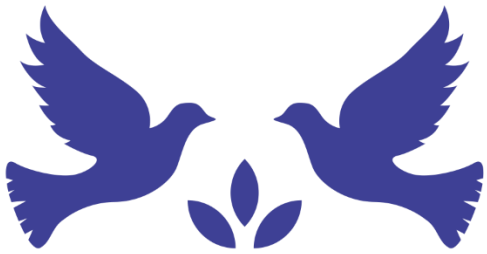

A PATH TO PEACE

Softer Approaches to Countering Terrorism and Extremism in Pakistan

By

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

P.O. Box 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Tel: +92-51-8359475-6 Fax: +92-51-8359474

Email: pips@pakpips.com

Web: www.pakpips.com

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Project Director: Muhammad Amir Rana.

Report Authors: Najam U Din and Shaheera Syed.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The last few decades have seen Pakistan grapple with serious and diverse security challenges. These have been accompanied not merely by deterioration of law and order, but also substantial socio-economic impact.

In recent years, particularly after 2014, Pakistan managed to achieve considerable success in containing terrorism. Militant groups no longer had large areas under their effective control and attacks and casualties declined sharply,[1] affording Pakistan a degree of relative peace. In early 2021, violence against civil society, security forces, public servants and other citizens was not as frequent or vicious as it had been a few years earlier.

Much has been said and written about the prevalence of violent extremism and terrorism in Pakistan and on ways to tackle them in order to restore peace to the country. Terrorism in the country is recent decades has been largely believed to be religiously motivated.[2] Groups responsible for the wave of terrorism from 2009 till 2017 were largely Sunni and Deobandi in nature, who targeted state institutions and civilians, both indiscriminately and along sectarian lines. Ethnonationalist organizations, predominantly from Balochistan, also conducted high profile attacks in Pakistan's urban areas. The State's counter-terrorism (CT) responses have almost exclusively fallen in the category of "hard approaches", involving kinetic force and tactical operations to physically eliminate terrorists.[3]

To be fair, many of the security threats that confronted Pakistan warranted some form of immediate military action. However, while successful in the short term, such approaches fail to address the wider issues or causes and factors of violent extremism. For instance, even as hard approaches eliminate terrorists already on the ground, as long as the motivation driving them survives, more would continue to take their place.

In that context, until the 'mindset' driving terrorism and violent extremism and the networks that connect them are confronted and eradicated, claims of victory over terrorism may be premature and unsustainable.[4]

Therefore, "soft" approaches must be an indispensable component in any counter-terrorism framework, particularly in the case of Pakistan, where not just terrorism but violent extremism is also rampant.

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[1] Pak Institute of Peace Studies. *Pakistan Security Report 2019*. [Islamabad: Pak Institute of Peace Studies, 2019], p.23
[2] David Rapoport. "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11", in UCLA Anthropoetics. 2002. Vol. 8, No. 1. [online] Available at: http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0801/terror/ [accessed 03/01/2022]
[3] Rohan Gunaratna. "Strategic Counter-Terrorism: A Game Changer in Fighting Terrorism?", in Terrorist Trends & Analyses. 2017. Vol.9, no.6, p.1
[4] Muhammad Amir Rana. "Politicising Terrorism", Dawn. 01/11/2020. [online]. Available at: https://www.dawn.com/news/1587959/politicising-terrorism [accessed 10/02/2022]

At the outset, it must be said unequivocally that the state has the right, and indeed the obligation, to use all lawful and reasonable options to maintain law and order and protect the rights and lives of citizens. However, perceiving hard approaches as the only option, for all intents and purposes, misses out on the sustainability and advantage of the alternatives that may be used instead of or in conjunction with the use of force, as a measure of last resort.

As the counter-terrorism approaches have relied on hard options over the past two decades, Pakistan's growing extremism challenge—including the factors, dynamics, ideologies, and actors that feed into terrorism—have not received as much attention.

This is not to say that no example of non-violent approaches for tackling terrorism and extremism exists in Pakistan. Several initiatives over the years have included components of counter-violent extremism (CVE) and the so-called soft approaches with the stated aim of preventing alienation, radicalization and promoting political means including dialogue and other forms of engagement, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration. Prominent instances of the use of soft approaches in Pakistan are enumerated in Chapter II. However, without exception, these so-called soft or non-violent approaches in the country have either had too miniscule a footprint, or little effort has been exerted on implementation, even for initiatives launched with much fanfare.

The post-2014 trend of improving security indicators seemed to be faltering, or even reversing in the latter half of 2021, particularly after the fall of the Afghan government in August. Even before this recent development, as the physical footprint of terrorist outfits and their attacks had seemingly receded in the face of military operations, little had been done to tackle the religious-ideological, sociocultural, political, or governance-related and other factors and drivers of extremism, which feed into violent extremism and terrorism.

This report has sprouted out of an initiative conceived in mid-2020, much before the unfolding of several recent events with significant implications for peace and security in Pakistan. That is to say that the need for considering soft approaches has only grown more urgent with the Taliban regaining power in Afghanistan and a clear uptick in security-related incidents in Pakistan in recent months.

Methodology and structure

In charting the scope for softer approaches in Pakistan, the present research sought to gather primary data through consultations and a perception assessment survey.

A consultation with participants from all regions of Pakistan was considered important for gathering the depth of information and direct interaction with and among the stakeholders. The perception assessment survey was used not only to determine respondents' opinion but also measure how strongly a view was held.

On November 18-19, 2021, Pak Institute for Peace Studies conducted a regional consultation in Islamabad on the theme of promoting soft approaches in countering terrorism and extremism in Pakistan. The themes of the consultation covered 'religious thought, social structures and dialogue among communities', 'constitution, citizenship, governance, and regional perspectives', 'countering terrorism practices in Pakistan: successes and gaps', 'the CVE policy frameworks and implementation mechanism', 'youth, madrassa, school, and narratives', 'political and strategic landscape of South Asia: impact on Pakistan's CT and CVE approaches', 'the militants, deradicalization and reintegration', 'marginalized communities and the social contract', and 'how can soft approaches effectively counter extremism.'

Each session was attended by a group of notable experts on the specific theme. The participants included current and former lawmakers, members of the federal cabinet, former senior military officials, religious scholars, representatives of civil society organizations, noted academics, economists, officials of Punjab Counter-terrorism Department (CTD) a former ambassador and senior journalists. The consultation included participants from Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, the federal capital, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan.

The discussion was held under the Chatham House Rule, with the identity and affiliation of the participants being kept anonymous in this report to encourage free discussion.

The draft would be further refined and endorsement and support sought from key stakeholders such as the political parties and other civil society actors for implementation of the Charter to ensure holistic efforts for sustainable peace in the country.

The participants of the November consultation were also requested to complete a perception assessment survey. The survey was also circulated among relevant local and international stakeholders. The semi-structured questionnaire aimed to gauge opinions of the consultation participants and other stakeholders on the past experience and scope of soft approaches in the context of Pakistan's efforts to counter terrorism and extremism. A total of 50 respondents completed the survey.

This report builds on the consultation participants' expertise and knowledge of local, regional, and national contexts in exploring avenues for deepening and broadening the role of soft approaches in countering extremism in Pakistan.

In terms of the report structure, this introductory section is followed by chapter II, which presents a quick overview of the CVE framework in Pakistan, enumerating the scope and impact of the key CVE tools and strategies that Pakistan has sought to use in recent years.

Chapter III opens with a quick look at the factors and drivers of extremism in Pakistan before proceeding to an overview of the current context.

Chapter IV offers analysis of the regional consultation findings as well as the perception assessment survey.

The report concludes with chapter V which lists international best practices and principles for establishing effective CVE efforts and frameworks. It also includes the combined conclusions and recommendations in Pakistan's context based on the primary data.

