YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN PAKISTAN: CAUSES, TRENDS, AND COUNTER-STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Youth radicalization in Pakistan has emerged as a pressing concern, with a significant portion of the country's young population being vulnerable to extremist ideologies. This study explores the causes, trends, and counter-strategies related to youth radicalization, focusing on socio-economic, political, and ideological factors that contribute to this phenomenon. Poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and exposure to extremist propaganda are identified as key drivers of radicalization among Pakistani youth. The paper also examines the role of social media and religious institutions in spreading extremist narratives, as well as the impact of regional conflicts and geopolitical dynamics on youth perceptions. Furthermore, it evaluates existing counter-radicalization strategies, including deradicalization programs, community engagement initiatives, and educational reforms, while highlighting their limitations and successes. The study concludes with recommendations for a multi-faceted approach to counter youth radicalization, emphasizing the need for inclusive economic policies, improved education systems, and stronger community-based interventions to address the root causes of extremism and foster resilience among young people.

Keywords: Youth Radicalization, Pakistan, Extremism, Counter-Radicalization, Socio-Economic Factors, Ideological Propaganda, Deradicalization Programs, Community Engagement, Education Reforms, Geopolitical Influences.

Introduction

Pakistan has been engaged in a relentless and unyielding battle against terrorism for more than a decade now. This ongoing and multifaceted war against terrorism encompasses two vital dimensions; one significant dimension focuses directly on combating terrorism itself and dismantling the networks that support it, while the other dimension is aimed at addressing the deep-rooted and pervasive issue of

radicalization within society. Following the catastrophic and tragic events of 9/11, Pakistan has had to confront a staggering number of brutal and heinous acts of terror that have claimed countless lives and have instilled a profound sense of insecurity among its people. (Rahman et al., 2023). Prior to this significant turning point in history, the nation did not experience any instances of 'suicide terrorism,' but it shockingly transformed into a grim reality and soon became a daily occurrence for various extremist organizations targeting the state. The troubling wave of violence began in the year 2002 and tragically continued thereafter. This period marked a time when the state found itself ill-prepared for such unprecedented and heinous acts of violence against its own citizens and institutions.

Civilian governments and military dictators did not take the issue seriously, either they wanted to utilize some militants or did not see 'the time bombs of radicalization' in the state. On the other hand, the army was not prepared for such kind of indirect and asymmetric war. Despite having better and competent security agencies they faced many challenges and problems during the war against terrorism. So far, a great loss has been incurred by state in shape of men and material, and still the war continues (Farooq et al., 2014). In this campaign Pakistan adopted several strategies and took some strategic decisions to defeat terrorism and radicalization. Creating of army operation i.e. Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb etc., for strong and hardcore militants. The state continued efforts against sleeper cells of terrorists based in urban centers. In this campaign the state succeeded against so many banned organizations, street mafias like MQM, and criminal mafias.

Background and Context

In under-developing countries, such as Pakistan, the youth bulge can pose serious development challenges. It has been posited that the youth bulge causes domestic political violence across countries. The shifting tendency towards political instability brought an increasing number of students in the drive of radical or extremist causes within the over populated youth segment. The educational institutions, thus, became melting pots for the certain elements pursuing the fanatic faith line and led to chaotic environments. Education, religions, and the holy places are being used as a medium to convey the hatred message to the extent that the poor chaps could commit suicide attacks. (Al-Jabri et al., 2022) The responsibility of such heinous events goes beyond the purview of education and must be looked upon from a broader perspective.

In 1967-68, China also faced the same kind of turmoil, which could have harvested a lot for us regarding the root causes, effects, and above all the strategies to mitigate these problems. The thesis, however, is to explore what strategies were followed by the Chinese Govt. to get rid of the decade-long disastrous consequences of the cultural revolution, so that the same be applied to the innocent young blood of our dear

homeland. Much of Pakistan's history has involved back and forth politics between the military and civilian hierarchy. The youth make up a very big part of Pakistan' society, nearly around 60% and are often seen to reflect the nation's current psyche. A new trend can be seen in the country- youth turning to 'radical Islam' (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013). This paper aims to delve into the reason for this change and what the future holds for Pakistan.

Understanding Radicalization

In the past few years, extensive research and efforts have been made to counter the process of radicalization. This includes research and programs that are designed to understand, prevent, and/or intervene against radicalization in different places and situations. Because of the endeavor in understanding radicalization, various concepts are obtained. Commonly, radicalization is likened as the diapason of circumstances or a course of development that make somebody aimed at increasing their political, social, or religious radical behavior (Taneski et al., 2019). Explaining radicalization is intricate as much as discussing the concept of extremism or fundamentalism. This is due to the assumption that radicalism is the leanest phase before turning into violence. However, some matters suggest that radicalization, extremism, and fundamentalism are connected yet not congruous.

Radicalization in Pakistan is a vexatious issue that has attained the interest of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Repeatedly, it is a challenge however must be comprehended inside the framework of broader social and political development. The hazardous impression of rushed and half-baked strategies has unintended repercussions for elevated probable fundraising of radicals. These resolutions must be grounded in Pakistan's olden circumstances and pay particular consideration to the ethnic, political, and communal dynamics of Pakistani society. Moreover, a local, sub-region, or a country-led strategy is obliged with international sustenance that is cooperative and subsidies to the fundamental frame of fighting terrorism and upholding counter-terrorism and radicalization exertions recognizes savvy nation-centered strategic developments (ZAIDI, 2024). The shaped approach acknowledges a comprehensive method to regional radicalization and endeavor to bind together security, political, socio-economic, and cultural issues into a harmonious attitude. Bulging the mentioned features, the subsequent purpose-driven policy recommendations are endeavored. The resolution to Pakistan specific radicalism and the course of action is developed resting in the current endemic context.

