology.

THE ROLE OF SIGNIFICANCE QUEST IN SHAPING ATTITUDES TOWARD MILITANTS

Human behavior, including the decision about how to view militant groups, is motivated by an individual's perceived needs. Human behavior is motivated by the needs for safety (avoiding physical harm), sustenance (food, water, housing), and significance.⁴⁵ We contend that the psychological need for significance is the most important factor shaping whether an individual views a militant group sympathetically or unfavorably. The more individuals believe that a militant group may bestow significance on them, the more sympathetic they will likely be toward that group.

The need for significance refers to the desire to feel like one's life matters, that one is respected, and that one has a degree of control over

⁴⁴Karl Kaltenthaler, William Miller, and C. Christine Fair, "Ethnicity, Islam, and Pakistani Public Opinion toward the Pakistani Taliban," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38, no. 12 (2015): 1065–1085; and Lyall, Blair, and Imai, "Explaining Support for Combatants during Wartime."

⁴⁵For an early, seminal work on human needs and motivations for behavior, see Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370–396.

the trajectory of one's life.⁴⁶ When individuals feel that their significance is lower than expected or what it should be, they will experience distress. This distress can include anxiety, anger, and depression. This psychological distress motivates individuals experiencing significance loss to try to regain or increase their significance. This is what is known as *significance quest*.⁴⁷

While individuals may face periodic deficits in safety and security that can motivate behavior (including how to view militants), personal significance issues are always present when individuals are considering their views toward others. When a government provides security to its people, it is sending the signal that it cares about the governed by making that effort. This display of caring bestows a sense of significance on the population. But when a government does not secure the population, not only does it threaten the security of the population, it can convey the message to individuals that the government does not care enough about them to provide for their security. The same logic holds for the provision of sustenance. While there are situations where individuals may be faced with potential death or extreme physical distress that may relegate significance concerns to secondary consideration, generally, significance concerns motivate human behavior more than physical needs.

Both militant groups and governments can do things that directly influence the sense of significance of ordinary citizens. One of the most important threats to individuals' sense of personal significance is the perception of inequity. Individuals may feel humiliated if they believe that their in-group is being treated unequally relative to other groups. There are many ways that governments and militant groups can project unfair treatment toward part of the population. For example, they may provide better services to one part of the population over another. Individuals who perceive themselves as the recipients of the lesser services will believe that they are not viewed as worthy of the same services as the better-treated group. This will create significance loss.

The quest for significance can explain concepts that scholars of support for militancy have explored in previous studies. Both the role of ideas in support for militancy and co-ethnic bias are primarily about personal significance. Many studies of the role of ideology in support for militancy have found that individuals who share the same ideas as the militants tend to support the militants. But these studies do not explain

⁴⁶Kruglanski et al., "The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization"; and Kruglanski, Belanger, and Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*.

⁴⁷Kruglanski, Belanger, and Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*.

why this is the case. Individuals are likely to support a group that shares their ideas because the successes of that group will validate those beliefs and bestow significance upon them. Conversely, the failures of the same group will impose a loss of significance. Thus, it is not the idiosyncratic content of the ideas that matters for predicting support for a militant group as much as those ideas are congruent with those held by segments of the population.

The co-ethnic bias argument relies upon similar logic. Individuals are more likely to give their in-group the benefit of the doubt because if they do not, they are potentially casting aspersions on their own ethnic identity. This is particularly true of individuals who feel that they are already suffering significance loss and are not confident in their ability to weather more. In fact, when one is feeling significance loss, one is likely to double down on the importance of one's social identity. One finds strength in numbers both by being a part of a group and the identity-based sense of reassurance such group membership confers.⁴⁸

HYPOTHESES

We contend that the most important consideration in assessing individual attitudes toward a group like LeT is an understanding of how that group may fulfill the person's psychological need for significance. In the case of Pakistan and public attitudes toward LeT, it is very important to reiterate that LeT does not undertake armed operations within Pakistan, and it does not seek to upset the political or social status quo in the country. LeT is, in fact, a staunch supporter of the current domestic political and economic system in Pakistan.

