



“Countering Violent Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Enforcing Legal framework”

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the dynamics of Countering Violent Religious Extremism (CVRE) in Pakistan, with a focus on critical evaluation of legal framework for dealing with violent extremism and enforcement by police. It identifies gaps in the existing framework of laws and challenges in achieving the desired level of enforcement.

Adopting qualitative research methods, research reports, journal articles, academic and practitioners works, relevant police incident reports were studied and analyzed to synthesize clear understanding of the dynamics and facets of religious extremist violence in Pakistan and crystalize the debate on religion and violence. The major legislative Acts and the Anti-terrorism Act 1997 were examined to study and point out the forms of extremist violent conduct adequately covered or otherwise by the existing laws.

It argues, it's imperative for Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy to incorporate robust CVE and deradicalization measures. The existing legal framework includes several useful provisions to deal with religious extremism, yet it requires to be revisited to expand its reach and plugin the gaps. It further argues, over half a million police officers of Pakistan's provincial and federal organizations are best placed to engage in a greater CVE role beyond the conventional role of prevention and detection of religious violence, extending to surveillance of potential violent extremists, monitoring of cyberspace, community policing engagements for building resilience against radicalization, deradicalization programs and most importantly achieving the requisite degree of enforcement of the legal framework and regulatory mechanism for a lasting and long-term solution to the menace of terrorism.

Section 1

1.1 Introduction

Terrorism and religious extremism pose significant challenges for Pakistan. The military, police, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies are engaged in a long battle against extremist violence. However, coercive methods alone cannot handle the menace of terrorism. Pakistan has faced considerable terrorism from religious extremist groups, making it essential to address violent religious extremism effectively.

Countering violent extremist beliefs plays a crucial role in combating terrorism. Pakistan needs a comprehensive approach to counter terrorism, including a clear policy, implementation plan, enforcement mechanism, legislative framework, and successful enforcement. Policing in this connection plays a pivotal role in tackling violence fueled by religious extremism as it focuses on upholding the law within the regulatory system.

Religious extremism involves the development of radical and intolerant views, leading to the endorsement of violence for politico-religious purposes. Indicators of religiously motivated extremism include absolutist thinking, intolerance, and the sanctioning of violence. Violent extremist religious offenses encompass crimes driven by religious fervor and ideology, categorized as terrorism or vigilantism. These offenses differ in their planning and execution, distinguishing them based on *mens rea* and *actus reus*.

This article aims to analyze the causes and origins of violent religious extremism in Pakistan, assess the challenges for the counterterrorism strategy, and critically evaluates the state's response through legislation and enforcement.

1.2 Significance of Study

This research study is innovative and novel as it highlights the importance of Countering Violent Religious Extremism (CVRE) and its relationship with terrorism. It identifies gaps in legislation and enforcement, and the increased role of police in CVRE. The study as a value addition in realm of terrorism and CVRE studies will be of interest to academics, civil society, policy-makers and the government.

1.3 Scope of Study

The research has been undertaken in order to study the genesis of religious violent extremism and how it is related to the threat of terrorism in Pakistan. It probes into acts of terrorism perpetrated with the motive of religious extremism. Legal framework has been looked into focusing on offences cognizable by police and the provisions of law that empower police officers to play their role either in prevention, detection, prosecution or other functions directly or indirectly related to CVRE. However, for the purposes of this study police organizations include all provincial and federal policing departments and units.

1.4 Problem Statement

Pakistan came into being with promise and demand of a separate homeland for Muslims of the Indian sub-continent and it was presumed the religion will be a unifying force for this multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation. Since its very inception, Pakistan has been severely affected by terrorism, which has mostly come from religious extremists. The law enforcement agencies and security forces have launched a number of operations against terrorist outfits, but the terrorists have always regrouped and resurfaced and most of kinetic actions went in vain. Amid such situation, it is imperative to revisit counterterrorism policies and implementation plans, shifting focus from kinetic to CVE initiatives. The police forces of various provinces and regions constitute the largest law enforcement force in the country and they can play their part tackling the situation in a reinvigorated manner. They act as the bulwark and first line of defense in fighting terrorists. It is need of the hour to equip and train them for a more effective role in non-coercive and non-kinetic efforts within the domain of counterterrorism.

