

PAKISTAN MILITANCY ASSESSMENT

March 2026 | Monthly Security Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Militant activity during the reporting period remains within the expected historical range, indicating stability in overall operational tempo without significant deviation from baseline patterns. Violence continues to be **driven primarily by militant actors**, with Pashtun militant groups and Baloch insurgents accounting for the majority of incidents, while security forces maintain a largely **reactive posture** in response to emerging threats.

Operational activity remains concentrated across core regions, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where district-level clustering suggests sustained localized pressure rather than broad territorial expansion. At the same time, low-frequency incidents in peripheral regions, including Sindh and Punjab, indicate early-stage geographic diffusion rather than established operational presence.

If current patterns persist, the near-term outlook suggests stable activity levels with a gradual widening of the conflict footprint rather than rapid escalation.

Activity Level
Moderate (Within Historical Range)

Primary Drivers
Pashtun Militants
Baloch Insurgents

Geographic Pattern
Concentrated with Early Diffusion

Key Signal
Peripheral presence outside core conflict zones

WHY THIS MATTERS

This report provides a structured assessment of militant activity, operational patterns, and geographic dynamics across Pakistan, translating complex incident-level data into actionable intelligence insights.

The analysis is designed to support:

- **Risk Monitoring:** Identification of high-activity zones, emerging hotspots, and areas of increasing operational pressure
- **Strategic Planning:** Understanding militant behavior, tactical evolution, and geographic concentration for forward-looking decision-making
- **Operational Awareness:** Real-time assessment of conflict dynamics affecting personnel, assets, and movement routes
- **Investment & Infrastructure Risk:** Evaluation of disruption risks in regions exposed to insurgent activity, particularly in transport corridors and resource-rich areas

By combining **incident data, tactical analysis, and geographic modeling**, the report enables stakeholders to move beyond reactive awareness toward **proactive risk assessment and planning**.

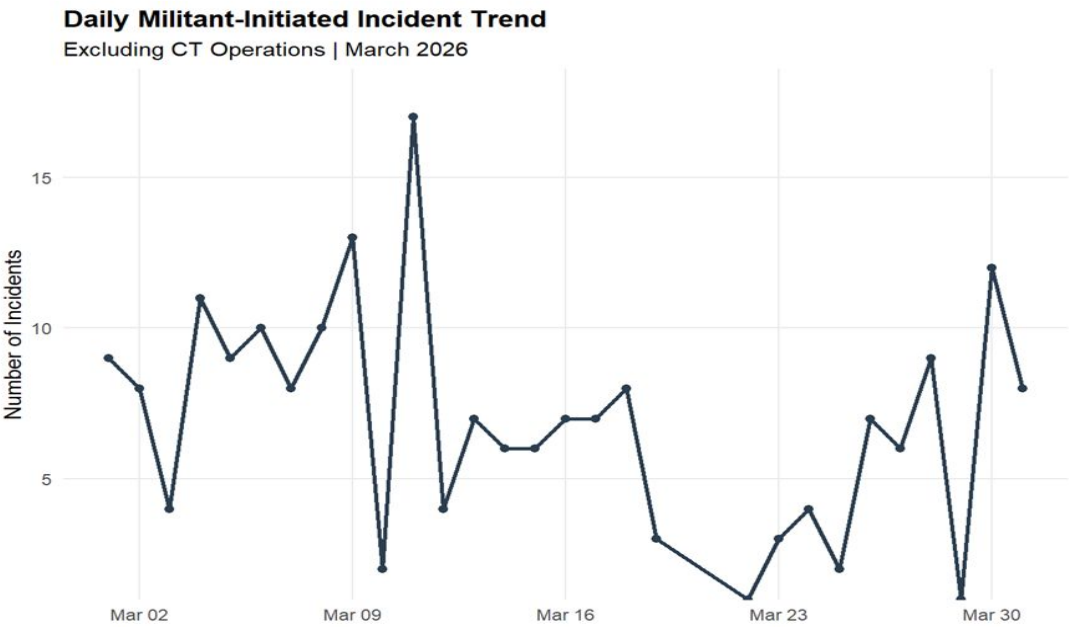
The inclusion of analytical frameworks such as the **Expansion Index** further allows for **early detection of geographic diffusion**, providing advance warning of potential conflict spread into secondary and urban regions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Militant actors retain operational initiative**, accounting for **202 out of 247 total incidents (~82%)**, indicating continued control over the tempo and direction of conflict
- **Security forces remain reactive**, with **45 CT operations (~18%)**, reflecting a response-driven posture rather than proactive disruption
- **Conflict remains geographically concentrated**, with **~97% of activity occurring in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (140 incidents) and Balochistan (100 incidents)**
- **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa functions as the primary activity hub**, while **Balochistan drives lethality**, recording **181 out of 314 total casualties (~58%)** despite lower incident volume
- **Violence is sustained through repeated engagements**, with **Clashes (65), Targeted Violence (54), and Explosions (50)** forming a balanced tactical mix rather than a single dominant method
- **Operational patterns reflect a mature insurgency model**, with **ambushes dominating clashes (57/65)** and **non-suicide explosives accounting for nearly all explosive incidents (49/50)**
- **Small arms dominate weapon usage**, accounting for **173 incidents (~70%)** and driving the majority of cumulative fatalities, indicating reliance on low-cost, sustainable tactics
- **Explosive systems act as force multipliers**, contributing to **36+ casualties from IEDs alone**, generating localized spikes in lethality despite lower frequency
- **Peripheral regions show early-stage diffusion signals**, with **7 incidents recorded across Sindh, Punjab, and Gilgit-Baltistan**, indicating probing activity rather than established expansion
- **Expansion Index (3.8/10) confirms controlled diffusion**, combining high geographic concentration with moderate district spread and weak sustained presence outside core zones
- **District-level patterns reveal uneven conflict intensity**, with high-frequency zones such as **Bannu (35 incidents)** contrasting with high-lethality districts like **Panjgur (62 casualties)**
- **Current conflict dynamics favor persistence over escalation**, with sustained low-to mid-intensity engagements driving cumulative impact rather than large-scale attacks

1. INCIDENT VOLUME & OPERATIONAL TEMPO

This section assesses militant operational tempo by isolating militant-initiated violence and comparing it against overall incident patterns.