This report has benefitted enormously from the review and guidance of a six-member advisory board, comprising civil society representatives, journalists and development experts.

Separately, at the conclusion of the consultation's opening day, a Charter of Peace campaign was formally launched. The campaign is part of PIPS' focus on building sustainable solutions towards peace. The recommendations for peacebuilding based on the primary data have culminated in the draft Charter of Peace, which is attached as **Annex A**. As consolidation of key points of the report, the charter would be used to engage and sensitize political parties and other civil society organizations, policy makers and in educational campuses and madrassas, etc.

Chapter II: Overview of CVE framework in Pakistan

Pakistan's recent CVE frameworks may be discerned by sifting through a patchwork of initiatives since the turn of the century. The following is a brief look back at the main initiatives and their impact and outcomes.

After the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, militants of all hues regrouped in the Pakistan-Afghan bordering areas and in parts of the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). When militants started to threaten peace and security in FATA, particularly between 2002 and 2008, the political administrations and security forces opted for engaging in talks with them and reached several agreements meant to sustain peace. In all, ***13 peace agreements*** were signed with the militants during this period. Conceived in a security-centric context, these agreements largely ignored the political, sociocultural, economic, ideological, and geo-strategic root causes of the problem. All 13 agreements failed in realizing their objective of sustaining peace.

The December 2014 attack on Army Public School (APS) children in Peshawar was such a watershed moment that Pakistan's counter-measures against terrorism and extremism are often seen distinctly as those prevailing prior to that attack and those adopted subsequently.

In February 2014, the federal government announced the ***National Internal Security Policy (2013-18).*** In terms of soft power or political overtures, the policy included three major elements: dialogue with all stakeholders; isolating terrorists from their support bases; and enhancing deterrence through capacity-building to enable the security apparatus to neutralize threats to internal security.

The framework to implement this policy approach was based on soft and hard components. The former entailed research and understanding, and winning hearts and minds. The National Counter-Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was to implement both components. However, implementation was preceded by the December 2014 Army Public School attack. The NISP in its original sense could not be fully implemented.

Pakistan has never had a comprehensive **deradicalization / reintegration program**, with the exception of two rehabilitation centers operated by the military in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Peaceful Balochistan Package, also running with security agencies' support.

The main components of the centers in KP included: Project ***Sabaoon***, with focus on juveniles; Project ***Mishal*** that concentrated on adult detainees; and Project ***Sparlay*** for family members of detained persons. The main modules under these initiatives included formal education, especially for juveniles, psychological counseling, focus on social issues, family participation and vocational training. Although not commensurate with the scale

of the challenge, the centers contributed to several hundred individuals being reintegrated into society. The Balochistan initiative incentivized Baloch insurgents to renounce violence and help them reintegrate in society. Intermittent media reports have cited scores of individuals renouncing violence under the initiative. In order to have any meaningful or lasting impact, the deradicalization/ rehabilitation/ reintegration effort needs to blunt or outpace any ongoing radicalization or alienation. In the absence of that, the rehabilitation centers in KP or any gains from the Balochistan initiative, although important, would have only a limited footprint and impact on the larger counter-terrorism (CT) and counter-violent extremism (CVE) endeavor.

The massacre of schoolchildren in APS Peshawar in December 2014 was instrumental in creating a tangible consensus among Pakistan's civilian and military leadership, the civil society and the common citizens of the urgency to tackle terrorism and extremism. It provided impetus to formulate concrete policies towards that end. Within days of that brutal attack, NACTA and other stakeholders finalized the 20-point ***National Action Plan*** (NAP). The plan provided the policy underpinnings for countering extremism and terrorism. The majority of the NAP points had a counter-terrorism focus. However, NAP did include specific counter-extremism provisions, which called for action against literature promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism, and intolerance; steps against religious persecution and for protection of religious minorities; regulation of religious seminaries; and curbs on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through print or electronic media, etc.

Following the NAP adoption, although gains were made against terrorist violence but not against religious extremism or intolerance. The action plan has not led to religious minorities feeling any less vulnerable and online hate speech in particular has increased rather than diminishing over the years.

Indications towards the end of 2021 hinted at further dilution of NAP's CVE focus,[5] with the military/hard force dimension becoming more prominent and NACTA and its civilian-led coordination role being sidelined.

In 2018, after 18 months of strenuous effort, NACTA formulated the ***National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines*** (NCEPG). The guidelines were the result of dozens of rounds of consultation involving stakeholders such as provincial governments, political leadership, religious leaders, academics, researchers, media personnel, and legal experts. The guidelines covered areas as diverse as rule of law and service delivery, building community resilience, media engagement, integrated education reforms, rehabilitation, reintegration, renunciation of violence and promotion of culture. Both NISP (2013-2018) and NCEPG have emphasized the need to understand the structural determinants or drivers of violent extremism and terrorism. Any set of guidelines, however comprehensive, cannot have much impact without effective implementation. That, unfortunately, has been the NCEPG's Achilles' heel.

[5]Waqar Gillani, September 29, 2021, Daily Jang, https://e.jang.com.pk/09-29-2021/pindi/pic.asp?picname=417.png

In January 2018, the federal government launched the ***Paigham-e-Pakistan*** initiative. It was a declaration / religious edict signed by over 1,800 religious scholars from various sects. It decreed eradication of extremism and terrorism in light of religious commandments. A countrywide awareness campaign in educational institutions presented the Paigham as the blueprint of an inclusive Pakistan.

One of the reasons for the Paigham not having a significant impact so far has been a lack of the government and civil society's ownership of the initiative. The clergy has also appeared reluctant to adopt the declaration as a manual or code for madrassas.

In May 2018, the federal cabinet approved ***National Internal Security Policy (NISP-II)*** for 2018-2023. Unlike the first internal security policy (2013-2018), NISP-II was the outcome of much consultation. It covered CT, CVE and border security measures. However, while the NISP-II has been announced, few measures for implementation have been adopted.

It is vital to explore why these or various other similar attempts have failed to have a discernible impact. Many of the above are certainly initiatives that hold much potential. However, even with the best of intentions and the best of programs, impact would be minimal unless key stakeholders are taken on board and focused and consistent implementation prioritized.

Scope of CVE

For the sake of clarity, it is pertinent to explain what is meant by softer approaches in the counterterrorism discourse. The use of political or soft approaches is referred to as an effective tool for reducing the appeal of militants' ideologies as well as bringing the militants back into the mainstream by persuading them to renounce violence.

According to Gabriel Hoeft, soft approaches "seek to render extremist movements obsolete by undermining the foundations upon which these movements are built."[6] Rather than relying on physical force, soft approaches target radicalized and vulnerable individuals cognitively. One such approach has come to be known as CVE.

Soft approaches also seek to prevent vulnerable individuals from falling victim to radical and violent beliefs, whilst attempting to rehabilitate radicalized individuals and reintegrate them into society.[7] CVE is thus both a preventative and corrective measure, and the non-coercive nature of CVE practices reduces the risk of blowback or retaliation associated with kinetic operations. It also acts in tandem with traditional kinetic

[6] Gabriel Hoeft. "'Soft' Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: An Exploration of the Benefits of Deradicalisation Programs". [Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2015], p.5
[7] Ibid, p.3

operations, as the deradicalized individuals are no longer inclined to join the ranks of terrorists and replace those eliminated in the field, thus leading to effective eradication of terrorism.

A growing number of states are beginning to realize this, evinced by the enactment of large-scale CVE infrastructures like Prevent (part of the United Kingdom's CONTEST strategy)[8] and the United States' Diminish program. Soft approaches derive from the concept of "Soft Power" introduced in 1990 by Joseph Nye, which argues that states can achieve their objectives by using influence and persuasion rather than military or economic strength.[9] While these concepts were developed in the context of the Cold War, such thinking and the use of persuasion can still be applied to non-state actors today.