Definitions and Concepts

Counter-radicalization and de-radicalization have emerged as new security threats and challenges in the post-9/11 world in some Western countries, including Canada and the United States. The radicalization process is undertaken quickly, although the

factors involved can be numerous and complex. In the Iraqi insurgency and Afghan availability, journalists suggested that the process can take a mere matter of weeks or days. There is no simple demonstration of the path to radicalization and the factors that have contributed to that viewpoint. Instead, several representative illustrations provide a model of accelerated radicalization (Reiter et al.2021).

Radicalization of youth poses a particular threat to Pakistan, which is afflicted by the war on terror. The topic has taken on greater salience with the upsurge of terrorist activity in the country and the spreading of its roots to new demographic sectors. Though existing in a historical context linked to global narratives, it presents a uniquely Pakistani challenge. These changing dynamics and new threat perceptions have significant implications for policy, particularly given the importance of understanding how and why previous efforts to counter radicalization have failed (Iqbal and Mehmood2021). This paper examines the issue of youth radicalization in Pakistan by considering its causes, trends, and examining strategies that are currently in place or could be put in place to counter radicalization among the Pakistani youth. The conclusion sees the implications for policy and future research directions, including the importance of creating policies that are not founded on false assumptions or narratives. Rather, policy and analysis of radicalization should be numerically driven.

Historical Context of Radicalization in Pakistan

After the 9/11 event where the greatest center of capitalism in the world was destroyed, the focus of attention shifted from attention to social injustice. From a struggle for labor rights, America broadened the focus on protecting the world becomes freer from the threat of terrorism. The world changed after the events of terror attack which cost the lives of thousands of innocent people was carried out by the Catch the Taliban and El-Qaeda networks on foreign soil. This operation continues to be developed in several countries to curb the threat contained in the name of terrorism. Enter War-on-Terror, as the support of a variety of regional countries with deployment of large groups of troops (ROSELY, 2013). Pakistan is one of them. At first they were asked to share the intelligence data to fight against terrorists. On the other hand, they also must fight the radicals in their country among the presence of indigenous forces and a variety of foreign mujahideen which secretly at the time of Soviet resistance came to Pakistan in the early 1980s. After the events of 9/11, there was massive global repression of the Islamic world. In the world and the western media, Islam is particularly accused as a religion that breeds violence. The media is a primary instrument taken by NATO especially United States as the leader to change this perception. This becomes very effective. Various policies and strategies are made by forcibly changing stereotypes and ideologies - symbols held by individuals through a variety of facilities such as media, schools and so on (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013). In Pakistan,

the embrace of the U.S. in WAT impacts considerably, besides being seen as anti-Muslim. United Nations and its nodes are indirectly commanded to change the display of Islamic historical events.

Key Events and Movements

During the transformative decade of the 1960s and the early part of the 1970s, a potent and vigorous leftist voice had emerged, making significant waves in the political domains of Pakistan. This leftist movement was characterized by progressive ideas and a strong push for social reforms. However, as the 1980s unfolded, the political landscape witnessed the birth of an entirely new kind of political discourse (Raza, 2023). The rise of the Jamat-i-Islami, paired with the growing sympathy of numerous influential politicians towards various religious parties, provided an essential space and medium for the newly emerged narrative of politics aligned with religious ideologies. This shift marked a significant turning point, reshaping the way politics functioned within the country during that era.

In the opinion of many, the process of radicalism in Pakistan on the lines of militancy and sectarianism was a by-product of the Afghan Jihad. The war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan began in 1979. The Pak-Afghan border, especially the Pakhtun belt on the crude divide from Pak tribal areas to Helmand province on the Afghan side of the border, provided an opportunity for different religious and jihadist groups to bond with each other and to wage a "holy war" against the "infidels". Later, the unforeseen and abrupt disengagement with the region after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 had catastrophic consequences, especially for Pakistan (Farooqi2022). Radical still with huge caches of lethal weapons at their deceits, thousands of returnee Afghan refugees, and above all, the political hardcore of radicalism, Pakistan's own "home growns" Jamiat e Islami, Pakistan Jamiat e Islami A and subsequently Hizb ul Mujahideen. Similarly, the rising phenomenon of suicides and target killings on the name of religion divides and sub-divides the already weak interfaith bonds of the country's four dominant groups which, hence, brought the full-fledged war on the country soil.

Causes of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan

Since the last two decades, Pakistan has gained immense prominence on the global stage for various reasons and stands out as a flashpoint of international geopolitics. The US invasion of Afghanistan, US Drone Attacks in Pakistan, War on Terror, hell-bent regional conflicts, unaddressed Kashmir Issue, eviscerated poverty and lopsided economic governance of Pakistan have provoked fierce reaction from a vast array of sinister and insidiously unwholesome dealings. A concomitant quandary that has further fed into the churning cauldron of vicissitudes has to do with youth radicalization. (Haque et al.2021) In case of Pakistan, youth radicalization is taking

place at a rate faster than a speeding bullet. Latest spectacle of Army Public School massacre in Peshawar is a blatant and mindboggling manifestation of the same quandary.