Assessment

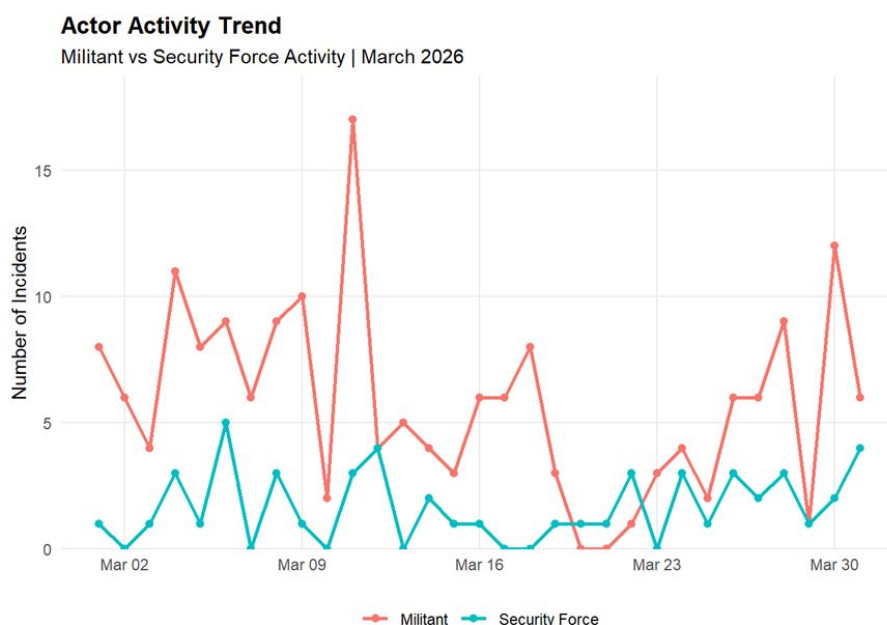
Incident data for the reporting period indicates that overall activity remains within expected historical bounds, reflecting a stable but sustained operational tempo. A total of 247 events were recorded, of which the majority consisted of militant-initiated attacks rather than counter-terrorism operations, reinforcing the continued role of insurgent actors as the primary drivers of violence.

The imbalance between militant activity and CT operations highlights a clear asymmetry in initiative. Militant actors are not only sustaining the tempo of violence but also shaping the timing and location of engagements. Security forces, by contrast, appear to be responding to incidents rather than pre-empting them, indicating limited disruption capability at scale. This dynamic suggests that militant networks retain operational freedom of movement within core conflict zones.

The persistence of this pattern points to continuity rather than escalation, but it also signals a structural constraint in the current security posture. While overall activity levels remain stable, the sustained dominance of militant-initiated actions increases the risk of gradual geographic diffusion, particularly into peripheral regions where state presence is comparatively thinner. In effect, the conflict is not intensifying in volume, but it is maintaining conditions that allow for slow outward expansion.

1.2 ACTOR ACTIVITY TREND (MILITANT VS SECURITY FORCE)

This section assesses initiative balance by comparing militant initiated violence against security force driven kinetic engagement, highlighting whether the operational tempo is being driven offensively or reactively during the reporting period.



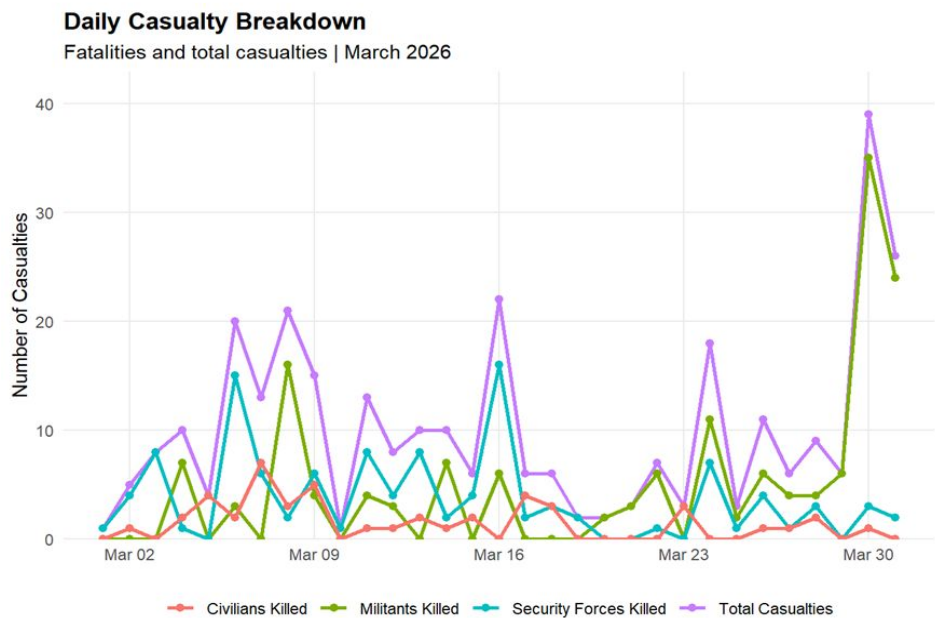
Comparison of actor activity trends indicates that militant initiated engagement consistently exceeds security force kinetic activity throughout the reporting period, reinforcing the dominant role of insurgent actors in driving operational tempo. While both series display broadly parallel movement, security force engagement appears closely tied to preceding militant activity, suggesting a reactive rather than pre-emptive operational posture.

