

REPORT



Pakistan's Counter- Extremism Challenge and Policy Recourse

Findings of virtual consultations on Pakistan's counter-extremism policies, regimes, and strategies with political leaders, security experts, and CE professionals and practitioners, organized by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Islamabad.

Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<i>iii</i>
<u>Summary</u>	<i>iv</i>
1. <u>Section One: Pakistan’s Extremism Landscape</u>	1
2. <u>Section Two: Issues and Analyses</u>	6
a) <u>Extremist Narratives and Militant Groups in Pakistan</u>	6
b) <u>Dysfunctional Public Education and the Expanding Madrassa System</u>	9
c) <u>Counter-Extremism Options and National Action Plan</u>	11
d) <u>The Criminal Justice System</u>	14
e) <u>External Dimension of Extremism in Pakistan</u>	15
f) <u>The De-radicalisation and Rehabilitation Challenge</u>	17
3. <u>Section Three: Solutions and Recommendations</u>	19
a) <u>Dealing with Extremist Narratives and Groups</u>	19
b) <u>Reforming the Religious and Public Education</u>	21
c) <u>Strategizing the CE Options and National Action Plan</u>	22
d) <u>Improving the Criminal Justice System</u>	24
e) <u>Tackling the External Factors of Extremism</u>	24
f) <u>Developing De-radicalisation Programmes</u>	25
g) <u>List of Speakers</u>	26

Introduction

In Pakistan, religious extremism threatens social cohesion and feeds into terrorism. Left unchecked, this problem can damage Pakistan beyond repair, though it is already responsible for some of the long-running internal security challenges such as religious and sectarian polarization and the persecution of minorities, etc. Extremism's inherent tendency for anarchy and hostility for democratic dispensation makes it all the more alarming.

Given the critically adverse impact of religious extremism on Pakistan's internal social dynamics, security, economy as well as its international implications such as the FATF grey-listing etc., the *Pak Institute for Peace Studies* (PIPS) held nine rounds of national consultations with leading scholars, CE experts, policy advisors, educationists, rehabilitation practitioners and psychologists, and members of law enforcement and clergy to explore and analyze Pakistan's extremism problem, and expand and update the knowledge base and fill the gaps. During the extensive rounds of consultations, critical lessons were drawn to inform key stakeholders, and potential policy reforms and options for the government were offered. Practical and detailed recommendations on addressing various aspects of the problem were also made which are given in this report.

Each round of the virtual consultations examined a specific aspect of the problem, and on the whole the consultations took a holistic view of Pakistan's extremism problem. Diverse yet interlinked factors behind extremism and the state's CE policies and regimes were subjected to in-depth examination, and evaluated on the bases of available facts and evidence. The following themes and issues were discussed and debated at the consultations:

1. Perilous Ideas

The genesis, proliferation, and prevalence of extremist narratives in Pakistan

2. Education or Indoctrination?

Are school textbooks breeding extremism?

3. Aggressive and Violent

Violent extremist groups and their trends and potential scenarios

4. The Beyond-the-Borders Factors

The external dimensions of terrorism in Pakistan

5. The National Action Plan

The NAP's relevance to and effectiveness for countering extremism

6. Counter-Extremism Policies

Strategizing Pakistan's CE policy options

7. Is the Criminal Justice System Delivering?

Definitional flaws and systemic lacunas in criminal justice and the way forward

8. De-radicalization and Rehabilitation of Ex-militants

Developing de-radicalization programs in Pakistan

9. The Madrassas in Pakistan

Reforming the madrassa system

This report of the consultations consists of three sections: the first section gives an overview of Pakistan's extremism landscape; the second contains detailed analyses of factors and dynamics of extremism; and the last one offers potential solutions or recommendations.

Summary

- Pakistan has had an inconsistent and confusing approach to eradicating extremism. Quite often, the state's actions contradict its own declared policies or the CE laws which only adds to the existing mass confusion and radicalization in the country.
- Religious extremism has grown in Pakistan, despite a steady decline in incidents of terrorism since 2009. At present, an alarming number of extremist groups continue to exist and operate in some form in the country despite official proscription. Many likeminded extremist outfits make alliances or cooperate with each other.
- Reports indicate that militant groups are regrouping in the merged districts of KP (ex-FATA). Critics claim the suspected regrouping is happening while the state looks the other way.
- Religious minorities continue to face violence and persecution in the country. In mid-2020, while the law enforcement agencies stood and watched, radical Sunnis marched on the streets with open calls for violence against the Shia. Likewise, the Ahmedi religious community faced increased attacks by extremists and several of their members were murdered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab in 2020. Similarly, extremists demolished an under-construction Hindu temple in Islamabad, and later burned a Hindu shrine in Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In all instances, the state's response was one of conventional ambiguity.
- The state did feel the heat of FATF, however, as it went about rushing over a dozen laws through the parliament to satisfy the FATF demands. Similarly, it pushed the Council of Islamic Ideology and the clergy to come up with a *Code of Conduct* to promote religious and sectarian harmony. In addition, some members of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa were also prosecuted for terror financing.
- The government's ability to deal with extremists is reduced by chronic political instability. As governments struggle for their survival and remain preoccupied with political issues, extremism slides down the priorities list. And with the military looking after the security policies, the government and parliament further lose interest in tackling these issues.
- Though Pakistan is plagued by religious extremism, yet it lacks clarity on what constitutes extremism. While nebulous definitions and varying interpretations create mass confusion, they also tend to enhance the state's discretion to act in questionable ways e.g. framing liberal critics or journalists for promoting extremism.
- Extremist ideologies and narratives are propagated through a number of forums like mosques, madrassas, internet, etc. The radicals have significant presence in the Pakistani cyberspace. On the internet, the government mostly chases porn websites, state critics, and separatist groups and their sympathizers while the extremist outfits routinely use the internet for radicalization and recruitment.
- Public education in Pakistan is more a cause of concern than hope as textbooks teach exclusionary and divisive narratives and instill narrow worldviews in students. Traditionally, the education has been used for political and religious indoctrination as part of the state's nation building efforts. To whitewash ethnic and lingual diversities, the pupils are taught vague and confusing ideologies based on religion. Critical thinking and questioning are discouraged, and blind faith in state narratives is promoted.

- The incumbent PTI-led government is currently rolling out the Single National Curricula (SNC) as part of its educational reforms. Some analysts fear the SNC would turn public schools into madrassas and add to further radicalization of the society. Reportedly, the SNC is premised on the idea that injection of more religion into education would produce better citizens.
- While Pakistan's public education has atrophied in quality and standard in recent decades, the madrassa sector has seen enormous expansion across the country. Only a portion of the estimated 35,000 madrassas are registered, while the rest operate beyond the radar of the state. Many have had links with militancy and terrorism. Repeated yet half-hearted attempts to reform the madrassa sector have fallen flat.
- The National Action Plan (NAP) has failed to check radicalization, and extremist groups continue to push their violent agendas. Besides, the Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was established in the post-NAP period which testifies to the NAP's ineffectiveness. Similarly, Balochistan continues to remain in turmoil. The NAP provision seeking reconciliation with indignant Baloch still awaits implementation.
- The Pakistani criminal justice system has many failings which range from sketchy definition of terrorism, to poor investigation and prosecution techniques, to corruption and mismanagement of resources, as well as an over-reliance on witness testimony as evidence. The state often placates the extremists which embolden them even further. And when the state chooses to operate beyond the law, the justice system struggles to uphold the law or deliver justice.
- The Shia-Sunni tension is fueled by Iran-Saudi rivalry. Both states are known for supporting and funding extremists in Pakistan. But, sectarian militants have also been patronized by the state for various strategic reasons. Similarly, the Afghan policy has produced homegrown terrorism and extremism.
- Pakistan has run some limited de-radicalization and rehabilitation programs for ex-militants. These programs have had limited civilian involvement. Most teenage militants at these programs were found to be motivated by monetary and other material gains rather than ideology.

Recommendations

- The state must develop clarity of thinking on terrorism and extremism, and as a first step, come up with a concrete definition of extremism in order to remove the ambiguities in policy and also address the mass confusion about what constitutes extremism.
- The *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (PeP) should be disseminated on a mass scale through the education system and media. PeP excerpts that criminalize militancy and religious vigilantism etc. should be taught at schools.
- The parliament must seriously debate the chronic identity crisis in Pakistan, and make it known to the wider public why Pakistan's stability and prosperity lie in a democratic dispensation. Identity crisis has given space to extremism to thrive.
- The education system must teach about the immense ethnic, religious, and cultural diversities in Pakistan and highlight the services of the Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, etc. to the country in order to help students appreciate diversity, and dilute the appeal of extremism. Similarly, critical thinking must be taught as a subject at schools.

- Definitional flaws in the anti-terrorism laws such as the ATA 1997 must be addressed in order to bring greater clarity on cases of terrorism and extremism, and also unburden the anti-terrorism courts. Likewise, the prosecution should gradually switch from reliance on witness testimony to forensics for evidence.

1. Section One

Pakistan's Extremism Landscape

Islamist extremism is rooted in Pakistan. There has not been any sustained and serious effort by the government to curb its growth. The National Action Plan (NAP) talk about dealing with aspects of extremism but their implementation and outcome are contested. Often, in cases involving extremist groups, the authorities either adopt an ambiguous stance or resort to appeasing the radicals in order to de-escalate a standoff or a potential violent confrontation. Such approaches not only contradict the existing laws and policies, but also tend to embolden the extremists and further incentivise their hostile behavior.

In 2020, an alliance of various Sunni extremist groups took to the streets of Karachi and Islamabad, calling the Shia sect as 'heretical' and openly inciting violence against its followers. The authorities took no action to prevent or contain this blunt display of extremism. On the contrary, the police registered several cases of blasphemy against Shia persons mostly on complaints by suspected members of extremist outfits like *Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat* (ASWJ). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan noted that over 40 such cases [mostly against Shia Muslims] had been registered under the blasphemy laws in August 2020 alone, wherein the "state ha[d] effectively abdicated its responsibilities under international human rights law by leaving those accused of blasphemy to the mercy of mobs, or trials that are marred by glaring legal and procedural flaws."¹

The sectarian tension surged in Pakistan in mid-September (2020) after a Shia cleric had made some controversial remarks during a *Moharram* sermon in late August. This resurgence in sectarianism was termed as 'unprecedented and alarming' by some observers. The tensions came weeks after the Punjab Assembly passed the controversial *Tahafuz-e-Bunyad Islam* (protection of the foundations of Islam) bill in July. The bill's provision for upholding Sunni interpretation as the only acceptable version of Islam sparked uproar among Shia clerics who complained that the bill's clause requiring mandatory reverence for esteemed Sunni figures was contrary to Shia beliefs.²

Similarly, the persecuted Ahmadi community faced increased violence in 2020 mostly in Peshawar where five Ahmadis were murdered in separate attacks. In one of these incidents, an under-trial prisoner, Tahir Ahmed Naseem, 57, was shot dead by a vigilante teenager inside a courtroom in Peshawar. The victim, an American national of Pakistani origin, was undergoing a trial for blasphemy. Likewise, another elderly Ahmadi businessman, Miraj Ahmad, was murdered at his shop by unknown gunmen in Peshawar.

