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MUSLIMS, MARKETS, AND THE MEANING OF A "GOOD" EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Matthew J. Nelson

Abstract

This paper examines the nature of local educational demands in Pakistan. I draw on a survey of parents in and around the city of Rawalpindi, and show that parents favor religious education, as opposed to secular education, far more than international education-sector reformers have generally been inclined to expect. This raises complex questions regarding the implications of "market-oriented" educational reforms in Pakistan and, possibly, other parts of the Muslim world.

Keywords: Pakistan, educational reform, religious education, Islam

> We must not forget the question of . . . how one ought to be educated. For in modern times, there are . . . no generally accepted assumptions about what the young should learn, either for virtue or the best life; nor yet is it clear whether their education ought to be conducted with more concern for the intellect than for the character of the soul.
>
> —Aristotle, *The Politics*

For several years, students of comparative politics have struggled with the question of culture and, more specifically, the question of cultural difference. Some believe that cultural differences matter a great deal and lead individuals to respond to the same institutional incentive structures in

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very different ways.[1] Others, however, view cultural differences as mattering very little. They argue that individual preferences have begun to converge in a dynamic and thoroughly interconnected global marketplace, and, as a result, institutional reform initiatives in one cultural context generally produce more or less the same outcome in other contexts as well.[2] These contrasting perspectives raise the interesting question of how the substantive features of individual *preferences* affect the outcome of targeted institutional *change.*

Naturally, the implications of this question become extremely difficult to ignore in relation to the question of *market-oriented* reforms. Indeed, for those interested in institutional reform in general, market-oriented reforms are particularly interesting precisely because they draw our attention to the causal significance of substantive local *demands.* In this article, I limit myself to the question of educational reform, and draw special attention to the importance of local "demands" regarding education. In particular, I focus on the link between markets, values, and educational outcomes defined in terms of curricular content. In an environment increasingly dominated by the notion of "school choice," I ask the following types of questions: What do parents demand? What is the meaning of a "good" education? And, which types of schools are the most likely to provide it?

The role of market forces is a matter of considerable significance for those with an interest in the trajectory of contemporary educational reform throughout the Muslim world. Some who focus on the salient features of cultural and religious difference argue that market forces are likely to draw parents' attention to the enduring importance of Islam, but others disagree. In contrast, they focus on the convergence of educational norms around the world and argue that market forces will not draw parents *toward* Islam but rather *away* from it.

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1. An excellent illustration of this point appears in Marshall Sahlins, "Cosmologies of Capitalism: The Trans-Pacific Sector of the World System" in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 412–55. Also see Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

2. One rather well-known example of this perspective appears in the work of Barrington Moore, Jr., *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1966). He concluded that, country-specific cultural differences notwithstanding, the origins of "democracy" lay in the emergence of a national bourgeoisie. In essence, he argued that a democracy could not emerge without a bourgeoisie. The most common expression of this perspective, however, surfaces in the rational-choice tradition, much of which seeks to illuminate the relationship between carefully defined incentive structures and patterns of change that are not "culturally specific." See, for example, Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and David Laitin, *Language Repertoires and State Construction in Africa* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

In what follows, I provide a brief discussion of the literature concerning market-oriented educational reforms in general and, also, with specific reference to the Muslim world. This discussion focuses on the parameters of an enduring dispute regarding the substantive features of local educational demands—religious demands on the one hand and secular demands on the other. In effect, I argue that the terms of existing *theoretical debates* regarding this issue hinge on a simple *empirical question*—namely, "what do parents demand?" As I point out, this is not a new question. In fact, fluctuations in the salience of religious and non-religious preferences are well documented in the history of private education throughout the Muslim world.[3]

I then take a closer look at the implications of recent market-oriented reforms by presenting the results of a survey undertaken in the city of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, during the summer of 2003. This survey was designed to illuminate the substantive features of local educational demands in an educational environment increasingly dominated by the terms of "school choice." Not surprisingly, given the history of demand-driven reforms undertaken elsewhere in the Muslim world, I found that religious education figures prominently in the local educational landscape. In fact, nearly half of those I interviewed (41%) identified religious education as their "top educational priority."

I found that those living in Rawalpindi tended to be sincerely devoted to the pursuit of religious education. In fact the substance of local educational demands did not point to any pattern of convergence with any specific global norms—for example, global secular norms. Instead, I found that scholars and policy makers with an appreciation for the permutations of cultural *difference* are far more likely to understand the substantive features of local educational demands and, thus, the outcomes to be expected from market-oriented reforms, than those without such an appreciation.

"School Choice" and the Nature of Local Educational Demands

Kevin B. Smith has argued that scholars and policy makers alike have failed to devote sufficient attention to a disinterested assessment of local educational "demands" even though the relationship in the U.S. among education, educational reform, and expanding notions of "school choice" has been analyzed, in considerable detail, by education specialists.[4] This omission is surprising considering

3. See Jarmo Houtsonen, "Traditional Qur'anic Education in a Southern Moroccan Village," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26:3 (1994), p. 489. See also Patricia Horvatich, "Ways of Knowing Islam," *American Ethnologist* 21:4 (1994), pp. 811–26 (regarding the Philippines); and John Damis, "The Free-School Phenomenon: The Cases of Tunisia and Algeria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5:4 (1974), pp. 434–49.

4. Kevin B. Smith, "Review of *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*," *Perspectives on Politics* 1:3 (2003), pp. 593–94.

that "school choice" initiatives have become increasingly popular and widespread. In fact, scholars and policy makers have demonstrated a remarkably consistent attitude in turning their attention away from what individual preferences *are* toward a politically motivated account of what scholars and policy makers believe they *should be.*[5]

This omission raises an important question concerning the substantive features of local educational demands and, more specifically, the relationship between (a) demands in general and (b) demands in favor of specific religious values. Do individual preferences converge around a secular liberal norm or not? And, if they do *not* converge around a secular liberal norm, what does this mean for the trajectory of market-oriented educational reforms in different parts of the world?

Market Forces and the Nature of Local Demands: Market Structure vs. Private Demands

Modern states routinely begin with the assumption that community values are not intrinsically "given." On the contrary, they must be "taught." In fact, authoritarian and democratic governments alike routinely argue that education must be regarded as an important feature of the state-building enterprise as a whole. What often differentiates them is not their commitment to public education per se but rather the "content" of the education that each type of regime is inclined to provide.