Periods of divergence between militant and security force activity reflect localized tactical fluctuations rather than systemic shifts in control. Short-term spikes in militant activity are not matched by corresponding increases in proactive security operations, indicating limited capacity to disrupt emerging threats before they materialize. Instead, engagement patterns suggest that security forces are responding to incidents after initiation, rather than shaping the operational environment in advance.

This sustained imbalance in initiative highlights a structural characteristic of the current conflict dynamic. Militant actors retain the ability to dictate the tempo and sequencing of violence, while security forces operate within a response-driven framework. If this pattern persists, it is likely to reinforce existing geographic concentrations of violence while enabling gradual spillover into secondary areas where early disruption mechanisms remain weak.

2. CASUALTIES AND IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

Casualty data indicates that while overall incident volume remains stable, the human impact of violence is unevenly distributed across the reporting period. The temporal pattern is characterized by intermittent spikes in daily casualties rather than consistent lethality, indicating that high-impact engagements occur episodically rather than as a sustained daily trend. These spikes suggest the presence of localized, high-intensity incidents embedded within a broader pattern of low-to-moderate intensity violence.



This reinforces the assessment that the conflict is not driven by large-scale coordinated attacks, but by recurring engagements that periodically escalate in lethality before returning to baseline levels.

The distribution of casualties across actor categories further clarifies the nature of the conflict. Militant and security force personnel account for the majority of fatalities, reflecting a conflict environment dominated by direct engagements between armed actors. This pattern is consistent with sustained kinetic interaction rather than indiscriminate mass-casualty targeting.

At the same time, the continued presence of civilian casualties, even at lower levels, indicates persistent exposure of non-combatants within active conflict zones. While civilians are not the primary targets of violence, their involvement highlights the inability to fully contain engagements within purely military domains.

From a tactical perspective, the relationship between incident frequency and casualty levels suggests that militant groups are prioritizing operational continuity over high-impact singular attacks. Rather than concentrating lethality into large-scale events, the pattern reflects sustained pressure through repeated engagements, allowing conflict intensity to persist without triggering sharp escalatory thresholds.

Overall, the data indicates that the conflict environment remains structurally persistent rather than episodically escalatory. While individual incidents may produce temporary spikes in lethality, the broader pattern reflects continuity in violence dynamics, with cumulative impact outweighing singular high-casualty events.

2.2 PROVINCE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF VIOLENCE AND LETHALITY

Provincial distribution of incidents and casualties reveals a clear geographic concentration of both operational activity and lethality within two primary conflict zones: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Together, these provinces account for the overwhelming majority of both total events and casualties, indicating that the conflict remains structurally anchored within these regions.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa records the highest number of total events, reflecting its role as the primary zone of sustained militant activity. However, while activity levels are highest in the province, overall lethality remains comparatively moderated relative to Balochistan. This suggests a conflict environment characterized by frequent engagements with relatively contained casualty outcomes, consistent with recurring clashes and smaller-scale attacks.

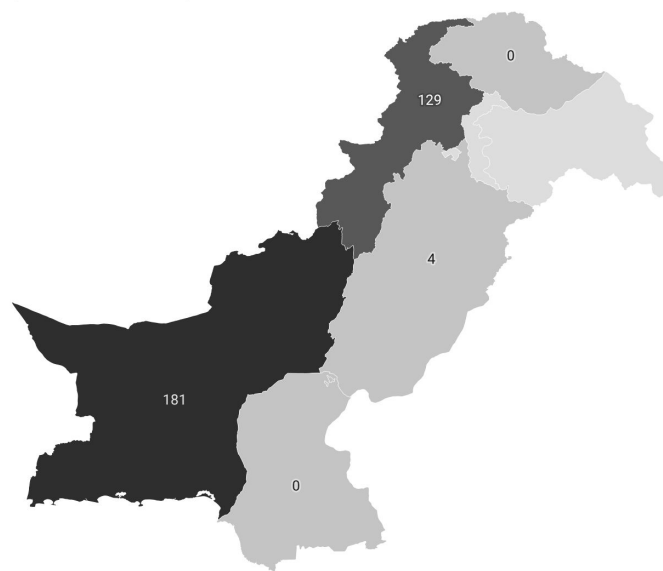
In contrast, Balochistan demonstrates a different operational profile. Despite recording fewer total events than Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it accounts for a disproportionately high share of total casualties. This indicates a higher lethality per incident, suggesting that engagements in the province are more intense, more destructive, or involve tactics that produce greater human impact. The concentration of both militant and security force fatalities further reinforces the presence of high-intensity engagements within localized areas.

The disparity between activity volume and lethality across these two provinces highlights a critical distinction in conflict dynamics. While Khyber Pakhtunkhwa functions as a high-frequency operational environment, Balochistan emerges as a high-impact battlespace where individual incidents carry greater consequences.

Outside these core regions, activity remains minimal. Sindh, Punjab, and Gilgit-Baltistan register only marginal incident counts and negligible casualties, indicating the absence of sustained militant presence or operational depth. However, the presence of even isolated incidents in these regions remains analytically significant, as it signals potential pathways for diffusion rather than established conflict zones.

TOTAL CASUALTIES BY PROVINCE

Casualties (Total)
0 181



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The distribution of casualties across actor categories further reinforces these geographic dynamics. Militants account for the highest number of fatalities overall, followed closely by security forces, indicating sustained direct engagement between armed actors. Civilian casualties, while lower in absolute terms, remain consistently present, reflecting the continued exposure of non-combatants in active conflict areas.

Taken together, the data indicates that the conflict is both geographically concentrated and structurally differentiated. Core regions continue to absorb the majority of operational and human impact, while peripheral regions remain relatively stable but not entirely insulated. This pattern suggests a conflict that is stable in structure but uneven in intensity, with localized hotspots driving overall lethality.