¹ "HRCPC concerned at blasphemy cases against minorities," *Dawn*, September 6, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1578146>

² Kunwar Khaldun Shahid, "What role does the state play in Pakistan anti-Shia hysteria" *The Diplomat*, Sep 17, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/what-role-does-the-state-play-in-pakistans-anti-shia-hysteria/>

According to the Ahmadi community, the murder was preceded by a social media hate campaign against the victim's family. And yet in another incident, an Ahmadi professor, Naeemuddin Khattak, was killed allegedly by his colleague following a heated debate. The Peshawar police also rescued an Ahmadi family from a Muslim mob that surrounded the family's house following some debate about a public event. Apart from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, two Ahmadi men were also killed in Khushab and Nankana Sahib districts of Punjab in the year 2020.

Extremism also came into full display over the construction of a Hindu temple in Islamabad. In June 2020, the prime minister approved funds for the construction of Krishna Mandir, a long-standing demand of Islamabad's about 3000-strong Hindu community. The temple complex was to include a crematorium, accommodation for visitors, a community hall, and a parking area. The temple's foundation stones were laid during a ceremony on June 23, which triggered a severe backlash from radical clerics, politicians, as well as some media houses. One of the government's coalition partners, the PML-Q, called for the cancellation of the project, claiming that it was "against the spirit of Islam".

Likewise, the Lahore-based *Jamia Ashrafia* issued a fatwa, declaring that the temple's construction was "not permissible" in Islam. Similarly, JUI-F leader and former minister, Maulana Amir Zaman, said Islam did not allow the construction of new places of worship by minorities in an Islamic state. As a consequence, on July 3, the government backtracked on its plan to fund the temple's construction, and two days later, a mob vandalized the temple's boundary walls.³ The government then referred the matter to the Council of Islamic Ideology for advice which ruled in October that there were no constitutional or religious barriers to the construction of the temple.

The Council's decision said that the Hindus like all other religious groups in Pakistan had the constitutional right to a place for last rites as per their faith.⁴ However, it ruled against providing public funds for the construction work. Following the decision, the Capital Development Authority issued a 'no objection certificate' on 23rd of December, allowing the Hindu community to build the temple.⁵ However, just a week after this positive development, a Muslim mob torched a Hindu shrine in Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The same shrine had also been vandalised back in 1997, but was rebuilt on the order of the Supreme Court. According to reports, the attack was instigated by a local cleric.

The upsurge in religious extremism is certainly a fuel to the fire, particularly at a time when the country is already lingering on the threshold of FATF sanctions for money laundering and terrorist financing. The government is apparently nervous about the FATF factor which is probably the reason the Council of Islamic Ideology put out a 'Code of Conduct' (CoC) in October 2020 for promoting sectarian harmony in the country. The CoC prohibits issuing decrees of infidelity against any sect or individual, and declares

³ Daud Khattak, "Pakistan bows to Islamic hard liners to halt Hindu temple construction" REFL, July 16, 2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-bows-to-islamic-hard-liners-to-halt-hindu-temple-construction/30731832.html>

⁴ Dawn, October 28, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587472>

⁵ "Pakistan issues NOC for Hindu temple construction in Islamabad" *Daily Pakistan*, December 23, 2020, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/23-Dec-2020/pakistan-issues-noc-for-hindu-temple-in-islamabad>

armed struggle against the state as rebellion. It also acknowledges the rights of non-Muslim citizens to practice their religion and rites as per their belief systems.

Similarly, the CoC prohibits the use of religious institutions or platforms like mosques and imambargahs for hate speech. However, analysts argue, “such fatwas and declarations have wielded little to no influence on most radical elements and extremist groups in Pakistan.”⁶ For one, as noted earlier, even in the presence of such drafts and decrees (like Paigham-e-Pakistan for instance), extremist elements and groups would continue to spread hatred as per their convictions or other internal and external compulsions. Certainly, the issue is deep-rooted and linked to the society’s religious, identity-related and sociopolitical ethos and cannot be resolved simply by a fire fighting approach.

A month after the pronouncement of the CoC, the cabinet also approved an interior ministry proposal for the establishment of a commission for the implementation of national narrative and development of structures against violent extremism and radicalisation. The proposed commission’s main objectives include, among other things, providing a legal mechanism to curb violent extremism and enforcing national narratives and policies in line with the National Action Plan.⁷ It is unclear how this proposed commission would be any different from existing institutions with similar mandates such as NACTA.

However, despite the growing extremism in the society what is encouraging is the constant decline in incidents of terrorism since 2009. In 2020 alone, the country witnessed a 36% decline in incidents of terrorism as compared to the year before.⁸ But reduction in incidents of terrorism has not translated into reduction in extremism. Currently, Pakistan is home to an alarming number of extremist groups which is evident by the proscription of seventy eight (78) outfits by the interior ministry on grounds of their links with terrorism or extremism. Many of these proscribed outfits are secular insurgent groups that claim to be fighting the central government in Balochistan and Sindh for greater political and economic rights or outright secession. The extremist groups can be broadly divided into the following three categories:

1. Islamist militant groups like the TTP, Al-Qaeda, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and the Haqqani Network, etc.
2. Violent sectarian outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, and Sipah-e-Muhammad, etc.
3. Nationalist insurgent groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army, Balochistan Liberation Front, and Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army, etc.

There are alliances and mutual sympathies among extremist groups. The Deobandis, Bareilvis, and Ahl-e-Hadith – all Sunni sects - banded together against the Shias by taking out rallies and chanting apostatising slogans against the latter in September 2020. At least three major anti-Shia rallies by leaders and members of officially-banned outfits were taken out in Karachi and Islamabad. The authorities showed no formal

⁶ Muhammad Amir Rana, “Sectarianism and civil society,” *Dawn*, October 18, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1585683>

⁷ Tariq Khosa, “Countering extremism,” *Dawn*, December 20, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596792>

⁸ Safdar Sial & Ahmed Ali, “Overview of Security in 2020: Critical Challenges and Recommendations,” in *Pakistan Security Report 2020* (Islamabad: PIPS, 2021), 17.

reaction to these developments. In the past, groups like the TTP, Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Haqqani Network etc. have worked as allies.

Similarly, the Baloch separatist groups also formed an alliance called the '*Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar*' in 2020. There have been some indications of a growing cooperation among the Baloch and Sindhi nationalist insurgents of late. The Baloch insurgents have grown more violent and sophisticated in their methods, and they have attacked selective and high-profile targets such as the Pakistan Stock Exchange and the Chinese Consulate in Karachi, and the Pearl Continental hotel in Gwadar. They often refrain from attacking soft targets like schools or other public spaces, but whatever brings them coverage destroys Pakistan's image.

On the other hand, the Sindhi nationalist groups are also increasingly asserting themselves, but they remain relatively weak, and often perpetrate low-intensity attacks. In 2020, Sindhi separatist outfits such as the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SDRA) and the Sindhudesh Liberation Army (SDLA) perpetrated ten terrorist attacks in Sindh. Seven of these attacks were carried out in Karachi, two in Larkana, and one in Ghotki. The key targets, among others, were the Rangers and an office of Ehsaas Program.

The attacks came a month after the interior ministry proscribed (in May 2020) the JSQM-A, SDRA, and SDLA under the anti-terrorism act of 1997. According to the interior ministry, there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that these outfits were involved in terrorism in Sindh. Historically, the Sindhi insurgents have perpetrated sporadic low-intensity and low-impact attacks, but in 2020 they managed to create some impact both in terms of the number of attacks and intensity of the attacks they launched.⁹

The overall decline in incidents of terrorism has been due to military operations in the tribal areas such as the Swat Valley and the former FATA, as well as actions taken under the National Action Plan (NAP) from 2015 onwards. Sectarian attacks also decreased from 2014 to 2020, but right at the turn of this year, a major terrorist attack in Balochistan shook the country once again. On January 3rd, eleven coalminers belonging to the Hazara Shia community were brutally murdered in Machh, a town in the suburb of Quetta. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack. This was followed by a countrywide protest against the government.

Statistically, the security situation has improved in spite of the prevailing religious radicalism in Pakistan. In the past decade, most terrorist attacks were perpetrated by the Pakistani Taliban i.e. the TTP before the group was put on the run and expelled from Pakistan following the operation Zarb-e-Azb launched in North Waziristan in 2014.

However, lately there have been indications that the pressures put on extremist groups are easing off. For instance, some outfits started regrouping in various parts of the country in 2020. The TTP has reportedly absorbed factions of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and 'Al-Qaeda in the Subcontinent'. The locals have reported

⁹ Safdar Sial & Ahmed Ali, "Overview of Security in 2020: Critical Challenges and Recommendations," in *Pakistan Security Report 2020* (Islamabad: PIPS, 2021), 35..

TTP movement and activity in the North Waziristan, suggesting the outfit is apparently trying to re-establish its command and control structure in the country. Besides, the TTP's breakaway factions i.e. Hizbul Ahrar and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar declared their reunion with their parent group TTP.¹⁰

On the other hand, conflict between the Afghan Taliban and the Islamic State (IS) has spilled over the Pak-Afghan border, resulting in IS-claimed bombings of a mosque in Quetta¹¹ and a madrassa in Peshawar¹² in January and October of 2020, respectively. Analysts fear this intra-jihadist battle will likely aggravate after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

On the top of these, chronic political and economic instabilities in Pakistan, which consume much of the state's focus and energies, also create an environment conducive to extremism. As cited earlier, no substantial effort has been made to curb the growing religious extremism in the country, and the existing CE policies and strategies such as the National Action Plan (NAP) formulated in 2015 have lacked implementation. One of the most malicious religious extremist group i.e. Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was born after the NAP was adopted as a CT and CE policy.