During the past 20 to 30 years, scholars have witnessed a remarkable (some would say "democratizing") shift in the prevailing wisdom on this topic. *Private* education is increasingly regarded as a viable alternative for those interested in sweeping educational reform not only in North America and Europe, but also throughout the world. International development agencies—including those associated with the U.N.—have thus taken up the terms of a debate that began in the United States and extended it to education ministries and community-based organizations in other parts of the world including Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In fact, a cursory glance at the literature produced by prominent development agencies like the World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) suggests that questions regarding the value of "public-private educational partnerships," with a special emphasis on the word "private," are no longer confined to the U.S.[6]

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5. Kevin B. Smith and Kenneth J. Meier, "Public Choice in Education: Markets and the Demand for Quality Education," *Political Research Quarterly* 48:3 (1995), p. 462.

6. See "Private and Public Initiatives Working Together in Health and Education," World Bank Group, <http://worldbank.org/html/extdr/hnp/health/ppi/pubpri2b.htm>. Also see "Public-Private Partnerships in Education" (Tokyo: Asian Development Bank, May 29–June 7, 2000), pp. 1–19, <http://www.ipfa.org/cgi/documents/documents.cgi?t= template.htm&a=179>.

Those who argue in favor of expanding "school choice" typically maintain that the failures of existing educational systems are related to the "structure" of the existing marketplace. In particular, they note that the existing marketplace tends to favor monopolies controlled by the state. Since these monopolies are regarded as inherently unresponsive to shifts in the nature of local educational "demands," they insist that the path to improvement lies in eliminating (or reducing) the monopolistic role of the state.

This line of argumentation, however, raises a number of questions about the relationship among markets, competition, and local "choices" in favor of religion. Some believe that market-oriented reforms—and, hence, lower levels of public-sector control—will promote *lower* levels of interest in religious education because individual preferences have begun to converge presumably in favor of secularism around the world. Others disagree, suggesting that lower levels of state control will promote *higher* levels of interest in religious education in what Mark Chaves, Peter J. Schraeder, and Mario Sprindys have termed higher levels of religious "vitality."[7] In fact, Chaves and his colleagues argue that local modes of religious expression will become increasingly "vibrant," "popular," and "politically significant" whenever they are less thoroughly regulated by the state. In other words, "marketization" allows for an *increase* in the level of what Chaves and his colleagues refer to as religious "enthusiasm."[8]

My argument reinforces this conclusion, but it arrives at the same point in a different way. Indeed, Chaves and his colleagues may be correct when they highlight the connection between "markets" and "religiosity," but the underlying causal mechanism is not necessarily found in a description of "markets" or "market structure" as Chaves and his colleagues suggest.[9] Instead, I argue that the underlying causal mechanism is captured in an empirically compelling account of local religious demands. In essence, if the public in question does not *demand* religious services, there is simply no reason to believe that a competitive educational marketplace will *supply* them. A closer look at the data presented in this article reveals that, in the end, the critical variable has little to do

7. Mark Chaves, Peter J. Schraeder, and Mario Sprindys, "State Regulation of Religion and Muslim Religious Vitality in the Industrialized West," *Journal of Politics* 56:4 (1994), pp. 1087–97.

8. Above all, Chaves explains that one of the central insights of rational choice theory in the context of religion is that "religious markets ought to function like economic markets." More specifically, competition for adherents in the religious "marketplace" should lead to the production of religious services tailored to meet local consumer "demands." "In a non-regulated 'free market'," Chaves notes, "religious consumption forces religious firms to produce efficiently [the] goods and services that are more likely to be the religious goods and services desired by consumers." "Hence," he concludes, "religious consumption—[defined in terms of] beliefs and participation—will be higher in [a] non-regulated market than in a market where certain religious institutions enjoy monopolistic or oligopolistic privileges." Ibid., pp. 1088–89.

9. Ibid., p. 1090.

with the level of public-sector control. Instead, it relates to the nature of local educational demands.[10] This represents a new and important point of departure for studies of contemporary educational reform, not only in Pakistan but throughout the Muslim world.

Market Forces and the Nature of Local Demands: Uniformity vs. Diversity

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Aristotle argued that citizens living in different countries tend to express different educational priorities. "For a start," he explained, "men do not all praise the same virtue, so naturally they differ also about the training for it."[11] In this context, a number of important questions have emerged about the substantive features of *local educational demands*. In particular, scholars have begun to dispute what might be called "global patterns of value-based convergence." Some perceive global patterns of value-based convergence moving in one direction—for example toward a universal liberal norm—but others have drawn attention to global patterns of convergence moving in more than one direction at once—for instance, increasingly homogeneous secular norms for some and increasingly homogeneous religious norms for others.

For example, John Meyer sees a unidirectional pattern of value-based convergence. He argues that, increasingly, "global society provides models that influence national educational systems a great deal, often forming surprisingly isomorphic educational arrangements around the world."[12] In particular, he departs from Aristotle and shows strong support for "universal" norms by stating that "the areas of isomorphism . . . prominently include curricular content." He explains that "the real unifying principle underlying the emergent global society is the natural [read: secular] human person."[13] In making this argument, however, Meyer tends to ignore the emergence of alternative patterns of international educational isomorphism—for example, in the context of "global" Islam.

In fact, research undertaken by those interested in the transnational flow of ideas illuminates a more complex picture. Scholars like Fiona Adamson, for instance, have noted that patterns of global "isomorphism" may occur along more than one trajectory at the same time.[14] In particular, Adamson argues that

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10. See Harold Alderman, Peter F. Orazem, and Elizabeth M. Paterno, "School Quality, School Cost, and the Public/Private School Choices of Low-Income Households in Pakistan," *Journal of Human Resources* 36 (Spring 2001) (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison), pp. 304–26.

11. Aristotle, *The Politics* (Book 8, Ch. 2) (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 454.

12. John Meyer, "Globalization and the Curriculum: Problems for Theory in the Sociology of Education" (1999), <http://www.yale.edu/ccr/meyer1.doc>.

13. Ibid., p. 13.

14. Fiona Adamson, "Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam: Competing Ideological Frameworks in International Politics," *International Studies Review* 7:4 (2005), pp. 547–69.

there may be an unmistakable process of convergence around global liberal norms for *some* people, but there has been an equally important process of convergence around specific religious norms for *others.* If Adamson is correct, the expanding educational universe does not resemble the simple, unidimensional universe that Meyer describes.

In fact, those interested in international educational reform increasingly find themselves confronted with a truly complex global marketplace of ideas. This, in turn, suggests that our attention should be focused on the *empirical* investigation of local demands and, more specifically, the nature of specific educational "choices" in the context of an expanding educational "marketplace." Standardized curricula may be "for sale" around the world, but what educational "products" will local "consumers" actually choose to buy? Furthermore, which ideational "commodities" are more likely to expand their local "market share" in this context? These are the types of questions that scholars must begin to answer.