As is the case with hard approaches, multiple methods can be applied when engaging in CVE. Some of the more important ones in Pakistan's context are briefly mentioned below.

Financial Incentivization: According to Hoeft, under-employment and lack of economic opportunity can make people vulnerable to radicalization.[10] Pakistan has experienced several periods of economic hardship over the years, with a severe one currently underway. Terrorism and retaliatory military operations inexorably affect the daily lives and livelihoods of citizens. With diminished prospects to feed their families, there is a high likelihood that many may turn to political violence for money; Schmid identifies socio-economic disparity as a root cause of terrorism.[11] It is important to note, however, that as per the broader literature, poor economic status alone may not be a factor directly responsible for recruitment for terrorism. Local economies and livelihoods need to be stimulated in the areas affected by terrorism; in Pakistan's case these particularly include parts of Balochistan, the area previously known as FATA and the Malakand region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Community Engagement and Outreach: Terrorist organizations rely heavily on the broader community they are based in for their fighters and support base, targeting vulnerable individuals for recruitment.[12] Engaging with communities at risk is key to preventing people from adopting extremist beliefs and violent behavior. This can be done through the enactment and enforcement of citizenship frameworks,[13] reforming education in both schools and madrassas and reassuring more vulnerable members of the community that they have

[8] UNITED KINGDOM. Home Office. "Prevent Strategy". 2011. [PDF] London: Home Office. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf [accessed 31/01/2022]
[9] Joseph Nye. "Soft Power", in Foreign Policy. 1990. No. 18, p.157
[10] Hoeft. 'Soft' Approaches to Counter-Terrorism. p.9
[11] Alex P Schmid. "Root Causes of Terrorism: Some Conceptual Notes, Indicators & a Model", in Democracy & Security. 2005. Vol.1, No.2. p.133
[12] Gunaratna. Strategic Counter-Terrorism. p.5
[13] A citizenship framework would accept and embrace all Pakistanis as equal citizens, thus improving the situation for minority groups; Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. National Strategy of Inclusive Pakistan. [Islamabad: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, 2017] p.31

not been left behind by the state. Should members of a community feel like a genuine part of the community, it would become difficult for extremist and contrarian beliefs to set in.

Strategic Communications: Strategic Communications (STRATCOM) involves influencing the thoughts, opinions and actions of a target audience to achieve the strategic objectives of the communicator.[14] In this case, the communicator would be the state, and the audience those most vulnerable to radical beliefs, or those who engage in radical violence and need to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. STRATCOM is achieved through the development and dissemination of targeted messaging conveying a narrative that the state wants the audience to act in accordance with. This can be achieved, for instance, through regulating sermons and disseminating pro-state or anti-terror messaging through media, including print, television, radio and the internet.

Why should Pakistan pursue CVE?: CVE offers a plethora of potential benefits. Beyond the aforementioned broadening of the existing CT practices, CVE is much more effective on a cost-benefit ratio. The federal government reportedly spent Rs 732.4 billion on Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* and security-related additional spending from June 2014 until the financial year 2016-17,[15] which was a substantial burden on the national treasury. CVE practices by comparison are far less expensive than military operations, both in terms of the monetary and human cost.

Furthermore, lack of use of force diminishes risk of losses to the civilian population and the associated sentiments of alienation and revenge. The use of military force carries the risk of the kin of killed combatants and non-combatants, or even others in the affected area taking up arms against the state; a similar situation was observed in Iraq during the US-led invasion.[16] Escalatory CT campaigns, according to Schmid, are a proximate cause of terrorism and can lead to calls for revenge from those affected by state action against terrorists. CVE by comparison is non-violent in its execution and relies more on shaping the thoughts of the individual, thus divorcing them from their radical beliefs. Additionally, rehabilitating and reintegrating militants can be seen as a gesture of mercy or clemency, thus aligning the population more with the state.

Limitations of CVE: While CVE has multiple benefits, its biggest drawback is time. Deradicalization takes far more time than launching a kinetic operation. Tactical and kinetic operations provide instant political gratification that a security threat has been neutralized. CVE requires a great deal more patience and sustained political will in order to be successful. However, the gains are much more sustainable and long-

[14] Kevin Marsh. "What is Strategic Communication?", in John Williams & Kevin Marsh. Strategic Communication. [London: Offspin Media, 2017], p.11

[15] Shahbaz Rana. "Additional Rs 250 billion spent annually since launch of Zarb-e-Azb", in *Express Tribune*. 14/02/2014. Available at: https://tribune.com.pk/story/1294539/additional-rs250-billion-spent-annually-since-launch-operation-zarb-e-azb [accessed 02/12/2021]

[16] Specifically, the attack that killed UN Special Representative Sergio Vierra de Mello in 2003, in response to the Coalition invasion and presence; Council on Foreign Relations. *The Iraq War: 2003-2011*. 2020. [online]. Available at: https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war [accessed 02/12/2021]

lasting compared to military operations. Furthermore, CVE is not an area of military's specialization and would need to move away from being the near exclusive domain of the military to the control of the civilian government. Dividing responsibilities like that would be efficient, and the broader range of expertise and perspectives from civilian CVE practitioners could benefit the scheme greatly.

Although CVE is a relatively new policy area, and the programming approach greatly varies from one country to another, it is pertinent to mention that extremism is not a Pakistan-specific issue and there are numerous resources and models that Pakistan can benefit from.

In the last two decades, various noteworthy deradicalization and counter-extremism strategies and programs have been unveiled by countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom. Some examples of models that stand out include one from the United Kingdom and another from Indonesia.

United Kingdom: For nearly two decades, Prevent has been the face of the United Kingdom's strategy to keep people from becoming involved in violent extremism or supporting terrorism.

Cases believed to present a real risk of violent extremism are escalated to the most intensive level of Prevent, known as the Channel program.

The Channel program provides support to individuals who are considered 'at risk' of being drawn into terrorism. The program is available within communities. In some instances, it is also available to individuals serving a prison sentence, particularly where an individual is due to be released soon and appropriate support is needed to be put in place. Individuals can be referred by anyone, including a family member or colleague. Referrals are assessed by a panel that decides what support can be offered. Participation in Channel is voluntary and is not a criminal sanction.[17]

Those managed under the Channel program are offered specific interventions designed to divert 'vulnerable people' away from whatever influence might be drawing them toward radicalization or terrorism. Examples of the type of support include help with education or career advice, sports, housing assistance, dealing with mental or emotional health issues, drug/alcohol abuse, online safety training for parents and specialized mentoring from an intervention provider. In essence, the program provides personalized enticement designed to encourage those deemed at risk to choose a path away from potential violence to one that is more attractive to the individual based on his/her self-interest.[18]

[17]Factsheet: Prevent and Channel, Home Office in the Media, https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/11/05/factsheet-prevent-and-channel/

[18]https://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/prevent/HM_Government_Channel_Duty_Guidance%20%20April_2015_Section_6.pdf

While the UK government claims that the strategy has diverted hundreds of people from extremism,[19] there have been suggestions that Prevent's deradicalization programs simply do not work. A private report by behavioral psychologists has cast doubt on the effectiveness of the program, questioning whether there is any evidence base behind its methods.

The program has also drawn considerable criticism from human rights lawyers, and some teachers and representatives from the Muslim community. They argue that this approach encourages well-meaning public officials to look for threats where they do not exist. They say that such statewide surveillance is not only discriminatory but actively counter-productive.

There have been concerns raised about the creation of insecurity amongst minority groups, accusations of stoking of Islamophobia and far-right extremism, and the erosion of civil and democratic rights.[20]

The UK Home Office suddenly announced in January 2019 an independent review of the program. In March 2021, the Home Office stated that the report and any recommendations "should be submitted to the Home Secretary by September 30, 2021".[21] The deadline passed without the review report being submitted.