Keeping the profile of LeT in mind, what basic needs will the group seem to meet for Pakistanis? What needs will it threaten among Pakistanis? Given that LeT conducts militant operations exclusively outside Pakistan, we suspect that LeT will not influence individual perceptions of security, with one notable exception: the Baloch ethnic groups, discussed later. Thus, the need for safety will not play a role in individual assessments of LeT. (Had the survey team been able to include Pakistan-administered Kashmir in the sample, we may have expected Kashmiris to assess that LeT is advancing the security of their community.) While JuD and FIF provide social services in marginalized communities and is most apparent during periods of national

⁴⁸Kruglanski, Belanger, and Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*.

emergencies (for example, the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, the 2010 and 2011 monsoon-related floods, as well as local crises such as the ongoing drought in Sindh); most Pakistanis are not direct beneficiaries of these organizations. Equally important, while the organization floated a political party for the 2018 elections, it did poorly, reflecting the fact that its brand-name equity did not translate into voter preference. For the purposes of this article, that effort is irrelevant because at the time of fielding this survey, the group vigorously eschewed the electoral system.

While LeT will likely have little effect on the security or sustenance of most Pakistanis, it will likely have import for the social significance of some Pakistanis, particularly those who share the group's predominant identities and those who see the group as a defender of the political and social status quo in Pakistan. The groups within Pakistani society who are most likely to view their social significance as increasing because of LeT's place in Pakistan are individuals who support the political system status quo, because LeT itself staunchly supports the status quo. Punjabis are likely to view LeT as enhancing their significance in several ways. First, Punjabis are the most important group in managing Pakistan through their dominance in the military and the bureaucracy. As such, any effort to undermine their positions as the preeminent guardians of the state would threaten their sense of self, while efforts to buttress their position would enhance their sense of self. Second, because LeT is a Punjab-based organization populated largely by Punjabis, we expect that the group will enhance Punjabis' sense of self.

Despite the ideological differences between LeT and the mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith ulema, we still anticipate that relative to other sectarian traditions, Ahl-e-Hadith adherents may believe that the group enhances their sense of self.

Despite popular perceptions that Islamists are anti-woman or fierce proponents of an Islamic patriarchy, LeT has long undertaken activities explicitly aimed at recruiting women. Its reasons are multiple. First and foremost, the group understands that women will literally reproduce the ideal Muslim both through childbearing and rearing. It acknowledges the critical role that mothers play in motivating their sons to prepare for jihad. LeT also understands that only women can recruit other women. Thus, the organization appoints local female organizers to mobilize other women. The group has long had a women-only gathering in Muridke. Once a woman joins LeT as a mobilizer, she is afforded great social and political status and can be more mobile in comparison with non-LeT women, whose unaccompanied movements are more restricted. In short, rather than trying to marginalize women as the Taliban have done, LeT

seeks to empower women as a means of expanding public support for the organization.

The foregoing discussion gives rise to several testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The more a person supports the political status quo, the more likely it is that they will be positively disposed toward LeT, all else being equal.

Hypothesis 2: Ahl-e-Hadith adherents are more likely to be positive toward LeT than those espousing other religious affinities, all else being equal.

Hypothesis 3: Punjabis are more likely to be positive toward LeT than non-Punjabis, all else being equal.

Hypothesis 4: Females are more likely to be positive about LeT than males, all else being equal.

In the same way that significance quest theory may aid in predicting sympathy toward LeT, it also facilitates understanding of who may oppose the group. Pakistanis whom LeT disparages in its speeches, writings, and domestic activities are more likely to oppose it. LeT frequently criticizes the practices and theology of Shia, Sufis (Barelvīs), and Deobandi Pakistani Muslims. While LeT does not engage in physical attacks on these communities, it does criticize these groups for engaging in activities that LeT disparages. Notably, LeT criticizes Shia for sowing discord in the ummat over the rightful succession of the Prophet Mohammad. It criticizes Sufis for *shirk* (apostasy) because they view the Prophet as having divine attributes that are exclusively reserved for Allah. Deobandis draw the organization's ire for promoting sectarian and communal violence; for working as contractors for al Qaeda and attacking targets within Pakistan, including attempted and successful assassinations of politicians, military leaders, police and intelligence operatives; as well as for their founding of and participation in the Pakistani Taliban and more recently the Islamic State.⁴⁹ These realities suggest three additional testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5: Shia are more likely to view LeT negatively than Ahl-e-Hadith adherents, all else being equal.

Hypothesis 6: Deobandis are more likely to view LeT negatively than Ahl-e-Hadith adherents, all else being equal.