There are many reasons for the youth radicalization in Pakistan. Above all, the large youth cohort is in Pakistan; 108 million are under the age of 30 years, representing 64 percent of the total population. Transitions in youth life cycle (family stage, education, employment, marriage, and family) have been associated with participation in political mobilization and violence. The majority of Pakistani youth did not find any prestigious place in society leading them towards conflict. In the school of thought, young people have been viewed with berserk and dazed apathy. Transformation in conflict theories perception of them has spotlighted their need to be educated in and embracing peaceable solutions of crisis (Ali et al.2022). Pakistan was one of the proxies that trained in the 80s. The very nature of guerrilla warfare involved support of covert groups leading to religious bigotry, and communal furor. In the post 9/11 decade, there has been an umpteen increase of pro jihadi forces in Pakistan; this is mainly visible in the form of proliferation in the network of Seminaries. Despite the state ban on them, they got fulsome green signals from some state organs in ambiguous ways. Jihadi forces have turned out to be financial juggernauts as well. Their vent is at lowest ebb in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In D.I Khan District, which has the worst literacy ratio of 17.5 percent, religious leaders' seminars are engendering the ideas of jihad as the only panacea to the multifaceted ferments of the society. Since the Latif Park incident, 39 young fellows have been arrested who were bent on sneak attacks on the forces (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013). Movements on the game plan predict that, youth involvement in the radical activities and terrorism has mostly a linear relationship with the state of education and literacy.

Conversely, ideology can be converted as a weapon to tackle social issues and make them visible to radicalization in the form of peaceful and lawful protests. Young generation being the disciple of changing mindset can be educated and reflected upon things as catalyst agents. To ascertain the causes leads one to the hallowed conclusion that the factor which has given an impetus to the youth to convert is the standing stupendous magnitude of Financial Deprivation from where all recusant seeds grow towards an intolerant delivery. Another imperative factor which shoves the youth to Communion joining is Social Inequality and the Historical Privation. It has been the historical phenomenon that the youth has always been on the front edge in the state of insurgency, and when they are aware of these situations, they feel relative deprivation and become frustrated why they have not enough opportunities.

Socio-Economic Factors

Radicalization and violence both are the high stake challenges for Pakistan. After 9/11, the wave of violent extremism was reached to Pakistan. The wave of terrorism coupled with insurgency hit to the Pakistan particularly from 2008 to 2013. It is the 11th largest country in the world and 1st in Islamic world. There are 197.29 million populations out of which 64% is the youth. Thereunder Pakistan is the largest country having the sgest youth in the world. The revolution is the dream of many nations especially in youth. What is a nation without revolution? Globalization intensified the nation building process. (Ahmad et al.2022) There are number of ways like ethnic identities and terrorism. Ethnic identities are playing a great role in terms of social democracy, confined states with bureau centric dealings encourage the growth of ethnic economies.

The world is passing through the era of neo-liberalism and regionalism. There is struggle among the big powers in search of hegemony and regional hegemony. The very fact provides evidence to the statement that the world has been divided into shapes of regions; it is likely to give rise to further competition and conflict between the states and alliance processes. The trans-advent of the twenty first century promises to see further increase in the intensity of international events involving even the most backward nations in the world (Farooq et al., 2014). On the one hand technological advancement is achieving greater feats. On the other more and more ominous clouds of economic strife, widening imbalances, social and human despair, ethnic nationalism and religious fundamentalism are looming large on the horizon with each passing day. Like so many other developing nations, Pakistan too is objectively part of this gigantic wave of regional contradictions and confrontations.

Political Factors

Radicalism in Pakistani society is different from what is happening in Syria or Iraq, which is due to the socio-political conditions of the region which are ripe enough to be exploited by the strong intent of external intervention. There is a need for deeper understanding of the factors that influence young people's sympathies on radical issues. This study aims to determine the narrative of young people who are sympathetic to radicalism in Pakistan. The research location is in Pakistan, one of the regions affected by radicalism.

In recent years, radicalism in Pakistan has not only captured the attention of its followers but has also garnered significant concern from international observers due to a series of terror acts that have led to a tragic number of casualties—these situations inflict severe consequences that result in tremendous losses, both for the state and for various communities throughout the nation. The presence of the radical group known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has roots that can be traced to a myriad of internal and external factors influencing its formation and activities (Khan et al., 2023).

Among the many internal factors, one of the most glaring issues is the radical activities perpetrated by this group, which have led to situations where public order becomes severely disrupted; public facilities are damaged or destroyed; and economic activities, including tourism in the tribal regions, see a significant downturn. The unsettling violence erupting in different areas of the country stands out as a pivotal factor contributing to the increasing emergence of young radicals who are drawn to extremist ideologies. The Taliban, in this context, is often heralded as the most influential radical group within Pakistan. The radical movement that has found a foothold in Pakistan gained momentum and was perceived as particularly strong following the notable incident at the Red Mosque back in 2007. This event was catalyzed by the escalating challenges posed by the Taliban group to the established state authority, with the group initiating violent actions aimed at demanding the implementation of stringent Islamic law. Sadly and ironically, this incident concluded in a tragic manner, highlighting the volatility of the situation. The extent of influence wielded by this religious movement expanded with remarkable speed in the tribal regions, most notably in Waziristan, where the Taliban has established a powerful presence.