Indonesia: The counter-extremism and deradicalization initiatives in Indonesia over the last two decades have deployed not just hard power, or a law enforcement approach, but also prevention efforts carried out through soft power, specifically programs for deradicalization and countering radicalism and extremism. Indonesia's is a dialogue-based model, which has focused on engaging former militants for molding their mindset to create an ideological response to radicalization and extremism.[22] It has targeted former convicts, former terrorists, their families, and their networks exposed to radicalism. It has several stages, including identification, rehabilitation, re-education, and social reintegration.

The Indonesian experience has not been without its challenges. Many institutions handle the process of deradicalization, and coordination among the institutions has not gone well.[23] Lack of skilled human resources has also been an obstacle.

These examples illustrate that even well-meaning intervention, unless well thought through and having extensive buy-in or ownership, might struggle to have an impact.

[19] Inside Prevent, the UK's controversial anti-terrorism programme, Financial Times, January 24, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/a82e18b4-1ea3-11e9-b126-46fc3ad87c65
[20] We Can't Trust the Prevent Review to be Honest About Counter-Terrorism Failings, Dr Richard McNeil-Willson, Byline Times, 26 October 2021, https://bylinetimes.com/2021/10/26/we-cant-trust-the-prevent-review-to-be-honest-about-counter-terrorism-failings/
[21] Deadline for long overdue Prevent review missed in weeks before Sir David Amess' murder, Independent, October 19, 2021, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prevent-review-extremism-terrorism-amess-b1941334.html
[22] Radicalization in Pakistan, chapter 7, Muhammad Amir Rana and Safdar Sial, Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Islamabad, 2012.
[23] Deradicalization in Indonesia: Implementation and Challenge, Bella Widya, Journal of Terrorism Studies, July 2020, https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1021&context=jts

Chapter III: Drivers of extremism & current context

This section takes a quick look at the factors and drivers of extremism in Pakistan, based on desk research, deliberations in the November consultation, and the survey responses. Subsequently, it enumerated the most recent developments in and around Pakistan and their significance for peacebuilding in the country.

Factors driving extremism in Pakistan

As is the case with any part of the world, the causes of extremism in Pakistan are complex and usually a combination of factors, rather than any single aspect, acts as a catalyst. Research by Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) suggests that both distinct and identical factors of extremism may influence certain individuals and groups among various segments of society. Even when the politico-ideological factors drive the process of extremism in Pakistan, socio-psychological ones further facilitate it.

While the role of institutions of religious education, or madrassas, has been focused upon in promoting intolerance and extremism in Pakistani society, many scholars do not rule out the role of Pakistan's public school system.[24] However, there is also the view that the public school curriculum in Pakistan is highly likely to engender intolerance and promote the concept of conflict resolution through violence. S. Hafeez has put it in these words: "Any attempt to 'Islamize' the social sciences is very likely to engender fanaticism, emotionalism, and post-facto analysis on or interpretation of social realities."[25] Parallel to public schools, higher education has also had similar trends of Islamization.

In fact, inaugurating the PIPS Charter of Peace campaign in November, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry said that extremism had flourished in Pakistan not through madrassas, but through mainstream educational institutions. He added that teachers intentionally recruited in mainstream schools and colleges in the 1980s and 90s promoted extremism.

Although religious motivations as a factor in the spread of extremism have been in sharp focus in Pakistan in recent years, due attention has not been paid to other factors and drivers. Many stakeholders, who stress

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[24] Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Education Reform in Pakistan: Challenges and Prospects," in *Pakistan: Haunting Shadows of Human Security*, ed. Jennifer Bennett (Dhaka: BIISS, 2009), 58.
[25] Sabeeha Hafeez, *The Changing Pakistan Society* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1991), 256.

the need to understand and address all factors and drivers of extremism, indicate that the lingering violence in Karachi and Balochistan over the years has not been religiously motivated but has ethno-nationalistic and political factors.

Reference is made to political deprivation and exclusion prompting the people to resort to violent means to alleviate their political deprivation. The conflict in Balochistan and, to some extent, in the tribal areas now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa may be seen as examples of that.

Many consider the youth bulge in Pakistan to be a problem where the young people are stereotyped to be the perpetrators of violence. However, recent literature suggests otherwise. Even though some young people engage in violence it is an undeniable reality that "the vast majority of young people choose not to engage in violence, and many are active agents of peace". The government can focus on harnessing the capabilities of young people to mitigate the vulnerability that youth present. The available evidence suggests that poverty or unemployment alone are not sufficient reasons to explain why some young people turn to violent extremism and the problem is in fact multi-faceted.[26] Hence, when discussing about preventing violence and extremism, it requires a departure from the traditional economic and social policies and making room for innovation. This "means inclusive solutions through dialogue, adapted macroeconomic policies, institutional reform in core state functions, and redistributive policies". From experiences around the world, we have learnt that the state has to be extremely sensitive to problems of "exclusion from access to power, opportunity, services, and security" that actually create fertile ground for "mobilizing group grievances to violence". This is particularly relevant for countries like Pakistan where the state has limited capacity and issues related to blanket legitimacy and human rights are not uncommon.[27].

Oppression, lack of justice and politico-economic inequalities are strong contributing factors towards extremism. Various forms of inequality have fueled alienation and resentment among those on the margins of society. Repeated demands of the people for expeditious justice and widespread complaints about the decay in the judicial system had contributed to the circumstances where the government capitulated to Taliban's demand for Nizam-i-Adl Regulation in Swat, amid an armed campaign by the militants. Victims of chronic inequality—whether economic, social, political, legal or in any other form—eventually start viewing the socio-political, economic and legal systems as flawed and favoring one section of society at the expense of others. It makes them think about revolting against the system, at times in the form of militancy. Peaceful societies are peaceful largely because they have achieved political, legal and civic equality.[28]

[26] "Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016" (Commonwealth Secretariat (2016) < https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/content/publication/global_youth-2016-en>

[27] "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict" (United Nations; World Bank 2018) https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28337

[28] Muhammad Azam and Safiya Aftab, "Inequality and the Militant Threat in Pakistan," C*onflict and Peace Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009).

Current context

The few months before and after the November 2021 regional consultation saw many new developments with major implications for security and peace in Pakistan and the wider region.

Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 was by far the most significant of these developments, not least because of the country's proximity to Pakistan, or Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan militants having a strong presence and sanctuary there, but also because how that could embolden or inspire other extremist organizations.

A clear upsurge in violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan closely followed the change in Afghanistan. Several of the consultation participants lamented that anyone with even a basic understanding of Afghanistan had been predicting that such a change in Afghanistan would lead to the hard-won gains against terrorism in Pakistan being reversed. They said that that was happening now. There was alarm about a bigger threat, that of spread of extremism, which no border fence could keep out.

Then there was the proscription of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) in mid-April and withdrawal of that ban "in the larger national interest" in early November. The ban was lifted days after the TLP activists had decided to march on Islamabad to press for their demands, including release of the group's chief who had been jailed since April. The marchers had blocked highways and abducted and brutally police personnel in several instances, killing at least five policemen and injuring hundreds more. With no justice for the slain policemen and the terms of the government's agreement with the TLP being kept secret even from the federal cabinet members, there was no hiding the state's capitulation to a violent mob.

Inaugurating the previously mentioned PIPS Charter of Peace campaign in November, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Fawad Chaudhry said that Pakistan, with its nuclear weapons and the sixth largest military in the world, faced no potential threat even from its arch-rival India. "The threat we face comes from within. If the state becomes weak and violent groups become strong, the problem starts," he said.