⁴⁹Fair, *In Their Own Words*.

Hypothesis 7: Barelvis are more likely to view LeT negatively than Ahl-e-Hadith adherents, all else being equal.

As intimated earlier, the ethnic Baloch community is likely to specifically view LeT as an existential threat to their ethnic group. Since Pakistan's independence, many Baloch have harbored significant grievances toward the state as they were never given a chance to vote in the 1946 election, which was a referendum on the creation of Pakistan. Second, much of Balochistan was governed by the khan of Qalat, whom some legal scholars argue was not bound by the terms of the Indian Independence Act of 1947 because his treaty arrangements were with London, in contrast with the other princely states, whose treaties were with Calcutta, the imperial capital of British India.⁵⁰ (The new capital at Delhi was inaugurated in 1931.) The sense of being forced to join Pakistan against their will has been exacerbated by the fact that while the state accounts for 40 percent of Pakistan's land mass, the population is only about 5 percent of Pakistan's total population. This means that provincial representation in the state's most powerful house, the general assembly, is anemic and unable to influence policy in a meaningful way. The Pakistan central government has opposed brutally any fissiparous tendencies in the state because it houses much of the country's resources, such as minerals and natural gas, which the state extracts with inadequate recompense. The most recent phase of the insurgency began in 2005; counterinsurgent operations have been brutal and have often involved extrajudicial murder and forced disappearances.⁵¹

While LeT is not a part of the armed operations in Balochistan, the group is an outspoken supporter of state's efforts to suppress Baloch aspirations. Balochistan frequently suffers earthquakes. The government has barred international relief organizations from providing assistance, citing fears that ethnic Baloch militants may harm them.⁵² With other competitors removed, FIF and JuD, with their Punjabi roots and Islamist militant ties, have often been at the forefront of "aid" operations in

⁵⁰Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan: The Baloch, Sindhi and Mohajir Ethnic Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵¹Rabia Aslam, "Greed, Creed, and Governance in Civil Conflicts: A Case Study of Balochistan," *Contemporary South Asia* 19, no. 2 (2011): 189–203; Adeel Khan, "Renewed Ethnonationalist Insurgency in Balochistan, Pakistan: The Militarized State and Continuing Economic Deprivation," *Asian Survey* 49 (November–December 2009): 1071–1091; and C. Christine Fair and Ali Hamza, "Rethinking Baloch Secularism: What the Data Say," *Peace and Conflict Studies* 24, no. 1 (2017): Article 1, accessed at <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/pcs/vol24/iss1/1>, 21 July 2021.

⁵²Abubakr Siddique, "Pakistani Quake Victims Suffer as Government Denies International Aid," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 16 October 2013, accessed at <http://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-earthquake-international-aid/25138901.html>, 31 July 2017.

Balochistan, with the blessing of the Pakistani state, in hopes of “converting” the wayward Baloch to embrace the ideology of Pakistan.⁵³

Baloch nationalists, who have been waging a secular, ethno-nationalist conflict against the Pakistani state and who nurse deep antagonism toward Punjabis because they believe them to be colonizing Balochistan, have been outraged by the growing presence of LeT-related organizations in the province. The spokesperson for a Baloch nationalist organization (BSO-Azad) explained that “the Pakistani government deliberately barred secular aid organizations from participating in relief operations and allowed the FIF to partake in relief activities, in line with the Pakistan army’s counter-insurgency operations.” Hafiz Saeed offers the clearest exposition for LeT’s expanding presence in Balochistan: the “government needs JuD’s ideology to resolve the issues of Balochistan.”⁵⁴

The fact that many Baloch view LeT as an accomplice of the Pakistani state gives rise to our final testable hypothesis:

Hypothesis 8: Baloch are more likely to view LeT negatively than those espousing the Ahl-e-Hadith interpretative tradition, all else being equal.

DATA AND METHODS

We derive our dependent variable from a survey item that queries respondents about what they believe LeT does: (1) try to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule; (2) provide social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools; (3) try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan; (4) try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant; (5) rid Pakistan of apostates and *munaḥiqin*; (6) *dawah* to spread correct Islam. We created binary variables for each answer, with 1 indicating yes and 0 indicating no. From these recoded responses, we created an additive index of support for LeT ranging from 0 to 6, with higher values indicating greater support. As is the case with all variables used in the analysis, “don’t know” and “no” responses were omitted from the sample used in the regression and first differences analyses. The sample size used in these analyses was 2,270.

