DETAILED REPORTS

Pakistan Conflict Monitor (December 01–31, 2025)

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Executive Assessment

The final quarter reflects a period of conflict consolidation rather than directional change in Pakistan's internal security environment. Across October, November, and December, militant activity demonstrated continuity in initiative, geography, and operational rhythm, indicating a conflict that is structurally stable but unresolved. There is no evidence of collapse, diffusion, or decisive escalation. Instead, the data point to an insurgency that has adjusted internally while maintaining pressure within established parameters.

December is best understood not as a break from earlier trends but as the culmination of dynamics visible across the quarter. Militant actors retained the initiative throughout, with security force activity remaining largely reactive. What distinguished December was not a surge in activity, but a reconfiguration of violence toward fewer, more consequential engagements, particularly those involving direct confrontation between militants and security forces. This shift marks a consolidation phase rather than a change in strategic direction.

Geographically, the quarter confirmed that militancy in Pakistan is corridor-based rather than diffuse. December reinforced this pattern most clearly. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former tribal districts, violence remained locked within a single dominant corridor spanning the southern and central tribal belt. Rather than expanding outward, activity in December became more concentrated within this corridor, with heightened lethality occurring without geographic

spread. This pattern indicates deepening entrenchment within permissive zones rather than exploratory expansion.

In Balochistan, December fit within a broader three-month pattern of multi-axis pressure rather than unified escalation. Violence continued to operate along two persistent corridors in central and southern districts. What shifted in December was the degree of linkage between these corridors, with indications of more coordinated pressure across axes. This does not yet amount to province-wide consolidation, but it suggests increasing connective tissue rather than fragmentation or decline.

The evolution of lethality across the quarter provides important context. October reflected high-intensity engagements, November showed a shift toward civilian harm and coercive pressure, and December marked a recalibration toward militant–security force confrontation. This progression suggests tactical flexibility rather than volatility. Militants adjusted the character of violence in response to conditions without abandoning core operating zones or overextending into new theatres.

The interaction between militant activity and counter-terror operations over the quarter underscores a managed conflict equilibrium. Security force pressure-imposed costs but did not disrupt militant operational coherence or geographic anchoring. December, in particular, demonstrates that increased engagement does not automatically translate into strategic advantage. Instead, both sides appear to be operating within predictable bounds, limiting escalation while entrenching persistence.

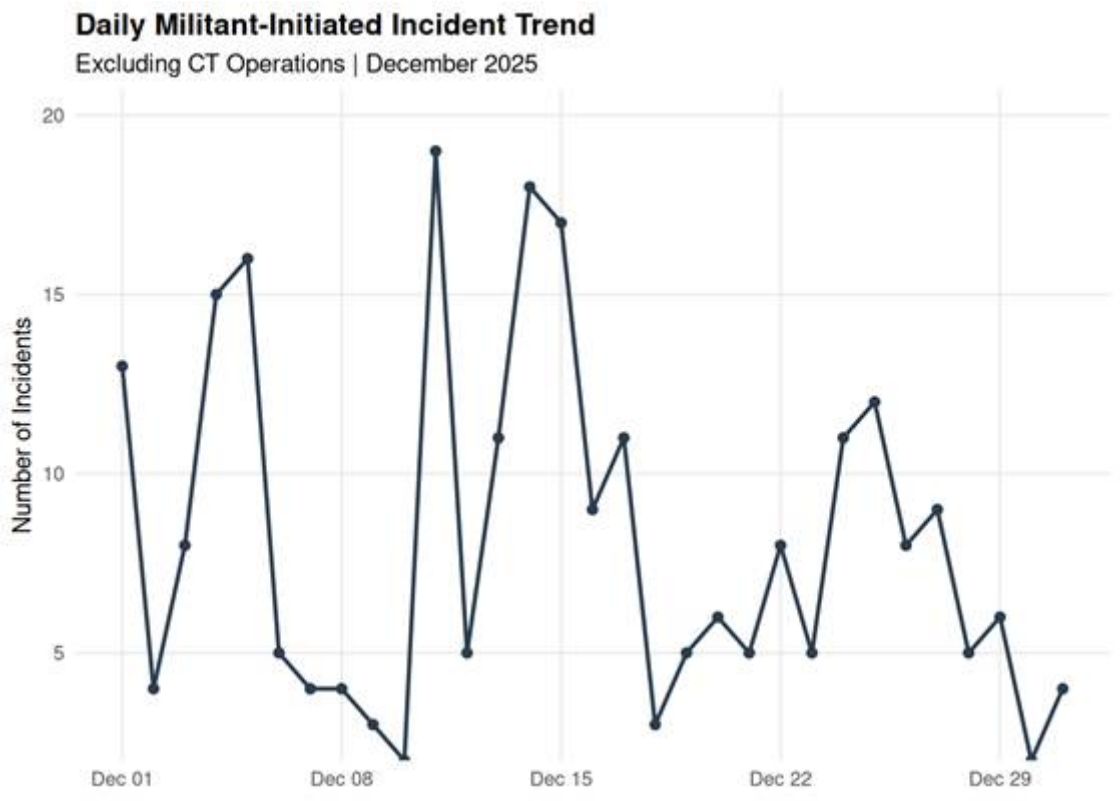
From an analytical perspective, the most salient feature of December is what did not occur. There was no geographic diffusion, no shift toward mass-casualty spectacle, and no collapse of militant operating environments. The conflict neither escalated nor de-escalated; it hardened internally. This reinforces the assessment that Pakistan’s militancy challenge at year’s end was defined by endurance and consolidation rather than transition.

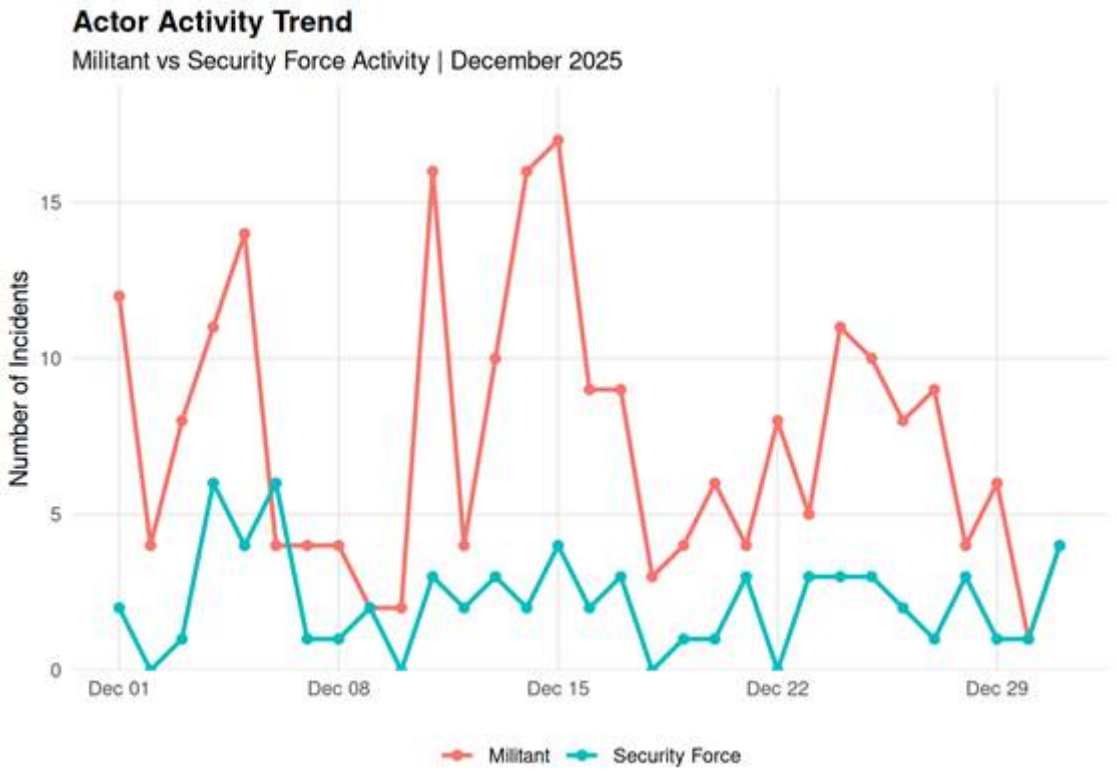
Based on the observed patterns across October to December, the most likely near-term trajectory is continued corridor-bound militancy with episodic spikes in lethality, rather than broad escalation or decline. December suggests a high probability that militants will continue to prioritise depth of engagement within established zones, adjusting tactics to impose costs without provoking overwhelming retaliation. Absent structural changes in local control, governance penetration, or security posture, the conflict is likely to persist in a managed but unresolved state, characterised by periodic intensification within the same geographic corridors rather than expansion into new areas or rapid degradation of militant capacity.

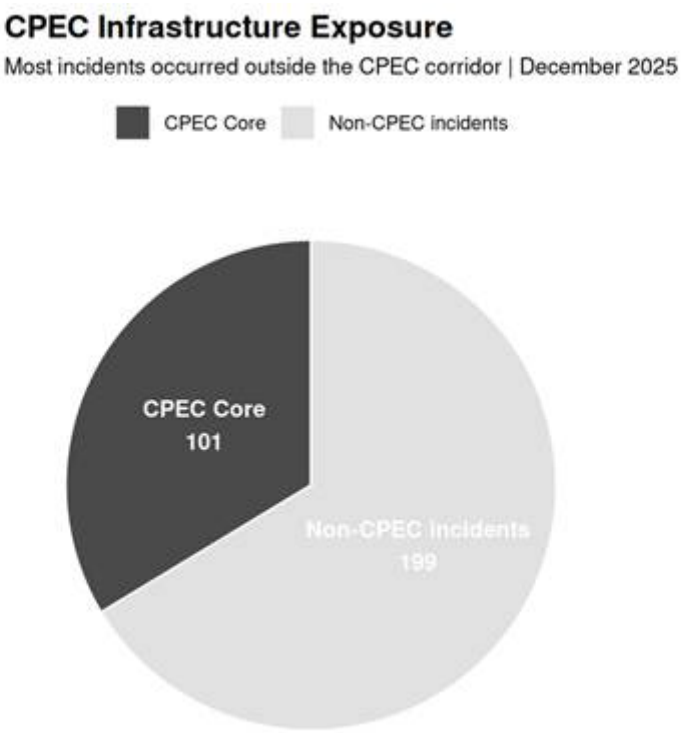
Quantitative Analysis

Overall Incident Volume and Operational Density

During December, Pakistan recorded a total of 300 militant-related events nationwide, comprising 253 militant-initiated attacks and 47 counter-terrorism operations. This distribution establishes a clear quantitative signal regarding initiative. Militants accounted for 84.3 percent of all recorded incidents, indicating that the operational tempo was driven overwhelmingly by insurgent action rather than proactive state disruption. From an analytical standpoint, this ratio is more significant than the absolute event count, as it demonstrates that security force activity, while persistent, remained structurally reactive and contingent on militant-initiated violence rather than pre-emptive control of the battlespace.


