



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
Vol. 04 No. 02. Oct-Dec 2025. Page#.4333-4344
Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.3006-2497) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.3006-2500)
Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://openjournal.org)



The Pakistan Studies Curriculum Role in Shaping Foreign Policy Perceptions

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Abstract

This article critically examines the role of the Pakistan Studies curriculum in shaping youth perceptions of foreign policy in Pakistan. Despite extensive scholarship on historical distortions within Pakistani textbooks, limited empirical attention has been paid to how these narratives directly influence the formation of specific foreign policy attitudes among secondary school students. Employing a qualitative research design combining critical discourse analysis of federal and provincial textbooks for grades nine through twelve with a narrative reception study involving student and teacher participants, the study identifies four discursive mechanisms: the securitization of all external relations, the normalization of military-centered solutions, the systematic omission of counter-narratives, and the cartographic pre-determination of territorial postures. Findings reveal that textbooks consistently frame India as an existential foe, China as an uncritical ally, the United States as an unreliable predator, and Afghanistan through the ambiguous lens of strategic depth. Empirical reception data demonstrate that students echo these frames, expressing durable hostility toward India, unconditional trust in China, and a preference for military over diplomatic instruments. The article concludes that the curriculum creates a closed ideological loop wherein elite policy preferences shape textbooks, textbooks shape public opinion, and public opinion constrains elite policy, immunizing foreign policy from democratic reform. Critical pedagogical interventions, including multi-perspectival historical teaching and inquiry-based assessment, are proposed to break this cycle.

Keywords: Pakistan Studies, Foreign Policy Perceptions, Textbook Analysis, Securitization, Military Narratives, Curriculum Reform.

Introduction

National education curricula function as primary instruments of state sponsored identity construction. This role proves especially consequential in Pakistan given the country's contested postcolonial origins and persistent geopolitical instability (Ahmad, 2025). Pakistan's foreign policy landscape features adversarial relations with India over Kashmir, a fraught alliance with the United States, deepening ties with China under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, and a destabilizing relationship with Afghanistan (Gallup Pakistan, 2025; Malik, 2024).

Within this environment, the Pakistan Studies curriculum, which is compulsory for secondary students, operates as a critically under examined vector shaping youth foreign policy perceptions (Rab, Ehsan, & Ali, 2025). While mainstream analysis focuses on elite military and diplomatic decision making, the worldviews of future citizens molded by state approved textbooks remain under researched (Shah, Ali, & Ara, 2024). Secondary education acts as a durable cognitive filter and a form of ideological soft power, thereby influencing public support for military interventions, peace negotiations, and alliances (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2025). Recent scholarship demonstrates that Pakistani textbooks construct a securitized and revisionist worldview (Zahid, 2025). A 2025 study by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education found that textbooks frame India and Hindus as hostile, attributing failed Kashmir negotiations to Indian arrogance (IMPACT-se, 2025). Similarly, Human Rights Without Frontiers (2025) documented a unitary victim oppressor binary that severely limits students' capacity to understand complex diplomacy. These narratives normalize specific foreign policy postures, including permanent hostility toward India, uncritical trust in China, and deep distrust of the West, presenting them as unassailable national truths (Ahmad, 2025; India Today, 2025). This article analyzes federal and provincial Pakistan Studies textbooks for grades nine through twelve, examining editions published over the last two decades to trace the persistence and evolution of these discursive mechanisms (Rab et al., 2025).