2.3 DISTRICT-LEVEL HOTSPOTS AND LETHALITY PATTERNS

District-level distribution reveals a highly concentrated conflict landscape, with a limited number of districts accounting for a disproportionate share of both operational activity and lethality. This indicates that while the conflict spans multiple regions, its intensity remains anchored within defined geographic hotspots.

Bannu emerges as the primary activity hub, recording the highest number of total events. Despite sustained frequency, casualty levels remain moderate, suggesting recurring engagements that maintain pressure without consistently producing high lethality.

In contrast, Panjgur and Kech exhibit significantly higher casualty counts relative to their activity levels, marking them as high-intensity zones. Panjgur in particular stands out as the most lethal district, indicating concentrated high-impact engagements rather than sustained high-frequency violence.

A secondary corridor across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, and Khyber, reflects continuous mid-level activity combined with moderate casualty impact. This suggests sustained operational movement across connected districts rather than isolated incidents.

At the same time, historically contested areas such as North and South Waziristan continue to show mixed patterns of militant, security force, and civilian casualties, indicating ongoing localized friction.

Beyond these clusters, a long tail of low-frequency districts records isolated incidents with minimal or no casualties. The presence of single incidents in districts such as Karachi, Hyderabad, and Dera Ghazi Khan does not indicate established presence, but signals early-stage penetration or probing activity.

Overall, the data reflects a layered conflict structure, with concentrated hotspots, active corridors, and peripheral signals of gradual diffusion rather than rapid expansion.

3. NATURE OF VIOLENCE & TACTICAL COMPOSITION

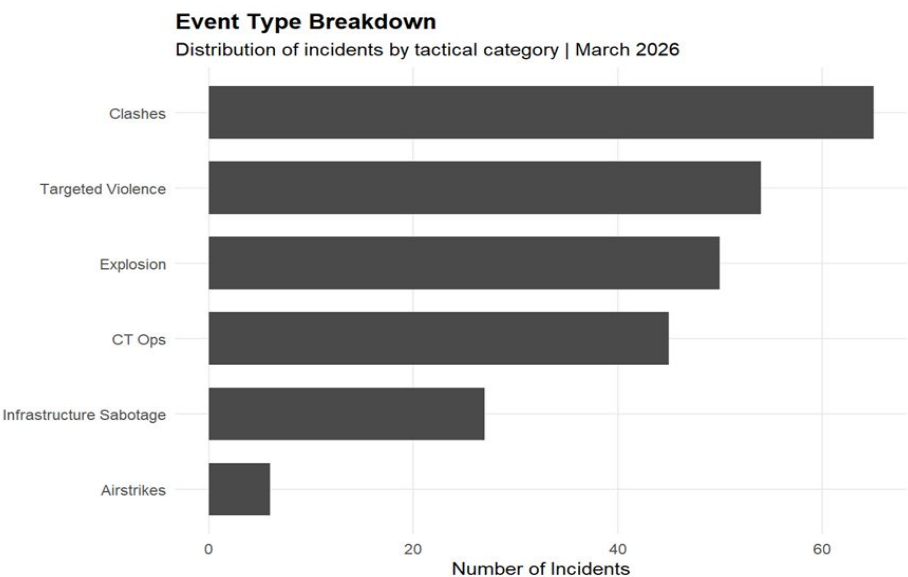
3.1 EVENT TYPE DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of incident types indicates a conflict environment characterized by a balanced mix of direct engagements and stand-off violence, rather than dominance by any single tactical mode. Clashes emerge as the single largest category, but are closely followed by targeted violence and explosive incidents, reflecting a diversified operational approach.

The continued presence of clashes suggests that militant groups retain the capability and willingness to engage security forces directly. However, the near parity with explosions and targeted attacks indicates that militants are not reliant on sustained battlefield confrontation, instead combining direct engagements with lower-risk, asymmetric methods. Explosive incidents form a substantial share of activity, pointing to the persistent use of improvised explosive devices and other stand-off mechanisms. This reduces exposure while maintaining operational impact, particularly in areas with sustained security force presence.

Targeted violence remains a key component, reflecting selective and intelligence-driven operations aimed at specific individuals. This indicates localized network awareness and the ability to identify and engage targets without requiring large-scale operations. Infrastructure sabotage, while smaller in volume, highlights an additional layer of disruption aimed at degrading state presence and economic activity. The limited number of airstrikes indicates that aerial force is present but not a defining feature of the conflict environment.

Overall, the tactical distribution reflects a hybrid conflict model, combining elements of insurgent warfare with asymmetric and targeted methods. This diversification reduces predictability and complicates response patterns for security forces.



TACTICAL ASSESSMENT

Tactical patterns vary across regions, indicating a conflict environment driven by **localized adaptation rather than a uniform operational model**.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is characterized by a high use of explosive incidents combined with sustained activity levels. This reflects a stand-off engagement model where militants prioritize mobility and reduced exposure while maintaining continuous pressure on security forces. In contrast, Balochistan demonstrates a more diversified tactical profile, with a stronger presence of infrastructure sabotage alongside explosives. This points to a broader strategy focused on disrupting state control and economic assets in addition to direct engagement.

At the district level, tactical behavior becomes more defined. High-activity districts such as Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and North Waziristan are dominated by explosive incidents, indicating sustained low- to mid-intensity engagements rather than large-scale confrontations. In Balochistan, districts such as Kharan and Khuzdar show a higher concentration of infrastructure sabotage, reinforcing patterns of targeted disruption.

Subtype analysis further refines this picture. Clashes are overwhelmingly conducted as ambushes rather than open firefights, suggesting that even direct engagements are structured to maximize surprise and minimize exposure. Explosive incidents are almost entirely non-suicide, indicating reliance on remote or indirect methods that sustain operational continuity while reducing risk. Targeted violence is dominated by targeted killings, reflecting precise and intelligence-driven operations rather than coercive or prolonged engagements.