Daily Militant-Initiated Incident Trend
Excluding CT Operations | December 2025
Number of Incidents
20
15
10
5
Dec 01
Dec 08
Dec 15
Dec 22
Dec 29


Actor Activity Trend
Militant vs Security Force Activity | December 2025
Number of Incidents
0
5
10
15
Dec 01
Dec 08
Dec 15
Dec 22
Dec 29
Militant
Security Force



The total event volume of 300 incidents sits within Pakistan's established post-2021 militancy baseline, neither representing a sharp escalation nor a meaningful decline. This stability in overall incident count matters because it indicates that militant networks were able to sustain operations at a predictable and repeatable rhythm throughout the month. When paired with the sustained dominance of militant-initiated attacks, the data suggest that December was not characterised by surge dynamics but by operational consolidation, with insurgent logistics, recruitment, and command-and-control systems functioning within sustainable thresholds rather than under strain.

Counter-terrorism activity, reflected in 47 CT operations, underscores a significant operational burden on security forces but does not indicate a shift in initiative. CT operations accounted for only 15.7 percent of total events, meaning that for every CT action undertaken, militants initiated more than five attacks during the same period. Quantitatively, this ratio reflects containment rather than suppression. Security forces demonstrated the capacity to engage militants repeatedly, but not at a scale sufficient to disrupt attack frequency or reverse the overall operational density within the reporting period. The data therefore point to a security posture focused on managing violence rather than decisively reducing it.

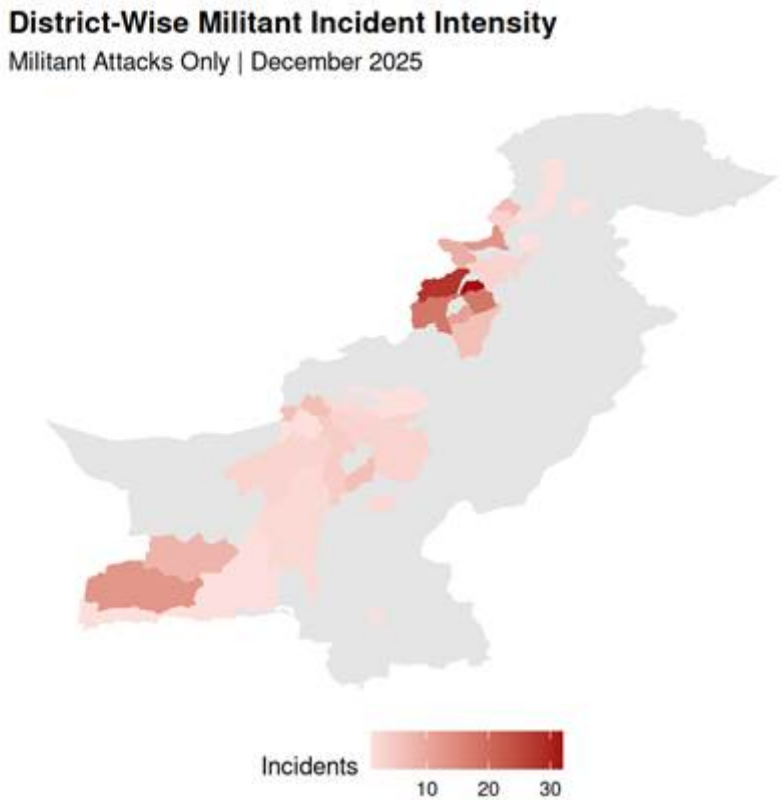
Geographic Distribution and Concentration of Activity

The spatial distribution of incidents in December reveals a sharply concentrated conflict environment. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa accounted for 213 recorded events, while Balochistan registered 81 events. Together, these two provinces accounted for 294 out of 300 total militant-related incidents, or 98 percent of nationwide activity. This concentration is analytically significant because it confirms that militancy in Pakistan is not geographically diffusing but remains entrenched within long-established theatres. There is no quantitative evidence of meaningful expansion into new regions during the reporting period.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s dominant share reflects a theatre of persistent low-to-medium intensity engagement, characterised by frequent attacks distributed across multiple districts rather than isolated spikes. The high incident count indicates sustained militant freedom of action across the former tribal districts and adjoining settled areas, reinforcing KP’s role as the primary arena of attritional insurgent pressure. In contrast, Balochistan’s lower absolute count masks a distinct operational logic, where fewer incidents often correspond to higher-impact actions, including attacks on infrastructure, prolonged engagements, and symbolic targets. Quantitatively, this divergence suggests different strategic priorities rather than differing capacity levels between theatres.

At the district level, activity in December clustered heavily in a small number of core locations, reinforcing the depth of engagement in permissive zones rather than geographic diffusion. North Waziristan recorded 43 events, making it the single most active district nationwide, followed by Bannu with 38 events and Lakki Marwat with 22 events. South Waziristan registered 18 events, while Khyber recorded 17, and Tank 15. Bajaur followed closely with 14 events. These seven districts alone accounted for well over half of all nationwide militant-related activity, despite representing a limited geographic footprint.

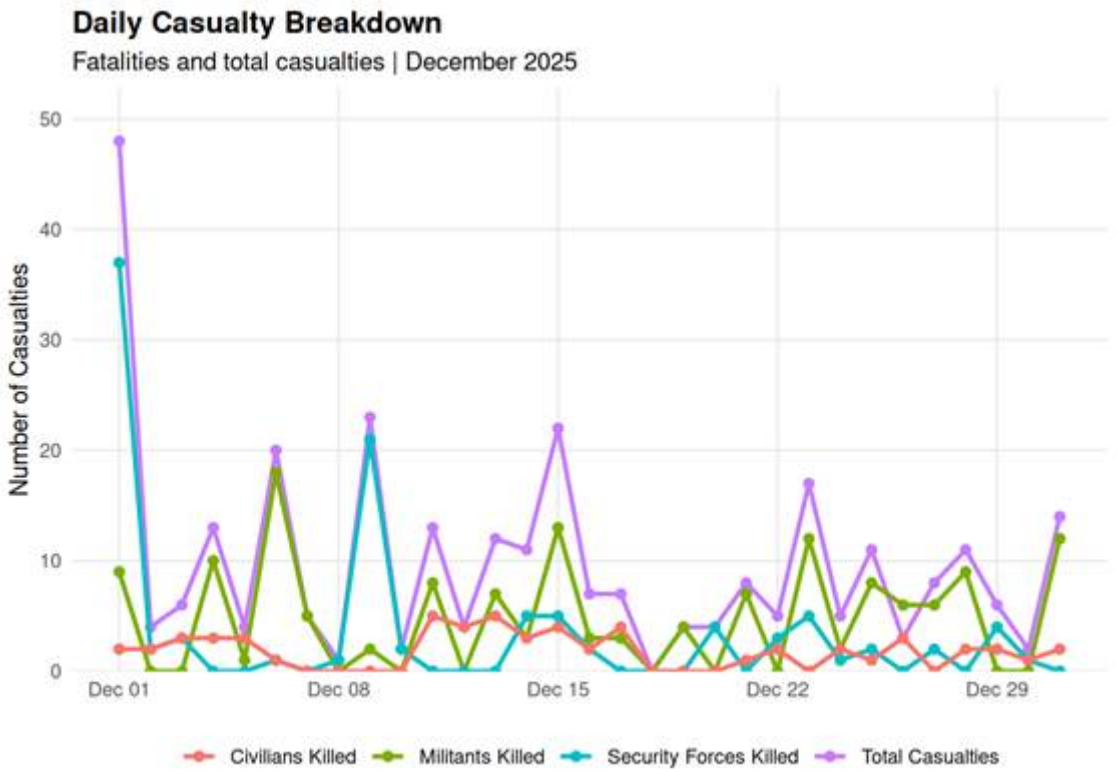
Quantitatively, this level of clustering is analytically significant. It indicates that militant groups are prioritising sustained depth of operations within entrenched theatres, repeatedly engaging in districts where terrain familiarity, facilitation networks, and operational freedom already exist. The persistence of these same districts across reporting periods signals durable militant ecosystems, where repeated counter-terrorism actions have not translated into lasting denial of space or reduction in operational density. Rather than attempting to open new fronts, militants are consolidating control and pressure within proven zones of activity.



Casualty Volume, Distribution, and Balance of Losses

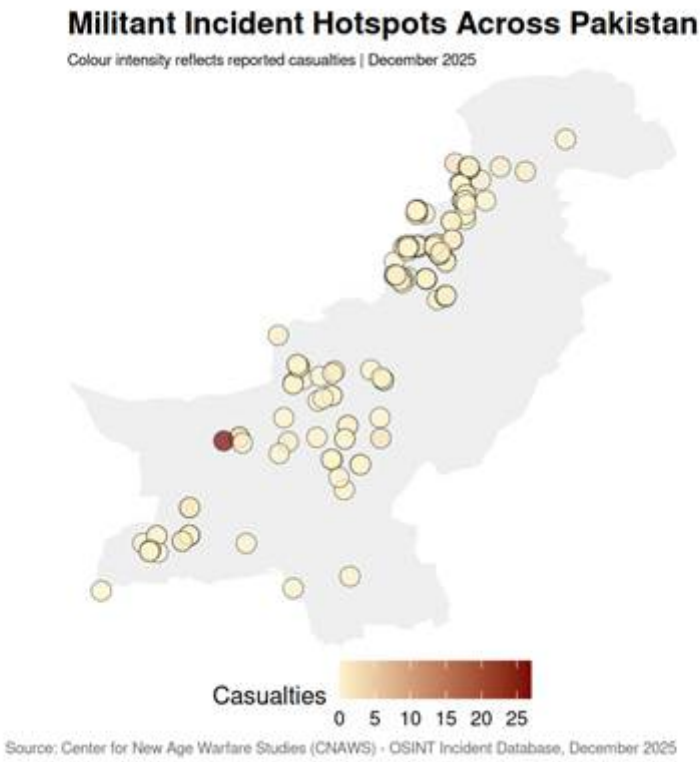
December recorded a total of 300 casualties nationwide, comprising 148 militants killed, 101 security personnel killed, and 57 civilian fatalities. The analytical value of this aggregate figure lies not in its absolute size but in its internal balance. Militant fatalities exceeded security force deaths, but not by a decisive margin. This near-parity outcome indicates that while counter-terror operations imposed attrition on militant groups, they did not generate a dominant kill ratio that would normally signal operational suppression or degradation of insurgent capacity.

