

IMSIS Dissertation Feedback & Mark Sheet

Student Matriculation No.	Glasgow 2338875 DCU 17116538 Charles 31246142
Dissertation Title	Pakistani Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Syria: A Comparative Analysis of Drivers of Radicalization

INDIVIDUAL INSTITUTION GRADING

Reviewer 1 Initial Grade <i>For internal use only</i>	Reviewer 2 Initial Grade <i>For internal use only</i>	Late Submission Penalty <i>no penalty</i>
Word Count Penalty (1 UofG grade point per 500 words below/above the min/max word limit +/- 10%)		
Word Count: 20,842 Suggested Penalty: no penalty		

JOINT GRADING (subject to agreement of the external examiner and approval at Joint Exam Board)

Final Agreed Mark. (Following correspondence reviewers should list the agreed final internal grade taking before and after any penalties to be applied).
Before Penalty: C3 [12] After Penalty: C3 [12]

DISSERTATION FEEDBACK

Assessment Criteria	Rating
A. Structure and Development of Answer	
This refers to your organisational skills and ability to construct an argument in a coherent and original manner	
• <i>Originality of topic</i>	Excellent
• <i>Coherent set of research questions and/or hypothesis identified</i>	Good
• <i>Appropriate methodology and evidence of effective organisation of work</i>	Good
• <i>Logically structured argument and flow of ideas reflecting research questions</i>	Good
• <i>Application of theory and/or concepts</i>	Very Good
B. Use of Source Material	
This refers to your skills to select and use relevant information and data in a correct manner	
• <i>Evidence of reading and review of published literature</i>	Very Good
• <i>Selection of relevant primary and/or secondary evidence to support argument</i>	Good
• <i>Critical analysis and evaluation of evidence</i>	Satisfactory
• <i>Accuracy of factual data</i>	Good
C. Academic Style	
This refers to your ability to write in a formal academic manner	
• <i>Appropriate formal and clear writing style</i>	Very Good
• <i>Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation</i>	Very Good
• <i>Consistent and accurate referencing (including complete bibliography)</i>	Very Good
• <i>Is the dissertation free from plagiarism?</i>	Yes
• <i>Evidence of ethics approval included (if required based on methodology)</i>	No
• <i>Appropriate word count</i>	Yes

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ADDITIONAL WRITTEN COMMENTS

Reviewer 1

This dissertation could have done much more with the data it collected. It seems to me that, while the candidate is to be commended for the interesting research work they conducted, a stronger theoretical framework, a clearer methodology, and a more streamlined organisation of the findings would have showcased in a more efficient fashion the central argument articulated here. The sighted draft was at best a decent attempt at presenting a complete thesis: more work was certainly required before submission.

Reviewer 2

This is a very ambitious dissertation, exploring a timely topic, which has substantial policy-making relevance. It aims to examine drivers of radicalization of Pakistani foreign fighters joining conflicts in Kashmir, Afghanistan and Syria. The questions it seeks to answer are:

“(1) Are the “drivers” identified by theorists of radicalization in Western countries sufficient to explain the motivations that drive foreign fighters throughout the world? (2) Are there motivations and factors that distinguish foreign fighters from other types of extremists, such as home-grown terrorists? (3) What lessons from the literature on radicalization should be taken by scholars in the budding field of studies on foreign fighters?” (p. 2)

The student argues that the drivers identified in the existing literature on radicalization are important to explain why Pakistani individuals join these conflicts, but that - in the case of Pakistan - there are additional drivers that lead people to become foreign fighters: these are a. individuals' proximity to the conflict, b. individual's status as former foreign fighters, and c. the influence that veteran foreign fighters play on new recruits. The student also strongly advises that “cause models” are more useful than “process models” to identify drivers for radicalization.

To answer these questions, the student relies on 22 interviews conducted in Pakistan with "experts on the subject of terrorism in Pakistan, including police officers, journalists, leaders of religious organizations, researchers, and directors general of the National Counter Terrorism Authority" (p. 2).