"School Choice" and Religious Education in the Muslim World: Comparative Evidence from Morocco

The work of Jarmo Houtsonen is instructive in attempting to answer these questions. Houtsonen focuses on the role of *timzkidas* (Qur'anic preschools) in the district of Bounaamane (Morocco), about 250 km south of Marrakesh, and asks the question, "Why do so many children attend Qur'anic schools, even though modern education is available?"[15] He notes that scholars are typically inclined to answer this question by pointing to economic factors suggesting that local biases in favor of religious education are limited to the desperately poor. But, according to Houtsonen, this assessment tends to obscure more than it reveals. In particular, it ignores three factors present in almost every Muslim community. First, it ignores the fact that poor students are by no means the only ones attending religious schools. Second, it ignores the fact that, even among the relatively affluent students who attend modern (secular) schools, religious education—for example, religious education in the home—is rarely ignored. Finally, he notes that raw enrollment figures can be misleading when children attend more than one school at a time.[16]

"What kind of education one chooses," Houtsonen notes, "is usually thought to be based on economic factors," and "the private demand for schooling is largely [thought to be] a function of the calculation of individual cost in relation to perceived future job opportunities." In particular, he says, "[T]he

15. Houtsonen, "Traditional Qur'anic Education," p. 489.
16. Ibid., p. 491.

initial reaction of all my informants . . . was that people send their children to Qur'anic schools because they cannot afford to send them to modern schools." Yet, at the same time, this initial reaction failed to convey the extent to which "most families do not simply regard education as an [economic] investment."[17] Instead, Houtsonen found that most families were inclined to believe that the "unchangeability of Qur'anic education, and its contribution toward teaching children proper Islamic behavior, are also important."[18]

In the end, Houtsonen points out that all of the Muslims living in Bounaamane were "aware of the links between schooling and employment in the modern sector" and indeed, they were often "proud when their children . . . acquired such skills as literacy and the ability to speak Arabic and French." Yet, at the same time, they also had serious "misgivings about the economic implications of modern education and its impact on traditional beliefs and lifestyles." In particular, he found that, in contrast to local perceptions of modern (secular) education, the strength of Qur'anic education was that "through its discipline and [its] cognitive style, it conveys the accepted Islamic code of conduct and patterns of thought, including respect for authority and social responsibility."[19]

This work examining rural Morocco draws our attention to a number of important points. In particular, it suggests that an accurate assessment of educational outcomes depends, in a number of important ways, on an accurate assessment of local educational demands especially in relation to religion and religious concerns. Certainly, many who believe that secular schools are essential for the development of a modern democratic state and a thriving market economy are inclined to assume that parents "prefer" modern secular schools. But, insofar as this is the case, they are also inclined to assume that one of the best ways to promote secular schools lies in giving parents more "choice." If Houtsonen is correct, however, their assessment of local educational demands is simply wrong (or incomplete), and their argument concerning the presence of a direct link between "choice" and "secularism" begins to unravel. Again, the crux of the matter does not depend on the existence of an active educational "marketplace" but rather on an accurate assessment of local educational "demands."

17. Ibid., pp. 491–92.

18. Ibid., p. 493. According to Houtsonen, "The goals and significance of modern education seem to be instrumental in encouraging individualism and competition . . . whereas the goals and significance of Qur'anic education seem to be expressive and normative in encouraging a common identity and beliefs." As one elderly man pointed out, "Those who learn in [modern] schools . . . concentrate more on salaries," whereas "a person learning in the *timzkida* . . . reads a *hizb* and calls on God to save his parents and relatives." Ibid., p. 494. Thus, Houtsonen notes that there are families who do not want to educate their children in modern schools even though they have the money to do so.

19. Ibid., pp. 497–98. See also Dale F. Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and Its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20:4 (1978), pp. 485–516.

Markets and the Meaning of a “Good” Education in Pakistan

In 2003, the *Washington Post* set out to launch a comprehensive review of the public schools in Washington, D.C. In conducting the study, however, journalist Jay Mathews noted that “we are still not sure which factors are most important to our readers in selecting and judging the places they send their children.”[20] The same could be said of those who wish to evaluate the nature of local educational demands throughout the Muslim world.

Initiatives sponsored by the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Pakistan, for example, are expected to pursue a bottom-up strategy focused on the local level. Yet, precisely *because* their attention has shifted to the local level, reformers routinely find themselves confronted with a wide range of difficult questions concerning (a) the nature of local demands, (b) the role of market forces when it comes to satisfying these demands, and, perhaps most importantly, (c) the extent to which international agencies are prepared to reinforce “demands in favor of religion.” In Washington, the question of school choice was believed to focus on factors such as standardized test scores and student-teacher ratios. In the context of my research in Pakistan, however, I found that an assessment of these concerns was simply incomplete without a more detailed account of local curricular matters including (a) the language of instruction (English v. Urdu) and (b) the relative importance of *dini* and *dunyavi taleem* (religious and nonreligious education), respectively.

During the summer of 2003, I traveled to Pakistan to examine these matters in more detail, working with two research assistants to complete a series of interviews with the parents of school-aged children living in and around Rawalpindi, a large urban district located 15 km south of the federal capital Islamabad. These interviews, involving a total of 112 respondents, allowed me to examine the substantive features of local educational demands. The research sample, involving 91 men and 21 women, ranging in age from 18 to 85, was deliberately constrained in two ways. First, we selected families for whom the local *madrasa* (Islamic religious school) was just one among at least two educational options. In other words, we did not visit communities with just one school. Second, we selected parents from a variety of economic circumstances (see Table 1), but we weighted our sample in favor of the (educated) lower middle and middle class earning Rs 1,000–10,000 ($17–175) per month with an average household size of six to eight persons.[21] These families have enough money to pay for inexpensive

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20. Jay Matthews, “An Education Writer’s Call for Assistance,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2003.

21. For average monthly income figures in Pakistan, see Government of Pakistan, Statistics Division, *Labor Force Survey (2001–02)*, <http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/publications/lfs 2001_2002/lfs2001_2002.html>. In particular, see Table 21, <http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/

TABLE 1 *Income Distribution of Interview Subjects* (Rs 57 = US$1)

Income	*Interviews*	*Education*	*Interviews*
Less than Rs 1,000/mo.	1	No formal education	20
Rs 1,000–5,000	44	Religious education (only)	3
Rs 5,001–10,000	27	Primary-Intermediate (F.A.)	51
Rs 10,001–20,000	10	University (B.A. or above)	38
Rs 20,001–50,000	13	No data/No answer	0
More than Rs 50,001	4		
No data/No answer	13		
Total	112	*Total*	112

SOURCE: Information compiled in all tables and chart is by the author.

private schools but, despite their own (rather impressive) educational achievements, the best schools remain out of reach. In other words, their educational choices are not unlimited, but the notion of "choice" itself is not entirely unknown.