In addition to their alliance with the Taliban, radical movements within the region have also embraced the tactics of insurgency, further complicating the situation. The emergence of the radical group TTP and its insurgent activities has become a serious concern for Pakistan's policymakers, as this group represents a collective of various non-mainstream opposition tribal groups in the tribal areas, aiming to reinstate, reinforce, and revolutionize the political systems in those regions. This group possesses significant military capabilities which raise alarms about security and stability in Pakistan. Notably, the existence of the TTP is also rooted in the ideological conflicts that occurred during the 1990s, particularly those between the Sindhi and Mohajir factions, which escalated social tensions while simultaneously destabilizing the political landscape in Pakistan. The repercussions of this long-standing conflict have contributed to a wave of political turmoil, significantly amplified by U.S. intervention in Pakistan, especially following the tragic events of September 11, 2001. In reality, the United States extended military assistance to Pakistan as part of its broader anti-terrorism strategy, yet this assistance inadvertently catalyzed the rise of the Pakistani Taliban as a counterforce (Ahmad et al.2024). The TTP has come to be viewed as a significant adversary by the Pakistani state, which is illustrated by the circumstances that led to the formation of the TTP itself. Further compounding this issue is the ongoing influence of Al-Qaeda's strategies and ideology, which aim to sustain solidarity among terrorist networks in the aftermath of September 11. This influence, though indirect, effectively provided material support to the TTP while simultaneously

inciting calls for a prolonged and sustainable jihad, complicating Pakistan's fight against radical extremism. (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013)

Religious Factors

Abstract: Pakistan is a country with a demographic setup where youth enjoys a significant portion of the total population. In Pakistan, particularly in underdeveloped areas, a significant number of schools offer madrassah education as an outreach tool. Thus, at an early age, religious processes become associated with their academic career. These madrassahs can become a den of radicalization. The current study provides a review of religious factors which are driving force for radicalization of Pakistani youth, with a sociological perspective. The perusal of this study unfolds that societal milieu influences have increased the affiliation of youth towards extremist sanctimonious ideologies. Further, a comprehensive scheme is discussed to contrive these imperiling concerns by speculating an evolutionary educational course curriculum.

Pakistan is a country with a demographic setup where youth enjoys a significant portion of the total population. (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013) defines that Pakistan's current population is 182 million and the ratio of educating age 5-19 years, include about 48.6 million children in 202,024 educational institutions consisting over 284,623 of primary, 25,287 secondary, and 176 madrassahs schools. In Pakistan, particularly in underdeveloped areas, a significant number of schools offer madrassah education as an outreach tool. Therefore, the madrassah educational system is directly established at a neighborhood level to provide religious as well as conventional education. Thus, at an early age, religious processes become associated with their academic career. Owning to this reason, the ratio of affiliation with the mosque has increased, especially in rural areas. But when we abstract this intention at a wider level, these madrassahs can become a den of radicalisation (Jephthar & Injendi, 2017).

Trends and Manifestations of Youth Radicalization

Youth radicalization is a multifaceted phenomenon of global concern because of its association with terrorism and the risk of violence. This phenomenon has coexisted with the rise of extremist ideologies among various religious and ethnic groups and the politicization of religious and cultural issues in almost all parts of the world, South Asian countries in particular. In Pakistan, ever since the country joined the War on Terror, there was an alarming rise in youth radicalization in the form of joining jihadi groups and political/religious activism. However, post-Osama Bin Laden episode, youth radicalization has swiftly and thought-provokingly metamorphosed into single actor terrorism by nature. Aided by advances in communication technology, social media, and the internet, there is a fast mobilization of youths into extremist activities in a flat world. (Iqbal and Mehmood2021)

The official data indicates that the violent events caused by radical youth group or individual was reducing year to year, it suggests that the threat is shifting into more complex and decentralized forms, signified by grasping the term decentralized terrorism. Meanwhile, Pakistan's youth bulge is also a major contributing factor to the radicalization of the country's youth population which is struggling with novel challenges of global, national, and local nature such as displacement and poverty but also identity crises of religious and national nature. However, mainstreaming of this wide youth population in national and local politics can be a productive step, for it will channelize youths' energies and potentials to serve democracy, tolerance, social harmony, and pluralism in the country. Intersectional approach will be more useful in understanding youth radicalization, rather than focusing only on social, economic, or politically driven explanations. This work is based on random sampling of 100 young students, followed by in-depth interviews of purposively targeted 15 university students in Quetta, Pakistan, who have been the target victims of this growing menace.

Online Radicalization

The concern about the induction and recruitment process of individuals into terrorist networks and their subsequent training (violent radicalization), specifically in the online environment, has opened a vast debate in the last fifteen years. On the one hand, researchers and governments have tried to establish indicators to prevent attacks, framed within narratives focused on Muslim fundamentalism and/or radicalization. Disclosure of "the art" of violent radicalization is distilled into internet materials and social media, faithfully reproduced ad absurdum in a panoptical environment. On the other hand, dissident voices consider the approach to the process too simplistic, and the material and immaterial scope of instruments already existing to face the jihadist threat on the internet, not always applied in full energy by Western governments (Vidino et al., 2015). A deeper look into online hate and war contents, such as those produced by nationalist, ultra-right or new-left extremist militias in the Occupied Territories and in other contexts, contexts of proxy wars and regime change, would shed light on a complex clandestine economy which favors the black market of cultural symbols, cutting off contextual relations, and awarding algorithms and closed source DLA programs.

Involvement in Extremist Groups

Young people are said to be easily persuaded and influenced, especially in a collectivist culture such as Pakistan (Iqbal Ahnaf, 2013). This factor alone attracts extremist groups to target young individuals, particularly in areas where religious observation plays a central role in most aspects of life. The latter statement is more applicable to countries like Pakistan, where religion plays a critical role in the life of people. There are many factors involved in the radicalization process. The reasons behind the involvement of

an individual in an extremist group are complex; religious, social, political, and economic aspects, including personal experience, play a part in making an individual violent. Group grievance, political mobilization, and systematic violations of human rights are considered important factors in making an individual choose the path of terror as a political strategy to address their grievances. But religious factors, in particular the belief in life after death (the hereafter), also play a significant role.