1.5 Research Questions

The research specifically looks into the following questions:

1. What is the nexus between religion and violence?
2. What are the main drivers and enablers of violent religious extremism in Pakistan's context?
3. What is the main legal framework for dealing with religious violence and extremism in Pakistan?

4. How effective is the enforcement mechanism and what are gaps in implementation and enforcement?
5. What role police is mandated to play and what is scope for police to play an increased and effective role in CVRE?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The starting point may be a reference to collective action approach of the Social Movement Theory. The proponents of this theory argue that frustrated individuals resort to aggression to express their resentment. (Rinehart, 2009).¹ It is asserted by Moghadam (2005)² that politically motivated violence results from an individual’s actions in pursuance of the available options for his response to what he considers injustice whether actual or perceived. To explain radicalization, Moghadam uses the analogy of an ascending staircase to put forward his argument. By climbing different stages of the stair case, the individual reduces or loses his options for attempting a retreat from the path to radicalization leading to violence.

1.7 Methodology

In this project qualitative research approach was adopted. Adopting this method, existing research reports, articles, academic works, practitioners’ works and where appropriate official records were studied and analyzed to understand the dynamics and facets of religious extremist violence in Pakistan. A qualitative study of existing and previous CVE policies, strategies and action plans was carried out. Case Study approach was adopted to develop in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of the issue in the peculiar context of Pakistan with a narrowed down focus on enforcement of CVRE regime by police. This approach helped analyze diverse perspectives on role of religion in violence and whether police officers would be suited to CVRE roles and responsibilities. Interdisciplinary approach was adopted to investigate motives of violent offences

¹ Rinehart, C. S. (2009). *Volatile Breeding Grounds: The Radicalization of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood*. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32(11), 953-988.

² Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). *The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration*. *American Psychologist*, 60(2), 161-169.

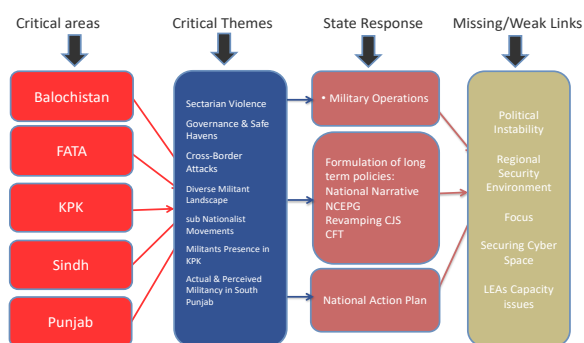
committed by extremist religious groups from sociological perspective and legal framework was researched to synthesize the information.

The secondary sources available in the shape of research articles, fact finding reports, newspaper accounts, police records and crime data compiled by police departments and NACTA were looked into, surveyed and analyzed to identify common and recurring themes and the information so obtained was crystalized into patterns and trends observed.

Section 2

2.1 Dealing with Terrorism: Pakistan’s Kinetic/Counter Terrorism Measures

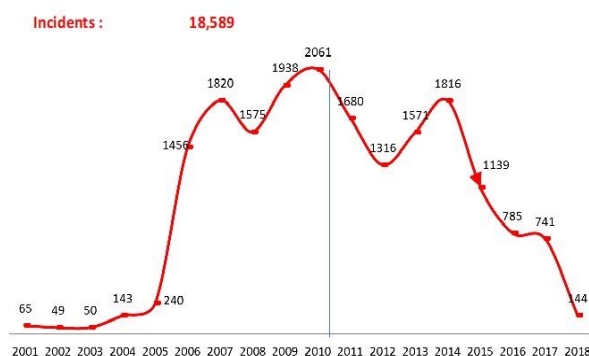
PAKISTAN’S SECURITY MATRIX



(Source: National Counter Terrorism Authority)

Pakistan’s state response could be understood from the abovementioned diagram. The state has used both kinetic and non-kinetic measures to reverse the momentum of terrorism in Pakistan. It would critical to mention here that most of the terrorist incidents in Pakistan were perpetrated by TTP, LeJ and IS-K.