In Nov 2017, the TLP marched on Islamabad, seizing key traffic chokepoints at Faizabad and paralyzing the nation's capital. The outfit took a minor modification in the wording of the oath for lawmakers as an excuse to accuse the PML-N government's lawmaker Zahid Hamid of committing blasphemy by amending the oath.¹³ The TLP activists also ransacked the minister's private home in Sialkot district, forcing him to retract the reported amendment and resign from the office. In order to end the capital's siege by the TLP, the government ordered a police crackdown which faltered, and pro-TLP protests broke out in other cities.

The government's attempts to put down the violent protest faltered, and ultimately the military brokered a peace deal between the government and the TLP, bringing the siege to an end.¹⁴ While denting the reputation of the elected government, the TLP-dictated deal boosted the image and morale of the outfit amongst the radicals. What's worse, the Election Commission of Pakistan allowed the mainstreaming of this outfit by registering it as a political party to contest elections.

In addition to NAP's many failings, Pakistan's principal legal tool against terrorism and extremism i.e. the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 continues to lack basic clarity on the definition of terrorism. The law was enacted over two decades ago, but the definitional flaw has still not been rectified. The vagueness of definition has overburdened the anti-terrorism courts with cases of non-terrorism offences, adding to the overall dysfunction of the criminal justice system. In the following section, Pakistan's CE landscape will be

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 17.

¹¹ Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan mosque bombing kills 15," Voice of America, January 10, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/pakistan-mosque-bombing-kills-15>

¹² "Islamic State-Khorasan province's Peshawar seminary attack and the war against Afghan Taliban," Jamestown.org, November 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/islamic-state-khorasan-provinces-peshawar-seminary-attack-and-war-against-afghan-taliban-hanafis>

¹³ Asad Hashim, "Pakistan minister resigns, ending Islamabad standoff," Al-Jazeera, November 27, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/27/pakistan-minister-resigns-ending-islamabad-standoff>

¹⁴ Amir Wasim, "Faizabad sit-in ends as army brokers deal," Dawn, November 28, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1373274>

explored in detail. The extremism problem is multidimensional, and each of those dimensions will be analyzed in the light of discussions and analyses provided by the webinar panelists as well as the PIPS.

2. Section Two: Issues and Analyses

This section explores various dimensions of Pakistan's extremism problem and analyses factors behind the growth of extremism and the failures to overcome the challenge. The analyses are sourced from the findings of the webinars with additional input from the PIPS.

a. Extremist Narratives and Militant Groups in Pakistan

There are many fundamental issues in Pakistan's counter-extremism (CE) response such as continuing lack of clarity on the definition of extremism, weak political resolve, policy inconsistency, use of religion as a political tool, overemphasis on military options and little focus on soft CE approaches etc. Pakistan has suffered a thousand cuts to its social, political, and economic fabrics in its prolonged battle with religious terrorism and extremism, yet the country is far from having the basic clarity as to what exactly constitutes 'extremism'.

Varying definitions, understandings, and interpretations of extremism have only generated mass confusion, and prevented a coherent response on the part of the state. The merger of the state and the mosque has given the country divergent and often mutually incompatible political ideals. The state seeks nationalistic and religious identities at the same time, and while being a modern constitutional democracy it has also been accommodating the demands for the enforcement of Islamic law. This 'contradiction' is also reflected in the constitution which ensures religious freedom to all citizens and then goes on to bar certain religious groups from practicing their faith.

This self-inflicted confusion has turned the social environment conducive for the extremist groups to sell their exclusionary narratives to a wide audience base. Extremist narratives claiming legitimacy from religion have considerable acceptance in the society. And jihadism and sectarianism, driving forces behind terrorism, are often viewed as normal and mainstream. The state has tolerated both for political and security purposes, and political leaders have contributed to the amplification of extremist narratives through their words and actions. For instance, serving cabinet members have publicly glorified religious fanatics and murderers like Mumtaz Qadri – the policeman who assassinated the Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, after accusing him of committing blasphemy.

Similarly, the Punjab government enacted the *Tahafuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam* law in 2020 that tends to criminalize certain beliefs held by the Shia sect, and ultimately validates the narratives of violent anti-Shia groups. The so called *Tahafuz-e-Bunyad-e-Islam* legislation triggered a chain of disturbing sectarian events in which first some Shia clerics passed controversial remarks about some sacred Sunni figures which led to public rallies by Sunni extremists against the Shias. As if these events were not already worrying

enough, the police moved to book many Shias for blasphemy on complaints by Sunni extremists. Overall, the situation does not augur well for a society that is already cracking under the weight of faith-based terrorism and extremism.

This disturbing trend shows that politics has been ‘religionised’ in Pakistan, and the powerful clerical establishment has been given the monopoly over national discourse. Open debate and discussion of critical issues are discouraged, and critiques are dismissed as enemy. This prevents both the state and society from gaining clarity or reaching a consensus on issues like extremism. Extremism is firmly entrenched in almost all layers of the society, and uprooting that requires long-term policies and strategies. But, on the contrary, whatever CE policies there are they either lack continuity or adequate implementation.

For instance, the government rolled out the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* – a clergy-backed narrative to counter the ones propagated by extremist groups. As a document, it is certainly significant as it has been authenticated by over 5000 scholars and clerics of all schools of Islamic thought, and is thus reflective of the majority’s will. However, its practical impact on the society has been insubstantial so far, and members of the public including highly educated ones have little or no knowledge of what the Paigham-e-Pakistan (PeP) really stands for.

On the other hand, some analysts believe the PeP was a mechanical exercise by the state to address some external demands or pressures rather than a genuine effort to build a meaningful counter-narrative against religious extremism. This stance is lent credence by the fact that some radical clerics who are signatories to the PeP narrative have been seen to be propagating their usual extremist views in the post-PeP period. This may be an indication that they had just put their signatures as a result of some compulsion or coercion rather than true conviction. In addition, the manner in which the PeP was produced was also flawed because the common public was ignored in the process of the drafting of the document.

Similarly, as cited earlier, in October 2020 the Council of Islamic Ideology produced a religious narrative to counter violent sectarianism. Called the ‘code of conduct’, the document was apparently produced in response to the sectarian tensions that soared around the country in September 2020. No doubt, robust counter narratives against terrorism and extremism are the cornerstone of any ideological response to nontraditional security threats, but the prevailing disconnect between the state and the public is hampering the building of strong consensus on counter narratives.

It is interesting to note that parallel to these government efforts, the extremist groups and elements continue to propagate their narratives from the platforms of mosques, madrassas, as well as the internet. They capitalise on unhindered access to social media platforms, and perpetuate their extremist propaganda and undertake recruitment without effective check from the authorities. Likewise, sectarian groups banned on official papers continue to operate freely on the ground. And documents like the ‘code of conduct’ are unlikely to stem violent sectarianism anytime soon because more complexity is involved in the extremism issue than meets the eye.

One critical dimension of this problem is that the curriculum and other literatures taught at madrassas have been responsible for violent sectarianism. There is evidence that *fatwas* (decrees by influential clerics) apostatising the Shias and legitimizing violence against them have circulated in leading Sunni madrassas in Pakistan. In 2011, the anti-Shia terrorist group, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, invoked a joint fatwa by various madrassa clerics as justification for the mass murder of Shia Hazara in Balochistan.¹⁵ Though this fact is not readily known by the general public outside the madrassa network, yet given the number of madrassas (estimated to be 35,000), it is safe to assume that hundreds of thousands of religious students are prone to coming into contact with and being influenced by these radical sectarian literatures.

In a similar way, extremism and faith-based exclusion of citizens from important public spheres are also embedded in the constitutional provisions and laws. For instance, the Second Amendment to the constitution legally ostracised the Ahmadis from the Muslim community by declaring them non-Muslim in September 1974. The country has seen a remarkable surge in extremist violence against the Ahmadi community ever since. Likewise, the Articles 41(2) and 91(3) bar a non-Muslim Pakistani from holding the office of the President and Prime Minister respectively.¹⁶ Apart from 'otherising' citizens on the basis of faith and reinforcing social polarisation, these provisions also tend to strengthen the exclusionary narratives of extremist groups.

These factors have also created the culture of vigilantism in Pakistan wherein individual persons or mobs often commit acts of violence while claiming to be acting in defense of Islam. And not unsurprisingly, the vigilantes are often showered with praise by the radicalised segments of the society. When Mumtaz Qadri murdered a sitting governor in 2011, the public including lawyers showered the murderer with rose petals during his court appearance. And after his execution, his grave in the outskirts of Islamabad has gained the aura of a sacred shrine where political leaders as well as ordinary public go to pay homage.

In a similar way, in July 2020, selfie pictures of policemen smiling with an under-custody murder suspect went viral on the social media. The teenage vigilante had gunned down an Ahmadi man inside a courtroom in Peshawar. The victim, an American citizen of Pakistani descent, was under trial for blasphemy. Like Mumtaz Qadri, this young murderer was also praised like a hero and hugged by members of the public, as if for a job well done.

Today, religious extremism has seeped into the core of the Pakistani society. A little glimpse of this phenomenon is the plethora of extremist groups that continue to find conducive environment to survive and thrive. The official proscription list alone contains as many as 78 extremist outfits, and the proscription has hardly dismantled an outfit in Pakistan. Individuals and groups banned on the papers continue to go about their business as usual. Some of them simply change their names and start afresh.

¹⁵ Khaled Ahmad, "Hunting the Hazara," *Newsweek Pakistan*, March 11, 2014, <https://www.newsweekpakistan.com/hunting-the-hazara>

¹⁶ Raj Kumar, "Why can't a non-Muslim dream of becoming the prime minister or president in Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, October 7, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/article/88830/why-cant-a-non-muslim-dream-of-becoming-the-prime-minister-or-president-of-pakistan>

However, it is important to mention here that the government did feel to be on its toes in 2020 due to the potential risk of blacklisting by the FATF. In February 2020, the watchdog had warned that Pakistan's failure to meet the body's set standards could lead to the FATF member states tightening their business relations and transactions with Pakistani clients. That pushed the government to carry out financial crackdowns on UNSC-designated terrorist entities, prosecute persons for terror financing, and go about an eleventh-hour legislation spree to meet the FATF standards.