In addition to these interviews with local parents, I also conducted a second set of interviews with the leaders of several NGOs.[22] In particular, I visited the offices of UNICEF, USAID, and several local agencies, asking the members of their professional education-sector staff to complete my questionnaire *as if they were members of the lower middle class.* In other words, I asked them to record their *perceptions* of local educational demands. I then compared the data regarding local demands with the demands expected by donors and, not surprisingly, encountered a significant gap. This gap was particularly pronounced when it came to religious education and the role of *dini madaris* (private Qur'anic schools). Indeed, donors seemed to believe that an education system dominated by secular schools would suffice, but local citizens disagreed. The results of the survey are presented below.

Religious Education and the Nature of Local Demands in Pakistan: Citizens v. Donors

Citizens and donors alike felt that all students should have access to the same primary schools. In other words, they agreed that school choice initiatives did not sit well with the notion of equal educational access, and they agreed that

publications/lfs2001_2002/t21.pdf>. In an average household, we rarely encountered more than two or three members who were employed. So, if the average income of an employee in the Punjab was Rs 3,014, the average household income would be Rs 3,000 (minimum) to Rs 9,000 (maximum).

22. All of my interviews with donor agencies were conducted in English, whereas the interviews with citizens were conducted in Urdu. I translated these interviews into English with occasional assistance from my research assistants.

increased inequality was something to be avoided.[23] Yet, interestingly, citizens' concerns about growing educational inequality were expressed far more intensely than many donors were inclined to expect. In fact, when we presented our respondents with two options—namely (a) "Pakistan should have one type of school for everyone" and (b) "Pakistan should have many different options, so that Pakistanis can choose 'the best option' for themselves"—83% of the citizens we met chose the first option. In other words, 83% were inclined to favor "uniformity" over "choice."

Still, more than half of those we met, including citizens *as well as donors*, agreed that government schools were suffering from a period of rather precipitous decline. In fact, 64% of citizens and 57% of donors felt that the quality of government schools had declined in recent years with 56% and 43%, respectively, arguing that they had declined "a lot." Even if they agreed that the quality of government schools had declined, however, they disagreed rather dramatically about "where to go from here."

At the center of their disagreement lay a fundamental difference of opinion regarding the value of a religious education in general and *madrasas* in particular. Perhaps the most illuminating question in this regard was phrased in the following way: "If your children were provided with a choice among all of the schools currently available in Pakistan *except madrasas*—because, in many cases, *madrasa* graduates suffer from unemployment—would you be satisfied with your educational options?" In response to this question, nearly 60% of the citizens we met said "no."[24]

And yet, in a remarkable demonstration of their failure to comprehend the nature of local educational demands, none of the donors—0%—were inclined to expect this answer. In fact, all of them simply assumed that citizens would abandon their local *madrasa* if they were granted access to an acceptable alternative school—for example, a government school, a private school, a public-private "partnership" school, or any one of several independent schools sponsored by domestic and international NGOs.

The extent of this gap was striking on its own, but it was reinforced by the data that we collected in later questions. One question provided respondents with a list defining five educational goals (see Chart 1), asking them to identify their first and second educational "priorities" (see Table 2). The responses

23. Not surprisingly, wealthier and more highly educated respondents were somewhat more enthusiastic about the notion of "choice." It is interesting to note, however, that the strongest voices in opposition to choice did not come from the poorest citizens but rather from the lower-middle class.

24. In keeping with the conventional wisdom, wealthier and more highly educated respondents were less likely to believe that *madrasas* are "absolutely indispensable." In fact, those *without* a B.A. and a monthly household income *below* Rs 10,000 tended to believe that *madrasas* were "indispensable" at a rate that hovered around 60%. Among those *with* a B.A. and incomes *above* Rs 10,000, however, this figure dropped to roughly 20%. In addition, it is interesting to note that women were considerably less likely to believe that *madrasas* were "absolutely indispensable" than men.

CHART 1 *Definitions of a "Good" Education (Five Goals)*

A. *Basic education*. "Some people say that a good school teaches students how to read and write. In other words, good schools provide students with basic reading skills and basic math skills."

B. *Religious education.* "Some people say that a good school is a school that creates good Muslims. In other words, good schools provide students with strong values and strong religious beliefs."

C. *Liberal education.* "Some people say that good schools teach students how to solve problems and think for themselves."

D. *Vocational education.* "Some people say that good schools prepare students to find good jobs."

E. *Civic education.* "Some people say that good schools make sure that every student becomes a good citizen, showing respect for the laws of their country."

TABLE 2 *Educational Goals* (in %)

First Priority		*Second Priority*		*Women's Priorities*			
					1st +	*2nd* =	*Total*
1. Religious	41	1. Vocational	31	1. Religious	25	32	57
2. Civic	22	2. Religious	26	2. Civic	25	16	41
3. Basic	16	3. Civic	22	3. Basic	25	16	41
4. Liberal	10	4. Basic	14	4. Liberal	15	21	36
5. Vocational	6	5. Liberal	4	5. Vocational	0	16	16
6. No response	6	6. No response	4	6. Other	10	0	10

to these questions were later disaggregated to highlight the preferences of local women. The Chart 1 list included (a) basic education—that is, basic literacy; (b) religious education; (c) liberal education; (d) vocational education; and (e) civic education. Again, citizens were inclined to place religious education at the very top of their list, whereas donors simply assumed that, given the extent of their poverty, parents with a "choice" would turn away from "religion" toward "vocational" education instead.[25] When we asked citizens about their

25. We found that, as a "first priority," religious education was especially important for (a) men and (b) those with lower levels of education. This is important, because, although our sample included "too many male respondents" (discounting the relatively secular views of female respondents), it also included "too few illiterate/uneducated respondents" (in effect, exaggerating the secular views of those with higher levels of education). In other words, what our sample lost in terms of the (relatively) secular views of women, it gained in terms of the (relatively) secular views of those with higher levels of education.