In Pakistan, social and political instability has created many reasons for an individual to become a criminal, extremist, or terrorist. Furthermore, the kingdom of Afghanistan was invaded in 1979 after a coup took place in the same year in Pakistan. The latter year can be marked as the turning point comparing the incidence of terrorism in Pakistan before the invasion of Afghanistan and after that event. In a different aspect, peoples' lives in Fata were plain; they only welcomed guests and first-time strangers, they respected women by keeping them at home until the evening; once they presented the food in a tray to their husband, they lost their eyesight until it was recovered by wearing eye-glasses; once they cooked food in a different style, they forgot how to do regular cooking, etc.. Now the same people feel proud of being the front line warriors (Ismail et al.2022).

Impact of Radicalization on Youth

This exacerbation of radicalization and extremism in general, and religio-political patterns in particular, has had numerous and disastrous direct and indirect effects on the youth of the country, with serious implications at the national, regional, and international levels. The broad impact of these reproductive activities and behaviors in general and, in particular, the religio-political coloring of everyday life on young people in different sectors of society is bitter. This is evident, among other things, in the declining standards of education and health, the failure to complete the demographic transition, the delayed sustainable development, the rise in poverty, the deepening class structure, the exacerbation of regional disparities, and the promotion and exploitation of religio-political radicalization and extremism (Khan et al.2024).

Moreover, the excessive increase in the population has created a high ratio of the dependent population (mainly composed of young children and adolescents), who are unable to assume personal and social responsibility in a psychologically mature, sociologically consistent, mutually interactive manner that is a must for the development process. There are other variables as well, created by the geopolitical and geostrategic location of the country, such as large-scale arms and drug trafficking, enormous monetary allocations to security and defense, and the consequences of different armed conflicts in the region. All these serve to exacerbate the problems that are exacerbated by natural disasters, especially earthquakes and floods of extraordinary intensity.

Psychological Effects

Ongoing terrorism has made life miserable, not only for the inhabitants of restive regions but also for those residing in relatively peaceful regions of Pakistan. However, terrorism has not only led to human losses, it has psychological impacts as well. Over time, prolonged terrorism has profoundly affected the mind-set of the individuals residing in the afflicted areas of Pakistan. Apart from other dimensions, terrorism has been augmenting fear as well as feelings of horror thereby creating detrimental impacts on the mindset of the people concerned. Such dimensions undoubtedly sway the national narrative as well. (Waqas et al., 2024) It has been presumed for a substantial time that education meant to cleanse the minds of the youth and make them more indulgent, has also failed to bring transformation, rather the diabolic narratives of the terrorist organizations are influencing the mindset of the educated youth. Therefore, a national logical narrative might be supposed remarkable to counteract violent extremism and radicalization. There are two traditions, the peace world has engendered in the recent past to oppose tolerance towards extreme thoughts; the "intimation" and the other to negate violence; the "terrorism".

Focus on the broken social bonds that give rise to terrorism. Terrorism necessarily arises in tight-knit social groups since massive organization is imperative to instigate terror (K DeJacimo, 2015). Development and sustenance of terrorist exploits depend on group and social dynamics that constitute of group meta-knowledge, a shared comprehension among the members of the group regarding the individual roles and process of the group. Members of the terrorist organizations acquire group meta-knowledge about the machineries and strategies of their personal groups that are necessary to practice and profit from terrorism, as well as groups in a wider social situation that reinforce the ideology of the terrorist organization. Broadening group central meta-knowledge would therefore be poisonous to the provision and replication of terrorism, and to the maintenance of the category-wide narratives and other dealings that reinforce the belief that terrorism is justifiable. Also, concern on the emergent properties of tight-knit social groups is not likely to be addressed by standard counterterrorism strategies.

Social Consequences

Youth in any society constitutes a vast portion of the population: 65% of Pakistani youth accounts for the age of 15-35. The story of nations is the story of their youth. In Pakistan, the vast majority of the population (60%) is young. About 36 million people are in the age of 18-29, and about 100 million (60% of the 180 million population) are younger than 30 years. More than one third of the population is between 15-29 years. Socially, these millions are the hope of the next generation. They mostly originate from an urban background. Unfortunately, due to the government's apathy, the young

population's immense energy remains unproductive. Their intellectual capabilities can bring about revolutionary changes. When they are deprived of education, they unknowingly and unintentionally become the prey of rebellion which declares the individuals of their nation as unbelievers due to their handwork, promise and zeal (Farooq et al., 2014).

The large youth majority was not prepared to find a prestigious place in the nation. Therefore, they are compelled to fight with the already existing power-wielders or wealthy individuals. This prepares the ground for an internal and external struggle. The urban youth can be easily mobilized not only due to their numerical preponderance in urban areas and higher education, but also due to their understanding of conditions and the situation. The group instead of individuals is comparatively more fearful for the culprits and powerful masses. That is why; the ruling classes, bureaucracy and capitalists use enormous power to grind them. The non-availability of jobs forces the youth towards unrest, and they become the fuel for an already burning fire. Across the borders, the only significant financial support can come from ethnic or linguistic brethren. For outsiders, to get into an alien's territory for such an act is impossible and out of the question. All these factors combine to urge the rebels to approach across the borders. (Ezemenaka, 2021)

Counter-Strategies and Interventions

There is no universally agreed definition of violent extremism (VE). In the current context, VE is often used interchangeably with terrorism, but it is less limited. Radicalization, on the other hand, is defined as the "phenomenon of people embracing beliefs, opinions and behaviors that could lead them to violence, with the intent of effecting change in society." Both processes happen along a continuum where individuals first change their belief system and then use violence. Finally, in the context of violent radicalization, the term youth is usually understood to encompass individuals between the ages of 15 to 29. Evidently, these processes in fragility and conflict-affected situations happen along fault lines that challenge identity and cohesion, where grievances are more elevated. This conceived injustice can be partly linked to the functioning, trust and practice of state institutions. Ultimately, the long-term strain on societies will be enormous, leading to 1.6 billion people being (Idris, 2019).