To test Hypothesis 1, which asserts that those who support the political status quo are more inclined to support LeT, we derive an independent variable from the following survey question: “Please choose the statement that best describes your opinion: 1. Our political system must

⁵³Fair, *In Their Own Words*.

⁵⁴Owais Jafri, “JuD Plans Development, Welfare Projects in Balochistan,” *Express Tribune*, 18 April 2012, accessed at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/366515/jud-plans-development-welfare-projects-in-balochistan/>, 31 July 2017.

be changed radically through drastic action; 2. Our political system must be changed gradually by reforms; 3. Our political system is fine as it is; 4. Our political system must be defended from those who want to change it.” In the original wording of the question, response options 3 and 4 were reversed. For ease of analysis, and because wanting to defend the system is a stronger level of system commitment than being fine with the system, response categories 3 and 4 were reordered.

To evaluate Hypotheses 2, 5, 6, and 7, which assert that while Ahl-e-Hadith adherents will be more likely to support LeT, Shia, Deobandis, and Barelvis will be less likely to do so, all else being equal, we derive our second key independent variable from a survey item that indirectly queries respondents about the interpretive tradition they espouse. Directly questioning respondents about such a sensitive question is likely to elicit nonresponses or responses influenced by social desirability or other forms of bias. For this reason, we asked respondents, “If a child in your house were to study Hafz-e-Quran, or nazira, what kind of madrasa or school would you like them to attend?” The response options were Ahl-e-Hadith, Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Deobandi, Barelvi, and Shia. (We exclude the Ahl-e-Sunnat (Sunni) category because it is too indeterminate. Adherents of numerous Sunni traditions could answer in this manner, including those who adhere to the Ahl-e-Hadith, Barelvi, or Deobandi traditions. In Pakistan, JeI is considered both an Islamic tradition from which its ulema inveigh upon contemporary issues as well as a political party. Because JeI formally eschews sectarian divisions, respondents who indicate that they are Ahl-e-Sunnat or Sunni may well be adherents of JeI, as the organization encourages nonsectarian affiliations for Sunni Muslims.) We created dummy variables from each response, with 1 indicating yes and 0 indicating no.

To test Hypotheses 3 and 8, which posit, respectively, that while Punjabis are more likely to positively view LeT, the Baloch are more inclined to view it adversely. We derived our ethnic dummy variable from a survey question asking respondents to self-identify their ethnicity. We created dummy variables indicating whether the respondent self-identified as Punjabi, Pashtun, Baloch, Muhajir, or Sindhi.

Finally, to evaluate Hypothesis 4, which posits that females are more likely to support LeT than males, all else being equal, we derive our final independent variable from a measure of gender that was coded by the enumerator using visual identification. (Note that while fielding the survey, females interviewed females and males interviewed males, consistent with social norms of Pakistan.)

In addition to these independent variables, we included several control variables in our models, including income, age, education, and district. Respondents were asked for their age and highest level of education attained out of a list of increasing levels of education. The district was coded by the enumerator when the survey was conducted. The income variable was not coded by responses to a question about annual income, as doing so often elicits insincere responses or no response at all. Income is a sensitive subject in a country where tax evasion is endemic. Thus, a question was asked that measures income indirectly. Respondents were asked, “How many of the following does your household have: Internet Access (including smart phones); Fans (Ceiling, Table, Pedestal, Exhaust); Refrigerator; Radio/Cassette recorder/CD Player; Television; Tractor; Air Conditioner; Motorcycle/Scooter; Personal Computer; Land Line Phone; Mobile phone; Car.” An additive index was created from these items; the greater the number of items owned, the higher the income of the respondent was presumed to be. (To assess whether there is collinearity between the income and education variables, we ran three versions of the model. One version included just education, one included just income, and the final version—the one included in this study—included both variables. There were no substantive differences between the three versions of the model for the results related to the variables of interest. Thus, there is no issue of collinearity between education and income that is skewing the results of this analysis.)

We estimated the model using an ordered probit specification because the dependent variable is an ordinal variable with more than two choice options but fewer than 10.

RESULTS

We present our probit estimates in Table 3.