Across categories, tactical diversity at the surface level is underpinned by **repetition of optimized methods**, rather than broad experimentation. This indicates a mature operational approach where effectiveness and survivability are prioritized over variation.

Taken together, the conflict reflects a hybrid tactical model combining ambush-based engagements, stand-off explosive attacks, targeted killings, and infrastructure disruption. This allows militant actors to maintain pressure without overexposure, adapt to local conditions, and avoid predictable patterns.

Overall, the tactical environment suggests a **sustained, adaptive insurgency**, characterized by localized execution, method consistency, and controlled intensity rather than escalation-driven conflict.

4. WEAPONS ANALYSIS

4.1 WEAPON UTILIZATION PATTERNS

Weapon usage patterns indicate a conflict environment dominated by **small arms engagements**, with limited but consistent use of explosive systems.

Small arms account for the majority of incidents across both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. This reflects a reliance on **close-range, ambush-style engagements**, particularly against patrols and checkpoints, reinforcing the continued use of direct, ground-level confrontation.

Explosive systems, including IEDs and other ordnance, form a secondary but critical component. While lower in frequency, they enable **stand-off targeting of convoys and movement routes**, particularly in areas with sustained security force presence.

Drone-related incidents remain limited but indicate gradual tactical adaptation, signaling early-stage experimentation rather than widespread operational use.

Overall, weapon distribution reflects a **low-tech, high-reliability model**, where militants prioritize accessible systems that support sustained activity without increasing exposure. This pattern indicates a conflict that can be sustained over time with limited resource requirements, making rapid disruption through conventional force alone unlikely.

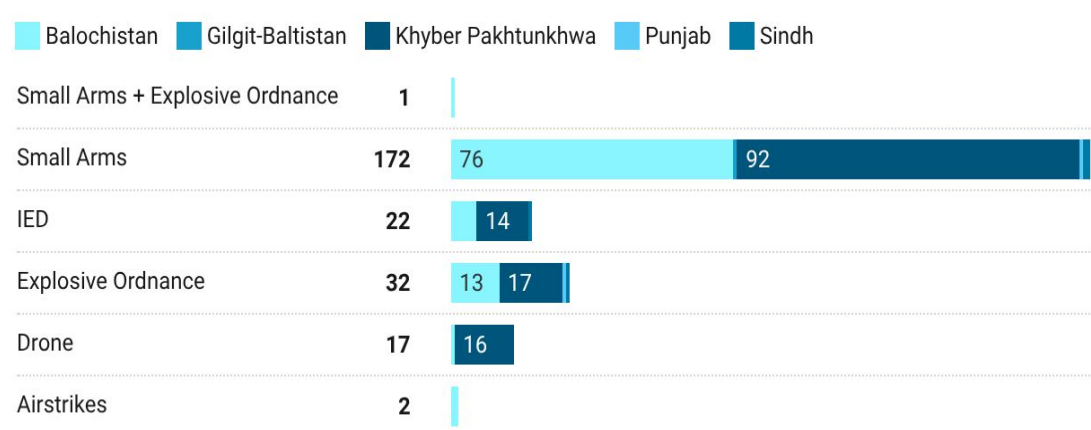


Chart: Weapon Type Distribution by Province (Including CT Operations)

4.2 GEOGRAPHIC VARIATION IN WEAPON USE

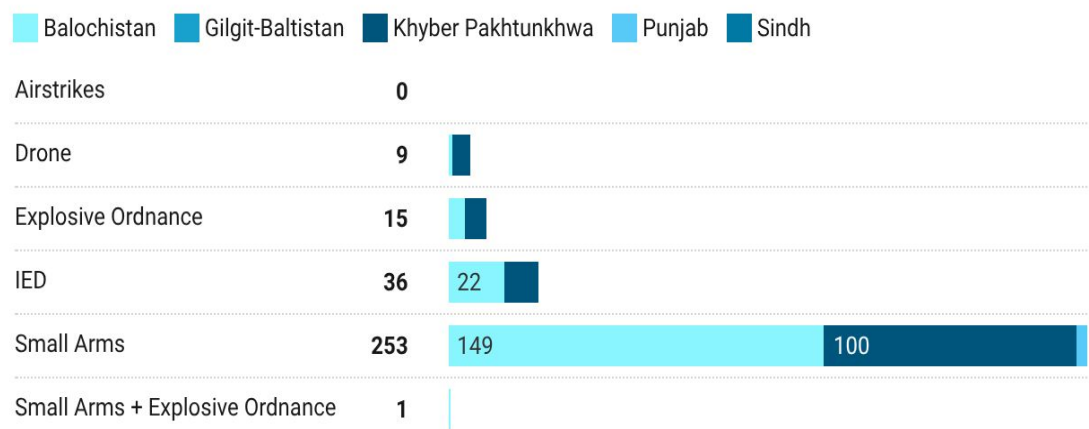


Chart: Province-wise Casualties by Weapon Type (All Events Included)

Weapon usage varies across provinces, reflecting localized operational conditions rather than a uniform tactical doctrine.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is characterized by high-frequency small arms usage supported by moderate explosive activity, indicating a **mobility-driven engagement model** where terrain familiarity enables repeated attacks.

Balochistan demonstrates a relatively higher reliance on explosive systems alongside small arms, reflecting a **disruption-focused approach** targeting infrastructure and movement routes across a wider geographic space. Peripheral regions such as Sindh and Punjab show minimal and inconsistent weapon usage, with isolated incidents that do not yet indicate sustained tactical patterns.

These differences suggest that militants are **adapting weapon choice to terrain and operational constraints**, rather than following a centralized strategy. This localized adaptation complicates counter-measures, as a single operational response is unlikely to be effective across all regions.