The distribution of casualties shows a strong concentration on security forces rather than civilians. Of the 300 total fatalities, 101 were security personnel, compared to 148 militants and 57 civilians. This balance matters because security forces accounted for over one-third of all deaths, despite primarily operating in a reactive role. Quantitatively, this indicates that militant attacks were effective at translating engagement into state losses, even when militants themselves incurred higher absolute fatalities. The data therefore reflect cost imposition rather than deterrence.



This loss balance reflects a condition of attritional equilibrium rather than counter-insurgent dominance. In scenarios where militant capability is being structurally degraded, militant fatalities typically exceed security force losses by wide margins and are followed by reductions in attack volume. December exhibits neither pattern. Militants absorbed 148 fatalities while sustaining 253 attacks, demonstrating that manpower losses did not constrain operational output within the reporting period. Quantitatively, attrition failed to translate into momentum reversal.

Provincially, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa accounted for 201 casualties, including 104 militants, 52 security personnel, and 51 civilians. This profile reflects a theatre characterised by frequent kinetic exchanges, where militant and security force losses occur at comparable levels and civilian harm remains significant but not dominant. In contrast, Balochistan recorded 96 casualties, comprising 41 militants, 49 security personnel, and 6 civilians. The higher security-force share relative to militants in Balochistan underscores the confrontational and high-risk nature of engagements there, particularly around fixed installations and convoys.



At the district level, casualty concentration reinforces the picture of localized intensity rather than nationwide diffusion. Kurram recorded 37 casualties, the highest of any district, followed by North Waziristan with 29, Bannu with 25, Lakki Marwat with 14, Tank with 14, Khyber with 13, and Bajaur with 15. These districts alone accounted for a substantial share of nationwide fatalities. Importantly, in several of these locations, security force deaths approached or exceeded militant losses, despite militants being numerically dominant at the national level. This indicates localized tactical

effectiveness by militants, amplifying the strategic impact of each incident.

The civilian casualty share remained comparatively limited, with 57 civilian fatalities nationwide, but this does not indicate reduced civilian exposure. Instead, it reflects the tactical prioritisation of security forces and state-aligned targets over mass-casualty civilian attacks. Quantitatively, this suggests deliberate target discrimination aimed at sustaining pressure on the state while avoiding actions that could trigger broader political or military escalation. The pattern is one of restraint in targeting, not de-escalation in violence.

Province	Total Events	CT Ops	Total Attacks	Casualties (Total)	Militants Killed	Security Forces Killed	Civilians Killed
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	213	35	178	201	104	52	51
Balochistan	81	11	70	96	41	49	6
Sindh	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Others	1	0	1	3	3	0	0
Punjab	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	300	47	253	300	148	101	57

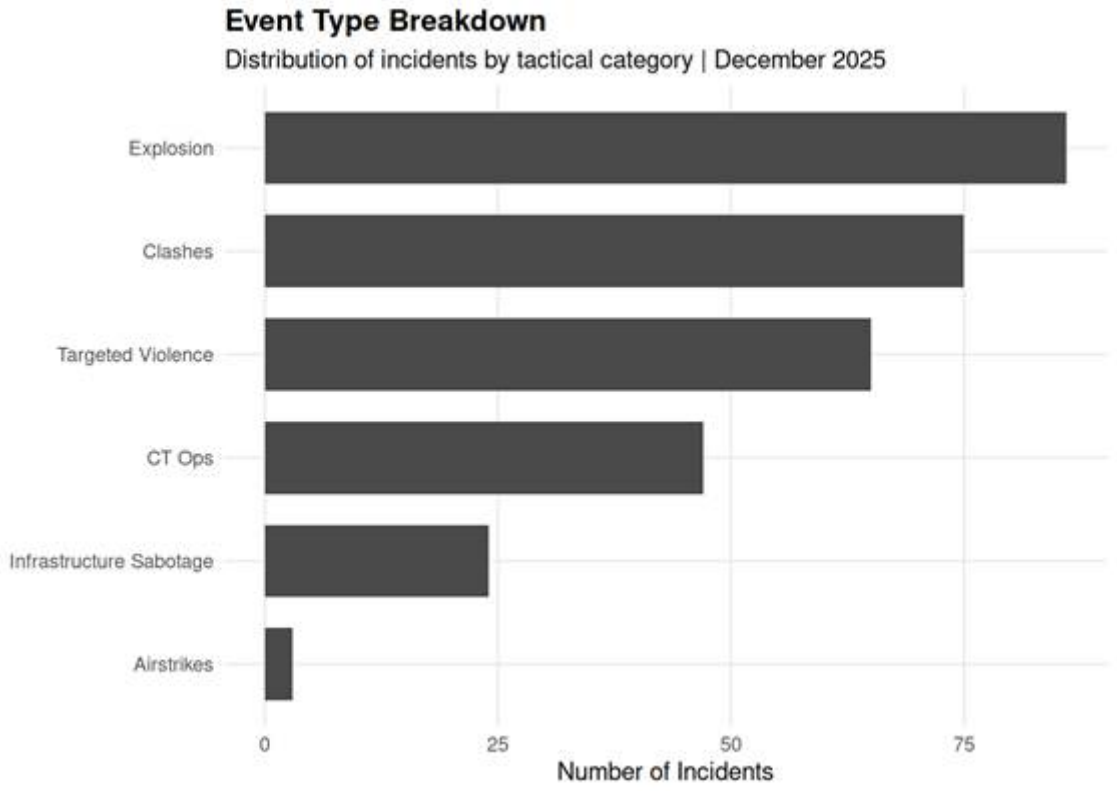
Province-wise Incident and Casualty Summary

District	Total Events	CT Ops	Total Attacks	Casualties (Total)	Militants Killed	Security Forces Killed	Civilians Killed
North Waziristan	43	5	38	29	20	2	7
Bannu	38	5	33	25	9	1	15
Lakki Marwat	22	3	19	14	9	2	9
South Waziristan	18	0	18	4	0	1	3
Khyber	17	2	15	13	6	5	2
Tank	15	3	12	14	10	3	1
Bajaur	14	4	10	15	6	2	7
Kech	13	0	13	5	0	3	2
Dera Ismail Khan	11	5	6	17	11	3	3
Kurram	11	2	9	37	12	24	1
Panjgur	9	1	8	15	4	10	1
Nasirabad	8	2	6	2	0	2	0
Karak	7	3	4	21	16	5	0
Quetta	6	0	6	27	0	27	0
Dera Bugti	5	1	4	14	14	0	0
Kachhi	5	1	4	0	0	0	0
Hub	4	1	3	0	0	0	0
Jhal Magsi	4	0	4	0	0	0	0
Kalat	4	1	3	12	12	0	0
Kharan	4	1	3	10	6	4	0
Mohmand	4	0	4	1	0	0	1
Hangu	3	0	3	2	0	1	1
Khuzdar	3	1	2	1	0	0	1
Kohat	3	0	3	1	0	0	1
Kohlu	3	0	3	2	0	2	0
Sibi	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Chagai	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Harnai	2	0	2	2	0	0	2
Nowshera	2	1	1	1	1	0	0
Shikarpur	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Awaran	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Batagram	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Chaman	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Diamer	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Gwadar	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Hyderabad	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Loralai	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lower Dir	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Malakand	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Mastung	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Okara	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Others	1	0	1	3	3	0	0
Peshawar	1	1	0	3	3	0	0
Swat	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Zhob	1	1	0	5	5	0	0
TOTAL	300	47	253	300	148	101	57

District-wise Incident and Casualty Summary

Nature of Violence, Tactics and Weapon Composition

In December, the nature of violence was decisively attack-driven, with militant actors initiating the overwhelming majority of kinetic activity. Militants therefore accounted for 253 of 300 incidents, establishing clear numerical dominance in setting the operational tempo. This distribution is analytically significant because it demonstrates that violence during the reporting period was structured around militant initiative, with security force engagement largely reactive rather than pre-emptive. This pattern is illustrated by repeated early-month attacks in Bannu and North Waziristan on 1 December, which triggered subsequent security force responses rather than being preceded by CT disruption.



Event Type	Incidents
Explosion	86
Clashes	75
Targeted Violence	65
CT Ops	47
Infrastructure Sabotage	24
Airstrikes	3

No Incidents based on Event Type

Province	Total Events	CT Ops	Total Attacks	Clashes	Explosions	Infrastructure Sabotage	Targeted Violence
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	213	35	178	0	59	8	0
Balochistan	81	11	70	0	24	14	0
Sindh	3	0	3	0	2	1	0
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Others	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Punjab	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	300	47	253	0	86	24	0

Province-wise Event Type Summary

District	Total Events	CT Ops	Total Attacks	Clashes	Explosions	Infrastructure Sabotage	Targeted Violence
North Waziristan	43	5	38	0	19	2	0
Bannu	38	5	33	0	12	2	0
Lakki Marwat	22	3	19	0	5	0	0
South Waziristan	18	0	18	0	5	2	0
Khyber	17	2	15	0	8	0	0
Tank	15	3	12	0	4	1	0
Bajaur	14	4	10	0	1	0	0
Kech	13	0	13	0	4	4	0
Dera Ismail Khan	11	5	6	0	1	0	0
Kurram	11	2	9	0	2	0	0
Panjgur	9	1	8	0	1	2	0
Nasirabad	8	2	6	0	5	1	0
Karak	7	3	4	0	0	1	0
Quetta	6	0	6	0	2	0	0
Dera Bugti	5	1	4	0	3	0	0
Kachhi	5	1	4	0	2	1	0
Hub	4	1	3	0	1	0	0
Jhal Magsi	4	0	4	0	0	1	0
Kalat	4	1	3	0	0	1	0
Kharan	4	1	3	0	0	0	0
Mohmand	4	0	4	0	2	0	0
Hangu	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Khuzdar	3	1	2	0	1	0	0
Kohat	3	0	3	0	0	0	0
Kohlu	3	0	3	0	2	1	0
Sibi	3	0	3	0	2	1	0
Chagai	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Harnai	2	0	2	0	0	0	0
Nowshera	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Shikarpur	2	0	2	0	1	1	0
Awaran	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Batagram	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Chaman	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Diamer	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Gwadar	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Hyderabad	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Loralai	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Lower Dir	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Malakand	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mastung	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Okara	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Others	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
Peshawar	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Swat	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Zhob	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	300	47	253	0	86	24	0

District-wise Event Type Summary

Disaggregation by event type shows that violence was tactically diversified rather than dominated by a single method. The dataset records 86 explosion incidents, 75 clashes, 65 incidents of targeted violence, 24 infrastructure sabotage incidents, and 3 airstrikes. This distribution matters because it indicates that militants sustained pressure through multiple, parallel tactical lines rather than over-relying on any one method. For example, while explosions formed the largest single category, direct-fire clashes remained frequent, as illustrated by multi-hour firefights around security posts in Kalat and Mastung on 4–5 December, occurring alongside separate explosive attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the same period. The pattern is one of breadth and redundancy rather than tactical dependence.