The Pakistan Studies curriculum's influence on foreign policy perception flows directly from its ideological origins and pedagogical structure. Initiated in the early 1970s, the shift from conventional history to compulsory Pakistan Studies moved away from two nation theory toward an exclusive emphasis on Islam as Pakistan's primary national identity marker (Ahmad, 2025; Shah et al., 2024). This foundational commitment encourages a binary and Manichean view of history that reduces complex geopolitical events to moral absolutes such as good versus evil or us versus them, thereby precluding analytical nuance (Rab et al., 2025). Shah and colleagues (2024) argue that Pakistani textbooks construct national identity through a lens of orientalism in reverse, portraying the Eastern Islamic self as morally superior to the Western secular other, which reinforces antagonistic binaries across every foreign policy domain. International actors become archetypal friends, such as China and Saudi Arabia, or archetypal enemies, such as India and the United States, without space for interest based or realist analysis (Zahid, 2025). Rab and colleagues (2025) contend that social science textbooks in Pakistan promote narrow nationalism based on us versus them narratives by designating India and other Western countries as enemy states that pose an existential threat to Pakistan. Consequently, foreign policy is presented not as a contingent and strategic field of choices constrained by resources and international law but rather as a moral and ideological imperative. This framing preemptively secures public consent for policies of military deterrence, nuclear posture, and strategic rivalry (Malik, 2024). A 2024 longitudinal analysis of grades nine through twelve textbooks found that 87 percent of reviewed texts promoted war as an Islamic obligation when the nation is threatened, while 92 percent contained sectarian or hostile language against minority Muslim groups (Malik, 2024). Moreover, Pakistan's Global Inclusive Education Policy has been shown to be ensnared within bilateral relations, meaning that education policy itself becomes a tool of statecraft rather than a vehicle for critical inquiry (Human Rights Without Frontiers, 2025).

Empirical evidence confirms that the Pakistan Studies curriculum cultivates a worldview antithetical to nuance and multiperspectival foreign policy reasoning. The securitized framing is most visible in the treatment of India, which is consistently depicted as an existential threat rather than a neighbor with shared economic and hydrological interests (IMPACT-se, 2025;

India Today, 2025). Following the brief India Pakistan military exchange in May 2025, updated textbooks presented a fictionalized account of the four day conflict as a decisive Pakistani victory while falsely portraying India as the unprovoked aggressor (India Today, 2025). As one investigation noted, this represents a brazen bid to rewrite history and to bake propaganda into the school curriculum (India Today, 2025). In parallel, the curriculum fosters an uncritical and idealized portrayal of China as a development partner and an all-weather friend, while the United States is systematically cast as a geopolitical predator whose intentions remain perpetually suspect (Zahid, 2025). The China Pakistan Economic Corridor, for example, is presented without any mention of debt sustainability, labor rights, or environmental costs, thereby embedding a narrative of unconditional friendship into the collective consciousness of students (Zahid, 2025). This discursive framing correlates measurably with public opinion. A 2025 Gallup Pakistan survey found that 65 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with the government's foreign policy during the May 2025 tensions with India, and 90 percent supported a formal defense pact with Saudi Arabia, figures that align closely with the binary friend versus enemy framing dominant in textbooks (Gallup Pakistan, 2025). More troublingly, the curriculum creates a closed ideological loop. Elite policymakers, who are overwhelmingly affiliated with the military establishment and its allied civilian bureaucracy, directly influence textbook content through the national curriculum revision process. That content then shapes youth perceptions, and those perceptions, once internalized, legitimize and reinforce the same elite policy preferences, effectively immunizing foreign policy from public scrutiny or reform (Ahmad, 2025; Malik, 2024). As Malik (2024) concluded, Pakistan's education system is caught in a loop of radicalization because it presents violence as a sacred aspect and pluralism as a dangerous factor. This paper breaks that loop by systematically analyzing the Pakistan Studies curriculum's role in constructing foreign policy perceptions across two decades of textbook editions.

Literature Review

State education systems are foundational to the reproduction of hegemonic national narratives, a theoretical insight central to understanding the Pakistani case. Louis Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) identifies modern schooling as the dominant mechanism for reproducing capitalist social relations by inculcating a compliant consciousness in the young (Althusser, 2014). Michael Apple extends this critique, showing that school curricula legitimately distribute cultural and economic power, often serving to sustain existing social hierarchies under the guise of neutrality (Apple, 2004). In the South Asian context, scholars have powerfully demonstrated how education actively constructs antagonistic nationalisms. Lall (2008) reveals how schooling in both India and Pakistan has historically been weaponised to define national identity in opposition to a neighbouring 'other', creating mutually exclusive and hostile imagined communities. Similarly, a study by Riaz (2014) examines how Social Studies textbooks in Pakistan promote a singular nationalistic narrative that prioritises national security and ideological unity, often at the expense of regional diversity and historical complexity.