Our findings clearly support the posited relationship in Hypothesis 1 that people who support the political status quo are more supportive of LeT, at the .01 level. Conversely, wanting significant change in the Pakistani political system is a highly significant predictor of negativity toward LeT (at the .01 level). This comports with the argument that LeT, as a supporter of the political status quo in Pakistan rather than a revolutionary organization, should be viewed negatively by those who want Pakistani politics to change.

Similarly, our estimates also provide strong support for Hypotheses 2, 5, 6, and 7, which contended that while Ahl-e-Hadith adherents will be more likely to support LeT, Shia, Deobandis, and Barelvis will be more likely to oppose the group. As predicted, Ahl-e-Hadith adherence predicts

TABLE 3
*Sympathy for and Opposition to LeT Ordered Probit Model Dependent Variable:
 Assessment of LeT Index*

| <i>Independent Variables</i> | <i>Coef.</i> | <i>S.E.</i> | <i>First Difference</i> |
|------------------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| District | -.000 | .001 | |
| Pashtun | .226* | .150 | |
| Punjabi | .347*** | .136 | .045 |
| Sindhi | -.347** | .148 | |
| Baloch | -.396*** | .156 | .051 |
| Muhajir | .014 | .151 | |
| Barelvi | -.394*** | .070 | .051 |
| Ahl-e-Hadith | .299** | .080 | .037 |
| Deobandi | -.257*** | .067 | .038 |
| Shia | -.444*** | .106 | .060 |
| JeI | -.121 | .069 | |
| Female | .248*** | .051 | .032 |
| wealth | .072*** | .015 | |
| Education | -.008 | .020 | |
| Age quartile | -.004** | .002 | |
| Cut 1 | -1.260 | | |
| N | 2,270 | | |
| LR $\chi^2(14)$ | 359.34 | | |
| Prob > χ^2 | 0.000 | | |

Source: Data from the Pakistani Media and Muslim Communities: Identifying and Supporting Critical Thinking Survey 2013.

Notes: Figures are unstandardized coefficients shown alongside standard errors.

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Cut 1 refers to a "cut-point" on a standardized normal distribution. Cut points are used to calculate the predicted probabilities for each category of the dependent variable. The constant of the model would be interpreted as the inverse of Cut 1 (.777).

support for LeT at the .05 level. While there is no significant relationship between supporting JeI and LeT, there is a significant (all at the .01 level) negative relationship between being Barelvi, Shia, and Deobandi and support for LeT.

With respect to Hypotheses 3 and 8, which predicted that while Punjabis would be more likely to support LeT, all else being equal, Baloch would be more likely to oppose it, our estimates support these hypotheses. Being Punjabi is strongly and positively predictive of support at the .01 level; Pashtun ethnicity is a weakly significant predictor of positivity toward LeT at the .01 level; and Sindhi ethnicity is a moderately significant predictor of negativity toward LeT at the .05 level. However, Baloch ethnicity is a highly significant predictor of opposition to LeT at the .01 level.

Gender proved to be a highly significant predictor of attitudes toward LeT. As predicted, women are much more likely than men in Pakistan to view LeT positively at .01 level.

Of the demographic control variables, age proved to be statistically significant, with younger Pakistanis being more positive about LeT than older Pakistanis. Education did not prove a significant predictor in this model. Income did result in a significant positive correlation with support for LeT. This is likely an artifact of the fact that LeT's materials—compared with JeM's materials—are rather sophisticated. This implies that only people who are quite literate would be knowledgeable of the group and conversant with its ideology.

To determine the relative predictive power of the explanatory variables, we calculated the marginal effects (or first differences) of our independent variables. The first differences indicate the change in the probability of a respondent giving a positive assessment of LeT when the variable of interest is changed from its minimum to its maximum value, while the other independent variables are held constant at their means. We did this for each of our independent variables so that we could discern the magnitude of the impact of each independent variable upon the dependent variable. We discuss the independent variables in order of their predictive power.

The first differences estimation results reveal that the strongest predictor of positivity toward LeT is being a Punjabi. This variable has a first difference value of .045. The second most predictive variables for positivity toward LeT is being an Ahl-e-Hadith adherent, with a first difference value of .037. The third most powerful predictor of LeT support is being a supporter of the Pakistani political system. This variable has a first difference value of .034. Being female is the next most powerful predictor, with a first difference value of .034.