4.3 WEAPONS AND LETHALITY

Casualty patterns indicate that **small arms remain the primary driver of fatalities**, reflecting the cumulative impact of repeated engagements rather than isolated high-impact attacks. Explosive systems, particularly IEDs, generate **localized spikes in casualties**, amplifying impact despite lower frequency.

Balochistan records higher lethality relative to activity levels, driven by combined use of small arms and explosives, indicating more intense engagements rather than higher operational tempo. Drone-related and combined weapon incidents remain limited in both frequency and impact.

Overall, lethality remains tied to sustained engagement patterns, with explosives functioning as force multipliers rather than primary drivers. The conflict is likely to remain persistently lethal even without escalation, as current tactics favor continuous engagement over sporadic high-intensity attacks.

5. ACTOR DYNAMICS & TARGETING PATTERNS

5.1 ACTOR DYNAMICS

The distribution of incidents indicates that militant actors continue to **drive the operational tempo**, accounting for the majority of violent activity, while security forces remain largely reactive.

Pashtun militant groups represent the primary drivers of violence, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where sustained activity reflects entrenched operational presence and local network support. Baloch insurgent groups form the secondary pillar of violence, with activity concentrated in Balochistan and characterized by a mix of direct engagement and infrastructure disruption.

Security forces maintain a consistent operational presence through counter-terrorism operations, but their activity remains comparatively lower in volume and is typically conducted in response to militant actions rather than as a sustained proactive campaign.

The presence of incidents attributed to unknown or unattributed actors indicates gaps in attribution and suggests either operational overlap or deliberate obfuscation in certain regions. The current balance indicates that militant groups retain **initiative and freedom of action**, with security forces primarily responding rather than shaping the operational environment.

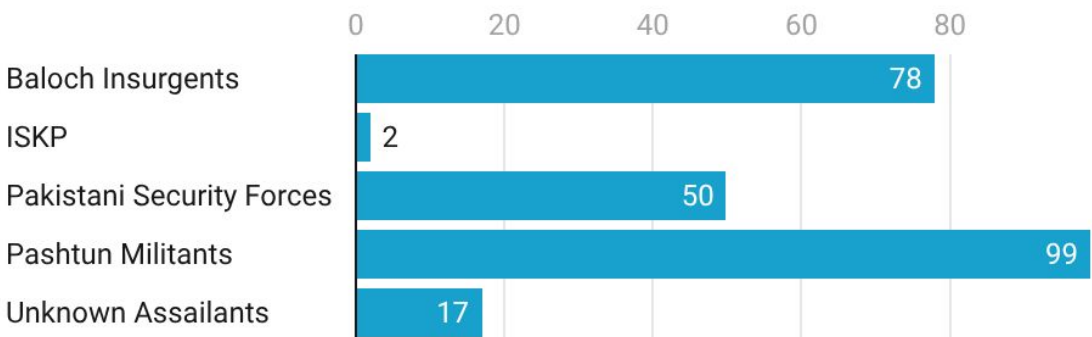


Chart: Conflict Actor Involvement by Incident Volume

5.2 TARGETING PATTERNS

Targeting patterns indicate that violence remains focused primarily on **security forces**, with civilians and infrastructure playing secondary but consistent roles.

Security personnel represent the most frequent targets, reflecting a continued emphasis on degrading state enforcement capacity and maintaining pressure on frontline units. These attacks are often linked to ambushes, small arms engagements, and explosive incidents targeting patrols and checkpoints.

Civilian targeting, while lower in volume, remains persistent and reflects both collateral exposure in active conflict zones and selective targeting in certain cases. This indicates that civilian risk remains structurally embedded within the conflict environment rather than incidental.

Infrastructure-related targeting, particularly in Balochistan, highlights a parallel strategy aimed at disrupting economic assets, transport routes, and state-linked systems. This expands the scope of conflict beyond direct engagement with security forces.

Peripheral urban incidents, though limited, demonstrate the ability to target beyond core conflict zones, even if such activity remains infrequent.

The focus on security forces, combined with continued civilian exposure and infrastructure targeting, indicates a conflict that aims to **sustain pressure on the state while expanding disruption beyond purely military objectives**.

5.3 ACTOR-TARGET INTERACTION

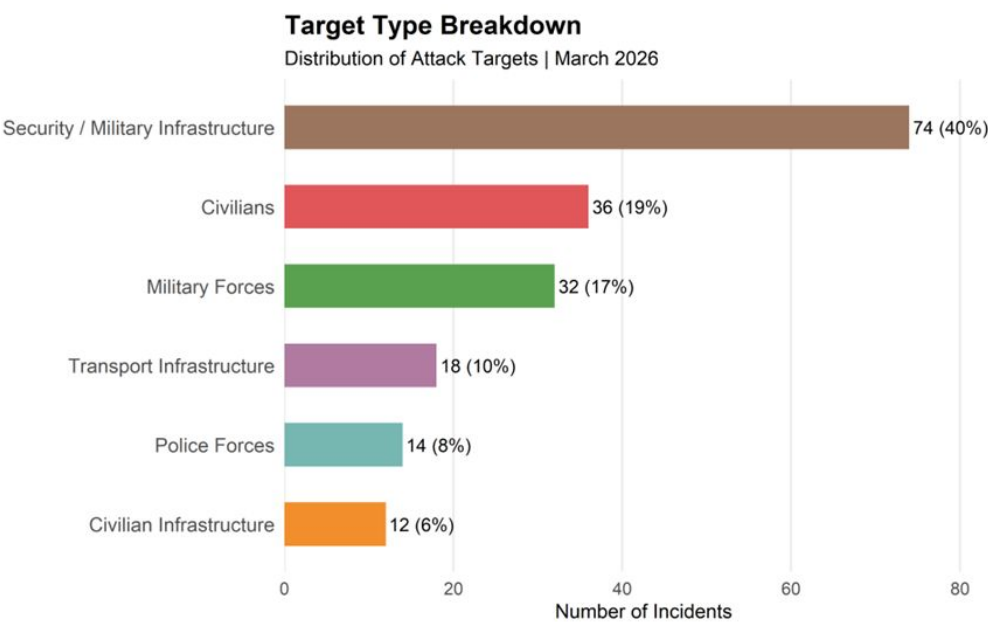
The interaction between actors and targets reflects a structured conflict dynamic, where different groups pursue distinct operational objectives within their respective regions.