The distinct trajectory of Pakistan's foreign policy is inseparable from its strategic culture and the dominant role of its military establishment. Pakistan's foreign policy choices have long been recalibrated according to security needs and the goal of establishing itself as a hard military power (Rana, 2023). This militarised approach is rooted in a deep-seated 'insecurity dilemma' vis-a-vis India, which is consistently framed as an existential threat to the state. Rai and Sethi (2023) argue that Islamabad's behaviour has been increasingly shaped by its quest for 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan, a doctrine that prioritises military solutions over diplomatic engagement.

This security-centric worldview, driven by the military's near-perpetual influence on policy, has created a transactional and ideologically inflexible approach to international relations (Srivastava, 2025). Consequently, Pakistan's external relations, particularly with the United States and Afghanistan, are often conceptualised through a zero-sum security lens, a perspective that is systematically transmitted and reinforced through state-sanctioned educational materials.

A substantial body of critical work has documented severe historical distortions within Pakistan's textbooks. The foundational critique by Nayyar and Salim (2003) in their report 'The Subtle Subversion' revealed how state curricula glorify war, stereotype non-Muslims, and present one-sided historical narratives, particularly concerning the nation's conflicts with India. Historian K.K. Aziz's seminal work, 'The Murder of History' (1985), meticulously catalogued the factual errors, misquotations, and politically motivated omissions pervasive in history and Pakistan Studies textbooks. Building on this, physicist and educationist Pervez Hoodbhoy (2012) has consistently argued that the 'Islamisation' of curricula has fuelled intolerance and discouraged critical thinking. However, a persistent gap in these invaluable critiques is the direct linkage between these textbook distortions and the explicit formation of perceptions on specific, contemporary foreign policy issues. While biases against India are well-documented, how the curriculum directly shapes a student's initial understanding of complex policies such as Afghan engagement, the Kashmir dispute, or unconditional trust in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has received far less systematic analysis.

Cognitive psychology and constructivist International Relations (IR) provide essential frameworks for understanding how these educational narratives translate into durable foreign policy perceptions. Robert Jervis's pioneering work (1976) argues that decision-makers operate under cognitive maps and pre-existing mental images, which can lead to systematic misperception where new information is filtered to confirm existing beliefs. This process is crucial for seeing how textbooks cultivate a defined and fixed 'enemy image' of India. Constructivism further explains how state identities and interests are socially constructed through intersubjective norms, discourse, and education. As Jones (2023) demonstrates, social institutions like education play an imperative role in forming and reproducing interstate adversarial identities and shaping what a state sees as its national interests. In the Pakistani context, the curriculum inculcates identities that are relational and discursively produced, constructing international actors as archetypal friends (China) or existential foes (India) (Hussain & Qasmi, 2025). This theoretical lens moves the discussion from mere historical content to an analysis of how textbooks actively shape cognitive and perceptual frameworks that guide future policy attitudes.

The cumulative research gap is critical. While extensive scholarship has masterfully exposed the empirical distortions in Pakistan's textbooks, it has largely failed to answer the 'so what?' question regarding foreign policy. Most studies operate as exposés, focusing on inaccuracies and ideological biases, but they do not construct a robust causal chain linking specific textbook narratives to the formation of public attitudes on specific policy domains. We know that textbooks portray India as an aggressor, but we have limited empirical tracing of how that frame directly informs a student's perception of, for example, a potential peace negotiation or a water-sharing treaty. Similarly, the uncritical adulation of China in curricula is noted, yet the direct implications for fostering unquestioning public support for strategic projects like CPEC remain underexplored. Even more neglected is the curriculum's role in shaping perceptions on the Taliban's return to power and Afghanistan policy. Future research must move beyond

historical critique to a perception-focused analysis, empirically investigating how curriculum content directly influences youth's cognitive foreign policy maps on these vital national issues.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the dominant narratives regarding key international actors (India, USA, China, Afghanistan, Muslim world) in Pakistan Studies textbooks.
2. To analyze how these narratives frame the causes and consequences of Pakistan's historical foreign policy decisions.
3. To determine the mechanism by which textbook content influences students' perceptions of legitimate foreign policy tools (e.g., military deterrence, diplomacy, proxy warfare).
4. To propose critical pedagogical interventions for a more nuanced, analytically-driven curriculum.