The student clearly demonstrates to have carried out extensive work for this dissertation. However, there are some areas that appear as problematic in this work. Among these:

Theoretical framework:

The student demonstrates awareness of key debates in the existing radicalization literature. To guide his/her theoretical framework, the student operates a distinction between “cause” and “cause-and-process” models of radicalization. The student dismisses the use of “cause process models” on the basis that models cannot possibly fit all contexts, and chose to adopt “cause” models to emphasise the peculiarity of different contexts (p. 59). In the dissertation, the student demonstrates that there are single-factors that have a certain prominence in driving radicalization in Pakistan. However, there is little discussion on why “cause-process-models” are not useful in this case. As the student also noted, drivers identified by “cause-process-models” - e.g. enabling structures, ideology, proximity to a conflict, influencers – continue to be important in the case of Pakistan. The student could have developed the discussion further and explain in greater detail

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and with greater rigour to what extent “cause-process-models” remain useful – or not – in radicalization analyses.

Theory and definitions:

There it seem to be little theorization around the notion of Foreign Fighters, particularly concerning the case of Kashmir. Definitions of Foreign Fighters are built on the notion that individuals are Foreign to the conflict and the state they join. But being Kashmir a disputed territory, and having Pakistan a shared history with Kashmir, including a population with family, political, ideological, ethnic and religious ties to Kashmiri nationals, it becomes more difficult to state that Pakistani individuals are “Foreign” to the Kashmiri conflict. The definition of Foreign Fighters applied in the study seems to rely on a minimal notion of what it means to be a foreign, one that does not problematize ideas of nation, identity and belonging in post-colonial states.

Methods and methodology:

There are methods and methodological aspects of this work that I believe merit further discussion. Qualitative research methodologies allow for flexibility, but precisely for this reason there are set standards that should be given full consideration in a methodology chapter when conducting fieldwork and interviewing.

For instance, I would have expected the methodology chapter to discuss more in depth issues of ethics and methodology in interviewing. The student mentioned several times that some interviewees felt uncomfortable discussing issues of radicalization and foreign fighters in Pakistan (p. 23). In this respect, I would have expected the student to explain in greater details the steps s/he took to overcome this challenge. For instance, by providing a thorough discussion of how the student worked to gain access, built trust, and the ethical procedures adopted during the interview process. Also, I believe that issues of anonymity should have been better dealt with. For instance, if a respondent opted to remain anonymous, then it might have been more ethically sound to conceal some information concerning his/her official position. The same precautions should be adopted for interview extracts quoted in the dissertation.

A further area that merits attention is that of the methodological implications that went into the data analysis. I would have wanted to know more about how the student dealt with issues of subjectivity in qualitative research. How the student worked to minimise bias in interviewing and their analysis? Or how did the student ‘filled gaps’ in the interviewees’ responses, given that the drivers for radicalization were identified on the basis of the interviews.

This was a difficult research. The student has merits for having conducted it. However, the methodology chapter should have dealt in greater details with these issues to demonstrate that the student was sufficiently knowledgeable of the methodological procedures and ethical considerations of qualitative research.

Finally, the ethical approval for this research was not provided as part of the dissertation, and I understand this to be a requirement.

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Findings and contribution:

At times, the findings of this dissertation seem forced into a narrative that emphasise their novelty. The student claims to have identified three drivers of radicalization unique to the case of Pakistan: a. individuals' proximity to the conflict, b. individual's status as former foreign fighters, and c. the influence that veteran foreign fighters play on new recruits. While these factors are significant in the case of Pakistan, their uniqueness is debatable. For instance, it seems to be expected that proximity to a conflict would foster radicalization in neighbouring states, as indicated in the IR and Conflict Studies literatures. From this, would not be more correct to consider "proximity" an enabling factor of radicalization other than a unique driver? A similar observation goes for the role played by "veteran foreign fighters". Would not "veteran foreign fighters" fall into the category of "influencers" and "motivators", along Imams and leaders of radical groups, already identified by the existing radicalization literature? I think the dissertation produced important findings, which did not have to necessarily be presented as novel to emphasise their value in the context of Pakistan.