Pashtun militant groups primarily engage security forces through repeated tactical encounters, maintaining pressure through sustained, localized operations. In contrast, Baloch insurgent groups demonstrate a broader targeting profile, combining security force engagement with infrastructure disruption to challenge state presence and economic control.

Security force activity is largely directed toward militant networks through counter-terrorism operations, but the reactive nature of these engagements limits their ability to fully disrupt militant initiative.

The overlap between actor types and target categories remains limited, suggesting that operational roles are relatively defined rather than interchangeable.

This division of roles indicates a **stable but persistent conflict structure**, where different actors sustain pressure through complementary but distinct targeting strategies rather than converging into a unified operational model.



6. URBAN & FRONTIER SIGNALS

This section identifies early-stage geographic signals outside core conflict zones, focusing on low-frequency incidents that may indicate emerging militant presence, testing activity, or future expansion pathways.

Emerging Peripheral Activity

Incident distribution outside core conflict zones remains limited but analytically significant.

Low-frequency events recorded in **Sindh, Punjab, and select urban districts** do not yet indicate sustained militant presence, but reflect early-stage geographic probing rather than random occurrence. Urban centers such as **Karachi and Hyderabad**, along with districts like **Dera Ghazi Khan**, register isolated incidents with minimal casualty impact. While individually insignificant, their presence suggests that militant actors retain the capability to operate beyond established conflict zones.

Nature of Expansion Signals

Peripheral incidents are characterized by:

- Low operational frequency
- Limited or zero casualties
- Absence of sustained follow-up activity

This pattern indicates **testing behavior rather than established deployment**, where actors assess terrain, response time, and operational feasibility without committing significant resources.

Frontier Spillover Indicators

In frontier districts adjacent to core conflict zones, incident patterns suggest **gradual outward pressure** rather than abrupt expansion.

These areas exhibit:

- intermittent activity linked to nearby hotspots
- spillover from established operational corridors
- early-stage presence without consolidation

This reinforces the assessment that expansion, if occurring, is **incremental and geographically contiguous**.

Signal Type
Early-stage diffusion

Primary Regions
Sindh, Punjab, Urban Centers

Risk Level
Low (Short-term)

Trend Direction
Gradual Expansion

Assessment

Current peripheral activity does not indicate immediate expansion into urban or secondary regions.

However, the **consistent presence of isolated incidents** across multiple non-core locations suggests that the conflict environment retains the conditions necessary for gradual geographic diffusion.

Key Implication

- Expansion risk is **low-intensity but persistent**
- Early signals suggest **probing and network testing** rather than active spread
- If sustained over time, these patterns may evolve into **stable secondary zones of activity**

The conflict is **not expanding rapidly, but it is not contained either**

7. EXPANSION INDEX

The Expansion Index quantifies the extent to which militant activity is spreading beyond core conflict zones by integrating geographic concentration, peripheral signals, and district-level distribution into a single composite assessment.

Expansion Index
Score: 3.8 / 10

Classification: Controlled
Diffusion

METHODOLOGY & CALCULATION

The index is derived from four components, each scored on a 0-10 scale and weighted based on analytical importance.

Component Scoring

Component	Score (0-10)	Weight	Weighted Score
Geographic Concentration	2.0	30%	0.60
Peripheral Presence	4.0	25%	1.00
District Spread	5.5	25%	1.38
Sustained Presence Outside Core	3.0	20%	0.60
(2.0 × 0.30) = 0.60 (4.0 × 0.25) = 1.00 (5.5 × 0.25) = 1.38 (3.0 × 0.20) = 0.60 Total = 3.58 ≈ 3.8 / 10			

**Core
Concentration:**
High

**Peripheral
Signals:** Present

Spread Level:
Moderate

Expansion Risk:
Low

HOW EACH SCORE WAS ASSIGNED

1. Geographic Concentration - Score: 2 / 10

- ~97% of incidents in KP + Balochistan
- Extremely concentrated

High concentration → low expansion score

2. Peripheral Presence - Score: 4 / 10

- Sindh, Punjab, GB show limited incidents
- Signals exist, but weak

Early-stage expansion → moderate-low score

3. District Spread - Score: 5.5 / 10

- Many districts active
- But intensity clustered in few

Moderate spread → mid score

4. Sustained Presence Outside Core - Score: 3 / 10

- Mostly isolated incidents
- No repeat activity patterns

No foothold → low score

Index Interpretation Summary

Contained structure	Weak peripheral signals	No sustained expansion
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8. FORWARD OUTLOOK

Current conflict patterns indicate a high likelihood of **continued stability in overall activity levels**, with no immediate indicators of large-scale escalation or operational collapse.

However, several forward-looking trends are likely to shape the near-term environment:

- **Sustained Militant Initiative:**

Militant actors are expected to retain control over operational tempo, with continued reliance on ambush-style engagements, small arms attacks, and selective use of explosive systems.

- **Gradual Geographic Diffusion:**

Low-frequency incidents in peripheral regions, including Sindh, Punjab, and urban districts, are likely to persist. While not indicative of immediate expansion, these signals suggest **ongoing network probing and potential groundwork for future presence**.

- **Localized Intensity in Balochistan:**

Balochistan is likely to remain a **high-impact zone**, with continued potential for disproportionate casualty events driven by combined use of explosives and direct engagement tactics.

- **Tactical Continuity Over Innovation:**

Militant groups are expected to maintain **proven, low-risk operational methods** rather than shift toward high-visibility or high-complexity attacks, reinforcing sustained conflict rather than escalation.