The most predictive variable of negativity toward LeT is being a Shia (.060). The next most predictive variables are Baloch ethnicity and adherence to Sufism (Barelvis) both with a first difference value of .051. Deobandis are the next likely category of Pakistanis to view LeT negatively with a first difference of .038. Being opposed to the Pakistani political status quo had a first difference value of .034.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to identify the factors that account for public positivity and opposition in Pakistan toward Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. We have argued that attitudes toward militant groups are driven by how individuals think such groups may serve their basic needs, namely, the need for a sense of significance. While militant groups may offer to improve safety and sustenance for potential supporters, most importantly, they stand to affect the personal significance of some individuals. Individuals are more

likely to be positive about militant groups that will make them feel more respected, more cared about, and more in control of their destinies. They will be opposed to groups that they believe will threaten their sense of personal significance. The results of this research very clearly indicate that Pakistanis think of LeT in these terms.

It must be remembered that many individuals may have very incomplete information about what a particular militant group does or what it seeks to achieve. People will look for cues about a group to determine how to assess it. In-group and out-group identities can play a powerful role in providing such cues. This likely explains why Punjabis and Ahl-e-Hadith adherents are more positive about LeT, even though the group downplays its ethnic base in its propaganda and is outside of mainstream Ahl-e-Hadith thought in its theology and beliefs about jihad and politics. Ethnicity and general Islamic tradition are very simple guideposts that people can use to determine what LeT means to them in terms of providing them a sense of significance or threatening to diminish it. Likewise, because LeT has been a stalwart ally of the Pakistani state, for Pakistanis of humble means, the group's advocacy for a political and social status quo that humiliates them seems more important than the free meals or other social benefits that LeT gives to the poor.

While the significance quest theory proved very useful in explaining sympathy for and opposition to LeT in Pakistan, there is one variable that is important to this case that cannot be measured with the data available: the role of the Pakistani state. A very interesting counterfactual question to ponder is: Would LeT be as positively viewed in Pakistan were it not supported by the Pakistani state? While some Pakistanis may hold this against LeT, other Pakistanis may be attracted to the group because they have absorbed the positive messaging provided by the Pakistani state about the group. Its support from the state in which it is based makes LeT a fairly unique militant group. Disentangling how state support benefits or hurts LeT in the eyes of the Pakistani public is a difficult but worthy question of further study.

APPENDIX 1

Positivity toward LeT by Ethnicity

| <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>Punjabi</i> | <i>Pashtun</i> | <i>Sindhi</i> | <i>Baloch</i> | <i>Muhajir</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Try to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule | 48% | 44% | 57% | 33% | 62% |
| Provide social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools | 40% | 27% | 39% | 30% | 29% |

(Continues)

TABLE 0 (Continued)

| <i>Ethnicity</i> | <i>Punjabi</i> | <i>Pashtun</i> | <i>Sindhi</i> | <i>Baloch</i> | <i>Muhajir</i> |
|--|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan | 39% | 26% | 49% | 26% | 58% |
| Try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant | 35% | 33% | 51% | 40% | 62% |
| Rid Pakistan of apostates and <i>munafiqin</i> | 37% | 34% | 51% | 44% | 64% |
| <i>Dawah</i> to spread correct Islam | 39% | 34% | 60% | 46% | 69% |
| Positivity average | 35% | 29% | 51% | 37% | 57% |

APPENDIX 2

Positivity toward LeT by Islamic Tradition

| <i>Islamic Tradition</i> | <i>Shia</i> | <i>Barelvi</i> | <i>Deobandi</i> | <i>Ahl-e-Hadith</i> | <i>Jel</i> |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------|
| Try to liberate Kashmiri Muslims from Indian rule | 62% | 40% | 44% | 54% | 58% |
| Provide social services to Muslims, like clinics and schools | 43% | 36% | 26% | 45% | 37% |
| Try to oust foreigners from Afghanistan | 43% | 36% | 30% | 47% | 39% |
| Try to make Pakistan Sharia-compliant | 41% | 26% | 34% | 45% | 41% |
| Rid Pakistan of apostates and <i>munafiqin</i> | 45% | 24% | 35% | 48% | 42% |
| <i>Dawah</i> to spread correct Islam | 50% | 28% | 36% | 47% | 45% |
| Positivity average | 44% | 55% | 34% | 43% | 47% |