Conceding that the government had to take a step back in its recent standoff with the TLP, the minister said the state and the government were not fully ready to fight extremism in the country

On the same day when the minister made these remarks, the TLP chief was released after seven months of detention in a prison.

A fortnight later, the lynching of Priyantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan national, by a mob in Sialkot, over blasphemy allegations further underlined the nature of the extremism challenge that confronted Pakistan. Priyantha's murder became a big headline not just because of its brutal nature but also because he was foreign national. For the society in Pakistan, however, recurrence of the such kind of violence over and over again is deeply concerning and indicative either of the absence or the inadequacy of remedial measures.

In January 2022, the prime minister inaugurated the public form of the Pakistan's first documented National Security Policy, which was approved by the cabinet a fortnight earlier. The government hailed the policy as a multi-pronged strategy for the future to ensure security and peace in the country. Amid gathering clouds, the security policy evinced that a momentum for addressing the challenges was also gathering steam.

However, it was difficult to ignore that political parties, civil society and parliament were not taken on board in the formulation of something as significant as the NSP.

In view of a complex conflict landscape and the various drivers of extremism, recent developments in Pakistan and in the region present new risks that further contributed to extremism and violence.

Chapter IV: Regional consultation and survey: perspectives on key themes

This chapter looks at the both at the drivers and diagnostics related to extremism on the basis of data we have collected through the PIPS regional consultation in Islamabad on November 18 and 19, 2021 as well as the responses to the perception assessment survey. Also highlighted here are the inadequacies of the state or societal response, again based on the primary data gathered through this exercise. The perspectives have been thematically segregated to facilitate focus and understanding.

Scope for soft approaches

At the outset, several consultation participants drew attention to examples of reliance on several soft approaches in Pakistan over the past decade. They advised that conducting an audit of the results of those exercises was called for. If those had not yielded a clear result, future initiatives needed to be mindful of the reasons for failure and should invest in improved designs and implementation strategies.

In terms of the scope for soft approaches, it was suggested that soft approaches would yield results only when hard facts had been understood and addressed. The consultations participants were of the view that soft approaches were being sought in a society with widespread weaponization, where the number of weapons in some cities was higher than their total population, in a country where weapons were delivered at home, and one where there had been extremist elements within state institutions themselves. There was a clear sentiment that no exercise would prove fruitful In the absence of addressing these fundamental issues.

It was strongly recommended that in dealing with extremism, a distinction should be based on the typology of violence. Ethno-political crime and religiously motivated or sectarian violence could not be viewed through the same lens. CVE and PVE often lumped together essentially different types of conflicts, whose drivers were distinct, although there were perhaps some common themes too. After taking into account the distinctions in the typology of violence recommendations should be offered for the entire value chain.

Equally important was what was routinely not discussed in the context of soft approaches. Many discussions around soft approaches discussed neither the sociological and political issues of extremism, nor the decisions

in the geopolitical context or how prudent those decisions had been. Also left unsaid were the things and factors that became vehicles of terrorism or deficiencies in the state structure and in the law and order machinery. With all that left aside, the discussion came directly to the role of religion. Perhaps a huge reason for this situation was different individuals' respective perception of religion too. The publications of various religious groups contained general messaging such as Islam was a religion of peace and taught tolerance and harmony. Yet the same publications, while arguing about the correctness of the publishers' respective sect, did not treat other sects too kindly. Their concept of religion then becomes their concept of sect. When everyone's concept of religion was in reality their concept of sect, that was a huge contradiction whose solution needed to be sought.

> "Generally, the state should stay away from religious affairs. However, maintenance of peace and order is the basic function of the state. Where attempts of faith-based dominance of others and discussion of such dominance become issues of peace and order, it is imperative for the state to interfere. However, that interference must not amount to distributing money among people to keep them quiet and send them home or heavy-handed tactics and beating them black and blue. The state should consider soft means to ensure that irrespective of the debates in the religious domain, social and general peace and order is not affected. States can do this. They have been doing this. When they can do it in other disciplines then it can be done in this respect too." —*A reputed academic from Sindh*

Several journalists, particularly two from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and officials of Punjab Counter-terrorism Department (CTD) illustrated just how lengthy and challenging the deradicalization and reintegration processes were and prevention was infinitely better than cure. For the militants that were in custody, frequent meetings with their family members and friends with a view to wean them away from their old ways were stressed. Looking for and making use of reformed extremists /militants to serve as role models was advised.

> "Just as we protect our airspace, we should safeguard the cyber space so that if there is any such thing on the social or print media that promotes extremism then the relevant CTDs or NACTA can work on that. Both these institutions should play a lead role in this regard." —*A Punjab CTD official*

The information related to soft approaches should not be shrouded in secrecy, rather should be defined by transparency, and ease of access. A journalist from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shared how he had been trying to visit a deradicalization center in the province for over five years but had not succeeded. The consensus view of the consultation participants was that needless secrecy bred suspicion. The work being done at the

deradicalization center should be open and accessible. In fact, the media highlighting that work should be considered beneficial and should be welcomed.

It was stated that while Pakistan had made much use of hard power, the soft side that Article 25 of the Constitution spoke about when it stressed equal rights was absent. The 21 articles forming the fundamental rights chapter in the Constitution were all about soft power. But propagandist rhetoric had been relied upon instead in addressing challenges through the use of those 21 articles. Border fencing, which had been emphasized to stop terrorism, which would not work when the country faced proxy terrorism. The fence had not even stopped smuggling, which obviously could not have continued without connivance. As the shadowboxing continued, due to internal governance failures, soft power was not developed or applied as a whole in dealing with terrorism, proxy terrorism and religious extremism.

A renowned economist was just one of the participants to underline that an economy of peace must have fair division of wealth, resources, income and other facilities. Considerable unevenness in that division would be the antithesis of the economy of peace. He said that on the one hand there was a Pakistan of the elite, which led lavish lives and resided in planned residential neighborhoods. The rest of the population lived in cramped quarters, slums or under the open sky. The children of the elite went to schools where the monthly fee was many times the monthly salary of that same school's guard. Each household had multiple cars and the children did not know how or where to get a bus from. In the Pakistan of the masses, the people sat or clung to the roofs of buses to get around. He clearly saw unevenness in these two Pakistans, which he explained bred an anger that was not created by poverty alone. He said that when there was unevenness and perceptions of injustice then some elements react differently, either by harming themselves, such as by committing suicide, or committing violence against others. The latter either become thieves and robbers, or their anger took a political color, with perceptions that others who spoke a different language, or adhered to a different religion or sect, were the cause of their struggle.

An academic said that having taught at a big public university in Karachi for 30 years he saw many of the students came from the middle class, and there was much idealism among many fresh graduates. However, they went through a big transformation after failing to find a job for a year or more. Since they belonged to the middle class, and had seen the financial difficulties of their parents and the many desires of their own or their siblings that remained unfulfilled. They had desired that they would remedy that once they were gainfully employed. When they do not find any work for a long time, they consider themselves to be failures. In that state, someone told them that they were not useless and God had created them for a higher purpose. They were given a gun, and taught how to use it either for a religious or nationalist agenda. When a youth's spirit was already so weakened due to the pressure of poverty, he could think that finally he had found a way through which he can stand up again and say that he too was somebody.

An economist said that societies with poverty and unevenness could not have peace. In fact, peace eluded even households or neighborhoods affected by poverty or uneven division of resources and opportunity. Wherever the economy was beset by unevenness, it gave birth to anti-peace sentiments. This would be the case when one section of the country made a lot of money, had a comfortable life in every sense and another lived off charity. He said that a few years earlier, amid a severe heatwave in Karachi nearly 300 people had died on the streets. No one had come forward to claim the bodies of nearly half of those victims. Researchers later traced and contacted some of those families, who told them that had they taken possession of the bodies from the hospital, they would not have had the money for the burial. They did not take the bodies knowing that the hospitals would find a way to bury them. "When you bring the society to this juncture, it is naïve to expect that that society will have peace," the economist said. An economy of peace would not come about through mere sloganeering. It needed changes in the structure of economy and of the society itself.