TERRORISM INCIDENTS



(Source: National Counter Terrorism Authority, 2021)

Pakistan is being faced with both internal and external security challenges. External challenges include archrival India, Iran (sectarianism and intermittent border tensions), sensitivities related to Kashmir dispute, global terrorism (IS-K), and CPEC security; whereas the internal security challenges include growing sectarian strife, ethnic disputes and divisions, ever growing Islamist extremism (most recent Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan), religious extremist terrorism, registration of religious seminaries, Afghan refugees, weak and dilapidated criminal justice system, and capacity issues related to law enforcement and security forces.

Dealing with TTP and IS-K amid the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and takeover of Afghan Taliban are both internal and external security challenges for Pakistan. If we analyze Pakistan's response then it could be divided into three major categories:

- Policy
- Legislative
- Tactical

At policy level we would see number of policies and institutionalization measures:

- National Counter Terrorism Authority, 2013
- National Internal Security Policy [NISP] February 2014
- 20 Points National Action Plan
- NISP (2018-23)
- National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines 2018
- Pakistan Declaration (2018)

Together these policies and measures could have materialized but there was no coherence and all these steps were taken in silos. Hence, no integrated approach was adopted for the implantation of these abovementioned policy measures. As far as legislative measures are concerned there have been number of enactments as well. The Anti-Terrorist Act 1997 was amended number of times, and new legislative measures such as PECA, and AMLA were promulgated but again could not make a difference.

Hence, Pakistan has been able to devise strategies and policies in addition to legislative and kinetic measures to reverse the momentum of terrorist groups. These measures somehow managed to reduce the number of terrorist incidents in Pakistan but failed at curbing other areas of major concern such as religious

extremism. The threat remains and TTP, the major terrorist organization though pushed into Afghanistan but continues to perpetrate terrorist attacks in Pakistan from its bases in neighboring Afghanistan.

2.2 Defining CVRE and its Importance in Counterterrorism

CVRE refers to the set of beliefs and acts of people in support of certain politico-religious ideologies while using violence in order to achieve the desired goals. In lieu of that terrorism emanates and is reinforced by such radicalized ideologies. Any strategy that aims to focus on terrorism alone will not achieve the desired and long-lasting goals unless a component of CVRE is not included in it.

It is argued here that effective measures to combat the problems of violent extremism may be implemented by carefully identifying radicalization and prospective extremists³. A counterterrorism effort based on CVRE initiatives is expected to achieve:

1. Hampering the growth and strength of organized terrorist groups;
2. Denying such terrorist organizations of potential recruits and supporters;
3. Effectively counter extremist narrative and create resilience among the communities against terrorist propaganda;
4. Create an environment of tolerance and contain extremist violence.

2.3 Literature Review

Countering Violent Religious Extremism (CVRE) is crucial in the broader context of counterterrorism, necessitating an understanding of terrorism's history, causes, consequences, and dynamics of religious violence. Academics, practitioners, and international organizations have produced extensive literature emphasizing the importance of CVE.

To comprehend religious extremism, one must grasp the concept of terrorism, viewing it through socio-economic and cultural lenses. Unlike other forms of violence, terrorism is often driven by social, political, or

³ Minerva_Nasser_et al, *Countering Violent Extremism Literature review, Counterterrorism and Security Technology Centre* (2011) Australia

ideological goals. It is not mindless but rooted in grievances perceived by individuals or groups against others. Crenshaw argues that ineffective government action is a permissive cause of terrorism-related violence.

Psychologists have extensively studied terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism. Researchers like Jerrold Post, Marc Sageman, and John Horgan have explored the psychological perspectives of radicalization, interviewing incarcerated terrorists and analyzing the motivations and emotional drivers of extremists. Their work sheds light on the development of terrorist networks and the psychological aspects of joining them.

Terrorism, defined as the use of violence to advance political or social goals, poses a global challenge requiring governments and academics to understand its motivations and develop effective counterterrorism strategies. Addressing violent extremism entails comprehending individuals' grooming and worldview favorable to extremism. Countering violent extremism should adopt a proactive approach and differentiate it from terrorism to avoid a muddled response.