Discussions and debates on these legislations were mostly blocked on the ground of 'urgency'. In Jun, the interior minister, Ejaz Shah, submitted a report on FATF compliance to the prime minister, detailing that the government had proscribed two main and eleven affiliated groups, and frozen 976 movable and immovable properties linked to proscribed entities. Without giving exact figures, the report also claimed that the government had seized control of schools, colleges, hospitals, dispensaries, and ambulances belonging to banned groups.¹⁷

¹⁷ Safdar Sial & Ahmed Ali, "Overview of Security in 2020: Critical Challenges and Recommendations," in *Pakistan Security Report 2020* (Islamabad: PIPS, 2021), 27.

b. Dysfunctional Public Education and the Expanding Madrassa System

In Pakistan, regular public education is no less a cause of religious extremism than madrassas. Religion-based exclusionary and divisive narratives have been a consistent element in Pakistan's educational curricula for the past forty years. For the state, the core purpose of education has been to disseminate religious-nationalist state ideologies as part of its nation-building project. The intellectual development of the citizens has never been the goal. But, the policy to create a nation with particular qualities through education overlooks the basic fact that nations cannot be created. "You can create a state, but you cannot manufacture a nation", an educationist said at the consultations.'

Through education, attempts have been made to whitewash ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversities in the name of national integration. Students are indoctrinated with overtly religiously oriented narratives, which are largely skewed, divisive, and less tolerant towards people of other faiths. That contributes to the development of exclusive, intolerant and unscientific minds. The textbooks promote narrow worldviews, and propagate the majority-religion at the cost of other faiths.

Religion has been made an integral part of national discourse, and a fundamental point of reference in the discussion of the Two Nation Theory, thus making it nearly impossible for the state to disengage from religious narrative. The educational curricula perpetuate faith-based discrimination and tend to equate Hinduism with India despite the fact that Hinduism is professed by millions of people in Pakistan. The teaching of religion is not a problem in itself, but the way the majority faith is projected and imposed as the sole religious identity in Pakistan is highly problematic, and a cause of Islamist radicalism in the country.

Pakistan is home to diverse peoples, cultures, languages, and religions. Imposing a blanket Islamist identity with a particular worldview on such a diversity brings adverse consequences including extremism. Likewise, the textbooks glorify wars and belligerence, and reinforce the typical narratives of a security state. Discriminatory contents against non-Muslim faiths are taught to students from early on, starting at primary levels. And even the Islamic faith is taught mostly from the perspective of a particular school of thought. In the presence of diverse schools of thought within the Islamic jurisprudence, this selective approach tends to create sectarian tensions.

However, even though the education system has been used as a tool for political indoctrination, it has never been a serious priority for successive governments. Under the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf, education slid further down on the priorities list, resulting in a boost to the relatively substandard private education sector. Some scholars argue that the state privatised education. 'Education is a fundamental right of the citizens, and the state went on to privatise people's fundamental right.' On the other hand, madrassas also proliferated by leaps and bounds, adding to the perception that the state had abandoned its responsibility to provide education to the children.

The incumbent PTI-led government has come up with the plan to enforce a unified educational curriculum across the country. Called the 'single national curriculum' (SNC), the new educational plan is premised on the idea that teaching more religion would produce better citizens, though Pakistan's past experience shows that such a practice has only produced extremism in the society. Nevertheless, the plan seeks to inject more religious contents in the curricula. Though the SNC is currently being rolled out in phases, still there is lack of transparency about it.

Based on available details, some leading academicians believe that under the SNC, the government is planning to impose madrassa education on non-madrassa students. Instead of reforming the madrassas, the regular schools are being turned into madrassas, they say. Others argue that the SNC may lower the quality of education even further in a sense that it ostensibly seeks to amalgamate two incompatible elements i.e. science and religion. The former is based on open discussion, logic, and evidence, while the latter is based solely on faith and beliefs.

Furthermore, it is claimed that the SNC would burden students with information overload that would be hard to digest. This discourages creative and critical thinking too. The SNC from grade one to five is a recycled version of 2006 curricula. But, ultimately, the SNC would be judged against the universal values of inclusion and diversity. Lastly, the federal government-proposed SNC also involves a political issue because under the constitution education is a provincial subject. Every individual province has the right to have its own educational curricula based on its unique history, culture, and folklores.

On the other hand, some private schools in Punjab have shown concerns over the SNC's planned implementation from August (2021), though they were part of the consultations during the development of the SNC. In early February 2021, the Lahore Grammar School wrote letters to parents, saying that providing quality education to children within the framework of the SNC was challenging. Another Beaconhouse student took to the social media to urge the government to not translate 'social studies' textbooks into Urdu under the SNC. Under the SNC, the subjects of social studies, Islamiyat (Islamic studies), and general knowledge would be taught in Urdu at both public and private schools.¹⁸

While overall the public education remains in tatters, the madrassa sector, in contrast, has seen constant expansion over the last two decades. Government estimates put the number of madrassas at 35,000 with only 9,500 (about 27%) of them registered with the *Tanzeem-ul-Madaris* (TuM). None of the registered madrassahs are Deobandi. Exams attendance figures show 175,000 students attended TuM institutions, and 275,000 students attended madrassahs registered with *Wafaq-ul-Madaris*.

Till the 1970s, there were only few hundred madrassas in Pakistan whose jobs were to mainly produce prayer leaders and religious teachers. But, that changed after the madrassas were integrated into the anti-Soviet war machinery back in the 1980s. Madrassas were lavishly funded to turn young students into trained militants through physical training and ideological indoctrination in order to justify waging jihad

¹⁸ Khalid Khattak, "Private schools unhappy with SNC policy for primary classes," *The News*, February 6, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/785920-private-schools-unhappy-with-snc-policy-for-primary-classes>

in Afghanistan. Repeated attempts at reforming the madrassa system have met frustrations due to various reasons including opposition from madrassas.

In 2020, madrassa reforms also reverberated in the FATF talks. Reforming the madrassa sector has probably been a point of discussion at the FATF meetings because in January 2020 Pakistan informed the FATF's joint group in Beijing that under new reforms the madrassas were given the status of schools where students would be awarded matriculation and intermediate education certificates.¹⁹ Many Pakistani madrassas have had ties with radical militant groups, and they helped maintain the militant network in Pakistan in the past.²⁰

On 29th of August (2019), the government signed an agreement with Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaaris Pakistan (ITMP), a coalition of the five wafaqs or religious education boards in Pakistan, for the registration of madrassas with the education ministry. The agreement envisaged allowing madrassas to open bank accounts, accept foreign donations, and manage their administrative affairs independently in return for registration. It also promised to allow madrassa students to take their secondary and higher secondary exams through their designated education boards and apply for higher studies through mainstream education institutions or for jobs.²¹

However, in February 2020, the madrassa leaders complained that the government was not implementing the agreement it had inked with the madrassas. Maulana Hanif Jalandhari, the secretary general of Wifaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia, accused the government of not being serious in negotiating with the madrassas.²² For one, a start to madrassa registration process with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MFE&PT) is still awaited, which is the first step in the agreement. For madrassa registration, the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE) has been established as a head office at Islamabad,²³ and 16 regional offices of DGRE have also been established; however, no official details are yet available if they have started registering the madrassas.

According to one observer, only a few madrassas are willing to register with the body designated by the government or with the education ministry. In nutshell, though the successive governments in Pakistan have toyed with madrassa reforms since the Musharraf era, yet no significant progress has been made so far. Due to the growing extremism in the country, the moderate madrassas and clerics within the religious establishment are losing ground to the more vocal extremist lots. Here it is important to note that while madrassas have produced extremists, they also emerge from liberal institutions and upbringings. Very

¹⁹ Mehtab Haider, "Pakistan to focus on buying more time in FATF meeting," *The News*, January 21, 2020,

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/601624-pakistan-to-focus-on-buying-more-time-in-fatf-meeting>

²⁰ Robert Looney, "Reforming Pakistan's educational system: the challenge of madrassa," Naval Postgraduate School, 2003

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36733201.pdf>

²¹ Dilawar Khan, "Another step towards madrassa reforms," *The News on Sunday*, November 10, 2019,

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/568850-another-step-towards-madrassah-reforms>

²² Zia ur Rehman, "Madrassa reform efforts at risk as representatives shun govt. help," *The News*, February 7, 2020,

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/609892-madrassa-reform-efforts-at-risk-as-representative-body-shuns-govt-help>

²³ Details can be seen here: <http://mofept.gov.pk/ProjectDetail/YzYxNjUwNDktMjgzMi00YmU3LTkxMzItYWWRiZWZjNmU4MDM3>

often, extremism is less about religious beliefs and more about political power and influence. Religious groups have employed extremism to both to gain power and negotiate with the powerful.

Between 2013 and 2014, the PTI-led KP government doled out over 300 million rupees from public purse to madrassas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, apparently in a bid to undercut the influence of its political rival, JUI-F, in the province. On the other hand, foreign funding to madrassas is underpinned by sectarian affiliation. Iran funds Shia madrassas, and its regional rivals like Saudi Arabia and UAE fund the Sunni madrassas. Pakistan's failure to create economic opportunities and alleviate extreme poverty is a contributing factor to extremism as many people seeking help eventually end up in the arms of the extremists.

c. Counter-Extremism Options and National Action Plan

At the beginning of 2020, the Prime Minister's Advisor on National Security announced to unveil a '*comprehensive*' National Security Policy by December of the same year. However, the policy has not been made public at the time of the writing of this report. The concept of national security is undergoing transformations around the world, and becoming more holistic to include social, economic, healthcare, and food securities as well as political stability in the wider matrix.

Any comprehensive national security plan must go beyond the traditional domains of physical and military security and focus on the human aspects because modern concept of national security revolves around people. Pakistan is a largely security-driven state where everything is readily seen from the perspective of security. Often, critical discussions, debates, and questions are stifled in the name of national security. But, what Pakistan needs is public discussion to determine what national security really is. Besides, debates about national security must be led by public representatives, not military commanders.

At present, the most severe threat to Pakistan's national security is internal, and comes from the chronic political instability that impedes governance and renders governments ineffective. Instability also paves the way for the growth of militancy and extremism as governments struggle to focus on these areas. Debates about extremism mostly occur in academic contexts in Pakistan, and politicians including sitting ministers show little interest in such discussions. The politicians have a strong tendency to detach themselves from issues of security and terrorism, and leave the matter to the military to sort out.

This tradition of ceding space to the military has led to the militarisation of security policies and strategies. In addition, there are serious gaps between policy practitioners and theoreticians, and between policy formation and policy implementation. In this context, there is a need to take the debate from academic circles to the policymaking circles. There are obvious discrepancies in policy implementations e.g. the policy says that banned outfits are not to be allowed to operate in the country, but the government protected extremist elements like Maulana Masood Azhar at the UN Security Council through the help of

China. Likewise, commander of the Afghan Taliban, Mullah Mansoor, had been secretly issued Pakistani identity documents.