Preventive Measures

Early prevention of violent radicalization is likely to be more successful if violent or violent extremist behavior can be detected when it first emerges (S Bhui et al., 2012). The focus is on encouraging individual members of the public to be vigilant for signs that a person is developing violent radical beliefs and to refer cases to dedicated state programs, similar to the one established in the UK. If radical beliefs can be detected and acted on early, the dissemination of ideologies and narratives that justify violence

may be prevented, so stopping the progression to violent and violent extremist activity. Cutting support for violent radicalization may improve an environment where non-violent political engagement is more likely and where more ambitious intercommunity engagement can take root, since research indicates that violent radicalization thrives in communities with limited exposure to mainstream intercommunal discourse and association. The assertion that violent crimes are often used for political objectives has implications for health and social policy. It suggests that a focus on violence prevention as part of efforts to promote social cohesion could have important national security implications. Here, evidence is reviewed supporting the assertion that violence-related activities are processes amenable to a public health approach and that the same evidence underscores the important role of trust personal trust in states, and states in their populations for public protection.

De-radicalization Programs

254 citizens from Khyber Pukhtunkhwah (KP) were involved in terrorism-related activities from 2010 to 2014. Since then, airport staff and law enforcement have been more vigilant about young people at risk. One tactic has been to prevent people suspected of wanting to join terrorist groups from traveling from Peshawar to Dubai. Parents have also opened up their networks to share information about children whose behavior has changed. These networks can track individuals without becoming an official counterterrorism agency. 850 names of people suspected of wanting to join terrorist groups were detected and as a result, 50 people were arrested in 2014. An example cited was that of a poor person from Mashokhel village, who suddenly flew to Libya to join Da'ish. This sudden change in travel behavior was what led parents of other suspected young people to join the airport staff and police. Over the next few years, people on their radar were stopped at the airport, and one was sent back due to suspicion. In addition, crackdowns have started occurring at the beauty parlor, where former militants aimed at female customers who came there.

Role of Education in Countering Radicalization

A significant percentage of the current young population does not have access to education in under-developing countries like Pakistan, and therefore is losing out on major opportunities for growth in politics, economic wellbeing, collective awareness and ultimate societal development. Major stakeholders in Pakistan largely support infrastructural / developmental projects, leaving the social sector to be ruined at the hands of less capable and less trustful beneficiaries. One strong reason for this is the radicalizing root in religion, as it stands over-politicized and therefore reflects as non-tolerant towards the educational diversity and equal access for all. Hence, youth is educated to be intolerant by their respective education system. Furthermore, a lifelong wish bestowed upon self-sacrifice to achieve the cause of the nation unconsciously is

fostered through imagination of great traditional heroes, leaving youth ever-ready to be indoctrinated for practicing on even the highest self-sacrifice and pay-cost whenever the time demands (Pels & J. de Ruyter, 2012).

Curriculum Development

Characterizing education quality is complex. The literature identifies both tangible and intangible aspects. Policies at the global and national level have focused on raising standards and on quality enhancement. Promotion of gender equality is strongly aligned with these objectives, given the well-researched evidence on the positive correlation between girls' education and socio-economic benefits. Not least, universal primary education is a Millennium Development Goal. Curriculum development and teacher guidance is seen as essential for promoting concepts of gender equality, tolerance and inculcating respect for diversity (Durrani & Halai, 2018). Educational reforms and curriculum change at the national level may be seen as essential for inculcating new, progressive and inclusive pedagogical practices. Nevertheless, given the seminal and intersectional nature of gender with class and religion in Pakistan, the extent to which such developments can embed in classroom practices, and be resilient to wider societal pressures, is under-interrogated. There are few studies of young people, especially boys, as key stakeholders in understanding the potential for educational reforms in mitigating or exacerbating gender injustice at school-level.

Teacher Training

A comprehensive survey of teacher trainers conducted in both Pakistan and England highlights the need for distinct teaching methods appropriate to the educational environments in the two nations. The findings underline that effective educational policies should concentrate on the collaborative involvement of the primary sectors of education and health. Moreover, those policies that either neglect or compromise political agendas are connected to more consistent reductions in educational disparities across regions. The outcomes suggest that during periods of conflict, it is common for governments to offer higher-quality essential health services to districts that provide them with greater support. This support often acts as a compensatory mechanism for the assistance provided. By prioritizing collaboration in education and wellness, both regions can enhance their educational frameworks significantly (Zaman et al., 2019).

Community Engagement and Empowerment

Engagement means tactics through which vital stakeholders, youth included, are active participants in the blueprint planning and execution of policies that affect them. An engagement venture is a collective venture among plural stakeholders and can be formal or informal. It is well recognized that making as well as implementing policy plans that are relevant to youth is more likely to be effective if youthful individuals are

involved in this country's formulation. The record also indicates that if engagement takes place too late, is poorly planned, is conducted unauthentically or is used only to endorse choices that have already been made, a stakeholder approach can be criticized (Javeed et al., 2022).

The empowerment of the youth means making the youngsters stronger and free from control by others according to the definition. This country believes that youngsters should live in an environment that nourishes their strengths and encourages them to become the best versions of themselves. In this country, one-third of the nation's populace comprises youth and it is very necessary to ensure their participation in the planning process and to arrange for mechanisms for youngsters to express their thoughts. As such, the State took a strategic decision to formulate an integrated National Youth Policy this year. This policy will make it possible to establish a holistic vision for the involvement, participation, and empowerment of young people and encourage the development of more ambitious ideas and projects aimed at enhancing youth welfare in all of its dimensions (Mushtaq & Batool).