Constitution

A number of participants from the academia and civil society at the regional consultation stated that the concept of its supremacy was always implicit in any constitution. They were of the view that, first and foremost, a constitution's supremacy was measured by how representative it was and what was the nature of the civic contract that it sought to establish in society. If it was a diverse society, such as Pakistan, the constitution would have to be a federal constitution, with a social contract between the center and its units finding expression in the constitution. In the presence of such things, the Constitution would be considered a reasonable one, which could make the state function and have people's support.

> "The Constitution is one thing and another very important thing is constitutionalism, i.e. whether the values derived from the constitution have penetrated the society and whether the society owns these values. If a society does not have constitutionalism, then even the best constitution in the world would bring little benefit." —*A civil society representative from Sindh*

Several consultation participants opined that while discussing religious thought and dialogue among communities, it would be worth recalling the inclination of religious segments, groups and parties towards the constitution over the last seven decades. On the whole, they had not given the constitution much importance. When the 1973 Constitution was being framed, the religious groups and parties wanted to get as many religion-related clauses inserted into it as they could and they did get their wish. Yet, by and large, the religious parties might have adhered to that same constitution in words only, but not in deeds.

> "It is vital that religious-political parties should be persuaded to discuss political problems inside parliament. There must not be this contradiction that they contest election to parliament, become members of that parliament and then stage sit-ins and hold protests outside the parliament. They should follow the political path that the constitution has laid down. In other matters too, rule of law should be adhered to." —*A noted academic*

It was felt that constitutional literacy was lacking among the citizenry. The need was stressed for creating awareness among students of madrassas and mainstream government or private educational institutions, and educating them about the significance of law, constitution and parliament.

> "The Constitutional prohibition of private militias has not been honored. The current army chief has spoken about it several times. The question is whether a line has been drawn that violation of this constitutional provision will not be condoned. Based on evidence from recent days and the dealings with the TLP, that commitment still appears to be blurred." —*Representative of an Islamabad-based think tank*

Several of the consultation participants, mainly from civil society, were of the view that regarding the use of soft power the point of reference should be the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution. They said that it was vital that state institutions also stuck to that. The world over, countries had ensured the rule of law at the cost of human lives. But in Pakistan the state hesitated to act against mischief makers, for fear that there might be repercussions if some of them were killed. Finding fault with this approach, a number of participants said that the people violating the constitution, not respecting the writ of the state even after it specifically engaged with them, should be made an example of, instead of bending to them and making the state a laughing stoke.

> "We will implore the state, in line with our social contract, to review things. It should see that if some violent people come out on the roads and through violence get what they want, then where is the social contract? If the social contract is not robust enough, then let us revise it. But when the state that is responsible for our safety retreats from decision-making then who will make decisions?" —*A civil society representative from the Christian community*

An Islamabad-based rights activist alluded to the language of Article 36 of the constitution, which spoke of the legitimate rights of religious minorities. She wondered what were illegitimate rights. She believed that with the use of such terms in the constitution, there were no surprises that there were tensions in society. "If

there are legitimate and illegitimate rights, they need to be defined and if that is not the case then the language needs to be fixed," she recommended.

A number of consultation participants voiced concern about a political vacuum in Gilgit Baltistan. A social scientist from the region said the vacuum left by the abolition of the traditional governance system in Gilgit Baltistan in 1974 was filled by religious parties and a sectarian identity. As the basis of identity in Gilgit Baltistan shifted from culture to sect, this region famous for its natural beauty also became infamous for sectarian violence. A number of participants from the region said that sectarian violence in Gilgit Baltistan had been so severe that entire neighborhoods had been divided along sectarian lines. It had come to a stage where there was separate public transport and separate sections of the airport and hospitals for Shias and Sunnis. Offices were categorized based on whether they were in Shia and Sunni areas of Gilgit. This was not reported in Pakistani mainstream media. There were such deep divisions that sectarian was the only lens used to see anything. Gilgit city had been weaponized to an unimaginable extent. It had more weapons than a small state. The main issue was the political vacuum in the region. It was recommended that Gilgit Baltistan should be given its due identity, made part of the constitution, or given local autonomy with defense and currency with the federal government and a special bill of rights. The participants cautioned that keeping Gilgit Baltistan in a limbo would be very dangerous.

> "Gilgit Baltistan is controlled by the federal government, through presidential orders. It is not part of the constitution. In this day and age, no place can be run without a social contract. In the circumstances, the emergence of discontent is inevitable, and the ideas that are surfacing there are good neither for peace nor for the state." —*A participant from Gilgit Baltistan*

Parliament

A recurring lament of the consultation participants was that the parliament was not supreme in policy making. They demanded that all institutions should focus on their respective work and leave foreign policy, economy and internal affairs to parliament. Political parties were urged to strengthen themselves and introduce democracy and merit in their own ranks. Several rights activists said that the media should do its work, which it had abandoned due to fear. They said that other institutions were not doing their job, mainly because of arm twisting.

A retired senior military officer said that since the 1960s, no government had used the parliament properly to make policy. If parliament acted as a rubber stamp, then it did not matter which government was in power. He deplored the mindset where, as soon as Pakistan moved from a presidential to parliamentary

system, the prime minister immediately made himself the most powerful individual. He said parliament should be the main source of policy making and that policy should reflect people's aspirations.

An Islamabad-based lawyer stated that Pakistan's Afghan policy had had significant implications for the country, with 80,000 people killed and colossal damage to the economy. The people had suffered so much, but they had not been engaged in the process or had a say when the Afghan policy was being finalized. It was emphasized that as long as the people remained excluded even from matters with such far reaching consequences, there would be a question mark on the parliament as well as the legitimacy of the social contract.

Religious leaders & madrassas

In Pakistan, terrorism and violent extremism being linked to religious motivations has not been uncommon.[29] Several consultation participants, mainly religious scholars, were of the view that religion had been either unfairly or disproportionately blamed for extremism and violence in Pakistan. While there was a consensus on the role of religious scholars in fostering peace and harmony in society, it was also emphasized that any expectations about their role should be commensurate with the position allowed to them in society.

> "What message would removal of names of 1,000 people from the Fourth Schedule under the Anti-Terrorism Act, through the use of street power, send? The individuals whose names have been there for 20 years will see the advantage of having and making use of street power to exert pressure. Only the state should have that power. Only the state—and no group, or organization or mob—should have the sole monopoly on the use of force. Once we agree on that, the other issues will be sorted out. Unlike other Muslim majority countries where only one person has the authority to give fatwa, Pakistan is self-sufficient in fatwas. Whichever the government, let there be a consensus on what is a red line in Pakistan. That should be a consensus for future generations on how we are to lead our lives in Pakistan." —*A religious scholar based in Punjab*

Several speakers, again including religious scholars as well, found fault with the state for repeatedly succumbing to those using the name of religion and resorting to violence to pressurize the government into accepting their demands.

[29] Muhammad Amir Rana. "Politicising Terrorism", Dawn, 01/11/2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1587959/politicising-terrorism

The participants said that the challenge Pakistan faced from violent extremism was a collective one and a collective stance was vital for sustainable solutions. State institutions, political and religious leaders and bureaucrats were all urged to play their role. They felt that despite the state being a big power, no one was willing to take a stand, for fear of upsetting their vote bank or support base.

Regarding much noise created recently over the TLP first being banned and subsequently restored, a number of participants criticized the propensity of religious and other political parties, for the sake of their own politics, to oppose decisions made by the state on sound reasoning to guard its writ.

