

Admission Test

M.Phil Political Science

13th October 2021

Time duration: 2 hours

Please read the following two articles. Then, write two essays (one essay per article) which include:

1. Summary of the overall argument(s) of the author
2. Discussion of the evidence provided by the author for the argument(s)
3. Discussion of your agreement/disagreement with the author, and why/why don't you agree

Please make sure to give yourself enough time for each essay. The two articles are given below.

Article 1

Women during the pandemic

Rafia Zakaria

ONE year ago, the world ran on different rules. The rhythm of day was different, the management of time was different, people behaved differently and were scared of different things. One custom of that bygone pre-pandemic world was the division of male and female work and space.

In Pakistan, where the number of females in the workforce is below 30 per cent, women mostly stayed at home and men went to work. When the men left in the morning, the women turned to the repetitive tasks of washing and cooking that make a household run efficiently.

All of this changed when the pandemic hit. Men began to stay at home either because they lost their job or because their employer wanted them to work from home. The small respite that their wives and mothers and sisters had during the day when men did not dominate and demand this or that was taken away from the women. As men stayed home day after day, they required waiting on, a cup of tea now, a meal prepared fresh not just for dinner but also for lunch. They dirtied dishes and created a mess.

Schools also closed and the children too made their own demands, their own messes, trapped as they were in the home. Pakistani women thus were caught in a 24/7 cycle of work, trying to sate appetites, calm tempers and maintain harmony in an uncertain and constrained world.

Women everywhere are the primary casualties of the coronavirus pandemic, having had to pay the price whether or not they were infected with the virus. Data from around the world substantiates this truth. In China, peer-reviewed studies reveal a 300pc increase in violence against women. In Lebanon, there has been a 45pc increase in violence against women. In the United Kingdom, violence against women has doubled from the 10-year average. Similar increases in violence have also been reported in Germany and Tunisia. Next door in India, the onset of the pandemic has led to at least a 21pc increase in violence against women.

The statistics quoted here are all from peer-reviewed studies in journals. It is very likely that the situation is far worse than what is being reported. In Pakistan, social workers and those who work in shelters and in other facilities that attend to abused women, report an exponential increase. The constant presence of men and the absence of any external outlet for women have created a pressure-cooker situation.

The situation of working women is just as bad. Those who have been told to work from home find that no one in the household seems to understand that they have to attend to work duties during work hours. These women find themselves forced to watch children and also be available for Zoom calls or other work interactions. Many others, like the 250,000 American women who were let go of by their employers in January 2021, have just lost their jobs and their income. The pandemic has set them years behind their male counterparts in career advancement.

The meaning of all these statistics is that in the post-pandemic world women will be at an even greater disadvantage than they were before it started. Those Pakistani working women who have either been fired or have had to quit their jobs because of the pandemic may not be able to return to work after it is over. The ability to bring in an income plays a huge role in the power women wield in their households; the lost earning potential, therefore will reduce their ability to make decisions in the household and to protect their own rights. This resection of women from the workforce is likely to have society-wide effects where cultural mores that keep women out of the workplace will be strengthened.

None of these realities are being talked about in Pakistan. This past International Women's Day, a television channel hosted a conservative female social worker who could not stop talking about how the pandemic was a blessing in disguise because it permitted families to spend quality time with each other. Some in government have also propagated this kind of fantasy because very few, if any, efforts have been made to collect statistics about exactly how many women are being abused. Nor has there been any work done to provide additional resources to shelters and legal aid cells who are trying to help these women. Instead, the ludicrous fantasy that imagines families living together without any conflict and without women waiting on everyone else all the time, has been nursed and propagated.

Pakistan needs to wake up. The women of the country cannot be expected to shoulder all the burden of housekeeping, childcare, studies and work from home. Vaccinations are now available for the Covid-19 virus but no pre-emptive solution is present for a society and a world that has just been heaping the entire burden of a terrible and catastrophic event on its women. Men must be held answerable for the cruelty and selfishness they have exhibited this past year, attitudes that they have never questioned or considered. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and indeed that is what has happened to many Pakistani males who stand and watch and live their lives, oblivious to the burdens and abuse they heap on Pakistani women.

Article 2

Pakistan Pitches Afghanistan's New Taliban Government to the World

Michael Kugelman

Pakistan has launched a global campaign to garner support for the Taliban government in Afghanistan, with senior officials making the pitch for engagement in speeches, op-eds, and interviews, as well as through diplomacy with Western governments. Islamabad has called for immediate development assistance to the country and for sanctions on the regime to be removed.

The gist of Pakistan's message is that failure to engage with the Taliban will doom Afghanistan to humanitarian disaster and other destabilizing outcomes. In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly last weekend,

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said, "There is only one way to go. We must strengthen and stabilize the current government, for the sake of the people of Afghanistan." He struck a similar note in a *Washington Post* op-ed this week.

No other government has made such a direct and sustained pitch for engagement with the Taliban. This isn't a surprise: Pakistan was one of only three countries to recognize the Taliban when they held power in the 1990s and the last country to end that recognition. It sheltered the Taliban's top leadership for much of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan. As I wrote for *Foreign Policy* earlier this month, Pakistan is recalibrating its support for the Taliban as the group again transitions from an insurgency to a government.

On one level, Islamabad's argument for recognizing the Taliban makes sense. As Afghanistan's eastern neighbor, Pakistan has good reason to worry about the potential spillover effects if the government collapses—refugees, drug trafficking, cross-border terrorism. Afghanistan's need for humanitarian assistance is critical. This week, CNN reported that food prices have risen by 30 percent and fuel prices by 40 percent.

Moreover, there's nothing unusual about countries (including the United States) engaging with brutal regimes, and studies show that sanctions often hurt common people more than their governments.

But Islamabad's argument is still a tough sell, in part because of the messenger itself. Pakistan doesn't engender a lot of trust when it comes to Afghanistan policy because of its long-standing support for the Taliban, including the Haqqani network faction, which is implicated in some of the deadliest attacks in the country. It is this very history of support that belies Pakistan's contention that it doesn't deserve blame for the Taliban takeover.

Pakistan is emphasizing its positive contributions in Afghanistan, including its help in delivering relief supplies and evacuating foreign nationals. That might not convince foreign governments, which may cynically view Pakistan's promotion of the Taliban regime as a ploy to get much-needed cash for its friends.

Additionally, Islamabad's main assertion—that the Taliban are more likely to moderate their policies if they are assured of continuous assistance—is questionable. The Taliban haven't indicated that their fundamental ideology has changed, even after getting what they have long wanted: legitimacy from Washington after a 2020 deal, and the withdrawal of all U.S. troops. The hard-line interim government is just the latest example of the Taliban's defiance. The more the group is given, the more it seemingly doubles down.

The Taliban seek international legitimacy. The group doesn't want to become a global pariah, as its regime was in the 1990s. But Pakistani efforts to help forestall that outcome face many obstacles. No Western country has indicated any intention of recognizing the Taliban regime. Even some regional actors expected to play a major role post-withdrawal—Iran, Russia, Turkey, Tajikistan, Qatar—have expressed concerns about the Taliban's lack of respect for rights and inclusivity.

This suggests that for the foreseeable future, any global engagement with the Taliban will likely be limited. Khan's calls for the world to "strengthen and stabilize" the new government in Kabul may well go ignored.