Youth-Led Initiatives

On October 9, 2011, the Punjab government launched the Punjab Youth Policy, which aimed to address the issues of the youth comprehensively and recognize the importance of youth development in the broader vision of social-economic progress and achievement of sustainable peace-building outcomes. The provincial youth policy aims to empower youth, capitalize on their potential as agents of social change, and push their participation for shaping social, economic, and political landscape of Pakistan. In the light of this youth policy, the Punjab government enacted the Punjab Youth Council Law, which provides the framework for provincial and district youth councils for ensuring the effective participation of 18-29 years old youth. The youth councils shall effectively contribute to the policy-making process of the issues which directly or indirectly affect the youth. The provincial youth policy appreciated and acknowledged the number of initiatives commenced by youth which were recognized as "youth-led development initiatives" (Ahmed Soomro & Shukui, 2015). These initiatives play dual role of engaging youth in positive activities and generating revenue for the financial sustainability of these initiatives. Such initiatives focus on positive actions to promote social harmony and national unity, meanwhile strengthen the possibilities of economic empowerment of the youth. At the same time, risk involved in youth involvement in violent situations increase because of being more vulnerable.

International Cooperation and Best Practices

During the past decade many countries have experienced more violent extremism, and young people are the most vulnerable group for radicalization. Pakistan has suffered

from this phenomenon for long, both in terms of casualties and reduced social cohesion. Despite considerable work by the security agencies, professionals and intellectuals have a little understanding of the mechanics and significant actors of radicalization. (Warraich et al.2023) This research rigorously investigates precisely how and why Pakistani youth are radicalized. Seven cities (each one in a different province) were sampled to scrutinize the causes of individual backlash leading to radicalization. Ethnographic research lasting some 18 months benefitted from finding out some radical views which have not been internalized. The findings were validated by social actors in these cities, i.e. parents, politicians and professionals. Revealed is the dynamics of the individual backlash leading to the youth's radicalization, and responses are suggested which are manageable by the security agencies without significant developments in the governance of school education.

Three major approaches to counter-violent radicalization are in place today, nevertheless, none is well suited to Pakistan. Policies to avert individuals becoming one-man bands require the cerebration of community leaders and professionals, however, when young people radicalize, it is beyond the horizon of social life. This fundamental research poses to expose exactly how and why Pakistani youth are radicalized. Comprehending both of these aspects will not only help to address the radicalization that has already taken place, but will also provide likely aggressors from being radicalized. Not just understanding the components, interactions and consequences of radicalization will help professionals design more effective instruments, but these new instruments can then be debated with the help of far deeper familiarity than hitherto with the mechanics of the process (Aiello et al., 2019). On social cohesion, the region face several challenges, not to mention the different ethno-linguistic groups. Despite increasing modernity, further ethnic strife is reasonably expected.

Lessons from Global Efforts

This global fight against youth radicalization and extremism is a challenging one, with countries looking to learn from one another's strategies, both successes and failures. While attention to the radicalization of younger age groups has increased nowadays, a more systematic examination of state responses to perceived youth radicalization is still needed. Youth radicalization is part of a larger complex problem of extremism and is challenging to define in a comprehensive way. There is no common international understanding of what constitutes youth radicalization, despite the increase in literature and policy documents on the topic (Stephens & Sieckelinck). Although the phenomenon is observed to be on the rise in the international arena, correlating with the growing struggle in the Middle East, the lack of a common international definition could be attributed to the differences in each state's particular discourses, national

security concerns, and political settings. The questions surrounding the differences between extremism, terrorism and radicalization, the contribution of bad governance, institutionalized and societally embedded corruption to the boost of such conditions, and the ramifications of disproportionate or politically motivated counterterrorism measures are also altercating attention from the international media and various parties.

Challenges and Limitations in Countering Radicalization

Tajik, a dedicated researcher hailing from Pakistan, engaged in an in-depth discussion regarding the various militant groups that have been responsible for a series of attacks on police forces. He highlighted that for many of these militants, the decision to belong to a particular group is often an "emotional decision" that is deeply influenced by feelings of insecurity, neglect, hostility, or even stress in their lives. This phenomenon of group identity plays a crucial role in affecting how individuals respond when faced with real or perceived threats; it may either lead to defensive posturing or provoke confrontational responses. Furthermore, if individuals experience negative treatment from authorities, they may become more inclined to support or even join militant factions. Thus, counter-destabilization policies that aim to foster local counterattacks often overlook the intricate complexities of these group-based relationships and, in fact, may inadvertently obstruct the pursuit of a peaceful equilibrium within the community.

Moreover, it was mutually recognized that the conviction rates in such cases tend to be significantly low, largely attributable to a deeply entrenched culture of violence and a pervasive sense of impunity stemming from political pressures. As previously noted in discussions, the harsh punitive measures and the suspension of liberal political activities have effectively laid fertile ground for a situation where "violence at the expense of peaceful assembly" becomes a prevalent norm. By framing the police as either fearful or complicit in such issues, the perceived bias and brutality further exacerbate the growing animosity directed towards law enforcement officers. Despite official pronouncements suggesting a willingness to mitigate these offenses, the machinery of investigation and ratification remains sluggish, and the roots of the challenges confronting the system remain obscure. Additionally, practical obstacles further complicate the process of prosecuting these cases, which can include the unavailability of necessary testing equipment, the considerable distance to forensic labs, or the sheer number of samples required for thorough investigations.