A government official tasked with promoting interfaith harmony regretted that not a single political party had reacted to the leader of a banned organization giving a list of nearly 50 National Assembly constituencies that he claimed had been won with that organization's support. He felt that the focus and demand was absent from political parties for the implementation of decisions made under the National Action Plan (NAP), even though that was a consensus document.

A religious scholar from Balochistan stated that when the suffering was perceived to be caused by a certain quarter, it was not unreasonable to expect the same quarter to bear the responsibility of offering a cure. However, he believed that in the case of Pakistan, the initial responsibility for promoting harmony and peace regarding religious matters was with the Council of Islamic Ideology (CCI), Milli Yakjehti Council, and civil society organizations. He said that the state only had a secondary responsibility in that aspect. He considered the CII being confined to the federal level as a limitation and suggested that establishing CII branches "at least at the provincial level with representation of each sect" could help find long-term solutions by analyzing fundamental motivations and drivers of extremism.

Another religious scholar from Punjab was critical of what he called an inclination in the society to pin the responsibility on others and exonerate oneself. He said that students of religion and religious scholars indeed needed to fulfill their role. Some people who had clout and power due to their political, religious or academic standing did take a stand. But he felt that things had progressed much beyond mosques, madrassas, and clerics. He questioned what further support was needed from religious scholars and volunteered that he could persuade religious scholars to say and sign anything needed to confront violent extremis. He asked, however, that who would then implement that and pave the way for that in society.

"Religious scholars do not have enforcement power. Everything can be reformed if those who have enforcement power so desire. What are religious scholars expected to do? First, they gave a code of conduct from the platform of Pakistan Ulema Council, then another from the Milli Yakjehti Council podium. Subsequently, in the shape of Paigham-e-Pakistan, they formed a code of conduct in collaboration with the state. Now implementing is the responsibility of everyone, including the people, the leaders and not just of the army and institutions," he added. Recalling the experience from 2006-07, it was highlighted that several

organizations were proscribed. That decision had been implemented because the state had demonstrated the will at the time.

A Punjab-based religious scholar was of the view that the Paigham-e-Pakistan initiative seemed to be fizzling out within just a couple of years of its launch. He felt that it was important to promote that. The religious scholar said that he understood the significance of dialogue in society but assurances of safety of life were a must for any dialogue on religion.

On that other hand, there appeared to be near consensus that as vehicles of soft power the effectiveness of initiatives like Paigham-e-Pakistan was very limited and was likely to remain so in the future as well. Part of the reason was said to be lack of attention to proper diagnosis as well as a preference for quick fixes and haste in getting to solutions. A speaker from a border district in Balochistan said that while there were various manifestations of violent extremism in his native area very few people there were aware about the existence of Paigham-e-Pakistan and even if they were aware, they did not give much importance to it.

Other participants said that one thing to take note of was the that theological interpretation in Islam was a decentralized function. That meant that a cleric in a village could ignore or reject something endorsed by thousands of religious scholars and use his own interpretation.

Several speakers, civil society activists included, stated that madrassas constituted a huge and effective system of education, with several exceptionally good madrassas as well. How good a madrassa was depended on the kind of education that it imparted. They also agreed, however, that over the years, many madrassas had become power brokers or power manifestation sources. The state that had not supported them for over 73 years belated wishing to do that or pursuing reform had caused resentment.

A renowned human rights activist said that just as the talk of religion and its dominance was growing in Pakistan, so was the country's cultural retreat. Few people pondered whether there was a correlation between the two or why Pakistan—which was at the same stage of development as China, Thailand and Malaysia 30 years ago—had become the most impoverished society in South Asia in every respect, from per capita income to education statistics and social indicators. He lamented that Pakistan was frighteningly deficient in how many books were written or read in the country as well as in the nature of the dialogue.

> "A key problem with the religious dialogue has been this monumental contradiction that whenever religious scholars speak about religion they judge themselves or their sect based on their own motive or intentions. But in judging others, they look not to their intentions but their actions. If motives and ideals are to be the yardstick, others too should be judged by the same standard." —*A noted journalist from Sindh*

A religious scholar from Gilgit Baltistan said that on one hand, Pakistan was known as a religious society, yet when it came to following the religious commandments, including accommodating fellow Muslims and diverse thought, the society was very narrow-minded. People were deprived of their lives on account of differences regarding religion. The leader of a religious political party from Balochistan stated that when religious scholars sat down collectively they spoke of harmony, love and solidarity, but in their private events, they instilled such potent toxicity among their students that it left a lasting impact. Several of the consultation participants stressed that religious scholars needed to change the nature of the discourse in the private discussions as well. Biased thinking and statements, which many stressed were not confined to religious scholars alone, helped spread hatred even in the face of collective constructive measures.

Speakers from Gilgit Baltistan said that their region illustrated both the worst descent into chaos and blood-letting in the name of sectarian difference and, in more recent time, sincere efforts for harmony by religious leaders across the sectarian divide bearing fruit. To this, a leading religious scholar from Balochistan had the following comment: "While good can spread on its own, negative things cannot spread so quickly without support. Even individuals with good intentions make a difference. We see it every day. If the state exerts due effort in spreading the good, the situation in Pakistan can see a marked improvement."

A civil society activist stated that the sort of comparisons routinely made in Pakistan indicated that many in the country were content with trying to demonstrate that the West too had similar issues of terrorism or it also had an extremist fringe, whose actions should not be used to paint the majority as extremist. While indulging in comparisons, he said it would not be out of place to see where the West and Pakistan stood in terms of the status of rule of law, women's standing in society, stature of education, health security, food security and human rights. He said that Pakistan had suffered much damage due to its policies and it would offer little solace to Pakistanis to keep repeating that as was the case in the west, Pakistan also only had a fringe that was extremist and the country was being unfairly criticized on that account. He stressed that it would yield nothing but benefit to gauge worldwide the state of followers of each religion in terms of education, innovation, creativity, where books are published and read and what was the mental, intellectual and moral environment. In that respect, much importance had been given to religion in Pakistan and the things needed for development and peace had been ignored. He found that to be an exceptionally dangerous situation.

Education

The consultation participants said that it was impossible to talk about education in Pakistan without taking note of the various tiers, distinctions and categories of the same. They said that Pakistan was already a classed society, which had bred different classes of education. It was often argued that the education system was flawed and its output reflects those flaws. However, the education system depicted the system of society,

which was overly class-centric. There were elite schools of various categories, various tiers of government schools and then there were madrassas. When the state failed to provide education facilities in villages, the poor sent their children to madrassas.

Several speakers alluded to a common narrative about madrassas' role in the spread of extremism. They stated that speaking at a related PIPS event a day earlier (on November 18), the federal minister for information and broadcasting had blamed formal schools and colleges for the spread of extremism. The minister had stated that the teachers recruited in the 1970s and 80s had radicalized students. Noting that secular and religious educational institutions routinely blamed each other for extremism, a number of speakers said that both arguments were correct to some extent. An important element was that the state had failed to fulfil many of its responsibilities, including education and health, under the social contract with the people.

Some participants of the consultation, mainly from the academic background, said that the values of harmony and tolerance could not be taught by adding some paragraphs to a course book. Students should be provided opportunities for exercising the values of tolerance and harmony through mutual interaction. Until the young generation and others—especially students of madrassas of various sects—had practical experience of living or exercising harmony and tolerance, instructions and lecturers alone would not be sufficient. It was stressed that that was not possible without positive contribution of the role of religious scholars, education and educators.