TABLE 3 *Education Level × Educational Priority*

	Basic n (%)	*Vocational n (%)*	*Civic n (%)*	*Liberal n (%)*	*Religious n (%)*	*Other n (%)*	*Total Respond-ents*
Educational Priority No. 1							
No education	0 (0)	2 (11.8)	2 (11.8)	0 (0)	12 (70.6)	1 (5.9)	17
Religious education	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)	0 (0)	2 (66.7)	0 (0)	3
Primary–F.A.	9 (17.6)	2 (3.9)	11 (21.6)	3 (5.9)	24 (47.1)	2 (3.9)	51
B.A.+	8 (21.1)	2 (5.3)	10 (26.3)	8 (21.1)	7 (18.4)	3 (7.9)	38
Total	17 (15.6)	6 (5.5)	24 (22.0)	11 (10.1)	45 (41.3)	6 (5.5)	109
Educational Priority No. 2							
No education	2 (11.8)	7 (41.2)	3 (17.6)	0 (0)	4 (23.5)	1 (5.9)	17
Religious education	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2
Primary–F.A.	5 (9.8)	14 (27.5)	13 (25.5)	1 (2.0)	17 (33.3)	1 (2.0)	51
B.A.+	6 (17.6)	10 (29.4)	7 (20.6)	3 (8.8)	6 (17.6)	2 (5.9)	34
Total	14 (13.5)	32 (30.8)	23 (22.1)	4 (3.8)	27 (26.0)	4 (3.8)	104
Percentage 1 + Percentage 2							
No education	11.8%	53.0%	29.4%	0%	94.1%	11.8%	17
Religious education	50.0%	50.0%	33.3%	0%	66.7%	0%	3
Primary–F.A.	27.4%	31.4%	47.1%	7.9%	80.4%	5.9%	51
B.A.+	38.7%	34.7%	46.9%	29.9%	36.0%	13.8%	36
Total	29.1%	36.3%	44.1%	13.9%	67.3%	9.3%	107
Rank	4	3	2	5	1	6	

"top educational priority," however, we found that they were not inclined to place vocational education anywhere near the top of their list. In fact, they placed it last (Tables 2 and 3).[26] When it came to questions about second priorities, however, citizens pulled vocational education back from the brink, ranking it as their first "second priority" (31%), slightly ahead of their second

26. Ultimately, we found that this commitment to "alternative ends" was reinforced by local perceptions about the link between education and employment. Indeed, a number of citizens drew attention to the disturbing plight of "the educated unemployed," noting that, even if education is regarded as an important credential, it is no longer an automatic guarantee of gainful employment. In fact, citizens were only too familiar with the plight of those who received a solid education only to find that they were unsuccessful in the job market for various reasons beyond their control including helpful family connections and kinship networks. In the end, therefore, we found that, even if citizens understood (theoretically) the link between education and "employment," they were inclined to focus (practically) on the link between education and "good citizenship," noting that good

"second priority," which was religion (26%). Thus, we found that even if citizens were not entirely *opposed* to the notion of vocational education, they were *more* concerned about religion.

One of the most important things about these results, however, particularly when it came to questions about second priorities, was the distribution of our data in terms of gender. Indeed, we found that, even if women were inclined to favor basic education and civic education just as much as religious education in the context of their first-place priorities, they paid far more attention to religious education in the context of their second-place priorities. This was so much so that, in the end, religious education trumped all of the remaining alternatives, not only as a second-place priority, but overall (Table 2).

Highly educated respondents—that is, those with some amount of university education (B.A., M.A., or Ph.D.)—were, for the most part, living in "a different world" when it came to questions about the value of religious education. In fact, as Tariq Rahman pointed out in a study completed during the winter of 2002–03, and my research largely confirmed, elite respondents were far more likely to reflect the expectations of the donor community at large by expressing considerable appreciation for the merits of a "liberal" education and, in general, favoring "civic" education over "religious" education by a margin of 4:3.[27] But, their fellow citizens—who represent the overwhelming majority of the population at large—clearly expressed different preferences (Tables 3, 4).[28]

The Nature of Local Demands: Language and Religion

The data we collected also allowed us to better ascertain the terms of local preferences regarding two important issues for local policy makers—namely, (a) language of instruction and (b) religion. These are important issues to examine especially because our data pointed to conclusions that contradict the

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citizenship and virtue would be valuable *even in the context of unemployment.* In this context, it is worth pointing out that, according to census figures compiled by the Government of Pakistan in 1998, literate citizens make up 55.1% of Pakistan's unemployed, while illiterate citizens comprised just 44.9%. See Table 34, *Labor Force Survey (2001–02)*, <http://www.statpak.gov.pk/depts/fbs/publications/lfs 2001_2002/ t34.pdf>.

27. Tariq Rahman,"Tolerance and Militancy among Schoolchildren," *Friday Times* (Lahore).

28. Overall, we noticed that as education levels increased, "vocational" education became less and less popular. "Civic" education and "liberal" education, on the other hand, become more popular. This was hardly surprising. The relationship between "liberal" education and "religious" education, however, was more interesting. In both cases, we noticed a significant difference between those with a university-level education and those without. In fact, the relatively secular views of the former—that is, those with a university-level education—seemed to depart, rather dramatically, from the norm.

TABLE 4 *Preferences for Mandatory Madrasa Education, by Age, Gender, Education Level, and Income*

Variable	*Madrasas Not Required n (%)*	*Madrasas Required n (%)*	*Total Respondents*
Age, years			
18–29	2 (40.0)	3 (60.0)	5
30–49	26 (41.3)	37 (58.7)	63
50+	15 (40.5)	22 (59.5)	37
Total	43 (41.0)	62 (59.0)	105
Gender			
Male	31 (36.0)	55 (64.0)	86
Female	12 (63.2)	7 (36.8)	19
Total	43 (41.0)	62 (59.0)	105
Education level			
None	4 (26.7)	11 (73.3)	15
Religious (only)	0 (0)	3 (100.0)	3
Primary–F.A.	13 (26.5)	36 (73.5)	49
B.A.+	26 (68.4)	12 (31.6)	38
Total	43 (41.0)	62 (59.0)	105
Income, Rs/month			
<1,000	0 (0)	0 (0)	0
1,000–5,000	10 (25.0)	30 (75.0)	40
5,001–10,000	11 (40.7)	16 (59.3)	27
10,001–20,000	8 (80.0)	2 (20.0)	10
20,001–50,000	11 (84.6)	2 (15.4)	13
>50,000	3 (75.0)	1 (25.0)	4
Total	43 (45.7)	51 (54.2)	94

expectations of those working in prominent donor agencies and think tanks. For example, according to Dominic Bremer, director of education programming at RAND and the leader of a major educational reform initiative in Qatar, *demand-driven reforms* will lead students to study "less Islam" and "more English."[29] This, however, does not appear to be the case in Pakistan. In fact, we discovered that demand-driven reforms would lead students to study "more English" *and* "more Islam."