Within explosive violence, the dataset distinguishes 82 non-suicide explosions from 4 suicide explosions. This internal composition is analytically significant. Suicide attacks represented a very small fraction of explosive activity, indicating selective rather than routine use. This restraint is illustrated by the 1 December suicide attack on a police vehicle in Lakki Marwat, which stood out precisely because it was not followed by similar attacks elsewhere in the month. In contrast, command-detonated IEDs recurred across multiple districts, such as IED strikes on convoys in Panjgur and Kurram in early December, reinforcing that non-suicide explosives formed the backbone of militant explosive capability.

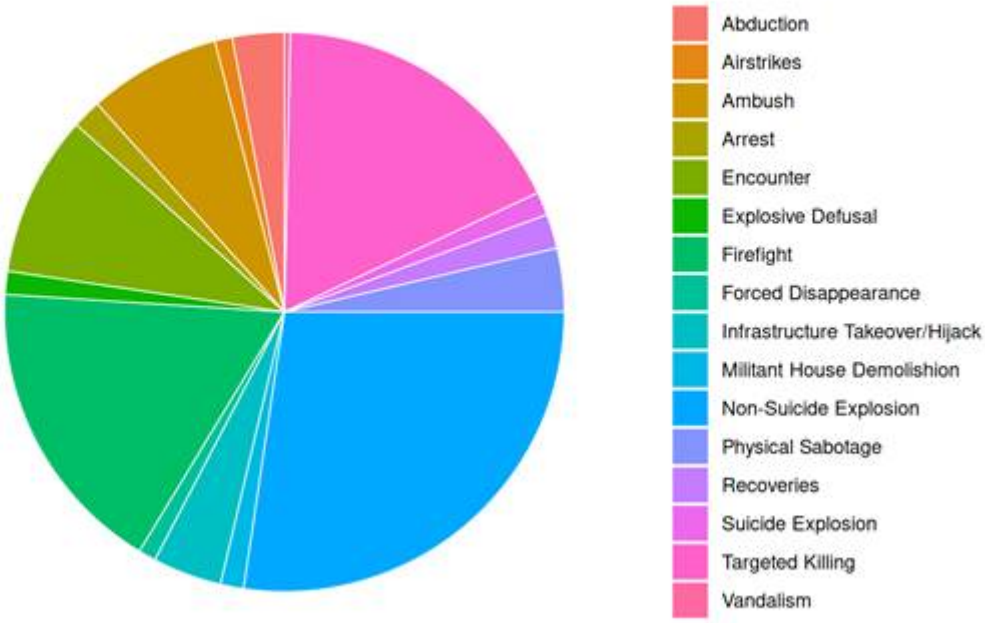
Clashes, totalling 75 incidents, further break down into 52 firefights and 23 ambushes. The predominance of firefights c tended e across r r than c

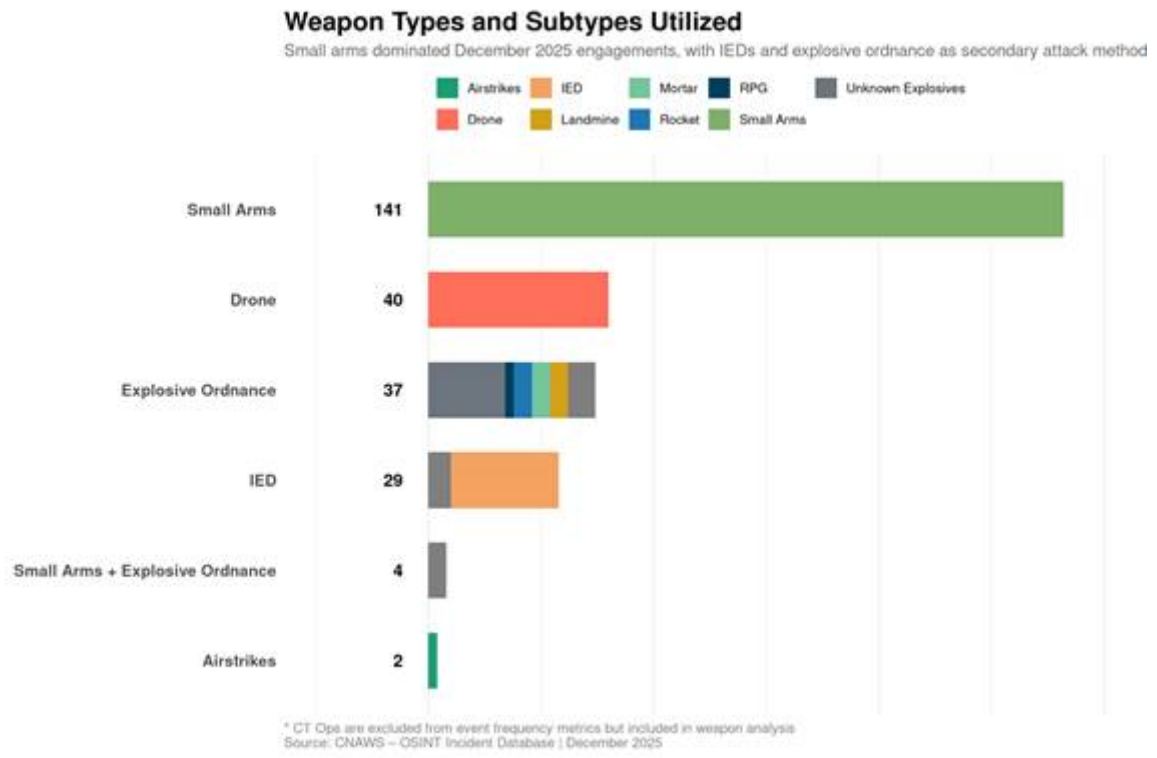
Event Type	Number of Incidents (Event Wise)	Event Subtype	Total Incidents per Event Sub-type
Airstrikes	3	Airstrikes	3
CT Ops	47	Arrest	5
		Encounter	28
		Explosive Defusal	4
		Militant House Demolition	4
		Recoveries	6
Clashes	75	Ambush	23
		Firefight	52
Explosion	86	Non-Suicide Explosion	82
		Suicide Explosion	4
Infrastructure Sabotage	24	Infrastructure Takeover/Hijack	12
		Physical Sabotage	11
		Vandalism	1
Targeted Violence	65	Abduction	9
		Forced Disappearance	3
		Targeted Killing	53
Total	300		300

Event Type and Event Subtype-wise Incident Breakdown

Event Subtype Breakdown

Distribution of incidents by tactical subtype | December 2025





These tactical patterns align directly with weapon usage data. The December Quantitative dataset records small arms used in 177 incidents nationwide, making them the most frequently employed weapon type. This dominance confirms that December's violence was primarily manpower-intensive rather than stand-off in character. The prevalence of small-arms usage is illustrated by repeated firefights involving automatic weapons in North Waziristan and Bannu throughout the first half of the month, where engagements evolved into sustained exchanges rather than single-contact attacks.

Explosive weapons formed the second major pillar of weapon utilization. Explosive ordnance excluding IEDs was used in 39 incidents, while IEDs were used in 32 incidents. Combined, explosives featured in 71 incidents, though the dataset treats these categories separately. This matters analytically because it shows that explosives complemented rather than replaced small-arms violence. A recurring pattern was IED-initiated contact followed by small-arms fire, as seen in convoy attacks in Panjgur and Kurram, reinforcing the integrated use of weapons rather than single-method attacks.

A notable feature of December's weapon profile was the routine use of drones, recorded in 46 incidents nationwide. This makes drones the third most frequently used weapon category after small arms and explosives. The scale of drone usage is analytically significant because it confirms that unmanned aerial systems are no longer experimental but embedded in regular militant operations. This pattern is illustrated by multiple quadcopter attacks in Bannu, North Waziristan, and Kurram between 3–6 December, including strikes on security positions and residential structures, indicating persistence rather than isolated experimentation.

A small number of incidents involved combined weapon use, with 4 incidents categorized as "Small Arms + Explosive Ordnance." Although numerically limited, these composite attacks are analytically important because they reflect higher tactical complexity. This pattern is illustrated by complex attacks on security force convoys in Balochistan in mid-December, where explosives were used to initiate contact and small arms to sustain engagement.

From the state side, airstrikes were recorded in 2 incidents nationwide. These represent state-led aerial kinetic actions rather than militant capability and remained marginal relative to ground-based engagements. Their limited use confirms that aerial force was applied selectively and did not define the month's tactical environment.

Provincially, tactical and weapon composition diverged sharply by theatre. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded 213 total events, including 178 militant attacks and 35 CT operations. Within KP, small arms were used in 132 incidents, drones in 45 incidents, explosive ordnance in 16 incidents, and IEDs in 16 incidents, reflecting a theatre dominated by manpower-intensive engagements supplemented by frequent drone usage. This profile is reflected in the dense clustering of attacks in North Waziristan, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat, where repeated incidents occurred without meaningful geographic spread.

In contrast, Balochistan recorded 81 total events, comprising 70 attacks and 11 CT operations. Weapon usage there included small arms in 43 incidents, explosive ordnance in 21 incidents, IEDs in 14 incidents, and drones in 1 incident. The higher relative reliance on explosives and infrastructure sabotage is illustrated by railway and gas pipeline attacks in Panjgur, Naseerabad, and Kachhi, underscoring a theatre oriented toward disruption and visibility rather than drone-enabled pressure.