Pakistan has a bulging youth population, but has little to offer to those young people. The state's failure to provide robust counter narratives to extremism leaves the youth vulnerable to radicalisation. As a consequence, more extremists are produced in the country. This phenomenon was in full display at the funeral of Maulana Khadim Hussain Rizvi in Lahore. Hundreds of thousands of people attended the extremist cleric's last rites. As extremism manifests itself in all forms and shapes across the country, the government continues to sleep to the threat.

Likewise, while the government usually bars ordinary citizens from traveling to the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ex-FATA), the extremist groups are apparently 'allowed' to regroup and re-emerge in the same areas. On the top of these, failing governance and declining public services also contribute to the general disorientation and sense of alienation which paves the way for extremism. A functioning governance system with the ability to deliver basic services to the people is essential to dampen the appeal of extremism, but unfortunately the government lags behind in this area too.

Similarly, Pakistan's media have also been playing negative role with regard to issues of terrorism and extremism. Airwaves are usually filled with negative and sensational contents because they are saleable and exciting. This inevitably instills a sense of hopelessness among people, and hopelessness itself makes people vulnerable to extremist ideas. Besides, political and military leaders also often send out confusing messages to the public e.g. a senior state official had to conduct *Milaad* at his home to prove his religious credentials and religiosity.

In the post-9/11, the CT and CE drive was led by military commanders who went on to ban extremist outfits in the country. Later, the military regime executed the Lal Masjid operation in 2007 that proved the culmination point of militants turning their guns on the state. The PPP government brought its CT policy of '3D Strategy' in 2008 with the support of the Parliament, but it could not see implementation mainly because the government was powerless when it came to security affairs. However, the attack on the GHQ in Oct 2009 altered the military's view on security as indicated by the COAS General Kayani's admission that threats to national security were internal rather than external. The military launched operations against the militants in North Waziristan whose blowback came in the form of terrorist attack on the Army Public School (APS), Peshawar, in December 2014 where over hundred children were massacred.

The APS attack renewed the national resolve to fight terrorism. Capitalizing on this sentiment, the government immediately enacted a 20-point CT framework i.e. the National Action Plan (NAP) which promised an all-encompassing response to terrorism. Since then, the NAP has achieved varying levels of success, mostly in kinetic operations against militants in erstwhile FATA and Karachi, etc. Ideally, the NAP should have been implemented under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office, which has not been the case so far.

Analysts believe the NAP was basically a knee-jerk reaction to the APS attack, and it was instituted by the federal government in haste without sufficient consultation with key stakeholders such as the provincial authorities etc. It is extremely heavy on agenda with short-term and long-term goals haphazardly placed with one another. Some goals are very broad and vague with no strategy as to how they would be achieved. Very limited attention has been given to the non-kinetic side of the NAP e.g. there has been little tangible progress on regulating madrassas or checking the internet for countering extremism.

With regard to madrasa reforms, the issue predates the 9/11 as Western writers were reporting on suspected links between madrassas and militancy before 2001. As noted earlier in the report, talks of madrasa reforms have mostly revolved around registration and regulation without sufficient details ever coming out to public domain. The governments' tendency to pursue policy of appeasement towards religious parties and groups makes reforms incredibly difficult.

The *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP) – a Barelvi extremist outfit - was born in the post-NAP period which is extremely worrying as it raises question over the effectiveness of NAP as a CE tool. To make matters worse, the PMLN government sought to appease the TLP in Nov 2017 by ditching its own law minister, Zahid Hamid, in a series of concessions to the TLP extremists. Appeasement strategy only emboldened the TLP to assert itself with greater confidence. The *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (PeP) makes only a part of the equation as it puts things into perspective from the standpoint of religion. What Pakistan truly needs is a cross-sectional narrative containing the interests of all peoples in the society and all aspects of public life.

Likewise, the NAP framework has failed to bring about the promised reconciliation with Baloch insurgents. The *Pur Aman Balochistan* (Peaceful Balochistan) project failed to open up dialogue process with the indignant tribal leaders. This is probably due to military's control over Balochistan policy. The government claims thousands of insurgents have surrendered under the *Peaceful Balochistan* project, but observers doubt if they were genuine militants. The press has progressively lost freedom and space in Balochistan. Most media outlets rely on official sources while reporting on Balochistan issue. The media mostly focus on day-to-day politics, and overlook the larger and more serious issues of security and stability.

Generally, the state has lacked the capacity or will to implement the NAP in letter and spirit. The NAP was initially viewed as a paradigm shift in the state's policy towards terrorism and extremism, though many sensed it to be just an attempt by the government to pacify the public sentiment that had reached a boiling point following the APS incident.

Even though certain NAP clauses propose soft approaches to the issues like Baloch insurgency and hate speech etc., still the broader NAP framework lacks a robust response to extremism which analysts term as a severe threat to social and political stability in Pakistan. Some observers believe implementing the NAP is not a priority for the government. In early 2020, the NAP came under severe criticism from analysts and public alike in the wake of Ehsanullah Ehsan's escape from state custody in Peshawar.

A former spokesman of the TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Ehsan had reportedly surrendered to the security agencies back in 2017. In February 2020, he released an audio message, claiming that he had escaped

from detention at a safe house in Peshawar. Initially, the government remained mum on the development but weeks later the Interior Minister, Ejaz Shah, confirmed that the ex-TTP leader had, indeed, escaped from the custody of security agencies.²⁴ Likewise, the reported regrouping of the TTP and its factions in the erstwhile FATA is also being attributed to government's failure to implement the NAP. Local accounts suggest that more militants are joining the TTP. As a result, the North Waziristan and Bajaur districts have become the flashpoints of insecurity in the past months. This disturbing scenario is seen, in large part, as the government's failure to implement the NAP.

d. The Criminal Justice System

The Pakistani criminal justice system has many failings which range from sketchy definition of terrorism, to poor investigation and prosecution techniques, to corruption and mismanagement of resources, as well as an over-reliance on witness testimony as evidence. The state continues to placate the extremists such as the TLP which empowers the extremists and adds to the appeal for extremism. In such a scenario, the judiciary cannot be expected to be effective in upholding the law and delivering justice when the state chooses to operate beyond the law. This goes hand-in-hand with the problems of impunity and a general lack of accountability in the LEAs.

Terrorism and extremism are looked at from a militaristic standpoint which also affects the legislation on these issues. Besides, there is a continuing confusion about the legal definition of terrorism and extremism. The existing definitions in the *Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 (ATA)* and the *Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016* are vague and open to interpretations. As a result, they have been misused by the authorities. For instance, the PECA criminalises criticism of the state.

Likewise, the vagueness of language in the ATA has led to the overburdening of anti-terrorism courts with non-terrorism cases. Technically, any criminal offence can fall under the ATA, depending on individual interpretations of the term "heinous offences" mentioned in the ATA. The law was enacted in 1997 in the backdrop of the sectarian violence that plagued the country in the 1990s. The dynamics of the challenges have changed ever since, and therefore these laws need reforms as per the conditions of the present times.

Furthermore, the law does not cover extremism fully. Besides, the prosecution leans heavily on witness testimony as evidence which is often unreliable and fragile. In many high profile terrorism cases, the witnesses were murdered by extremist groups. Some of them backtracked, voluntarily or under duress, on their testimonies because there was no witness protection mechanism to protect them against the threats and intimidations.

²⁴ Asad Hashim, "Pakistan confirms escape of ex-Pakistani Taliban spokesman," Al Jazeera, February 18, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/2/18/pakistan-confirms-escape-of-ex-pakistan-taliban-spokesman>

The inefficacy of the CT and CE laws and the general failings of the criminal justice system were key reasons behind the establishment of a parallel justice system i.e. the military courts in 2015. The National Action Plan envisaged speedy trial of terror suspects for which the favorite recourse was the military courts due to their perceived efficiency. However, instead of bringing about any swift justice, the military courts resulted in other issues as illustrated by the abnormally high rate of confessions by and convictions of the suspects. Not surprisingly, hundreds of confessional statements were incredibly identical as if drafted by a single individual. Most of those confessional statements were dismissed and two hundred convictions based on them were set aside by the Peshawar High Court in Jun 2020.

So, what started as speedy trials culminated in a chaotic situation. And the attempt at quick fix through military courts failed to deliver the promised justice. Nonetheless, it almost stalled the discourse on revamping and reforming the criminal justice system. This reinforces the simple fact that Pakistan needs to reform its criminal justice system instead of relying on ad hoc arrangements. Some key laws like the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) are obsolete, continuing from the colonial era.

And the absence of political will to tackle the problem of extremism also extends to the judicial sphere. It is possible that the lack of clarity about the definition of terrorism or extremism stems from the lack of consensus on a definition of terrorism in the international community. While the United Nations Security Council has made progress on developing a definition, a universally accepted definition is yet to be found.

It is important to note that extremism is inherently not a criminal offence. Most terrorists are extremists but not every extremist is a terrorist. Therefore, clarity of thinking is indispensable for improving criminal justice in Pakistan. Quite often, lack of resources is cited as a reason for the government's inability to revamp the justice system which is mostly inaccurate. The problem is the misuse and misallocation of resources, and whatever resources are allocated correctly are squandered due to incompetence, inadequate training, or corruption. Above all, the government shows little appetite for consultative process with regards to reforms in the criminal justice system.

e. External Dimension of Extremism in Pakistan

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, Pakistan has been a proxy battlefield where foreign states notably Saudi Arabia and Iran have competed for sectarian influence. The Khomeini-led regime exported extremist Shia beliefs across the Muslim world, and the KSA responded by exporting its version of Salafist-Wahabist ideology to Muslim-majority states including Pakistan. Both have funded extremist groups, causing sustained sectarian tension and violence.

The Pakistani government, on its part, has largely been unable or simply unwilling to confront this challenge head on. The country finds itself in a complex geopolitical and geostrategic environment, with plenty of hostile neighbours. Combined with the impacts of past security policies, this environment limits Pakistan's options in battling extremism. At its core, religious extremism in Pakistan is predominantly

made up of a mixture of extremist ideas imported from the Middle East and the Deobandi ideas which originated in South Asia.