When we asked our respondents about the language of instruction, the importance of English was impossible to ignore. Still, it would be a mistake to conclude that English-medium schools were regarded as "the order of the day."

29. Susan B. Glasser, "Qatar Reshapes Its Schools, Putting English over Islam," *Washington Post*, February 2, 2003.

In fact, when we asked parents if they would be satisfied with their educational options if English-medium schools were the *only* option, 87% said "no."[30] Taking a closer look at the data, however, we encountered a number of important details. In particular, we found something that the donor community was not inclined to expect—namely, a small bias in favor of Urdu. In fact, when we asked citizens what portion of the curriculum should be devoted to English and what portion should be devoted to Urdu, 60% said that the balance should be exactly equal. But among the remaining 40%, more than half (25%) were inclined to favor "more than 50 percent Urdu" (see Table 5).[31]

Donors, on the other hand, simply assumed that citizens would be inclined to "lean" toward English. In fact, 44% of the donors we met felt that, in a curriculum employing *both* English *and* Urdu, citizens would prefer a curriculum in which "less than 50%" of the curriculum was devoted to Urdu. By comparison, only 11% felt that citizens would prefer a curriculum with "more than 50%" Urdu. Clearly, English is regarded as an essential feature of a "good" education in Pakistan, but the story is more complicated than many tend to assume. In fact, English is often valued as a "subject" in the context of a "curriculum" conveyed in Urdu. As one woman pointed out, expressing a rather common view: "It is difficult for students to learn new things when their teachers are speaking a foreign language [namely, English]."

As noted above, citizens and donors alike were inclined to believe that all students should have access to the same schools. Yet, the views of citizens and donors began to diverge in a number of nuanced, but important, ways when the conversation turned away from the importance of "common schools" to a discussion about the "content" of the curriculum itself. Interestingly, most citizens and donors seemed to agree that *dini* and *dunyavi* education should *not* be divided into separate schools. In other words, there was a general agreement that an education system in which *dini taleem* was provided exclusively in *madrasas* and *dunyavi taleem* was provided exclusively in government and private schools would be undesirable. In fact, fully 85% of the citizens we met and 88% of the donors felt that *dini* and *dunyavi taleem* should be provided in the same school. Moreover, 98% of citizens and 67% of donors indicated that Islamic studies should be "required" as a part of the curriculum within these schools.[32]

30. In general, those with higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely to favor an "English Only" policy in their children's schools. Even among those with a university education and a monthly income of Rs 20,000 (or more), however, this figure never rose above 20% or 30%.

31. Not surprisingly, the bias in favor of Urdu was particularly strong among older citizens, male citizens, citizens earning less than Rs 10,000/month, and citizens with less than an "intermediate" (F.A./F.Sc.) degree.

32. The strongest preference for Islamic studies came from younger citizens, those with a religious education, and those who had completed their F.A. but not, for the most part, their B.A.

TABLE 5 *Preferred Amount of Urdu Use in Schools, by Age, Gender, Education Level, and Income*

	Preferred Amount of Time					
Variable	*≤10% n (%)*	*25% n (%)*	*50% n (%)*	*75% n (%)*	*≥90% n (%)*	*Total Respondents*
Age, years						
18–29	0 (0)	1 (20.0)	4 (80.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	5
30–49	5 (8.1)	5 (8.1)	38 (61.2)	6 (9.7)	8 (12.9)	62
50+	2 (6.1)	2 (6.1)	18 (54.5)	4 (12.1)	7 (21.2)	33
Total	7 (7.0)	8 (8.0)	60 (60.0)	10 (10.0)	15 (15.0)	100
Gender						
Male	5 (6.2)	7 (8.6)	46 (56.8)	10 (12.3)	13 (16.0)	81
Female	2 (10.5)	1 (5.3)	14 (73.7)	0 (0)	2 (10.5)	19
Total	7 (7.0)	8 (8.0)	60 (60.0)	10 (10.0)	15 (15.0)	100
Education level						
None	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (33.3)	3 (20.0)	7 (46.7)	15
Religious (only)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (100.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2
Primary–F.A.	1 (2.1)	4 (8.3)	34 (70.8)	6 (12.5)	3 (6.3)	48
B.A.+	6 (17.1)	4 (11.4)	19 (54.3)	1 (2.9)	5 (14.3)	35
Total	7 (7.0)	8 (8.0)	60 (60.0)	10 (10.0)	15 (15.0)	100
Income, Rs/month						
<1,000	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1
1,000–5,000	1 (2.4)	1 (2.4)	27 (64.3)	6 (14.3)	7 (16.6)	42
5,001–10,000	1 (4.5)	3 (13.6)	14 (63.6)	1 (4.5)	3 (13.6)	22
10,001–20,000	5 (35.7)	0 (0)	7 (50.0)	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	14
20,001–50,000	3 (23.1)	4 (30.8)	5 (38.5)	0 (0)	1 (7.7)	13
>50,000	1 (33.3)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)	3
Total	11 (11.6)	8 (8.4)	55 (57.9)	8 (8.4)	13 (13.7)	95

The views of citizens and donors began to diverge, however, when they were asked to identify how much time should be devoted each day to religious and non-religious subjects. Most citizens expressed an interest in striking a nearly equal balance, with 52% saying that they would prefer half and half—that is, half religious subjects and half non-religious subjects—27% favoring "less than 50%" religion, and 21% favoring "more than 50%" religion (see Table 6). Donors, on the other hand, simply assumed that citizens would articulate a stronger preference in favor of "non-religious" subjects. In fact, 67% of donors felt that citizens would prefer a curriculum in which "less than 50%" of the subjects was devoted to religion. Thus, donors was clearly inclined to assume that citizens would be drawn to the merits of a "secular" education more than they actually were.