In Pakistan, a significant rise in extremism occurred after the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, supported Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy. Bareilvi clerics issued fatwas against the governor, leading to his assassination and the subsequent rise of extremist outfits. Extremism has also disproportionately affected Pakistan's minorities, with attacks on churches and religious processions by groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

The religion and violence debate is addressed in books such as Robert A. Pape's "Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism" and Hector Avalon's "Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence." Although scrutiny often falls on the role of Islam in terrorism, research reveals that Christian terrorists have attacked the United States more frequently in recent years. The debate challenges whether religion itself causes terrorism or if it is exploited by political activists for their own purposes.

Extensive literature exists on violent extremism, including its drivers, radicalization processes, deradicalization strategies, rehab

programs, and the nexus between CVE, rule of law, democracy, development, inclusiveness, and extremism-related theoretical frameworks. However, the role of police in countering violent religious extremism has received limited focus, except for community policing programs. The present research project aims to address this gap.

Throughout history, religious extremists from various faiths have committed violent acts, raising the question of whether religion sanctions or causes terrorism. Scholars differentiate between the deviant actions of perpetrators and the normative traditions of religions. Political context and frustration can transform a primarily political and secular movement into a sacred cause, resulting in violence.

Radicalization patterns in Pakistan encompass sectarian, political, and pan-Islamist forms. Sectarian radicalization primarily affects the less educated and poorer sections of society, while political radicalization relates to issues like the Kashmir conflict or conspiracy theories of Western interference. Pan-Islamist radicalization emerges among the affluent and elite, yearning for a return to the perceived fundamentals of Islam.

Concerningly, the average Pakistani is exposed to jihadist narratives, anti-West sentiments, and extremist interpretations of religious texts. Jihadists exploit frustration and anger among certain sections of the population, offering simplistic solutions and armed struggles in the name of religion. While the majority of Pakistanis are moderate, the intolerant minority poses a threat to the country's peace and stability.

2.4 Existing Legal framework on VRE

Pakistan has implemented various laws to address religious extremism and its associated crimes. These laws empower the police and other agencies to investigate and prosecute acts that incite violence, hatred, or disharmony among different sections of society.

Some of these provisions, such as Section 295 and 295-A of the Pakistan Penal Code, date back to the British colonial period.

The Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of 1997, aimed to prevent terrorism, sectarian violence, and ensure speedy trials for terrorism offenses. The ATA included provisions to

combat activities contributing to terrorism, such as hate speech and financing. Over time, the ATA was amended to introduce more stringent measures, aligning with the evolving nature of terrorist threats and the requirements of the United Nations Security Council.

Pakistan faced a prolonged wave of religiously motivated terrorism after the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 and the ouster of the Afghan Taliban from power. To address this emerging threat, the ATA was further amended. These amendments focused on curbing support to proscribed organizations, including measures to control hate speech through the Punjab Sound System (Regulation) Act of 2015 and to combat online hate speech through the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act of 2016. The ATA encompasses provisions that relate to violent extremism offenses, such as:

a) Sectarian Hatred:

The ATA 1997 defines "sectarian hatred" as hostility against a group based on religion, sect, inclination, or belief, with charges applicable if someone intends to incite sectarian hatred or knows their actions may result in it.

b) Incitement to Hatred:

The ATA 1997 considers actions as terrorism if they incite hatred and contempt based on religion, sect, or ethnicity, intending to create conflict or internal dissent.

c) Incitement to Sectarian Animosity:

Violation occurs when actions incite sectarian animosity through threatening language or actions, displaying, publishing, disseminating written or visual material that is threatening, abusive, or insulting.

d) Raising Money for Terrorism:

Committing a crime involves inviting others to provide money or property for terrorism, knowing it will be used for terrorist actions, or giving money or property that may be used for such activities.

e) Using Money for Terrorism:

Engaging in terrorist activities, intending to use money or assets for terrorism, or having good grounds to believe they will be used for terrorism is considered an offense.

f) Eulogizing Terrorism:

Printing, publishing, or distributing content that glorifies terrorists or their actions, incites religious, sectarian, or ethnic hatred, or supports convicted criminals is an offense, including dissemination through various means.

g) Assistance to Proscribed Organization:

Soliciting assistance for a proscribed organization, planning or overseeing meetings to promote its objectives, or delivering speeches to rally support for such a group is unlawful.

h) Funding for Terrorism:

Engaging in arrangements where money or property is made available for terrorist activities, with knowledge or belief that it may be used for such purposes, is an offense. Providing money, property, or services for a prohibited organization or person is also a crime.

i) Money Laundering:

Participating in arrangements that facilitate the control of terrorist property through concealment, transfer, or other means is an offense, unless the person can prove they had no knowledge or cause to suspect involvement with terrorist property.

Furthermore, the ATA provides for the proscription of individuals and organizations involved in terrorism.

a) Proscription of a Person:

The Federal Government can list an individual as a proscribed person if there are valid reasons to believe they are involved in terrorism or associated with a proscribed organization, publishing the order in the official Gazette.

b) Proscription of an Organization:

The Federal Government can list an organization as a proscribed organization if there are reasonable grounds to believe it is involved in terrorism, owned or controlled by a prohibited individual or organization, or acting on behalf of a prohibited entity, publishing the order in the official Gazette.

c) Powers to Arrest and Detain:

The Government can issue a written order to arrest and detain a person listed under Section 11EE, if it believes their detention is necessary to prevent terrorist

acts, with the possibility of extending the detention period up to 90 days if required.

Section 3

3.1 Identifying the Gaps in Legal Framework

After going through the existing legal framework during the course of study, a number of gaps have been identified in this study. These include the following:

- a) The existing legal framework is scattered, overlapping and incoherent.
- b) It does not provide a holistic and overarching approach towards addressing the issue of violent extremism and religiously motivated crimes in its entirety.
- c) Existing legal framework does not provide incentives for whistle blowers and sanctions for those not reporting upon.

3.2 Challenges in Enforcement and the Police Role

- a) There is lack of training of police officers and prosecutors in developing understanding of various provisions of existing legal framework on violent extremism and application of appropriate provisions.
- b) There are no explanatory guidelines and SOPs on the appropriate application and legal requirements of relevant provisions of different sections of laws pertaining to various forms of violent extremism and religiously motivated crimes.
- c) In absence of mass awareness campaigns on various types of violent extremism and religiously motivated crimes, it becomes hard for police to initiate action on each violation of concerned legal provisions.

Amid this situation, the role of the police in countering violent extremism is crucial for effective enforcement of relevant laws. With their wide network of police stations, local intelligence gathering mechanisms, and powers of arrest and prosecution, the police are well-positioned to lead the non-kinetic aspect of any counter violent extremism (CVE) strategy. They can

prevent, investigate, and take action against violations related to violent extremism and religiously motivated crimes. Additionally, the police have the authority to recommend surveillance, impose restrictions, and even preventive detention on individuals who may potentially engage in such crimes.

Through community policing initiatives, the police can engage with the community and collaborate with religious seminaries, educational institutions, media, youth groups, civil society, and academia. By learning from successful models in countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, and the UK, partnerships can be established to enhance the effectiveness of CVE plans and programs. While the police play a vital role in prevention, investigation, and prosecution, it is crucial to ensure that their powers are not abused, leading to human rights violations. Building the capacity of police officers to adhere to good practices in countering violent extremism and religiously motivated crimes is essential to maintain public trust.

To improve the current situation, there is a need for exclusive legislation that defines violent extremism and its various manifestations. Overlaps and discrepancies in punishment and judicial oversight should be reviewed and addressed. New legislation should enable the police to utilize surveillance tools, technology, and non-penal mechanisms to effectively prevent violent extremism.