Other regions remained marginal. Sindh recorded 3 events, Punjab 1, Gilgit-Baltistan 1, and Others 1, with limited weapon diversity and no sustained follow-on activity. This reinforces the quantitative conclusion that December's violence and weapon employment remained geographically concentrated rather than diffusely expanding.

Province	Airstrikes	Drone	Explosive Ordnance	IED	Small Arms	Small Arms + Explosive Ordnance	Total Incidents
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	1	45	16	16	132	3	213
Balochistan	1	1	21	14	43	1	81
Sindh	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
Gilgit-Baltistan	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Others	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Punjab	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	2	46	39	32	177	4	300

Province-wise Distribution of Incidents based on Weapon Type

Province	Airstrikes	Drone	Explosive Ordnance	IED	Small Arms	Small Arms + Explosive Ordnance	Total Casualties
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	0	24	1	10	163	3	201
Balochistan	7	0	9	6	74	0	96
Others	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Gilgit-Baltistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Punjab	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sindh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	7	24	13	16	237	3	300

Province-wise Casualties by Weapon Type

Conflict Actor Involvement

In December, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliated factions remained the dominant conflict actors, driving the majority of high-casualty engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in former tribal districts. The most consequential illustration was the 9–10 December escalation in Kurram District, where TTP-led forces executed coordinated ambushes and sustained clashes with security forces, resulting in exceptionally high cumulative fatalities and injuries over consecutive days. Additional TTP-linked attacks on 1–6 December in Bannu, Lakki Marwat, and North Waziristan reinforced the group's role as the primary initiator of lethal violence. This matters because it confirms that TTP retains operational initiative and the ability to mass effects across time rather than relying on isolated actions. The pattern signals organisational resilience and a deliberate focus on contested districts where terrain, sectarian fault lines, and weak local governance converge.

Conflict Actor 1	Total Incidents
Pashtun Militants	164
Baloch Insurgents	68
Pakistani Security Forces	68
Total	300

Conflict Actor Involvement by Incident Volume

Alongside core TTP structures, Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGB)–linked networks and allied shadow formations played a critical role in sustaining violence in North Waziristan and Bannu. A high-impact example occurred on 2 December in Masoomabad, Mamand Khel, when an ambush on the Assistant Commissioner North Waziristan's convoy, claimed by an HGB-aligned faction, killed the AC, security personnel, and a civilian, marking one of the deadliest single attacks of the month. Further lethal engagements involving HGB elements were recorded on 1 and 4 December in Mir Ali and Shiwa, including targeted strikes and follow-on clashes. This matters because it demonstrates that HGB networks remain deeply embedded locally and capable of targeting high-value state officials. The trend signals functional autonomy within the broader TTP ecosystem, complicating counter-terror strategies that treat the movement as a single, centrally directed actor.

In Balochistan, Baloch nationalist militant groups, primarily BLA- and BLF-aligned formations, dominated the conflict actor profile, accounting for the province's most intense casualty events. Between 1–7 December in Panjgur, Kharan, Kalat, and Mastung, coordinated attacks and prolonged engagements against security force camps and convoys resulted in substantial security force fatalities and injuries, including multi-day fighting around Kalat. These operations were frequently accompanied by claims of weapon seizures and temporary area control. This matters because it highlights a distinct operational logic from KP-based militancy, prioritising visibility, territorial contestation, and symbolic challenge to state authority. The trend signals that Baloch militant groups retain the capability to mount sustained operations despite ongoing security pressure, reinforcing the persistence of a parallel insurgency trajectory in the southwest.

Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)–linked elements played a secondary but lethal role, primarily through targeted attacks and clashes with police and CTD units. A notable high-impact case occurred on 6 December in Karak District, when a prolonged encounter with ISKP commander Hakeem Nisar resulted in multiple police casualties, including injuries to senior officers. Earlier ISKP-linked violence in the district had already contributed to cumulative fatalities. This matters because ISKP activity, while lower in volume, disproportionately targets law enforcement and seeks to exploit sectarian and ideological fractures. The trend signals persistence rather than expansion, positioning ISKP as a spoiler actor rather than a mass-mobilisation threat in December.

Finally, security forces remained predominantly reactive conflict actors, incurring heavy casualties while responding to militant-initiated violence rather than pre-emptively shaping the battlespace. The casualty burden borne by the military and police during 9–10 December in Kurram, 1–2 December in Panjgur and Bannu, and 4–7 December in Kalat underscores that most lethal engagements were triggered by militant action. This matters because it highlights limits in early warning, area control, and disruption capacity in key theatres. The pattern signals a security posture driven by containment rather than initiative, allowing militant actors to dictate the timing and location of violence across multiple fronts.

Comparative Quantitative Analysis: October, November, and December

A comparison of October, November, and December indicates that militant activity over the final quarter followed a pattern of reconfiguration rather than linear escalation or decline. October recorded 243 total militant-related events, November recorded 285 events, and December recorded 300 events. While this reflects a sequential increase in total recorded activity across the quarter, the distribution of that activity across actors, geography, and lethality reveals shifting internal dynamics rather than simple expansion. The increase from October to November was more pronounced than the increase from November to December, suggesting that growth in operational tempo slowed as the year closed, consistent with consolidation rather than surge behaviour.

The proportion of militant-initiated attacks remained consistently dominant throughout the quarter. In October, 186 of 243 events were militant attacks; in November, 209 of 285 events were attacks; and in December, 253 of 300 events were attacks. Although the absolute number of attacks increased month-on-month, the key quantitative signal is the stability of militant initiative. In all three months, militants initiated the clear majority of incidents, and no month showed a shift toward security-force-led operational tempo. This consistency indicates that state activity, while persistent, did not succeed in structurally reversing initiative at any point during the quarter.

Geographic distribution reinforces this interpretation. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa recorded 140 events in October, 176 in November, and 213 in December, showing a steady month-on-month increase. Balochistan recorded 92 events in October, 100 in November, and 81 in December, peaking mid-quarter before declining. Quantitatively, this divergence indicates a redistribution of militant effort toward Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rather than an overall contraction of activity. As national event counts increased, activity became more concentrated in KP, suggesting prioritisation of theatres offering greater operational permissiveness or strategic payoff.

Casualty figures introduce a more complex and analytically significant dimension. October recorded 624 total casualties, November recorded 342, and December recorded 300. This steep decline in casualties across the quarter occurred despite rising event counts, demonstrating a clear decoupling between incident volume and lethality. October stands out as an outlier month characterised by high-intensity engagements, while November and December reflect progressively lower aggregate lethality even as operational tempo increased.

Disaggregated casualty data clarify the nature of this shift. In October, casualties included 325 militants killed, 241 security personnel killed, and 58 civilians killed. In November, 160 militants, 67 security personnel, and 115 civilians were killed. In December, 148 militants, 101 security personnel, and 57 civilians were killed. October was therefore defined by exceptionally high militant and security force fatalities, November by a sharp spike in civilian deaths relative to security force losses, and December by a rebalancing toward militant–security force fatalities with comparatively fewer civilian casualties. This sequence reflects changes in the character of violence, not merely its scale.

The balance of losses further reinforces this assessment. In October, militant deaths exceeded security force deaths by 84; in November, by 93; and in December, by 47. While militants consistently suffered higher fatalities, the narrowing gap in December, combined with higher security force deaths relative to November, indicates that increased counter-terror engagement did not translate into asymmetric advantage. Instead, December shows a pattern of mutual attrition, where intensified engagements imposed higher costs on both sides.

District-level event data show strong continuity across the quarter, underscoring entrenched militant operating environments. In October, the most active districts included South Waziristan (21 events), Bannu (20), and North Waziristan (18). In November, Bannu (35 events) emerged as the most active district, followed by North Waziristan (22) and Khyber (18). In December, South Waziristan (21) and Bannu (20) again led, followed by North Waziristan (18) and Kalat (13). The recurrence of Bannu and the Waziristan districts across all three months indicates no geographic diffusion of militancy, only tactical recalibration within the same core zones.

District-level casualty patterns are more dynamic than event counts, revealing how lethality shifted even as geography remained stable. In October, casualties were distributed across several districts without a single dominant outlier. In November, Bannu recorded 61 casualties, clearly exceeding other districts such as Kurram (32) and Lakki Marwat (25). By December, casualty concentration shifted again, with Kurram recording 37 casualties, followed by North Waziristan (29) and Bannu (25). This progression demonstrates a transition toward fewer but more lethal engagements in specific districts, even as overall casualty totals declined.

Counter-terrorism operations fluctuated across the quarter but did not produce proportional effects on militant activity. October recorded 57 CT operations, November recorded 76, and December recorded 47. The November increase in CT operations did not correspond with a reduction in attacks in December, which instead rose to 253 attacks. Quantitatively, this weak relationship between CT volume and subsequent attack frequency highlights the limits of attrition-based approaches under prevailing conditions.

Taken together, the October–December quantitative sequence does not support a narrative of de-escalation. Instead, it reflects a transition from high-intensity, casualty-heavy engagements in October, to civilian-heavy violence in November, to higher-volume but comparatively lower-lethality militant–security force confrontation in December. Across all three months, activity remained geographically concentrated in the same districts, with shifting lethality profiles rather than displacement or resolution. Quantitatively, the data point to conflict consolidation and hardening, not fragmentation or decline.