Adding fuel to the fire, the amalgamation of the state and the religion in Pakistan has created a situation where anti-Shia intolerance is allowed to thrive and sectarian violence to run rampant. In many incidents, the local jihadist and sectarian groups provided safe havens and logistics to transnational terrorist groups like the Al-Qaeda, Islamic State terrorist group, and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) etc. In retrospect, this is partly result of the anti-Soviet jihad project that brought Islamists of diverse nationalities together and established lasting bonds amongst them. That pattern of physical and ideological alliances persists to this day.

Pakistan's ability to deter foreign terrorists from using its soil is hampered by a number of factors including hostile neighbors, lack of CT and CE expertise (particularly till before 2014), difficult-to-police frontier terrain in the northwest, etc. On the top of these, the military's dominant role in national security and foreign policy also limits the available options for peace. The military calls the shots in relations with India, and the two countries routinely engage in blame games, accusing each other of sponsoring terrorism. Traditionally, such blame games have served no purpose apart from keeping the mutual hostility alive including in Afghanistan whose militant landscape has huge implications for that of Pakistan's.

Therefore, Pakistan needs to have irrefutable evidence of any Indian wrongdoing which could be presented to the international community. Building an evidence-based case is more important than creating narratives or employing rhetoric. This is particularly significant in the context of the ongoing Indian repression in Kashmir which has opened up space for militants to exist and operate there. The young Kashmiris are pressed against the wall, making them vulnerable to extremism.

The current Kashmir militancy is largely homegrown, and even India has recently acknowledged a lack of infiltration from Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan's options for peace with India are currently limited especially with the BJP government in place. Nevertheless, Pakistan must adhere to peaceful resolution of all outstanding bilateral issues with India, and abandon the policy of proxy warfare which has done more harm than good to Pakistan itself.

Similarly, Pakistan's Afghan policy has been a great source of homegrown terrorism and extremism. Pakistan's active participation in the CIA-led jihad against the USSR not only militarised the Pakistani state to the core, but also brought terrorism, sectarianism, as well as heroin to the society. The pursuit of the strategic depth in Afghanistan resulted in Pakistan's full-fledged support for the radical and reactionary Afghan Taliban regime in the 1990s.

The legacy of that policy is today seen in the plethora of extremist and militant groups in Pakistan. What's worse, there are indications that there may still be support for the so called 'Taliban Project' at the state level. During the first term of President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan and Afghanistan inked 48 MoUs with for

long-lasting friendship. However, the resurgence of Afghan Taliban turned the relations sour as Afghanistan viewed it as an attempt by Pakistan to install a puppet regime in Kabul.

On the other hand, the US-Taliban peace deal also has raised many questions about the future of Afghanistan. The deal offers no plan for the reintegration of militants. UN reports suggest that an estimated 6,000 Pakistani militants are active in Afghanistan. Can they be integrated back into society peacefully? Likewise, the intra-Afghan talks are shrouded in mystery, creating an air of uncertainty because they have taken place mostly behind closed doors with no involvement from outsiders. The outcome of these talks is a guesswork at present. The only positive takeaway at this point is the interest and willingness of the Taliban to continue the talks.

f. The De-radicalization and Rehabilitation Challenge

Pakistan's de-radicalisation programmes are mainly run by the military, even though they should, ideally, be spearheaded by civilians. Traditionally, CT has mostly been seen through a kinetic lens, relying on security operations to defeat the terrorists. Meanwhile, there was no befitting strategy to defeat or counter violent extremism. There are three main concepts in play in the de-radicalisation process: de-radicalisation, which involves detaching radical individuals from their violent extremist beliefs; reintegration or rehabilitation, whereby the deradicalised individual is rehabilitated and integrated back into society; and disengagement, where violent individuals are disconnected from the potential source of violence or terrorist affiliation(s).

Many persons who engaged in terrorism in regions like Swat and erstwhile FATA were not ideologically motivated. Very few had the religious credentials or believed in the jihadist ideology propagated by the terrorist outfits. Teenage militants were found to be lacking basic critical thinking skills, emotional intelligence, or empathy. Most of them were school dropouts from the lower-middle class who learned the Quran in a language they did not understand. These factors made them vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups.

Many of the children at the Sabaoon de-radicalisation center in the Swat valley were those who had been living without their fathers for years mainly because their fathers were working in the Middle East. Consciously or subconsciously, such children longed for their fathers, and they were attracted to militancy because they saw father figures in the militant commanders. In addition, socioeconomic status was also a major factor behind recruitment and radicalisation. For instance, the TTP would demand money from families in Swat. When they were unable to provide money, the TTP would take their children instead.

In other instances, young boys were paid to plant improvised explosive devices (IEDs) around Quetta. This illustrates that foot-soldiers in terrorist groups are also motivated by monetary incentives as opposed to extremist ideology. Radicalisation is a process, and a product of the socioeconomic and political contexts at the time. This needs to be borne in mind when designing de-radicalisation programmes, as most people will join terrorists for the promise of financial support or empowerment, not the ideology that drives

them. While this could be true for Swat's context, ideology, power, and vengeance, among other factors, could be as relevant in other contexts. For instance, most among the Islamic State affiliates in Pakistan were believed to be middle-class educated youths who were highly driven by politico-ideological motives.

In Pakistan, the prisons also serve as centers for radicalisation. Convicted terrorists are often isolated from the rest of the inmates which strengthens their extremist beliefs. The 2009 Sabaoon de-radicalisation programme in Swat ensured vocational training; education to inculcate critical thinking and empathy; and reintegration into society with the skills and mindset befitting a normal citizen. Sabaoon graduates were monitored after they graduated from the programme, for recidivism and potential relapsing into extremist beliefs or activities. Despite rare exceptions where people receded due to ideological motivation, the recidivism rate of Sabaoon remained at less than 1%.

The Sabaoon experience suggests that de-radicalisation programmes need to be targeted and focused on individuals in order to cater to how extreme their beliefs are as well as their individual skill sets and needs. However, de-radicalised persons continue to face challenges as they are viewed with suspicion by the security agencies and even society even after they are reintegrated into their communities. In addition, previous association with extremists often deprive them of jobs opportunities as employers feel reluctant to hire them. In some instances, they face threats from the militant groups they were once part of. Such scenarios may push them back into extremism and militancy.

3. Section Three: Solutions and Recommendations

This section contains potential solutions/recommendations for improving the CE policies, regimes, and strategies.

a. Dealing with Extremist Narratives and Groups

- Clarity of thinking at policy level is key to developing a functional CE policy. As a fundamental step, the government must begin to publicly acknowledge the social, political, economic, and security issues caused by extremism. This acknowledgement is necessary for clearing any confusions, ambiguities, and doubts in public's minds about extremism, and increasing the shared public understanding of the threats and risks emanating from extremism. It should also include clearly underlining the consequences of extremism for the state and the broader society. One way of doing this is to use means of mass communication such as the press, and electronic and social media etc. to highlight the various aspects of the damage and losses Pakistan has been suffering in terms of men and material as well as international reputation and image due to extremism. Such a strategy can shape public opinion in support of CE efforts.
- Secondly, it is essential that the government comes up with a concrete definition of extremism before embarking on policy formulation. For this purpose, there is no need to start from scratch and reinvent the wheel. Pakistan can learn lessons and benefit from best practices in other countries including the United Kingdom which has succinctly defined extremism as vocal or active opposition to the country's fundamental values including democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect, and tolerance for different beliefs. The prime minister can constitute a body such as a 'commission' to examine the extremism problem in Pakistan in the light of available literature and evidence and come up with a crystal-clear definition of extremism. Such a body may consult Pakistani CE and legal experts, civil society leaders, and international CE professionals in the process.
- It has been noted that a lot of Pakistani lawmakers lack adequate understanding of national issues including extremism. Many of them remain focused on their constituency-level issues and politics. This is often also true of the ones manning the critical standing committees of the National Assembly and Senate. This intellectual shortcoming is a significant reason for the decline in the Parliament's overall influence and input in the domains of internal security policy as well as foreign affairs. For this reason, the civil society and other stakeholders need to strengthen and expand the existing training and advocacy campaigns to sensitise the lawmakers particularly those on standing committees about the need to debate the issue of extremism in the Parliament, scrutinise and draft laws more informedly, and make extremism a legislative priority.
- Public debates on issues of extremism are critical to countering the narratives propagated by radical groups. Some think tanks like the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) have undertaken programmes to encourage debate and dialogue among various stakeholders on themes around extremism, diversity and inclusion etc., but there is a need for a more permanent and all-inclusive public platform

where debate and discussion on critical issues including extremism could take place. Dedicated to the public and easily accessible to intelligentsia, opinion makers, journalists, politicians, and members of the general public, such a forum can be established through a joint venture of the government and civil society and other stakeholders.

- Fatwas and literature circulating among many leading madrassas have often provided justification for the persecution of minority Islamic sects. Sectarian extremist groups such as the LeJ invoke these literatures to legitimise the use of violence. Therefore, the federal education ministry, which has been dealing with the madrasa reforms of late, should put it on its agenda to urge madrasa education boards to start reducing hateful contents and finally cleanse their curricula of literatures that incite sectarian hostility. It is of little concern if a fatwa has been issued by an individual cleric in his personal capacity, or by a group of clerics, or by a madrasa. What is problematic is that in the mid-1980s, a Muslim cleric in India had compiled all anti-Shia apostatising fatwas (by individual clerics as well as madrassas) into a book, and that book is believed to be making rounds in the Pakistani madrasa system. Besides, that book (discussed in detail by Khaled Ahmed in his book *'Sectarian Wars: Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Violence and its Roots in the Middle East'*) contains anti-Shia fatwas issued by Pakistan's leading madrassas such as the Jamia Banoria, Akora Khattak, etc. during the Zia-ul-Haq regime.
- As discussed earlier in the analysis part, a number of constitutional provisions and laws reinforce faith-based exclusion and abet extremism in the society. Due to the prevailing religious extremism and the presence of religious-political pressure groups in Pakistan, it is unrealistic at this point to seek rectification of these legal provisions. However, one way of mitigating the overall impact of these discriminatory laws on religious minorities is to educate the policymakers and members of the law enforcement particularly the police about the citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution in the local as well as broader contexts. In addition, they should also be sensitised about how Pakistan as a state cannot afford to operate outside the contemporary globalised international order and its core principles and values. Accordingly, they should be made aware of Pakistan's international obligations, and why fulfilling those obligations is important, and the practical implications of failing to fulfill them.
- The *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (PeP) is a significant document as it has been endorsed by over 5000 religious scholars, political leaders, and members of civil society. On the top of these, the document has also been accorded endorsement by the Imam-e-Kaaba – a divine figure revered highly by many Pakistanis. Therefore, selected contents and messages from the PeP especially those criminalising militancy and violence against citizens and delegitimising the practice of declaring someone *kafir* (disbeliever or out of the creed of Islam) should be included in the syllabus of both schools and madrassas. Likewise, short and targeted messaging designed around the PeP contents can be disseminated for the general knowledge and education of the wider public.
- There is a chronic identity crisis in Pakistan. The state has pursued both Islamic governance system as well as constitutional and parliamentary democracy, creating confusion as to what the state actually wants to be identify itself with. This mass confusion has given way to extremist groups to push their own radical narratives about the system. In this regard, the civil society and other stakeholders should push the parliamentarians to initiate discussions and debates in the National Assembly and the Senate

on the state identify. Ideally, the issue should be discussed in broader perspectives and in the context of Pakistan being an integral member of the global community which cannot afford to disregard universally-accepted values and norms. Increased clarity about state identity would hopefully reduce space for the radicals to sell their narratives.