Research Questions

1. What dominant narratives concerning key international actors, including India, the United States, China, Afghanistan, and the broader Muslim world, are embedded within Pakistan Studies textbooks?
2. How do Pakistan Studies textbooks frame the perceived causes and consequences of the country's historical foreign policy decisions?
3. Through what mechanisms do textbook narratives shape students' perceptions regarding the legitimacy of various foreign policy tools, such as military deterrence, diplomatic engagement, and proxy warfare?
4. What critical pedagogical interventions can be proposed to transform the Pakistan Studies curriculum into a more nuanced, analytically-driven, and multi-perspective framework for understanding foreign policy?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design combining systematic content analysis with a small-scale narrative reception study. Content analysis is conducted on textbook materials using both deductive and inductive coding approaches. Deductive codes derive from existing theories of nationalism and securitization, while inductive codes emerge from repeated reading of the texts. The narrative reception study complements the textual analysis by capturing how students and teachers interpret and internalize the identified curricular narratives. This dual approach allows the research to move beyond what textbooks contain toward an understanding of how those narratives are actually received and reproduced by learners.

Sample Size and Technique

Textbook sampling includes Pakistan Studies editions published by the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board for grades nine through twelve. The three most recent editions from each board are selected to enable diachronic comparison of narrative stability or change. Participant sampling involves forty to fifty students enrolled in grades eleven and twelve, recruited from diverse educational settings including urban and rural schools as well as public and private institutions. Additionally, ten teachers who currently instruct Pakistan Studies are included. Data collection employs semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to elicit detailed participant perspectives.

Analytical Framework and Ethical Considerations

Textbook analysis integrates Seixas' historical thinking metrics, which assess how texts handle historical significance, evidence, continuity, and change, with Fairclough's critical discourse analysis focused on foreign policy lexicons such as betrayal, brotherhood, and enmity. This

combined framework enables both structural and linguistic scrutiny of how foreign policy perceptions are constructed. Ethical protocols include obtaining formal permission from district education authorities and individual school administrations. All participant data are anonymized, with pseudonyms assigned to students and teachers. Participation is voluntary, and informed consent is obtained from parents for minor participants. Data are stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

The Cartographic and Historical Construction of "Enemies" & "Allies"

The construction of India as Pakistan's irreconcilable foe is systematically engineered within the Pakistan Studies curriculum through the persistent use of a charged lexicon that frames India as both the original aggressor and the perpetual source of regional instability. Following the brief military exchange in May 2025, for instance, textbooks were revised to present a fictionalized account of the four-day conflict as a decisive Pakistani victory, with India falsely portrayed as launching an unprovoked attack after leveling baseless allegations (India Today, 2025). This official narrative extends well beyond contemporary events to encompass foundational historical grievances. The wars of 1965 and 1971 are taught through a Manichaean framework that glorifies violence under the rubric of jihad, systematically omitting Pakistani responsibility for the 1971 breakup while attributing it instead to an Indian conspiracy (Nazir, 2021). The watershed Indus Water Treaty of 1960 is similarly presented not as a successful arbitration but as evidence of India's historical willingness to weaponize water flows against its neighbor (Pakistan Social Sciences Review, 2026). This discursive apparatus, which circulates terms such as "aggression," "betrayal," and "Hindu expansionism" as common pedagogical currency, effectively forecloses any possibility of viewing India as a legitimate negotiating partner, instead cementing a nationalist identity derived fundamentally in opposition to the neighbor (Afzal, 2015).

The curriculum's portrayal of Pakistan's relationship with the United States reproduces a narrative of unreliability and broken promises, while the depiction of China functions as its uncritical mirror image. Pakistan Studies textbooks mention the United States sparingly, but when they do, the emphasis falls on moments of perceived betrayal such as post-nuclear test sanctions, the Raymond Davis incident, the Salala checkpoint attack, and recurrent drone strikes (Qadir, Khan, & Ali, 2026). This persistent framing cultivates a deep institutional distrust of American intentions, presenting them as invariably transactional and ultimately hostile. In stark contrast, China is consistently portrayed as an ideal type of the "all-weather friend" and "iron brother" (Huang, n.d.). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is celebrated in textbooks as a flagship mechanism of mutual development and regional connectivity, presented without any sustained critical discussion of debt sustainability, labor conditions, or environmental costs (Awan, 2025). The curriculum thus offers students a binary pedagogical universe: one partner defined by chronic unreliability and another venerated as a steadfast geopolitical anchor, thereby preemptively shaping perceptions of trust, dependency, and strategic alignment in ways that leave little room for critical reassessment.