- **Limited Pre-emptive Disruption:**

In the absence of a shift toward proactive security operations, current patterns suggest that **militant networks will continue operating with relative freedom within core zones**.

Outlook Summary

The near-term trajectory points toward a **continuation of controlled but persistent conflict**, with the primary risk not being sudden escalation, but **gradual expansion and entrenchment over time**.

9. FINAL ASSESSMENT

The March 2026 conflict environment reflects a stable but structurally persistent insurgency, characterized by sustained militant initiative, geographic concentration within core zones, and early-stage signals of gradual diffusion beyond established conflict areas.

Across the reporting period, militant actors remain the primary drivers of violence, accounting for the majority of operational activity and maintaining control over the tempo, timing, and location of engagements. In contrast, security forces continue to operate within a reactive framework, responding to incidents rather than pre-empting them. This imbalance in initiative is a defining feature of the current conflict dynamic and indicates that militant networks retain operational freedom of movement within core regions.

The militant landscape is dominated by two primary actor ecosystems.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, violence is driven largely by Pashtun militant groups, consisting primarily of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its allied networks, including Islamic Movement of Pakistan (IMP), Jamaat-ul-Hurriyat (JuH), Hafiz Gul Bahadur (HGB) factions, and other localized militant formations. These groups sustain high-frequency operational activity through repeated engagements, ambushes, and small arms attacks.

In Balochistan, the conflict is shaped by Baloch insurgent groups, led primarily by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), alongside smaller aligned factions. These groups demonstrate a more diversified operational approach, combining direct engagements with infrastructure sabotage and disruption-oriented attacks targeting economic and state-linked assets.

This dual-actor structure results in regionally distinct conflict models.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa functions as a high-frequency operational environment, where repeated engagements maintain continuous pressure on security forces.

Balochistan, by contrast, operates as a high-impact battlespace, where fewer incidents generate disproportionately higher casualties, indicating more intense and destructive engagements.

From a tactical perspective, the conflict reflects a mature hybrid insurgency model. Militants combine ambush-based clashes, stand-off explosive attacks, targeted killings, and infrastructure sabotage, allowing them to sustain pressure while minimizing exposure. The dominance of small arms as the primary weapon system, supported by selective use of IEDs and explosive ordnance, reinforces a low-cost, high-sustainability warfare model. This enables prolonged conflict without reliance on high-end capabilities, reducing vulnerability to conventional counter-measures.

The relationship between activity and lethality further highlights the nature of the conflict.

Rather than being driven by large-scale, high-casualty attacks, violence is sustained through repeated low- to mid-intensity engagements, with occasional spikes in casualties driven by explosive incidents. This results in a cumulative lethality effect, where overall human impact remains significant despite the absence of major escalatory events.

Geographically, the conflict remains **highly concentrated**, with the overwhelming majority of incidents occurring in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. However, the consistent presence of **low-frequency incidents in peripheral regions**, including Sindh, Punjab, and select urban centers, indicates that the conflict is **not fully contained**. These incidents are characterized by low intensity, minimal casualties, and lack of repetition, suggesting **probing activity and early-stage network testing rather than established expansion**.

This pattern is reflected in the **Expansion Index score of 3.8/10**, classifying the current trajectory as **controlled diffusion**. While there is no evidence of rapid or large-scale geographic expansion, the persistence of peripheral signals indicates that the conflict environment retains the conditions necessary for **gradual outward spread over time**.

At the district level, the conflict demonstrates a **layered structure**, consisting of:

- **High-frequency operational hubs** (e.g., Bannu)
- **High-lethality zones** (e.g., Panjgur, Kech)
- **Active corridors of sustained movement** (e.g., Lakki Marwat – Dera Ismail Khan – Khyber)
- **Peripheral districts with isolated incidents**

This structure reinforces the assessment that the conflict is **not uniformly distributed**, but instead driven by **localized hotspots and connected operational networks**, with gradual spillover into adjacent regions.

Key Judgement

The conflict in Pakistan is **not escalating in volume, but it is not diminishing either**. Instead, it has entered a phase of **sustained equilibrium**, where militant actors maintain operational pressure without triggering large-scale escalation, while security forces are unable to significantly disrupt underlying networks.

Implications

- **Short-Term Outlook:**
Activity levels are likely to remain **stable within current ranges**, with continued militant dominance in operational initiative.
- **Medium-Term Risk:**
The persistence of peripheral signals suggests a **gradual widening of the conflict footprint**, particularly into secondary districts and urban peripheries.
- **Strategic Risk:**
The combination of **low-cost tactics, adaptive methods, and sustained operational tempo** makes the conflict structurally resilient. Without a shift toward proactive disruption, the current model is likely to **persist and slowly expand rather than collapse or escalate sharply**.

Bottom Line

Pakistan's conflict environment is best understood as a **controlled but enduring insurgency**, characterized by:

- **Militant-led operational tempo**
- **Geographically concentrated but slowly diffusing activity**
- **Sustainable, low-intensity warfare models**
- **Limited state ability to pre-empt or disrupt networks at scale**

The conflict is stable, but stability, in this case, reflects persistence, not control.

STRATEGIC WARNING

The current conflict environment, while stable in overall volume, reflects a **structurally resilient insurgency that is not being effectively contained**. Militant groups continue to retain **initiative, operational freedom, and sustainable low-cost tactics**, enabling persistent engagement without triggering escalation thresholds. The presence of **consistent low-frequency incidents in peripheral and urban regions** indicates ongoing **network probing and early-stage expansion pathways**. If left unaddressed, these signals are likely to evolve into **established secondary zones of activity**, gradually widening the conflict footprint. The absence of a proactive disruption posture increases the risk that the conflict will **expand incrementally rather than escalate suddenly**, making it harder to detect, contain, and reverse over time.