Although Pakistan lacks a standalone law specifically targeting violent extremism, existing criminal and anti-terrorism laws provide provisions to address religiously motivated crimes. However, implementation remains suboptimal due to limited understanding, capacity, and focus. By introducing an exclusive legislation on countering violent extremism and enhancing police capacity, Pakistan can effectively combat the rising incidence of violent extremism and its linkages to terrorism. Enforcing comprehensive legal frameworks is crucial in preventing extremist activities and upholding the rule of law. Police play a central role in the enforcement mechanism, as they are an integral part of the criminal justice system. By strengthening the rule of law, police officers contribute to fostering tolerance, preventing radicalization, and curbing violent tendencies. Additionally, ensuring justice and accountability through fair and transparent

legal processes serves as a deterrent to radicalization.

Human rights violations often fuel waves of violent extremism, as non-state actors exploit these violations to advance their propaganda and attract marginalized individuals. For instance, in regions like former FATA, perceptions of unchecked military operations have led to increased recruitment by violent terrorist organizations. It is vital for police organizations to prioritize the protection of human rights and cultivate an environment of trust and respect between marginalized communities and the state.

3.3 Contextualizing the Criminal Justice System

The criminal justice system is vital in countering violent extremism (CVE) by addressing extremist acts, holding perpetrators accountable, and safeguarding the community. However, it faces deficiencies that hinder its effectiveness. Inadequate reporting of crimes, flaws in investigations, and capacity issues within the police can lead to weak investigations, undermining justice and impeding CVE efforts. Prosecutors face threats, particularly in cases related to religious extremism, impacting their ability to pursue cases effectively. Pakistan's prosecution, in cases like Aasia Bibi's blasphemy case, faced threats, and the absence of a robust witness protection system resulted in resiling of prosecution witnesses. To ensure a stronger and more secure environment, a focus on the safety of prosecutors and witnesses involved in violent extremism cases is crucial. Courts, responsible for adjudicating such cases, experience delays due to backlogs, shortage of judges, and lengthy appeals, eroding public trust and potentially leading to vigilante justice. Prisons, meant for housing and rehabilitating individuals convicted of violent extremism, can become breeding grounds for radicalization if not properly managed. Effective rehabilitation and reintegration programs are necessary. Addressing deficiencies involves investing in training and resources for law enforcement, improving investigations, expediting court proceedings, and implementing rehabilitation programs in correctional facilities. Establishing checks and balances, promoting accountability, and safeguarding judicial independence are crucial for building public

trust. Strengthening the criminal justice system enhances its role in countering violent extremism and ensuring community security.

3.4 Police as Gateway to the Criminal Justice System

The Police Department holds a unique position in countering terrorism and extremism as they are often the first to be informed about such offenses. They serve as the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system, making crucial decisions regarding the fate of suspects involved in these crimes. Upon receiving a report, the police are the initial responders at the scene, and the effectiveness of their response is vital for the subsequent investigation and detection of the case. From gathering evidence to arresting offenders and handing over the case to prosecution, the police remain actively involved. They also provide support to the prosecution by testifying as witnesses in court, while closely interacting with victims and witnesses throughout the process. Additionally, they play a pivotal role in providing counseling, compensation, and legal assistance to crime victims. However, it is important for the police to uphold transparency, justice, and ethical principles, as these factors are crucial in maintaining public trust in the criminal justice system.

3.4 Policing the Violent Religious Crimes

The role of the police in preventing religious violence extends beyond simply enforcing the law. It requires a multi-sectoral approach, involving various segments of society and stakeholders, to create a society where different religious denominations can peacefully coexist. To effectively combat violent extremism, it is necessary to go beyond security concerns and identify the underlying drivers of radicalization. Pakistan has a significant police force, with nearly 500,000 policemen, including those in the FIA, IB, and NACTA. They are constantly interacting with the community and are well-positioned to address extremism through non-kinetic measures.