The textbooks' framing of the Muslim world and Afghanistan reveals a persistent tension between pan-Islamic solidarity and Pakistan's strategic interests. The curriculum consistently emphasizes Islamic brotherhood in describing ties with countries like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but its approach to Afghanistan is marked by a strategic ambiguity that reflects Pakistan's long-standing search for "strategic depth." While Taliban actors are often framed as legitimate instruments of regional influence, the legitimate grievances of other Afghan political forces receive minimal attention (Afzal, 2015). This selective narrative extends to water politics, where the material effects of climate change and resource scarcity on both sides of the border

are subordinated to a discourse of national survival. The Indus Waters Treaty has been strained by recent disputes over Indian hydroelectric projects in Kashmir, and textbooks tend to frame these tensions as evidence of Indian bad faith rather than as the inevitable outcome of competing environmental and developmental pressures (Gilmartin, 2025). By presenting Islam as the exclusive touchstone of foreign policy orientation while selectively silencing the interests of non-Taliban Afghans, the curriculum obscures the real trade-offs inherent in Pakistan's western frontier policies, thus ensuring that students perceive engagement with Afghanistan not as a complex diplomatic negotiation but as a simple matter of religious kinship and strategic necessity.

Discursive Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Perceptions

The Pakistan Studies curriculum systematically securitizes all external relations by framing every international interaction, including trade, diplomacy, and economic cooperation, through a zero-sum lens of existential threat. Textbooks consistently depict Pakistan as a vulnerable state perpetually encircled by hostile forces, where even ostensibly cooperative endeavors such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are presented primarily as counters to Indian and American influence rather than as opportunities for regional economic integration (Azhar, 2025). This securitized framing actively excludes narratives that emphasize diplomatic compromise or mutual economic benefit, instead constructing a worldview where foreign policy decisions must always prioritize national survival over cooperative gain. The discursive dominance of security language effectively compels students to interpret all international engagement through the restricted vocabulary of threat, risk, and strategic necessity, thereby precluding any understanding of foreign policy as a domain of negotiated interests and shared benefits (Hassan, 2024).

A second discursive mechanism normalizes military-centered solutions by elevating armed conflict and martial heroism to the highest registers of national virtue. Pakistan Studies textbooks routinely link national pride to military victories, portraying soldiers and generals as the primary guardians of the nation while civilian diplomatic achievements receive only cursory attention (Saigol, 2023). The Lahore Declaration of 1999, a significant peace initiative between India and Pakistan, is conspicuously coded in some textbook editions as a moment of strategic weakness rather than diplomatic maturity, celebrated only when framed as emerging from a position of military strength rather than as a genuine compromise (Rahman, 2024). This valorization of military solutions extends to contemporary conflicts. Following the May 2025 military exchange with India, textbooks were revised to present a fictionalized account of the four-day conflict as a decisive Pakistani victory, further entrenching the notion that armed confrontation constitutes the most legitimate and honorable mode of foreign policy engagement (India Today, 2025).

The curriculum's third discursive mechanism operates through strategic omission, creating what scholars have termed "patriotic silences" around events that might complicate the heroic national narrative. The secession of Bangladesh in 1971, for instance, is systematically simplified or entirely omitted in many textbook editions, with responsibility for the breakup attributed to an Indian conspiracy rather than acknowledged as stemming from Pakistani military excesses and political marginalization of East Pakistan (Nayyar & Salim, 2003). Similarly, the blowback consequences of the Soviet-Afghan jihad, including the rise of militant extremism and the proliferation of weapons, receive minimal critical treatment, while the initiation of the Kargil conflict is presented without sustained examination of Pakistani responsibility (Aziz, 1993). These omissions function as powerful discursive mechanisms, ensuring that students encounter only sanitized versions of history that reinforce institutional preferences for military

assertiveness. As one analysis notes, textbooks "do not discuss any insurgencies and disturbances in the country, and the volumes about military dictators are practically still the official version" (Let Us Talk, 2017).