TABLE 6 *Preferred Amount of Religious Education in Schools (as Opposed to Madrasas), by Education Level and Income*

	Preferred Amount of Time					
Variable	*≤10% n (%)*	*25% n (%)*	*50% n (%)*	*75% n (%)*	*≥90% n (%)*	*Total Respond-ents*
Education level						
None	2 (11.1)	1 (5.6)	12 (66.6)	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	18
Religious (only)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (100.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3
Primary–F.A.	4 (8.2)	4 (8.2)	22 (44.9)	10 (20.4)	9 (18.4)	49
B.A.+	7 (20.0)	10 (28.6)	18 (51.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	35
Total	13 (12.4)	15 (14.3)	55 (52.4)	11 (10.5)	11 (10.5)	105
Income, Rs/month						
<1,000	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (100.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1
1,000–5,000	2 (4.8)	2 (4.8)	26 (61.9)	5 (11.9)	7 (16.7)	42
5,001–10,000	2 (7.4)	5 (18.5)	14 (51.9)	3 (11.1)	3 (11.1)	27
10,001–20,000	1 (12.5)	3 (37.5)	4 (50.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	8
20,001–50,000	4 (33.3)	3 (25.0)	4 (33.3)	1 (8.3)	0 (0)	12
>50,000	2 (66.7)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3
Total	11 (11.8)	13 (14.0)	50 (53.8)	9 (9.7)	10 (10.8)	93

Regarding the question of local *madrasas*, the views of citizens and donors continued to both overlap and diverge in important ways. In particular, 90% of the citizens we interviewed and 78% of the donors agreed that *madrasas* should move away from their existing religious curriculum toward a more equal balance between religious and non-religious education. Yet, the opinions of citizens and donors began to diverge when it came to a more detailed description of this desired balance. Specifically, citizens no longer expressed an interest in striking a perfect balance between religious and non-religious education when asked more refined questions about the exact curricular content preferred *in their local madrasa.* In fact, they expressed a stronger desire for an emphasis on religion. Even though 42% of the citizens favored a perfectly equal balance between religious and non-religious education in the context of their local *madrasa*, they tended (once again) to stress the importance of religious education more than local donors were inclined to expect. For example, 47% were inclined to favor a *madrasa* curriculum with "less than 50% non-religious [secular] education" whereas only 10% were inclined to press for "more than 50% [secular]." (see Table 7).[33] This shows a divergence of views held by

33. In general, citizens tended to believe that *more than half* of the curriculum in their local *madrasa* should be devoted to religious education. Yet, within this general trend, it is interesting to note that women once again tended to be somewhat less enthusiastic about religious education than

TABLE 7 *Preferred Amount of Dunyavi (Non-Religious) Education in Madrasas, by Gender, Education Level, and Income*

	Preferred Amount of Time					
Variable	*≤10% n (%)*	*25% n (%)*	*50% n (%)*	*75% n (%)*	*≥90% n (%)*	*Total Respond-ents*
Gender						
Male	25 (31.3)	16 (20.0)	29 (36.3)	6 (7.5)	4 (5.0)	80
Female	4 (21.1)	2 (10.5)	13 (68.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)	19
Total	29 (29.3)	18 (18.2)	42 (42.4)	6 (6.1)	4 (4.1)	99
Education level						
None	12 (75.0)	1 (6.4)	3 (18.8)	0 (0)	0 (0)	16
Religious (only)	0 (0)	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2
Primary–F.A.	15 (31.9)	11 (23.4)	17 (36.2)	2 (4.3)	2 (4.3)	47
B.A.+	2 (5.9)	5 (14.7)	21 (61.8)	4 (11.8)	2 (5.9)	34
Total	29 (29.3)	18 (18.2)	42 (42.2)	6 (6.1)	4 (4.1)	99
Income, Rs/month						
<1,000	1 (100.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1
1,000–5,000	16 (40.0)	8 (20.0)	14 (35.0)	1 (2.5)	1 (2.5)	40
5,001–10,000	7 (28.0)	6 (24.0)	11 (44.0)	0 (0)	1 (4.0)	25
10,001–20,000	2 (20.7)	0 (0)	5 (50.0)	2 (20.0)	1 (10.0)	10
20,001–50,000	0 (0)	2 (15.4)	10 (76.9)	1 (7.7)	0 (0)	13
>50,000	1 (50.0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (50.0)	2
Total	27 (29.7)	16 (17.6)	40 (44.0)	4 (4.4)	4 (4.4)	91

citizens and donors regarding the role of religion, even in the context of local *madrasas*, with citizens having a much stronger preference for it.

Conclusion

In recent years and especially after the attacks of 9/11, numerous journalists and political commentators have pointed to the expanding universe of religious activity in Pakistan, especially since the early 1970s, catalyzed in part by Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's push for pan-Islamic ties (1970–77) and, subsequently, by the "Islamization" campaign of Bhutto's successor, Zia ul-Haq (1977–88). Within this apparently expanding universe of religious activity, there has been, however, considerable confusion surrounding the question

men. Furthermore, we found that, without departing from the general trend in favor of a curriculum focused on religion in their local *madrasa*, highly educated citizens tended to accept the notion that *madrasas* should include *both* religious *and* non-religious education far more readily than less well-educated citizens.

of religious education in local *madrasas.*[34] For example, Pamela Constable, writing for the *Washington Post*, stated that there were only 900 *madrasas* in Pakistan in 1971, but today there were "about 7,000."[35] In contrast, Thomas Friedman has written in the *New York Times* that there were 3,000 *madrasas* in 1978 compared to more than 39,000 today.[36] According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) based in Brussels, however, "[N]obody is sure how many *madrasas* actually exist [in Pakistan]." In fact, former Minister for Religious Affairs Dr. Mahmood Ahmed Ghazi placed the total figure at approximately 10,000, although he admits that there is "a problem of definition" leading him to speculate that the total number "could be higher."[37]

Yet, as the ICG points out, understanding the importance or the impact of religious education in Pakistan does not necessarily lie in determining the total number of *madrasas* or, for that matter, the total number of *madrasa* students. Instead, it lies in understanding and reconciling the "problem" of religious education, as perceived by international and domestic observers, with local citizen "perceptions" regarding the enduring value of a robust *dini taleem.*[38] In the

34. See Peter W. Singer, "Analysis Paper No. 14: Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education, Not Jihad," Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, <www. ciaonet.org/wps/sip02/sip02.pdf> (2001). Also see, Joe Stevens and David B. Ottaway, "From U.S., the ABCs of Jihad," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2002; Arif Jamal, "Redefining Madrassahs," *The News on Sunday* (Islamabad), July 7, 2002; John Lancaster, "Lessons in Jihad for Pakistani Youth," *Washington Post*, July 14, 2002; David Rohde, "A Dead End for Afghan Children Adrift in Pakistan," *New York Times*, March 7, 2003; Khaled Ahmed, "Our Madrasas and Our World View," *Friday Times* (Lahore), March 14, 2003; Jane Perlez, "Leave No Madrasa Ahead: Enlisting Aid to Education in the War on Terror," *New York Times*, October 12, 2003; Maura Reynolds and Richard C. Paddock, "Muslim Leaders Confront Bush," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 2003; and Walter Pincus, "Idea of Influencing Schools Echoes '50s," *Washington Post*, November 1, 2003.