Table 6: Sanctioned police strength

Police Unit	PPO/JCP	Addl. IC	DIG	SSP	SP	ASP	DSP	IP	SI	ASI	HC	Const	Total
Punjab	1	14	38	81	186	833	3794	15945	16032	22651	131636		191211
Sindh	1	6	24	95	120	631	2895	6179	11180	19987	114536		186664
KPK	1	5	18	35	80	17	247	704	2552	3681	8454	52736	68630
Balochistan	1	4	18	34	91	365	719	1933	3125	8121	26401		40812
Islamabad	1	0	3	10	19	47	163	499	1117	1498	7887		11244
Railways	1	0	2	0	9	0	15	60	169	336	880	5571	7043
Gilgit Balistan	1	0	3	5	16	4	51	62	155	202	692	4911	6102
AJK	1	1	7	6	16	5	43	114	269	286	961	6614	8323
Total	8	30	113	266	537	1902	356	8511	27701	35959	63244	380292	488919

Source: National Police Bureau

The police can perform various functions related to extremist violence, including prevention, investigation, surveillance, assisting in prosecution, rehabilitation, building resilience, conflict resolution, strengthening the rule of law, addressing early stages of discontent, protecting human rights, and treating citizens with dignity and honor.

In Pakistan, the police are responsible for investigating criminal offenses under the Code of Criminal Procedure. They also undertake efforts in countering violent extremism (CVE), such as the Punjab Rehabilitation Programme and the Swat Deradicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP). The Punjab Rehabilitation Programme, managed by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), focuses on prevention, rehabilitation, and aftercare. It provides technical and vocational education to militants and offers them loans to start their own businesses. Regular meetings, counseling, and follow-up sessions ensure sustained reintegration.

Similarly, rehabilitation centers were established in Bajaur and Khyber districts of former FATA, jointly managed by the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps, and other law enforcement agencies. These centers combine religious and ideological training with vocational training, addressing individual-level causes and motivations of terrorism. The Mishal program's "no blood on hand" policy exemplifies Pakistan's non-kinetic approach, emphasizing rehabilitation to break the cycle of violence and create an environment less conducive to terrorism.

Drawing from international best practices, Egypt provides a notable example of counter-narrative building. Following 9/11,

Egypt adopted a strategy to counter the influence of violent organizations by promoting a counter-narrative. They endorsed and supported former terrorist leaders who spoke out against terrorism, contributing to transforming radicalized minds. Egypt's efforts weakened extremist groups and reduced terrorism incidents, showcasing the effectiveness of countering violent extremism through narrative transformation.

With the emergence of non-traditional challenges like violent extremism, the police response and legal framework need to be dynamic. In Pakistan, initiatives have been taken to strengthen police enforcement against religious extremism, ranging from regulating religious seminaries to curtailing terror financing. The state policy underwent revisions after the APS Peshawar incident in 2014, resulting in the redesign of the national counter-terrorism and extremism strategy. The National Action Plan (NAP) provides a comprehensive response to terrorism, including structural interventions to counter extremism in society.

Police officers can also work with religious seminaries, to ensure those are not involved in spreading a narrative of extremist violence. Although, on the question of linkage of religious seminaries with militancy, it is not easy to offer a definitive answer neither in affirmation nor in negation. One section of the western scholarship is divided whereas the other denies any primary linkage between the two on the pretext that those involved in major terror incidents like World Trade Centre and Bali bombings did not have any primary linkage with religious seminaries.⁴ Nevertheless, it is important for taking into account the secondary and indirect linkage with religious seminaries for being the source of indoctrination.⁵

⁴ For those who believe in this linkage; see for instance, R. Looney, (2002). A U.S. Strategy for Achieving Stability in Pakistan: Expanding Educational Opportunities. *Strategic Insights*, 7(7); P. Singer, (2001). Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad. *Brookings Institute Analysis Paper*(41); and J. Stern, (2001, January-February). Meeting with the Muj. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 57(1), 42-50. For those who overlook this connection, see, P. Bergen, & S. Pandey, (2006, Spring). The Madrassah Scapegoat. *Washington Quarterly*, 2(29), 117-125; A. Evans, (2006, January-February). Understanding Madrassahs. *Foreign Affairs*, 1(85), 9-16 and M. Sageman, (2004). *Understanding Terrorists' Networks*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁵ Marath, Munir Masood. *Fallacy of Militant Ideology: Competing Ideologies and Conflict Among Militants, the Muslim World and the West*. Routledge, 2021.