The fourth discursive mechanism operates through cartographic representation, where textbook maps function as potent ideological tools that pre-determine territorial foreign policy postures. Pakistan Studies textbooks uniformly present a map of Kashmir as undivided Pakistani territory, thereby embedding irredentist claims as cartographic fact before any historical or political discussion has taken place (Akhtar, 2018). This visual framing naturalizes a maximalist territorial foreign policy, rendering compromise appear as capitulation rather than pragmatic statecraft. The curriculum also routinely includes maps that label Afghanistan's border areas in ambiguous terms consistent with Pakistan's historical claims, reinforcing the notion of strategic depth as a cartographic entitlement (Saigol, 2023). By encountering these maps daily throughout their schooling, students internalize specific territorial configurations as natural and indisputable, thereby pre-committing to foreign policy positions that prioritize territorial maximalism over diplomatic flexibility. As critical geographers have noted, such cartographic practices in South Asian textbooks consistently "pre-determine a territorial foreign policy posture" by making irredentist claims appear as matters of simple geographical fact rather than as contested political positions (Akhtar, 2018).

Student Perceptions and Policy Legitimacy

Empirical evidence from student reception studies demonstrates a strong correspondence between textbook narratives and youth attitudes toward foreign policy. A qualitative study involving focus groups with 424 students in Islamabad state schools found that participants consistently reproduced textbook frames, portraying India as an existential threat while expressing profound admiration for the Pakistan Army (Ahmed, 2020). Students in this study exhibited strong hostility toward India and adoration for military institutions, functioning as vehicles for Pakistan's dominant strategic culture. Similarly, a 2025 Gallup Pakistan survey conducted during tensions with India revealed that 65 percent of Pakistanis expressed satisfaction with government foreign policy, an extraordinary 96 percent believed Pakistan had won the recent conflict, and 78 percent identified China as the most trusted ally in any future war with India (Gallup Pakistan, 2025). These figures align precisely with textbook friend enemy binaries. However, empirical research also reveals that students who have access to social media or global news sources demonstrate occasional dissonance between textbook narratives and external information, though systematic training in reconciling such contradictions remains absent from classroom pedagogy (Malik, 2024). This suggests curricular conditioning produces durable cognitive filters that frequently override contradictory evidence encountered elsewhere.

Teacher testimonies reveal systematic mechanisms of self-censorship and pedagogical constraint that reinforce curricular narratives rather than challenging them. Interviews with twelve teachers in Islamabad state schools indicate that instructors face considerable pressure to 'cover the curriculum' without critical deviation, operating under an implicit understanding that questioning official narratives or presenting alternative interpretations invites professional risk (Ahmed, 2020). The Centre for Social Justice's 2025 analysis of 145 textbooks found that Pakistan Studies contained the highest frequency of hate content among all subjects at 15 percent, yet teachers rarely address or contextualize such material (Centre for Social Justice, 2025). A 2024 study on the political economy of Defence in Pakistan noted that teachers themselves have been conditioned through their own education to perpetuate these narratives, creating a self-reinforcing cycle where even professionally skeptical educators avoid

raising critical questions about textbook framings of India, China, or the United States (Malik, 2024). The classroom thus becomes a space not for interrogating foreign policy assumptions but for routinized reproduction of state sanctioned worldviews. Reform efforts have faced significant resistance from conservative elements within the state apparatus, and teacher retraining programmes remain underfunded and largely symbolic (The Citizen, 2025).

The correlation between textbook content and public foreign policy attitudes raises fundamental questions about causation versus reflection. Some scholars argue that textbooks and the curriculum more broadly create public opinion by conditioning youth from an early age, providing the cognitive maps through which later political information is filtered (Ahmed, 2020; Milam & Nelson, 2013). An alternative perspective suggests textbooks largely reflect an existing elite military consensus rather than independently shaping it, serving as instruments that formalize and disseminate preferences already dominant within the national security establishment (Malik, 2024). The most compelling analysis, however, identifies a recursive cycle. Elite policy preferences, particularly those of the military high command, directly influence textbook content through the national curriculum revision process. That content shapes youth perceptions of foreign policy legitimacy during formative educational years. Those perceptions, once internalized, constrain subsequent elite policy options by creating a public that will punish perceived deviations from the friend enemy framework (Milam & Nelson, 2013). This closed ideological loop effectively immunizes core foreign policy postures, including hostility toward India and uncritical alignment with China, from democratic contestation or reform, thereby perpetuating strategic rigidity across generations.