35. Pamela Constable, "Pakistani Children Add School to Workday," *Washington Post*, March 30, 2003.

36. Thomas Friedman, "Jihad 101 Taught in Pakistan," *New York Times*, November 13, 2001.

37. ICG, "Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism, and the Military" (Brussels: ICG, 2003), <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/asia/afghanistan_southasia/reports/A400717_ 29072002.pdf>.

38. When asked about the notion that *madrasas* were "centers of terrorism," historian and journalist Dr. Mubarak Ali was doubtful. "I must admit," he said, "much of this talk is exaggerated." "On the whole," he argued, "the *madrasas* create narrow-minded, sectarian students, but not terrorists." "Not all the Afghan Taliban were *madrasa*-educated," he noted. "They also included young people in modern schools or colleges." See Yoginder Sikand, "Pakistan Is Becoming More Fundamentalist by the Day: An Interview with Dr. Mubarak Ali," <http://www.islaminterfaith. org/oct2002/interview.html>. In fact, what Ali says about the Taliban, the ICG extends to Kashmir as well. "The credit for pioneering the campaign [in Kashmir]," it explains, "goes to the Jama'at-e Islami, the modernist ally of the military." As a matter of fact, it notes that "the Jama'at-e Islami was the only religious party that fully supported proposals to modernize *madrasa* education." And even today, "Its power base is in the big cities among the educated classes." And yet, as the ICG reports, there is a large billboard in the entrance of the Jama'at-e-Islami's headquarters near Lahore carrying the names of hundreds of fallen *jihadis*, and "very few had ever been to a traditional *madrasa.*" ICG, "Pakistan," p. 12.

post-9/11 world, this matter of local perceptions has assumed even more importance. In fact, other specific questions of contemporary significance also flow from this general question. For example, is it safe to conclude that the majority of the local population in Pakistan is committed to religious extremism and militancy if we know that 98% of this population believes that Islamic studies should be a "required" part of the curriculum, 60% believe that *madrasas* are an "indispensable" feature of the existing educational landscape, or that 40% are inclined to identify religious education as their "top" educational priority? Furthermore, is every Muslim with an interest in religious education and, embedded within this, a certain ambivalence regarding the expanding scope of secularism, simply a terrorist in the making?

The answer to these questions is emphatically "no." As the ICG points out, the "[*M*]*adrasas* associated with *jihad* and sectarian and international terrorism are easily recognizable." Furthermore, it explains that these *madrasas* "must not be confused with those that are a normal part of Pakistani life."[39] In particular, the ICG notes that most of those trained in local *madrasas* have little or nothing to do with the notion of international militant *jihad*.[40] On the contrary, most go on to manage local mosques, lead the call to prayer, and officiate in routine religious events.[41]

Increasingly, I would argue that those interested in educational reform—including many of the international donors I encountered in Islamabad—are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the reform community remains committed to the principle of market-oriented, demand-driven, and even "democratic" reforms. Yet, on the other hand, they seem to be faced with the possibility that efforts to promote "choice" will invariably lead to "choices" in favor of religion. In other words, it may be extremely difficult to separate the general question of "choice" from the specific terms of "choices in favor of faith."

Prominent education-sector donors in Islamabad, including the largest, "Educational Sector Reform Assistance" (ESRA) funded by USAID, have made little discernible attempt to publish any systematic or disinterested assessment of local educational demands even though they claim that their work is "demand-driven." In fact, when I inquired about the strategies that ESRA used to collect empiri-

39. Ibid., p. 2.

40. Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey, "The Madrassa Myth," *New York Times*, June 14, 2005.

41. Apart from their basic religious duties, *mullahs* have a number of other duties as well. In particular, they deal with a greater proportion of the desperately poor than any other group or institution. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that *madrasas* are supported by the general public—including those who are not, themselves, desperately poor—precisely because they provide the poor with essential social services. In fact, for most Pakistanis criticizing a local *madrasa* would be like criticizing the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, or the local YMCA. As one news article explained, "Even critics of the system concede that *madrasas* perform a useful social function, providing basic free education as well as room and board to poor students who might otherwise not go to school." Lancaster, "Lessons in Jihad for Pakistani Youth," *Washington Post*, p. A19.

cal data regarding the nature of local demands, I was told that the office had no time for "ethnographic research."[42] This is surprising considering the complex nature of this matter and its potentially important political and public-policy ramifications.

In fact, the nature of local educational demands in Pakistan has left agencies like USAID with an exceedingly difficult choice. On the one hand, they can simply announce that the notion of "demand" does not include "demands in favor of religion" as it relates to international assistance. So far, this seems to be the preferred, but unstated, option. On the other hand, however, they could attempt to reconfigure their relationship with existing educational demands by looking for ways to work *within* the language of Islam—not apart from it or against it. As the ICG points out, reading from the Holy Qu'ran (*nazira*) and memorizing specific verses (*hifz*), for example, are traditions in almost every Muslim household and, indeed, in most formal schools. In fact, the ICG argues that there are a number of reasons to believe that "modern education can coexist with these [and other] features of a [modern] *madrasa* education."[43] For example, efforts to include Qur'anic recitation *both* in Arabic *and* in translation could be encouraged to concurrently promote higher levels of reading comprehension and also higher levels of religious understanding. Unfortunately, the dominant thrust of current efforts seeks to *avoid* Islam more than seeking to constructively *engage* it.

When scholars like John Meyer turn to the question of educational reform, they invariably stress the importance of "choice" while, at the same time, looking forward to the emergence of a modern secular norm. Yet, as Fiona Adamson correctly points out, these scholars often assume too much about the "content" of emerging global norms.[44] Global patterns of curricular isomorphism are impossible to ignore, but, as the data presented in this article suggest, these patterns may be moving in more than one direction at the same time. For those interested in specific outcomes, it is not enough to know that educational consumers are confronted with an emerging marketplace of ideas. Instead, it is necessary to move beyond an account of "market structure" and toward an empirically compelling account of substantive local "demands."

42. Field notes, December 16, 2003.

43. ICG, "Pakistan," p. 29. In addition, those with an interest in educational reform could look for ways to support scholars (*ulema*) who express an interest in offering their services to *madrasas* associated with more than one school of thought (*maktab-i-fikr*). This, along with a number of similar initiatives, would target the problem of sectarianism without, at the same time, departing from the substance of local educational demands. See Yoginder Sikand, "Madrasas and Intra-Muslim Conflict," <http://www.kashmirobserver.com/tabloid6.htm>.

44. Meyer, "Globalization and the Curriculum"; and Adamson, "Global Liberalism Versus Political Islam."