Analytical Dimension	October	November	December	Quarterly Interpretation (Non-Numeric)
Total Militant-Related Events	243	285	300	Event volume increased across the quarter, but the rate of increase slowed toward December, indicating consolidation rather than surge escalation.
Militant-Initiated Attacks	186	209	253	Militants initiated the majority of incidents in all three months, demonstrating uninterrupted operational initiative throughout the quarter.
Counter-Terrorism Operations	57	76	47	CT operations peaked in November but declined in December, without reversing militant initiative or attack volume.
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Events	140	176	213	KP became increasingly central to militant activity, indicating a redistribution of effort toward a single dominant theatre.
Balochistan Events	92	100	81	Balochistan activity peaked mid-quarter and declined in December, suggesting tactical recalibration rather than withdrawal.
Total Casualties	624	342	300	Lethality declined sharply across the quarter despite rising event counts, showing decoupling between volume and intensity.
Militants Killed	325	160	148	Militant fatalities were highest in October and declined thereafter, without constraining attack frequency.
Security Personnel Killed	241	67	101	Security force fatalities dropped sharply in November but rebounded in December, indicating intensified direct confrontations late in the quarter.
Civilians Killed	58	115	57	Civilian harm peaked in November, reflecting a temporary shift toward coercive or population-adjacent violence.
Balance of Losses (Militant vs SF)	+84 militants	+93 militants	+47 militants	The gap narrowed in December, reflecting mutual attrition rather than asymmetric state advantage.
Most Active Districts (Events)	South Waziristan (21), Bannu (20), North Waziristan (18)	Bannu (35), North Waziristan (22), Khyber (18)	South Waziristan (21), Bannu (20), North Waziristan (18), Kalat (13)	District rankings show continuity rather than diffusion, confirming entrenched militant operating zones.
Highest Casualty Districts	Distributed, no dominant outlier	Bannu (61), Kurram (32), Lakki Marwat (25)	Kurram (37), North Waziristan (29), Bannu (25)	Casualty concentration intensified over time, shifting toward fewer but deadlier engagements.
Overall Conflict Character	High-intensity, casualty-heavy	Civilian-heavy, mixed violence	Higher-volume, lower-lethality SF–militant clashes	The quarter reflects conflict hardening and spatial consolidation, not de-escalation or expansion.

The militant landscape in Pakistan during the final quarter reflects insurgency consolidation rather than escalation or decline. The quantitative record demonstrates stability in initiative, geography, and operational persistence, and the qualitative implication is that militant actors are operating within a mature conflict equilibrium. Rather than expanding territorially or intensifying indiscriminately, militant groups appear to have prioritized depth over breadth, reinforcing established operating environments and sustaining pressure through repeatable, resource-manageable tactics.

Across the three months, militancy exhibited organizational endurance and adaptive restraint. The absence of geographic diffusion, combined with persistent activity in the same districts, suggests that militant ecosystems remain intact despite sustained counter-terror pressure. These ecosystems are not opportunistic or transient; they are embedded within local terrain, social networks, and logistical corridors that enable repeated engagement without requiring escalation to spectacular violence. This pattern reflects an insurgency that has moved beyond experimentation and into routinised conflict management.

The internal evolution of violence across the quarter further indicates strategic calibration rather than volatility. October's high-intensity engagements point to moments of concentrated confrontation, while November's elevated civilian harm suggests tactical coercion and pressure signalling rather than battlefield dominance. December's shift toward militant–security force engagements, with fewer civilians affected, indicates a recalibration toward direct contestation of state authority rather than population-centric intimidation. Collectively, this progression reflects tactical flexibility within bounded limits, not fragmentation or loss of control.

Militant intent over the quarter appears oriented toward cost imposition rather than territorial takeover or decisive victory. The persistence of attacks despite fluctuations in casualties and counter-terror operations suggests that militants are not seeking rapid escalation or collapse of state control. Instead, the objective appears to be sustained pressure, aimed at stretching security forces, normalizing insecurity in key districts, and reinforcing perceptions of state vulnerability without triggering overwhelming retaliation.

The interaction between militancy and counter-terror operations also reveals a structural asymmetry in objectives. While security forces increased operational activity at points during the quarter, the qualitative outcome was containment rather than disruption. Militants absorbed attrition without measurable degradation in operational rhythm, indicating that current counter-terror approaches are managing violence rather than reshaping the conflict environment. This dynamic reinforces a cycle in which both sides operate within predictable parameters, limiting escalation but entrenching persistence.

Importantly, the quarter does not reflect a transition toward mass-casualty terrorism or symbolic spectacle. The limited use of suicide attacks, the reliance on conventional small arms and explosives, and the focus on repeatable engagements all suggest deliberate restraint. This restraint should not be misinterpreted as weakness. Instead, it reflects confidence in sustainability, where militants prioritize survivability, local dominance, and continuity over dramatic but costly actions.

Violence Corridors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa–Former FATA

The three-month quantitative record indicates the presence of a single dominant violence corridor in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa–Former FATA, rather than multiple fragmented axes. Across October, November, and December, the same contiguous set of districts absorbed the highest share of recorded events and casualties, demonstrating spatial persistence rather than volatility.

The core of this corridor spans North Waziristan, Bannu, South Waziristan, and Lakki Marwat, with Kurram and Khyber functioning as peripheral extensions. In October, this corridor was already clearly visible, with North Waziristan

recording 43 events, Bannu 38, Lakki Marwat 22, and South Waziristan 18. These districts formed a geographically contiguous arc accounting for the majority of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa activity during the month.

In November, the same spatial configuration persisted rather than shifting. Bannu again emerged as the most active district with 35 events, followed by North Waziristan with 22, while Khyber recorded 18 events and South Waziristan 17. No new districts displaced this core, indicating consolidation rather than diffusion.

In December, overall event volumes within the corridor showed modest numerical contraction but no spatial displacement. South Waziristan recorded 21 events, Bannu 20, and North Waziristan 18, maintaining their position as national activity anchors. The repetition of the same districts across all three months confirms that militancy in KP–FATA remained geographically locked within a single belt.

Casualty data further reinforces the corridor interpretation. In October, Kurram already exhibited elevated casualty levels relative to its event count, indicating early signs of lethality concentration within the same corridor. In November, lethality intensified in the same belt, with Bannu recording 61 casualties and Kurram 32, despite neither district experiencing a disproportionate surge in events.

By December, lethality within the corridor escalated further without geographic spread. North Waziristan recorded 117 casualties, South Waziristan 50, and Kurram 35, despite only moderate event counts relative to October and November. This divergence between event volume and casualty magnitude confirms that violence within the corridor was intensifying internally rather than expanding outward.

Analytically, the persistence of this corridor across all three months indicates that KP–FATA militancy is structured around a primary operating belt, not episodic hotspots. The data show spatial stability combined with rising per-incident lethality, suggesting that security force pressure has constrained outward diffusion but has not fragmented or degraded the corridor itself.

Violence Corridors in Balochistan

In contrast to KP–FATA, the three-month quantitative record for Balochistan does not show a single unified violence corridor, but rather two intersecting and persistent corridors, each with a distinct spatial orientation. Importantly, both corridors remain visible across October, November, and December, indicating structure rather than opportunism.

The first corridor runs through central Balochistan, anchored by Kalat, with extensions into Khuzdar and intermittent linkage to Mastung. In October, Kalat appeared among active districts with moderate event counts. In November, Kalat recorded 9 events and Khuzdar 4, maintaining continuity within the same central belt. By December, Kalat recorded 13 events, confirming its role as a recurring node across all three months. The repeated appearance of Kalat, combined with its adjacency to multiple affected districts, identifies it as a transit and staging corridor rather than a one-off engagement zone.

The second corridor is located in southern and southwestern Balochistan, running through Kech, Panjgur, and Awaran, with spillover into Kharan. In October, Kech recorded 13 events and Panjgur 9, establishing early corridor activity. In November, this axis persisted, with Kech recording 14 events and Panjgur 11. In December, Kech recorded 12 events and Panjgur 6, confirming continuity despite lower absolute volumes.

Casualty patterns along this southern corridor show internal evolution rather than spatial expansion. While casualties were lower in October, they increased in November and December, particularly in Awaran and Panjgur, indicating a shift from lower-intensity harassment toward more lethal engagements within the same geographic frame.

What is analytically significant is that December shows convergence rather than separation between the two Balochistan corridors. Elevated casualties in Kalat, Khuzdar, and Awaran during December suggest increasing operational linkage between the central and southern axes. While the data do not support the conclusion of a single province-wide corridor, they do indicate growing connective pressure across parallel axes rather than isolated district-level actions.

Comparative Analytical Conclusion

Across October to December, the quantitative data support a corridor-based model of militancy rather than point-based hotspot analysis. In KP–FATA, violence is consolidated within a single hardened corridor cantered on the southern tribal districts, with rising lethality indicating deepening insurgent entrenchment rather than expansion.

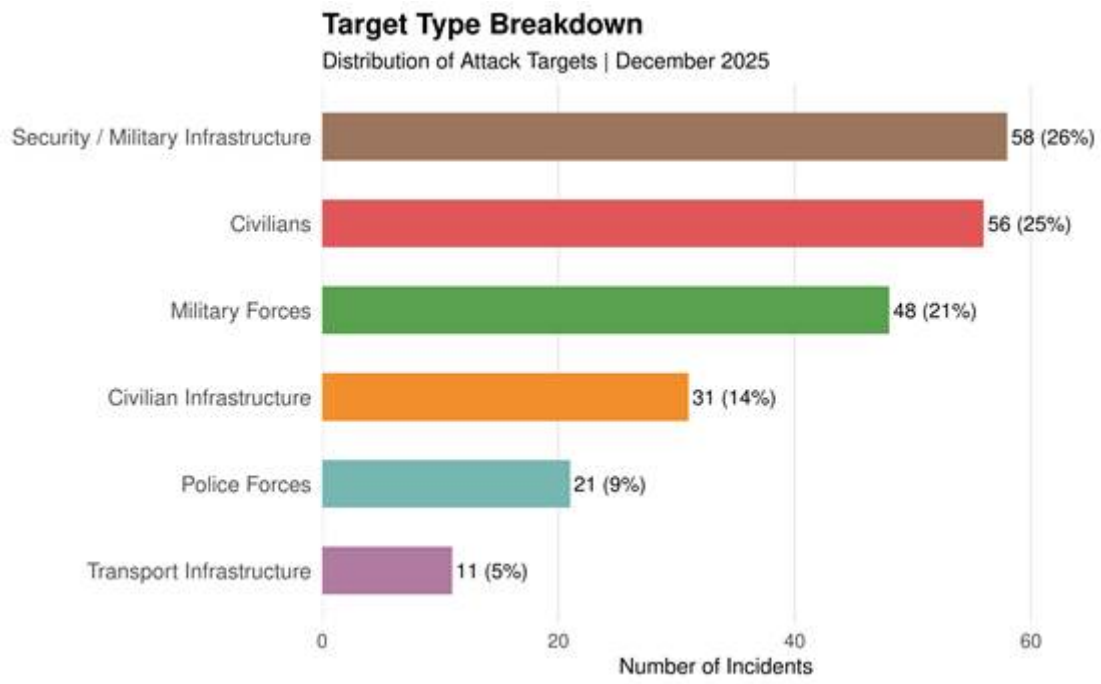
In Balochistan, violence is structured along two semi-distinct but persistent corridors, reflecting a strategy of distributed disruption across parallel axes rather than concentrated confrontation in one theatre. The increasing linkage between these corridors in December suggests coordination rather than fragmentation.