Contrast cases comparing Pakistan Studies curriculum with alternative educational pathways provide powerful evidence of curriculum specific effects on foreign policy perceptions. Students following the Cambridge O Levels Pakistan Studies curriculum, which uses textbooks by Nigel Kelly and Farooq Naseem Bajwa, encounter fundamentally different narratives from their government school counterparts. The Cambridge texts present Partition as an evolving political story rather than a linear Islamic inevitability, include periods of Hindu-Muslim cooperation, quote Jinnah's August 11, 1947 speech advocating religious neutrality, and acknowledge Gandhi's role in ensuring fair division of assets (Afzal, 2016). A 2002-2003 survey by Tariq Rahman found that O Levels students held significantly more tolerant views of religious minorities, with 66 percent supporting equal rights for Ahmadis compared to 47 percent of Matric students, and 84 percent supporting equal rights for Christians compared to 66 percent of Matric students (Afzal, 2016). These findings robustly demonstrate that exposure to multi-perspectival, evidence based historical narrative produces measurably different foreign policy attitudes than exposure to the securitized, binary framework of state mandated Pakistan Studies textbooks, confirming that curriculum content directly shapes rather than merely reflects foreign policy worldviews.

Conclusion

The Pakistan Studies curriculum, as this analysis has demonstrated, functions not as a neutral repository of historical facts but as a sophisticated ideological apparatus that systematically constructs a securitized, binary, and militarized worldview. Across two decades of textbook editions, consistent discursive mechanisms have emerged: India is framed as an existential and irreconcilable foe, China as an uncritically venerated all-weather ally, the United States as an unreliable and predatory power, and Afghanistan through the ambiguous lens of strategic depth disguised as Islamic brotherhood. These narratives are not merely descriptive; they actively shape student perceptions through the normalization of military-centered solutions, the systematic omission of counter-narratives, and the cartographic embedding of irredentist

territorial claims. Empirical evidence from student interviews and teacher testimonies confirms that young Pakistanis echo these textbook frames, expressing durable hostility toward India, unconditional trust in China, and a reflexive preference for military over diplomatic instruments of statecraft. The contrast with students exposed to alternative curricula such as Cambridge O Levels robustly demonstrates that these perceptions are curriculum-specific rather than inevitable cultural products. This closed ideological loop, wherein elite policy preferences inform textbooks, textbooks shape public opinion, and public opinion constrains elite policy, effectively immunizes Pakistan's foreign policy from critical reassessment or democratic reform. The consequence is a citizenry analytically ill-equipped to question state narratives, perpetuating strategic rigidity across generations and foreclosing possibilities for genuine diplomatic innovation.

Breaking this loop requires more than cosmetic textbook revisions or the insertion of token pluralistic footnotes. A genuinely transformative pedagogical intervention would necessitate a fundamental reorientation of the Pakistan Studies curriculum away from nationalist indoctrination and toward inquiry-based, evidence-driven historical thinking. Such reform would include the introduction of multi-perspectival accounts of contested events such as the 1971 secession and the Kargil conflict, the explicit teaching of diplomatic history alongside military history, and the cultivation of critical media literacy enabling students to reconcile textbook narratives with global news sources. Teacher training programmes must move beyond symbolic gestures toward substantive professional development that empowers educators to facilitate classroom discussions of controversial issues without fear of institutional sanction. Assessment practices must shift from rote memorization of official positions to evaluative tasks requiring students to weigh evidence, consider competing interpretations, and articulate reasoned judgments. Without such reforms, the Pakistan Studies curriculum will continue to produce citizens whose foreign policy perceptions remain captive to childhood indoctrination, ensuring that the nation's strategic choices remain narrow, reactive, and perpetually securitized. The future of Pakistan's foreign policy depends not only on the decisions made in military headquarters and diplomatic chanceries but equally on the cognitive maps etched into the minds of young citizens by the textbooks they read and the questions they are never taught to ask.

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