Conclusions

Terrorism is a grave issue in Pakistan, causing significant damage to security, economy, stability, and social cohesion. To effectively address this problem, a multidimensional approach is necessary. While progress has been made in dealing with terrorist outfits, it has only provided temporary relief. To achieve lasting peace, the core issue of violent extremism must be addressed.

Pakistan has postponed the battle against violent extremist religious mindset for too long. Superficial measures are no longer a solution. The manipulation of religion for political gain has divided the population instead of creating a strong bond. The education system, madrassah curriculum, media policy, and role of religion in society must be reexamined to transform the country into a tolerant, enlightened, and rational Muslim society.

Recommendations

a) *Reforming Criminal Justice System:*

The criminal justice system must be reformed to ensure easy and speedy justice within due process, transparency, credibility, reliability, accessibility, efficiency, and fairness. Disappointment with the system in Swat led to extremist appeals for Sharia law and violence. Reforms should streamline the legal process, enhance security, uphold human rights, and enforce international norms. Fair trials, legal counsel, and open access to prosecution should be guaranteed. Oversight and monitoring procedures are crucial for protecting human rights in the criminal justice system.

b) *Capacity building of police:*

Policing initiatives combat violent religious extremism (CVE) through proactive strategies, including early intervention programs to support individuals at risk of radicalization and intelligence-led policing to track threats, networks, and online activities.

c) *Developing technical expertise:*

Policing initiatives against violent religious extremism involve technical expertise such as digital forensics, cybersecurity, and

open-source intelligence (OSINT) analysis. Skilled personnel investigate online activities, collaborate with service providers, remove extremist content, and engage in counter-messaging to challenge extremist ideologies.

d) *Community Policing:*

Community policing is vital in building resilience against religiously motivated violence. Local authorities, stakeholders, and police should collaborate to engage communities through education, public events, and information technology. Trust and partnerships are fostered through regular communication, meetings, and engagement with community leaders.

e) *Specialized CVRE Unit:*

The Police must raise a separate unit to deal with matters pertaining to the prevention, detection and identification of matters related to violent extremism. This unit may be named as countering violent extremism Unit. The unit must have the mandate to analyse, investigate and prosecute groups and individuals subscribing to violent hate related crime.

f) *Data Sharing & Collaboration:*

Enhance data sharing and fusion centers among law enforcement agencies to improve coordination and understanding of the threat landscape. Utilize forensic psychology and behavioral analysis to identify risk factors and develop tailored intervention strategies. Promote collaboration and information exchange between national and international intelligence organizations. To prevent religious violence, focus on early identification of at-risk individuals through partnerships with local governments and academia. Combine large-scale outreach campaigns with targeted interventions to reach a larger number of young people. Utilize academic research and knowledge to develop effective policy interventions

g) *Creating awareness:*

It is important to work to spread knowledge and increase public

awareness of the violent extremism threat. Institutions of higher learning should implement curricula that prioritize respect for variety, tolerance, and pluralism. To involve civil society, religious leaders, and local communities in thwarting extremist narratives and promoting social cohesion, public awareness campaigns and community outreach initiatives should be put in place.

h) Protecting vulnerable communities:

Vulnerable communities must strengthen their defenses against violent extremism and be provided with safety and confidence. Service providers should swiftly utilize Artificial Intelligence to prevent cyber offenses, removing and blocking content that promotes violent acts.

i) Adopting a Wholistic Approach:

Addressing religious violent crime requires a holistic approach beyond the capacity of the police alone. It is crucial for all law enforcement and government bodies to align their efforts, work together, and utilize shared resources to confront the spectrum of threats associated with religious extremism. Success is attainable through collective action.

Future Research

Pakistan's police units in provinces and Centre can play a very useful role in this long-term fight against extremist forms of violence. Police are quite capable of this and their resources and services have not been put to proper use for the success of CVRE. This is a new challenge and a big opportunity as well. Will Pakistan's state, civilian police forces, citizens' communities and other components of the criminal justice system rise to the occasion and work in tandem? An affirmative answer to this crucial question will set the direction for the vibrant nation of over 230 million. There is much room for future research focusing on the above-mentioned challenges specifically for designing evidence based CVRE programs.

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