Critically, none of these corridors show evidence of collapse, displacement, or geographic rollback across the three-month period. Instead, they demonstrate spatial persistence combined with internal intensification, which is a stronger indicator of militant resilience than raw incident counts alone. The corridor framework therefore provides a more accurate representation of Pakistan’s militancy landscape during the quarter, explaining why tactical successes have not translated into durable territorial or spatial denial.

Qualitative Analysis

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Sustained Pressure Without Territorial Ambition

The qualitative pattern in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during December reflects a deliberate militant strategy of sustained coercion rather than spatial control. Militants are not attempting to seize or administer territory, nor are they declaring liberated zones. Instead, they are executing a campaign designed to continuously contest the state’s ability to project authority, protect collaborators, and ensure routine governance. This is evident in the repeated targeting of security patrols, logistics movements, and police-linked infrastructure across Bannu, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Kurram, and Lakki Marwat.



What distinguishes December from episodic violence is the consistency of pressure. Attacks occurred with sufficient regularity to prevent normalization, but without the intensity that would provoke a full-spectrum military escalation. This suggests a calibrated use of violence intended to exhaust rather than overwhelm. Militants appear to be managing escalation thresholds carefully, maintaining a level of activity that keeps security forces stretched across multiple districts simultaneously, thereby diluting their capacity to dominate any single area decisively.

A critical qualitative feature of the KP theatre is the systematic dismantling of community-based stabilizing mechanisms. Peace committees, jirga participants, former militia members, and individuals perceived as intermediaries between the state and society were repeatedly targeted. This is not incidental violence. These actors represent the informal architecture through which the state compensates for limited administrative penetration in peripheral districts. By neutralizing them, militants are not merely punishing individuals but collapsing the connective tissue that enables intelligence sharing, dispute resolution, and localized conflict management.

The persistence of suicide tactics and complex ambushes in KP further indicates that militant organizations retain both ideological commitment and organizational depth. Suicide attacks are costly in manpower and require extensive facilitation networks. Their continued use in December signals confidence rather than desperation. Militants appear willing to trade personnel for psychological impact, particularly against police and paramilitary targets that symbolize routine state authority.

Importantly, militant activity in KP also demonstrates a fluid operational environment. Fighters frequently disengaged after attacks, avoided prolonged engagements unless tactically advantageous, and exploited terrain familiarity to evade follow-on operations. This pattern reinforces the assessment that militants are prioritizing survivability and continuity over spectacle.

Balochistan: Denial, Disruption, and Symbolic Control

In Balochistan, the qualitative character of violence during December diverges sharply from that observed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Here, militancy is less about attritional pressure and more about denying the state functional control over space, infrastructure, and narrative legitimacy. Attacks on rail lines, police stations, energy installations, and convoy routes were not isolated acts but components of a broader disruption strategy.

Militants in Balochistan demonstrated a clear preference for targets that carry symbolic and economic weight. Rail infrastructure attacks disrupted not only transport but also the perception of state reliability. Temporary overruns of police posts and levies stations, even when followed by militant withdrawal, served to publicly expose the fragility of local security arrangements. These actions are designed to resonate beyond their immediate tactical effects, reinforcing a narrative of contested sovereignty.

Civilian exposure in Balochistan was notably higher in proportional terms. This does not necessarily indicate indiscriminate violence but rather reflects the coercive environment militants seek to impose. Civilian harm functions as a signal to local populations about the costs of alignment with the state and the limits of state protection. In this context, violence against civilians is not collateral but instrumental, shaping behaviour through fear and uncertainty.

Another defining feature of the Balochistan theatre is the apparent coordination across districts. December incidents suggest a degree of synchronization in timing and targeting that exceeds spontaneous or purely local action. While multiple group identities and banners may be present, the operational logic appears aligned. This indicates either coordination mechanisms or shared strategic intent, even if command structures remain fragmented.

State responses in Balochistan, particularly intelligence-based operations, achieved tactical success in eliminating militants. However, the continued occurrence of attacks indicates that these operations are attritional rather than transformative. They reduce immediate threat vectors but do not dismantle the broader militant infrastructure that sustains operations.

Militant Ecosystem Resilience and Organizational Logic

Across both theatres, December qualitative evidence points to a resilient militant ecosystem rather than isolated cells acting independently. Despite significant losses, militant groups demonstrated the capacity to regenerate, reorganize, and continue operations without observable degradation in tempo. This suggests that recruitment pipelines, facilitation networks, and safe havens remain sufficiently intact.

Militant behaviour in December also reflects learning and adaptation. Groups avoided predictable patterns, diversified targeting, and adjusted tactics based on security force responses. The preference for ambushes, hit-and-run attacks, and infrastructure sabotage over static confrontations indicates an emphasis on cost imposition rather than battlefield dominance.

The coexistence of multiple militant actors within the same operational spaces did not produce observable friction in December. Instead, violence appeared complementary rather than competitive. This does not imply unity of command, but it does suggest a permissive environment in which different actors can operate without mutual interference, further complicating counter-terror efforts.

Counter-Terrorism Posture and Structural Constraints

Security force activity during December demonstrates tactical competence but strategic constraint. Counter-terrorism operations successfully neutralized a substantial number of militants, disrupted specific plots, and reasserted control in

localized engagements. However, these gains did not translate into sustained suppression of militant activity.

A key limitation is the reactive nature of operations. Security forces are frequently responding to attacks rather than preventing them. This reactive posture cedes initiative to militants and allows them to dictate tempo and geography. Additionally, the dispersion of forces across multiple hotspots limits the ability to concentrate power and dismantle networks comprehensively.

Another constraint is the absence of parallel governance consolidation. Military operations clear space temporarily, but without durable administrative presence, militants are able to reconstitute influence once forces redeploy. December patterns suggest that kinetic success alone is insufficient to alter the underlying conflict dynamics.

Civilian Space, Governance Erosion, and Psychological Impact

One of the most consequential qualitative trends in December is the progressive erosion of civilian space. Targeted killings, intimidation, and infrastructure disruption collectively shrink the zone in which civilians can operate without risk. This has cumulative effects on governance, economic activity, and social cohesion.

Fear alters behaviour. Civilians reduce engagement with state institutions, avoid cooperation with security forces, and prioritize survival over participation. Over time, this creates an environment in which militant narratives gain passive acceptance, not necessarily through ideological alignment but through resignation.

The psychological impact of repeated, localized violence is therefore disproportionate to casualty figures. Even when attacks do not produce high fatalities, they reinforce perceptions of insecurity and state vulnerability, which militants exploit strategically.

Background Developments Influencing the Militancy Environment

A number of structural and contextual developments during the reporting period have materially shaped Pakistan’s internal security environment and help explain the persistence and configuration of militant violence observed in December. These developments do not constitute incident data themselves, but they exert significant influence on militant capability, resilience, and targeting behaviour.

1. Cross-Border Dynamics and the Western Frontier

Militancy trends continue to be affected by instability along the Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier. Public statements by Pakistan’s military and civilian leadership consistently emphasize cross-border facilitation of militant movement, including allegations of infiltration enabled by gaps in border security and limited Afghan enforcement. Regardless of attribution debates, the operational effect is clear. Militant groups active in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former tribal districts appear to retain access to external depth that allows regrouping, logistical replenishment, and leadership survivability. This external dimension constrains Pakistan’s ability to impose decisive disruption and contributes to the observed resilience of militant networks despite sustained counter-terror operations.

At the strategic level, repeated border clashes and diplomatic exchanges have increased friction between Islamabad and Kabul, while failing to produce effective coordination mechanisms. This has forced Pakistan to divide attention between internal security management and frontier stabilization, reducing flexibility in addressing domestic militancy comprehensively.

2. Federal–Provincial Coordination and Governance Friction

Internal political dynamics have also had a bearing on the security environment. Public disputes between the federal government and provincial authorities, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, over the implementation of national security directives signal friction in policy execution. Such divergence matters in a counter-terror context because it introduces delays, uneven enforcement, and jurisdictional ambiguity. Militant groups historically exploit these gaps to evade pressure and adapt their operations. While federal assertions of centralized authority reflect recognition of this risk, the persistence of visible disagreement indicates that governance coherence remains a vulnerability rather than a stabilizing factor.

3. Post-Conflict Neglect and Structural Grievances in Former Tribal Areas

Long-standing governance deficits in previously militancy-affected areas continue to shape the threat landscape. Reports of delayed reconstruction, inadequate service delivery, unresolved displacement issues, and absence of political engagement in areas such as Tirah Valley and Upper Bara underscore a failure of post-conflict consolidation. These conditions do not generate immediate violence, but they sustain the social and economic grievances that militant groups exploit for recruitment, facilitation, and local acquiescence. The disconnect between security gains and civilian recovery reinforces perceptions of abandonment, weakening the state's long-term position even where kinetic control is periodically restored.

4. Balochistan: Repression, Alienation, and Insurgency Persistence

In Balochistan, background developments point to a deepening cycle of coercion and resistance. Reports of enforced disappearances, discovery of bodies bearing signs of torture, prolonged detention of activists and academics, and restrictions on political activity have intensified local alienation. While such measures may yield short-term control, they erode institutional legitimacy and expand the pool of passive or active support for insurgent narratives. The persistence of violence in districts repeatedly associated with these practices suggests that coercive governance is functioning as an amplifier of instability rather than a suppressant.

This environment also complicates counter-insurgency efforts by blurring distinctions between security operations and political repression, making it harder to isolate militant actors from the broader population.

5. Tactical and Psychological Adaptation by Militant Groups

Background reporting indicates that militant groups are continuing to adapt tactically and psychologically. The use of female suicide attackers, targeted assassinations of civil administrators, and assaults on symbolic security installations point to efforts to bypass established security profiling and undermine administrative confidence. These adaptations align with quantitative indicators of higher lethality per incident and concentrated violence in select districts, suggesting confidence in operational planning rather than organizational decline.

Such tactics are designed not only to inflict casualties but to disrupt governance, intimidate state representatives, and generate psychological impact disproportionate to the scale of individual attacks.