- Many countries have developed successful CE policies and strategies. The Pakistani authorities dealing with CE such as the interior ministry, parliamentary committees, police, and other bodies should study and benefit from those models while developing Pakistan-specific CE responses.
- There is a perception that the state has grown soft or weak because it often fails to enforce the existing policies or laws relating to CE. Indications of weakness only emboldens the extremists to push their narratives with greater vigor. To address this problem, the civil society leaders and organizations should play a proactive role and forcefully highlight the failures of implementations of policies, and push the government to perform its duties in this regard.
- Studies show that countering extremism is a priority neither for the government nor the Parliament. Therefore, there is a need for advocacy campaigns to show the policymakers and the parliamentarians how religious extremism is threatening Pakistan's political stability, social cohesion, economy, security, and image and reputation, and what tangible losses Pakistan is incurring globally due to homegrown extremism.
- Strategic communication must be incorporated as an integral part of the overall CE framework. The mass dissemination of targeted messages strongly espousing values of peace, diversity, coexistence etc. will be useful not just for de-radicalisation but also for preventing radicalisation in the first place. Messages of peace and interfaith harmony from sacred Islamic scriptures and the life of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) must be disseminated widely on a sustained basis in order to undermine the extremist narratives of sectarian and other extremist groups. Similarly, programmes should be launched to educate the youth about Pakistan's cultural heritage, inclusive history and diversity, including at educational campuses.
- The government internet watchdog, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), should prioritise curbing online radicalisation and recruitment by extremist groups, and sectarian hate speech. While the PTA mostly blocks sexually explicit contents and criticism of the state, extremist materials often find space in the cyber realm. To start with, the PTA staff dealing with online content should be engaged in awareness programmes to educate and sensitise them on issues linked to extremism and ideological radicalism.

b.Reforming the Public and Religious Education

- What constitutes Pakistan is a land of diverse religions and faiths with an ancient history dating back to the pre-Islamic Indus Valley Civilization. The wider region is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc. and the primordial footprints of these religions and faiths are found all over Pakistan. Pakistan's constitution guarantees freedom of faith to all citizens. As such, studies of all religions that exist or have existed in the region that now constitutes Pakistan should gradually be introduced in the educational curricula. A study of the religious and cultural landscape of the country would make students more accepting of diversity and peaceful coexistence and less susceptible to narrow and extremist ideas.

- The federal education ministry is currently rolling out a reformed educational curricula called the *Single National Curricula* (SNC) across the country. The ministry should be encouraged to include critical thinking as a subject at public schools. Evidence from Pakistan’s de-radicalisation programmes shows that youth lacking basic critical thinking skills are extremely vulnerable to radicalisation and exploitation by extremist groups. The same applies to madrassas. One way of diversifying the madrassa student’s thinking is to teach him different interpretations of Islam as propounded by various schools of thought.
- Likewise, the universally-accepted values and lessons of peace, acceptance of diversity, and interfaith harmony must be incorporated into the curricula in order to progressively neutralise the exclusivist mindset that tends to judge citizens on the basis of faith, and view non-Muslim Pakistanis as peripheral or others.
- The roles and services of the Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and other non-Muslims for the creation, defense, and development of Pakistan must be clearly highlighted in the educational syllabus. Few Pakistanis know that in preparing the draft of the Lahore Resolution of 1940, Jinnah was assisted by Alvin Robert Cornelius – a Christian lawyer who later pioneered the Pakistani judicial system, and served as the country’s chief justice in the 1960s.
- South Asia has had an ancient Sufi tradition. Sufism and its teachings of peaceful coexistence can be incorporated into religious studies at public schools.
- In Pakistan, discussions about extremism inevitably touch upon madrassas, yet the data on the actual number of madrassas is a guesswork at best. What is certain, however, is that the madrassa sector has seen a monumental expansion in the last two decades. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive mapping of the madrassas, detailing their actual number, their growth rate, and the factors behind this rapid expansion. In addition, the social, political, and economic impacts of the madrassas’ growing outreach should also be analyzed in detail. Such a study would enable the state, the civil society, and other stakeholders to see the complete picture vis-à-vis the madrassas in Pakistan and figure out effective solutions.
- The federal education ministry should push the madrassa boards to introduce teaching of the constitution and democratic concepts of citizenship in order to preclude the growth of or neutralise exclusionary and radical outlooks among madrassa students. Learning about the constitution, basic rights and freedom, and functions of the state will aid in creating counter-narratives to those spread by extremists. Gradually, it will also help increase the education and appeal of the constitution among madrassa students, which extremists usually describe as against Shariah or Islamic law.
- Overall, the state of public education is pathetic particularly in the rural areas where the education system is mostly dysfunctional. This is mainly because the sector is not a priority for the government. Therefore, the civil society organisations should push the government to allocate more budget for education.

c. Strategizing the CE Options and National Action Plan

- In Pakistan, *national security* is a highly nebulous concept, and quite often it is left to the plethora of security agencies to individually interpret national security, and discretionarily decide what does and does not constitute a threat to that security. Apart from creating mass confusion, the vagueness of this concept often also leads to misplaced priorities or questionable policies by state entities. To address this problem, the Prime Minister should constitute a commission, representative of public will, to define Pakistan's national interests and security in concrete and unambiguous terms. A crystal-clear definition will bring clarity of thinking both to the state and the citizens about their national aspirations.
- CE policies are usually the products of bureaucratic paperwork in Pakistan, chalked out by unelected officials who are mostly detached from the common people. This is deeply problematic because public ownership is critical to the success of any CE policy. Therefore, there is a need for advocacy campaigns to sensitise the elected representatives about the importance of them discussing security challenges and opportunities in the legislature, and mobilising them to take a more proactive approach when it comes to security matters.
- The civil society organisations, think tanks, and other stakeholders should start a focused debate about why Pakistan should modernise its concept of national security by shifting from the traditional military-centric concept to the one where the security and welfare of the common citizens constitute the core of national security.
- The ministries of interior or the religious affairs should develop a national database of moderate and progressive scholars and clerics of various schools of thought. These should be engaged by the government for the dissemination of messages of peace, compassion, and kindness as enunciated by Islam.
- Under the constitution, law and order is the domain of the provincial government, and countering extremism should primarily be the function of provincial governments which deal with the threat directly. And given the variations in local cultures and norms in Pakistan, the dynamics of the threats and challenges may vary from province to province, and from region to region within the province. Therefore, the provincial authorities should start taking charge of their CE policies and formulate their strategies with their domestic cultures and sensitivities in mind instead of just looking towards the central government for top-down instructions.
- The government should be pressed to lift unstated restrictions on the constitutionally-ensured freedom of speech in order to allow expression and exchange of alternative ideas for countering radical narratives.
- Some experts see a directly proportionate relationship between extremism and misogyny in Pakistan. It has been noted that people with extremist mindsets oppose equality of women or any leadership roles for them. This phenomenon needs in-depth research. And the scenario makes it even more urgent to ensure women's representation in all bodies and forums that deal with CE.
- The government should develop a computerised national database on terrorism and extremism, allowing provincial police and CTDs to access and share information swiftly. The NADRA which has a comprehensive national database can be mandated to undertake this task.
- Despite cybercrime laws, leaders and members of supposedly banned radical groups continue to have online presence including on social media platforms. In the past, the cybercrime laws were used to harass journalists and muffle criticism or dissent. In fact, one of the reasons the National Action Plan (NAP) is rendered ineffective is that the government has often shown greater interest in containing political dissent and criticism of its policies rather than making genuine efforts to counter religious

extremism. Similarly, the bureaucrats at the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority are more obsessed with cracking down on what they view as immoral and indecent such as pornographic sites than taking down extremist contents that openly incite violence against citizens on the basis of their faith or sect. Therefore, the ministry of information technology which oversees the PTA should be pressed to enforce the cybercrime laws and do not allow extremist elements a free pass on the internet particularly on the popular social media sites.

d.Improving the Criminal Justice System

- Pakistan’s anti-terrorism courts (ATCs) are overwhelmed by the volume of cases, most of which relate to non-terrorism offences. The problem is primarily caused by the term “heinous offences” mentioned in the preamble of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997. Until such time that this definitional flaw is rectified, there should be an alternative mechanism for filtering out non-terrorism cases from the ATCs. One way is to initiate the practice of pre-trial hearings in order to establish if the crime in question falls under the terrorism law.
- The criminal justice system should gradually steer away from reliance on witness testimony as evidence, and adopt modern methods of forensics, though the Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs) have already begun employing forensics for investigation and case building. Scientific methods enhance the integrity of the evidence.
- Likewise, the government should raise a corps of judges with specialization in terrorism cases in order to improve adjudication. Currently, the ATC judges are drawn from the regular district and sessions courts who often lack knowledge, experience, and expertise in terrorism cases. The situation leads to both poor adjudication and delays.
- Pakistan should introduce an effective witness protection regime because many terrorism cases falter due to witnesses backtracking on their testimonies due to lack of security or fears of harm or persecution.
- In Pakistan, radicalisation and recruitment for extremist outfits also occur within the confines of prisons. To help mitigate this problem, the prison staffs should be trained to identify the propaganda and recruitment techniques commonly used by extremist groups, and taught the skills to tackle such challenges. In addition, the provincial home departments should introduce CE programmes in prisons to discourage and prevent radicalisation of inmates.
- The civil society should constantly remind the government of its obligations towards international law and human rights norms, and press it to end the widely prevalent practice of unlawful detention and enforced disappearance of suspects. The state must operate within the framework of the constitution, and not contribute to the erosion of rule of law and ultimately of the justice system.

e.Tackling the External Factors of Terrorism

- Over the past decades, Pakistan has suffered monumental losses in terms of its security, economy, as well as political stability due to the traditional hostility and proxy warfare with India and Afghanistan.