Another significant issue is that prosecutions seem to focus solely on issues predominant in Punjab, neglecting the need for a systematic approach that seeks to dismantle corruption entrenched in influential sectors such as prison and police departments. A similar emphasis is placed on addressing corruption perpetuated by

what are termed as "entrepreneurs of violence." Any genuine attempts to combat corruption and establish thorough frameworks depend heavily on adherence to a scattered collection of appealing liberal democratic phrases, rather than offering locally-rooted remedies to confront the deep-seated issues that plague society (Korai et al.2022).

Moreover, there is a pressing dilemma that involves the careful balance of internal strategies and means. While decisive action may resonate positively with a wider public, there is the risk that any perceived aggressiveness or overreach could alienate the very supporters necessary for effective governance. Hence, agencies must develop a nuanced understanding of the degree of pressure they ought to exert upon the security forces that provide them with broader patronage at both the constituency level and among higher echelons of power. Part of this aggression stems from a concern for maintaining reputation and authority, rather than stemming from a dispassionate analysis of stability and state interests. The prevailing situation in Gilgit-Baltistan serves as an important cautionary example of how conflicts can escalate, and the haunting memories of violent events can delay necessary counteractions to restore peace. Finally, it is critical to note that there is no assurance that any action taken will be completely effective. This adversary is highly adaptive, possessing intimate knowledge of their surroundings, enjoying widespread support in certain areas, and possessing extensive experience in outmaneuvering previous attempts to suppress them. There also exists a real danger of misunderstandings and pre-emptive actions that can reignite tensions and lead to negative consequences. This is a complex and continuous struggle that could very well lead to a state of rebellion and unrest (Beissinger, 2022).

Legal and Policy Challenges

There are several legal and policy challenges hampering effective responses to radicalization of youths. The effort remained limited and it is beset with various changes. Some well-intentioned policies went awry and ended up exacerbating the problem. It would not be incorrect to say that in view of limitations of approach India lacks a wholesome counter-radicalization strategy for the Kashmir valley. There is little evidence of vigorous outreach programs with people of different faiths to foster understanding and an inclusive society. Defense, however, is an overarching term that comprises not only the force of arms but also policy, intelligence, economic, social, political, and psychological measures (Bima and Aswari2025). Radicalizing Kashmiri youth and exploiting their pent up anger and frustration has been an essential plank of Pakistan's policy in Kashmir. Such radicalization can be through direct action, including infiltration of trained terrorists and instigation of indigenous armed insurrection, as also more covert operations. Evidence of Pakistan's continuous

interference in Kashmir often comes in spurts but is always difficult to push through these internationally. This attitude, however, appears to be soft pedaled by major powers for geo-strategic reasons. As for human rights violations, India does have mechanisms to keep them under check, though such incidents are an endearing fixture of all low intensity conflicts. No such measures exist in 'Azad Kashmir' where there have been widespread protests over the rigged elections. The erosion of democracy there suits Pakistan's purpose. This issue could be well utilized to discredit Pakistan and weaken its proxy support base.

Conclusion

The radicalization of young individuals, especially those who find themselves in the age bracket of 15 to 29 years, is becoming increasingly recognized as a profoundly disturbing and impactful factor influencing the contemporary political landscape. Within this volatile and unpredictable environment, acts of violence are frequently utilized as a powerful instrument to achieve a multitude of varying political aims and objectives. This deeply alarming phenomenon encapsulates the various methods through which young people, particularly during their formative adolescent and early adult years, can be lured into engaging in activities that advocate for violence and extremism, all for differing political motivations. In light of this unsettling trend, the development and implementation of counter-strategies become absolutely critical. These strategies involve a comprehensive array of steps and measures systematically designed to combat the unfortunate and detrimental misuse of violence by the youth as a means to secure unsettling political goals. This inquiry into youth radicalization is regarded as immensely significant due to a plethora of pressing and interconnected issues. These issues encompass, but are not limited to, Pakistan's ongoing struggles against radical and violent extremist forces that present a substantial threat to the vital social fabric and stability of the nation.

The complex and multifaceted challenges that arise in efforts to successfully integrate a large youth demographic into the broader economy and educational systems merit significant attention. Furthermore, the intense demographic transitions currently unfolding in the country, set against the backdrop of rapid shifts in societal norms and expectations, amplify the urgency of addressing these concerns. The research undertaken for this critical study relied extensively on a rich and diverse array of data types, meticulously collected from numerous reputable sources. These included well-established mainstream media outlets, official government reports, and a selection of non-official studies and findings that have emerged from within the diverse landscape of Pakistan. Such a multifaceted and comprehensive research approach ensures a profound and in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics at play in relation to youth radicalization. Moreover, it reveals the potential for exploring a variety of

pathways to effectively tackle this critical societal issue, paving the way for the formulation and implementation of more effective interventions and proactive measures. By addressing the risks associated with this alarming trend, the study aims to foster a more stable, secure, and cohesive society, where the youth can be guided toward positive engagement rather than destructive radicalization.

After Al-Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, the Pakistani state came under intense pressure from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the world proper in order to decimate Al-Qaeda, weaken the Taliban, and fight against the religious radicals and militants within its borders. It was indicated in the study that, though England-Pacific had succeeded in that respect in the past few years, these pressures ultimately led to the weakening of domestic security, political and social systems. On the one hand, with the emergence of interconnected problems, administrative attention and resources have been limited on very important issues such as economy, demographics, energy, and education. Although it had a very young population structure, the state has not yet developed the right policies to acquire, improve, and use the vast majority of the economic, social and political resources of these young people.

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