6. Legal, Judicial, and Civic Space Pressures

The broader legal environment also intersects with militancy dynamics. Judicial interventions pushing back against misuse of anti-terror legislation coexist with continued application of these laws in politically sensitive contexts. This tension reflects stress within the legal architecture of counter-terrorism. When exceptional security laws are perceived as instruments of political control, public trust erodes, indirectly weakening societal resistance to militant messaging cantered on injustice and repression. Expanded surveillance practices and restrictions on civic activity further narrow non-violent channels of dissent, increasing the long-term risk of radicalization.

7. Strategic Messaging and Externalization of Threat Narratives

Finally, intensified official emphasis on foreign sponsorship of militancy, particularly through Afghanistan and India, shapes both domestic and external security discourse. While this narrative supports diplomatic positioning and deterrence messaging, it risks overshadowing internal drivers of militancy such as governance deficits, economic exclusion, and institutional mistrust. Over-externalization of the threat can slow necessary internal reforms, thereby indirectly sustaining the conditions that allow militancy to endure.

Special Analysis - TTP's Organizational Structure for 2026

The annual organizational structure released by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in December 2025 for 2026 provides rare insight into the group's internal evolution, command discipline, and strategic intent. Far from being a symbolic or aspirational document, the structure reflects an organization that views itself not as a transient militant network but as a durable parallel system of governance, security, and administration. The breadth, granularity, and territorial mapping embedded in the structure signal confidence in continuity and an expectation of sustained operational relevance.

At the highest level, the division of the organization into four zonal commands, Northern, Central, Southern, and Western, reflects a mature command-and-control framework aligned closely with Pakistan's internal security geography. Each zone corresponds to areas of persistent militant activity observed in quantitative data, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the former tribal districts, and Balochistan. The presence of dedicated organizational commissions in each zone, with clearly defined leadership roles, indicates that TTP prioritizes administrative coherence alongside military operations. This reduces dependence on individual commanders and mitigates the impact of leadership attrition.

Under the Northern Zone, the organizational structure explicitly lists both Gilgit-Baltistan Province and a separate Kashmir Province, placing them alongside districts in Malakand, Bajaur, Hazara, and adjoining regions. The inclusion of Kashmir as a distinct provincial entity warrants careful analytical scrutiny. The document does not clarify whether this reference pertains to Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, or is deliberately constructed to encompass both. The absence of geographic qualifiers, operational boundaries, or subordinate unit details introduces ambiguity regarding intent. One interpretation is that the reference reflects organizational presence or facilitation networks within Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. An alternative, and not mutually exclusive, interpretation is that the designation is aspirational, signalling ideological alignment or long-term intent toward Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir without indicating current operational capability. Given TTP's historical focus on the Pakistani state rather than India-centric militancy, the Kashmir reference should not be read as confirmation of an imminent expansion of operations. Instead, it likely serves as a strategic placeholder, preserving narrative flexibility and symbolic positioning across the broader Kashmir issue. Until corroborated by observable incident patterns, recruitment flows, or operational claims, the Kashmir Province designation remains an ambiguous organizational signal rather than evidence of an active or emerging theatre.

The Central and Southern Zones merit particular attention due to their overlap with Pakistan's most active violence corridors. The Central Zone encompasses Peshawar, Khyber, Kurram, Orakzai, Kohat, and adjacent areas, while the Southern Zone covers Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Tank, Dera Ismail Khan, North and South Waziristan, and extends into Karachi and interior Sindh. This territorial framing mirrors the districts that consistently dominate event and casualty data, suggesting that the organizational structure is not aspirational but grounded in existing militant influence and operational reach. The explicit inclusion of Karachi and Southern Punjab within the Southern Zone further indicates intent to maintain facilitation, logistics, and urban networks beyond the immediate conflict belt.

The establishment of a dedicated Western Zone for Balochistan is analytically significant. Historically, TTP activity in Balochistan has been secondary to Baloch separatist groups. By formalizing a zonal command with its own organizational commission, military in-charge, and provincial subdivisions, TTP signals intent to institutionalize its presence in the province rather than operate opportunistically. This aligns with December trends showing increased lethality and coordination in parts of Balochistan, even where TTP is not the dominant actor.

Beyond zonal organization, the document reveals a sophisticated central apparatus that mirrors state-like governance. The existence of a General Intelligence Directorate with subdivisions for external intelligence, internal security, and counter-intelligence indicates prioritization of survivability, penetration resistance, and operational security. This structure helps explain the group's resilience despite sustained counter-terror pressure and suggests an increasing emphasis on identifying informants, preventing defections, and detecting state penetration.

Equally important is the presence of multiple functional directorates responsible for economy, welfare, education, dawah, media, accountability, judiciary, and explosives management. These bodies serve several strategic purposes. Internally, they enforce discipline, regulate resources, and manage internal disputes. Externally, they allow the group to project itself as an alternative authority structure, particularly in areas where state governance is weak or contested. The welfare and education directorates, in particular, indicate long-term investment in social influence rather than short-term military gain.

The judiciary system outlined in the structure, including appellate courts, primary courts, and a dar-ul-ifta, demonstrates an attempt to monopolize dispute resolution and religious legitimacy within areas of influence. This institutionalization reduces reliance on coercion alone and allows TTP to embed itself within local social structures. The presence of an accountability directorate further indicates concern with internal corruption and command discipline, suggesting lessons learned from past factionalism and fragmentation.

The explicit maintenance of an Istishhadi force and dedicated training camps across zones confirms that suicide operations remain a central component of TTP's military doctrine. These units are not treated as ad hoc assets but as standing formations with named leadership, reinforcing the assessment that suicide attacks observed in recent months are not reactive measures but part of a sustained operational capability.

At the provincial level, the structure is especially granular. Each province is assigned governors, intelligence heads, economy heads, and unit commanders, often with multiple subordinate units in high-activity areas such as North and South Waziristan. This mirrors the districts that consistently produce the highest number of incidents and casualties, reinforcing the link between organizational investment and operational output. The inclusion of provinces in Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, Northern Punjab, Karachi, and interior Sindh suggests that even where overt violence remains limited, TTP seeks to preserve latent networks for facilitation, recruitment, and strategic depth.

Analytically, the 2026 organizational structure signals three core trends. First, TTP assesses that it has survived the attrition phase and is now consolidating for endurance. Second, the group anticipates prolonged conflict rather than near-term resolution, justifying investment in governance, justice, and social sectors. Third, the structure reflects confidence that territorial access, cross-border depth, and recruitment pipelines will remain viable despite state pressure.

For Pakistan's internal security environment, this organizational blueprint implies that militancy is likely to remain structurally embedded rather than episodic. The depth and institutionalization of TTP's structure reduce the likelihood that kinetic operations alone will dismantle the group. Instead, the structure points toward a protracted contest in which military pressure, governance capacity, and legitimacy will be decisive variables rather than force ratios alone.

Conclusion

Strategic Implications

The combined October to December data point to a militancy landscape in Pakistan that is structurally resilient under constraint, rather than volatile, weakening, or escalating. When the data are examined collectively rather than month by month, the most consistent signal is not change in scale or method, but continuity in how violence is organised, where it is absorbed, and what it is designed to achieve.

December is analytically decisive because it resolves ambiguities present earlier in the quarter. October can be interpreted as a period of episodic intensity and November as a phase of tactical deviation toward civilian harm. December clarifies that neither interpretation captures the underlying trajectory. Instead, the data show that militant actors retained the ability to shape the character of violence without altering its strategic footprint. This capacity for internal adjustment without spatial displacement is characteristic of a mature insurgent system rather than a movement in flux.

Across the three months, militancy appears governed by a logic of operational sufficiency rather than expansion. The data show no sustained attempt to broaden the conflict geographically, escalate toward mass casualty spectacle, or force decisive confrontation. At the same time, there is no evidence of retreat, fragmentation, or organisational decay. The emerging pattern is one of managed persistence, where violence is calibrated to sustain pressure, demonstrate relevance, and preserve operational depth without overexposure.

The geographic structure of violence reinforces this assessment. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former tribal districts, the repeated concentration of activity in the same districts across all three months indicates that militancy is anchored rather than opportunistic. The data consistently show that violence returns to the same terrain even after security force action. This suggests that militant networks retain facilitation, mobility, and local depth sufficient to absorb disruption without relocation. Counter-terror pressure appears to constrain behaviour but not dismantle the spatial logic sustaining insurgent endurance.

In Balochistan, the data reveal a different but equally stable configuration. Violence is distributed across parallel corridors rather than consolidated into a single axis. This distribution does not reflect fragmentation. Instead, it reflects a strategy of dispersed pressure that stretches state response capacity while avoiding decisive confrontation. December shows indications of increasing linkage between these corridors, suggesting coordination rather than decline, and reinforcing the assessment that militancy in the province is adaptive but controlled.

Qualitative patterns in the data further clarify militant intent. There is little indication of strategic desperation or ideological overreach. Suicide attacks remain limited, targeting choices fluctuate within bounds, and actions that would invite overwhelming retaliation are consistently avoided. This restraint should not be interpreted as weakness. It reflects confidence in endurance. Militants appear to assess that persistence and friction offer greater strategic value than escalation.

The interaction between militant activity and counter-terror operations across the quarter highlights a deeper asymmetry. Security forces are active and capable, but the data suggest that their actions are largely reactive and regulatory rather than transformative. Operations disrupt and attrit, but they do not alter where violence re-emerges. The result is a stable but unfavourable equilibrium for the state, where effort is sustained but leverage remains limited.

Taken together, the quarter does not reflect a conflict moving toward resolution. It reflects a conflict that has settled into a durable pattern, where both sides operate within understood limits. December confirms that this pattern is not

transitional but structural.

Forward Trajectory and Probabilistic Forecast

Based on the integrated October to December data, the most likely forward trajectory is continued persistence of militancy within established corridors, accompanied by episodic shifts in lethality rather than changes in geography or strategic intent. Militants are likely to continue prioritising depth, survivability, and cost imposition over expansion or spectacle.

There is a meaningful probability of localised intensification within existing zones, particularly in response to security force pressure or symbolic triggers. However, the likelihood of nationwide diffusion, sustained escalation, or strategic transformation remains low under current conditions. The data consistently show avoidance of actions that would disrupt the existing equilibrium.

In the former tribal districts, violence is likely to remain corridor-bound, with periodic hardening rather than displacement. In Balochistan, the more probable evolution is greater coordination across parallel axes, increasing operational friction for the state without converging into a single suppressible front.

The assessment is based on insights drawn from CNAWS's open source incident database. (The views expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of CNAWS.)

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