There is a need for focused and detailed studies to lay bare in clear terms what damages Pakistan has born to its security, stability, economy, and the broader society (for instance, radicalisation) due to its traditional policies towards its eastern and northwestern neighbors. The findings of such studies should be widely disseminated for public knowledge. And secondly, based on such evidence-based studies, advocacy campaigns should be run to mobilize the policymakers and parliamentarians to start exploring alternative policy options. Gradual normalisation of relations with neighboring states is essential for neutralising the transnational terrorism at home.

- The Parliament has ceded a lot of space to the military with regard to security policies. There should be advocacy campaigns to sensitise the elected representatives about their roles and responsibilities regarding legislation and policymaking processes. They should be encouraged to start debating, scrutinising, and questioning any policy that affect the public in one way or the other.
- Likewise, with regards to the Kashmir issue, Pakistan should commit to building evidence-based case for Kashmiri human rights and presenting it to the international community. Supporting militancy in Kashmir has not only harmed the indigenous Kashmiri struggle for rights but has also contributed to the radicalisation of the Pakistani society.
- Currently, Pakistan is under the FATF pressure to improve its financial system and bring it at par with FATF standards. Loopholes in the financial system such as *hawala* can be used for terror financing and money laundering. Therefore, Pakistan should fully comply with the requirements of the international watchdog because doing so would ultimately help counter terrorism and violent sectarianism.
- The government should enact laws or institute administrative measures to restrict open access to materials that can be used for terrorism purposes e.g. making it harder for bomb-making materials to be acquired. This will hinder the terrorists' operational capability.

f. Developing De-radicalisation Programmes

- De-radicalisation has been an insignificant component of the overall CE efforts in Pakistan. This may partly be due to lack of knowledge and appreciation about the efficacy of de-radicalisation programmes among the policymakers and the larger community of politicians. The utility of de-radicalisation programmes have been proven both locally as well as in many other countries. Therefore, there should be briefings by experts to the Parliament on this subject. Potentially, such initiatives may also generate political will in the Parliament to own the ongoing de-radicalisation efforts.
- The best place to curb radicalisation is the school. Simply by introducing critical thinking as a subject at schools, and inculcating empathy and compassion in children, the growth of radical tendencies can be checked in the longer term. Evidence from Pakistan's de-radicalisation programmes show that most of the radicalised individuals lacked basic critical thinking skills.
- Presenting de-radicalisation through the prism of religion has shown promise of dispelling the radical ideologies propagated by militant groups in Pakistan. The government should engage clerics to build strong de-radicalisation contents, explaining how armed struggle and violence damage Islam's image and harm the interests of Muslims.
- Pakistan's de-radicalisation programmes are mostly secretive and led by the military, whereas the process should ideally be spearheaded by civilians. For an effective de-radicalisation drive, the

government should engage civilian experts and diverse stakeholders including the civil society and local communities. Through discussions and engagement, the local communities can rebuild the discourses about the adverse impacts of radicalisation, and help reintegrate individuals back into the community.

- Evidence shows monetary benefit has been a significant factor in attracting young people to terrorism. Thus, any de-radicalisation programme must offer alternatives to the individuals in terms of career or occupation so as to prevent them from falling back into terrorism.

List of Speakers:

1. **Professor Dr. Qibla Ayaz:** Chairperson, Council of Islamic Ideology and a graduate of the University of Edinburgh in the UK, Dr. Ayaz has been a leading voice on issues of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan. He is also one of the signatories of the recently issued 'Code of Conduct' for religious harmony.
2. **Zahid Hussain:** Zahid Hussain is a senior journalist who has covered politics and security in Pakistan and Afghanistan for several international publications including *The Times of London*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *the Associated Press*, and *the Economist*. His latest book is *The Scorpion's Tail: the Relentless Rise of Islamic Militants in Pakistan – and how it threatens America*. He also contributes to *Dawn* op-ed.
3. **Dr. Muhammad Khalid Masud:** Dr. Khalid Masud is a former chairperson of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), and an eminent scholar of religion. He has written and spoken extensively on issues of religious extremism.
4. **Khurshid Ahmed Nadeem:** Khurshid Ahmed Nadeem is a scholar, researcher, and columnist. He is also the director of Rawalpindi-based Organization for Research and Education (ORE). In the past, he hosted a popular debate *Alif* on Geo television.
5. **Tariq Khosa:** Tariq Khosa is a security analyst, author, and regular contributor to daily *Dawn*. He has extensive knowledge and practical experience about the issues of terrorism and extremism. Previously, he served as the chief of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).
6. **Dr. Rubina Saigol:** Dr. Saigol is an eminent scholar, educationist, and author of several works. Her scholarly work explores themes of gender, education, nationalism, religious extremism, etc.
7. **Dr. Khalida Ghaus:** Dr. Khalida Ghaus is a scholar of international relations and human rights. Currently, she is the managing director of the Social Policy and Development Center in Karachi.
8. **Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed:** Former director of the school of politics and international relations at Quaid-e-Azam University, Dr. Ahmed is currently the vice chancellor of the University of Sargodha. He has written extensively on politics and security in South Asia, and spoken at international forums including the UN Human Rights Council.
9. **Ammar Khan Nasir:** Ammar Khan Nasir is a religious scholar with several academic works to his credit. He is the director of Al-Shariah Academy in Gujranwala, Punjab.
10. **Tariq Pervez:** Tariq Pervez is a security analyst with practical knowledge about Pakistan's terrorism and extremism problems. He headed the NACTA in its initial years when Pakistan was reeling with extremist violence.

11. **Zia-ur-Rehman:** Rehman is a renowned journalist based in Karachi. He has studied and reported on militant groups in Pakistan very closely.
12. **Ihsan Ghani:** Ihsan Ghani is a former head of the Intelligence Bureau and Nacta.
13. **Shahzada Zulfiqar:** veteran journalist based in Quetta, and head of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ).
14. **Farhatullah Babar:** Senior politician and former Senator, Babar is a vocal critic of Pakistan's security policies. He is also a senior member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP).
15. **Quatrina Hussain:** Senior journalist with experience working with local and international news agencies. Hosted political talk shows at various television channels.
16. **Arifa Noor:** Resident editor and columnist for daily Dawn.
17. **Barrister Mirza Shahzad Akbar:** Advisor to the Prime Minister on Accountability and Interior. As human rights lawyer, he campaigned against US drone strikes in the former FATA in the past.
18. **Rahimullah Yusufzai:** Senior journalist and security analyst. He has been reporting on Islamist militants in Afghanistan since the Afghan jihad. He also interviewed militants such as Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar in the past.
19. **Afrasiab Khattak:** Afrasiab Khattak is a senior politician and a former Senator and leader of the Awami National Party. He also served as the President of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in the past.
20. **Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed:** Former director of the school of politics and international relations at Quaid-e-Azam University, Dr. Ahmed is currently the vice chancellor of the University of Sargodha. He has written extensively on politics and security in South Asia, and spoken at international forums including the UN Human Rights Council.
21. **Imtiaz Gul:** Security analyst; Author of several books; Founding director of Center for Research & Security Studies, Islamabad
22. **General[®] Nasser Janjua:** Former Corps Commander Blochistan; former National Security Advisor
23. **Tasneem Noorani:** Public policy analyst; Dawn columnist
24. **Sarooop Ijaz:** Saroop Ijaz is a lawyer by profession who is currently a Senior Counsel at the Asia Division of the Human Rights Watch. Saroop is a prolific writer and a critic of the Pakistani criminal justice and police system. He has written op-eds in leading dailies like Dawn, Express Tribune, The News, etc. on issues of religious minorities, women, honor killings, torture, and blasphemy.
25. **Imaan Zainab Mazari:** Imaan Zainab is a lawyer and international law researcher. A vocal advocate of rule of law, she has written crucial pieces on political victimization, enforced disappearances, child abuse, and women's rights. Imaan is also a social activist who has been supporting the cause of marginalized communities in Pakistan.
26. **Dr. Farhan Zahid:** Dr. Farhan Zahid is Deputy Inspector General of police in Quetta. Previously he served as Director at NACTA. He has written on counter-terrorism, al-Qaeda, Daesh, and Taliban. He has also authored three books which include "*Roots of Islamic Violent Activism in South Asia*", "*From Jihad to al-Qaeda to Islamic State*", and "*The Al-Qaeda Network in Pakistan*". Moreover, Dr. Zahid has authored more than 90 research papers and articles.
27. **Dr. Feriha Peracha:** Distinguished clinical psychologist and one of the first Pakistani woman to lead counter extremism initiative in Pakistan. She served as director and supervising psychologist for the

Sabaoon deradicalization and rehabilitation project. Dr. Peracha's works have been projected both at home and internationally.

28. **Dr. Khadim Hussain:** Dr. Khadim Hussain is a noted academician, political analyst, and author with in-depth knowledge of the problems of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan. He has authored a book *Re-thinking Education: Critical Discourse & Society* which provides a detailed analysis of what is wrong with education in Pakistan. Likewise, he writes opinion pieces in daily Dawn. Dr. Khadim Hussain is also a leader of the Awami National Party, and has served as director of the Bacha Khan Foundation and culture secretary of the party.
29. **Mosarrat Qadeem:** Mossarat Qadeem is a globally recognized expert in counter-extremism and de-radicalization, and has spoken three times at the UN General Assembly on this topic. She is the co-founder of Paiman Trust, a non-government organization promoting socio-political and economic empowerment of marginalized communities. Paiman employs an innovative way of neutralizing extremist tendencies through community mobilization, active citizenship, and community empowerment to build social cohesion. This model has received international recognition, and has presented thousands of young people with an alternative narrative to extremism.
30. **Maulana Tahir Ashrafi:** Prime Minister's Special Representative on Interfaith Harmony
31. **Maulana Raghieb Naeemi:** Principal Jamia Naeemia, Lahore
32. **Prof. Syed Jaffar Ahmed:** Academician, political analyst, former head of Pakistan Study Center at the University of Karachi.
33. **Amir Abdullah:** Religious scholar and researcher.