Culture

Many participant of the regional consultation, mainly civil society activists and educators, emphasized that Pakistanis should consider the reason for the country's intellectual and civilizational retreat. They said that it was important to comprehend that that was the nature of the crisis the country faced. Educational institutions were in such a bad way that college students did not even read a book outside their core syllabus. They asked what could be a bigger travesty than what happened to Mishaal Khan and added that when precedence was overwhelmingly given to religion then rational dialogue weakened. The nature of difference of opinion had changed and the importance of asking questions diminished. "We certainly should change our path. Along with us, all of South Asia is stuck in a whirlpool of religious extremism. One solution in the context of soft approaches could be to facilitate people-to-people contact in South Asia. Irrespective of relations with India, at least cultural and literary links should be maintained. There should be ease of traveling in that respect. Prospects for Pakistan's development would appear with regional peace."

> "What we suffer from is a severe identity crisis. We try to trace our cultural roots everywhere, from Saudi Arabia, to Turkey and Malaysia. We have neither recognized our own culture, civilization and heroes, nor given them due credit." —*An Islamabad-based lawyer*

A number of speakers from Gilgit Baltistan region linked the region's devastated by sectarian violence to a retreat of cultural norms and identity. They said that that had happened because multiple identities and all diversities had been reduced to the single sectarian identity. Culture had been the glue that bound together everyone, whether they were Shia, Sunni, Ismaili or Noor Bakhshi. A new brand of Islam brought to Gilgit Baltistan in the 1970s and 80s was exceptionally political and was eradicating local diversity. There were all sorts of headgear and dress for followers of this new brand and the entire visual presentation of religion was also being eradicated. The traditional caps from the region were nowhere to be seen. The Shahi Polo Ground was located between Sunni and Shia mosques. Individuals from all sects went to that polo ground. That indicated that reverting to cultural activities could be a unifying factor and help address many issues. Establishment of research institutes in Gilgit Baltistan was stressed to support culture.

Youth

There was a consensus among the consultation participants that if properly utilized, Pakistan's youth bulge could be of huge benefit to the country. For various reasons, it had not been utilized in Pakistan. "It is easy to talk of youth but nothing meaningful would happen without engaging them. They have not configured in the same way in the state objectives, unlike groups that take to the streets and hold the state hostage," said a youth activist from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

> "Amid conflicting narratives, there is utter confusion on what kind of national narrative Pakistan wishes to promote. Political parties should have done work on counternarratives but unfortunately that had not happened. However, it is never too late to engage the youth politically. The so-called youth bulge needs to be engaged in counternarratives and provided space and leadership. The political parties have not been able to effectively do that. However, the youth find a way, whether in the shape of Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement, or in other forms. These are youth movements that political parties have not been able to capitalize on." —*A political and rights activist*

Several civil society representatives said that the state needed to take proactive steps to prevent the youth from falling prey to radicalization and extremism. It was emphasized that the youth should be engaged, so that they had access to paths for personal progress. That was deemed important to deny other elements space and opportunity to exploit the sentiments and resentment of the youth.

The speakers said that a positive thing about many of the youth movements active in Pakistan was that they were struggling for those values and rights that offered hope for Pakistan in the days to come. They spoke of equality, strengthening democracy and giving rights and stood for and promoted soft approaches and were willing to face difficulties for that. It was stressed that the mainstream should talk to student and youth movements rather than waging campaigns against them.

Citizens & civil society

Many of the consultation participants were of the view that the challenge of strengthening democracy in Pakistan was tied to promoting soft approaches. According to them, the biggest responsibility and greatest hope in this regard rested with political parties. The wanted the civil society, including political parties, to provide platforms to youth and for democratic institutions to be promoted and political parties to give youth space and leadership.

> "When a citizen looks at the state from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or from Balochistan, the State does not appear to be weak. It appears to be fully in control and achieving whatever policy objectives it sets for itself." —*A young political and rights activist*

The participants said that discussions in seminars and conferences could only be effective if the actors who had the most direct role played that role in a positive manner and the civil society stood with them in support. The political parties could do this better than other civil society actors. Political parties had great scope for offering counter-narrative because they mobilized the masses and had support among them. They had access to forums like parliament where they could contribute to debate and make policy "to change the state narrative somewhat."

> "To comments about the liberals in Pakistan ceding space to extremist narratives, let me say that the ability to ask questions is vital for critical dialogue. Asking questions about religion is unfortunately not a choice everywhere. Space has shrunk because the atmosphere where such debate can take place is absent. This misfortune is not unique to Pakistan. In the entire Muslim world, there is not a single country where you can engage in critical dialogue on any religious issue without endangering your life. With the result that all the fresh literature on political Islam, modernity and Islam, democracy and Islam has almost entirely come from Muslims residing in Europe. That is because those Muslims have to face these questions there on a daily basis. At least they can raise questions and give responses. That can only happen in an environment conducive for conducting debate." —*A development expert from Balochistan*

Marginalized sections

A number of civil society representatives said that women and religious minorities were the biggest marginalized communities in Pakistan. They said that both groups had historically been excluded from the social contract. An arrangement that preceded the social contract supported a patriarchal social order. The aim of the State's contract historically had been to protect the interest of the propertied class, which was predominantly men.

Women

It was argued that even in the letter of the social contract in Pakistan, discrimination against marginalized communities, including women, transgender, and religious minorities, was present. State institutions enforced that same gender-related patriarchy.

A number of civil society activists stated that elsewhere in the world at least equality of rights at the state level had been accommodated in the constitution, which was part of the social contract of any society. The law and constitution of Pakistan were full of contradictions. Article 25 of the constitution stated that there should be no discrimination on the basis of sex but at the same time so much of the legislation under the constitution discriminated against women that it rendered them second-class citizen. Discrimination in the law of evidence, and different procedures for accessing citizenship for a Pakistani national's spouse depending on her or his gender were cited as just some of the examples.

> "We should incorporate half the population of Pakistan in the mainstream. This will do more than just solve the country's economic problems. Empowered women can play a vital role in ridding Pakistan of extremism. Incorporating women in the political, social and, especially, economic fields can weaken extremism." —*A prominent journalist from Punjab*

Some speakers highlighted a selective streak in tackling extremism. They noted that many people were alarmed if Taliban attacked girl schools, yet the same people often did not condemn the thinking that did not allow the girl child in their own homes from going to school. This was a form of extremism that went unchallenged.

A speaker from Gilgit Baltistan said that that theirs was a society with tribal and patriarchal mentality. In its present dimension of peace, the entire contribution was of men. Hundreds of people had been killed in violence committed exclusively by men. He said that women should be brought into the mainstream and allowed to benefit from culture and see what emerges.

Religious minorities

Several academics and rights activists expressed their unease with using the word minority while referring to non-Muslim citizens. They said that the word minority was essentially a reference to numerical equation and was not a status. The same person could simultaneously be part of a minority as well as majority from different points of references. How a state treated citizens from any minority did not have any co-relation with percentages. The link was with the character of the state and society. Several speakers believed that the way Pakistan had treated its religious minorities was the very prescription of extremism. They stressed that in any civilized society, any religious or political ideology that involved picking up the gun would not be acceptable.

A young Hindu lawyer said that the marginalized communities had been pushed against the wall and excluded from rights due to their faith. He stated that categorizing all citizens other than Muslims as non-Muslim amounted to denial of acknowledging their identity. Historical identifications were brushed aside when individuals were merely referred to as non-Muslims. Citizens from all religious groups should be mentioned in the curriculum by name, rather than being mentioned as non-Muslims or religious minorities.

Under Articles 41 (2) and 93 (3) of the constitution, there was stark exclusion and no chance of religious minorities' representation as only a Muslim could be president or prime minister. The sense of deprivation this created among marginalized communities affected them deeply. They were of the view that in the prevailing circumstances, where all things operated through authority, power and resources, the category in which marginalized communities were placed mattered a lot.

> "When the state is equated with a parent, then it cannot treat some of its citizens as favorites and others as step-children. All children should be equal in its view. Pakistanis other than Muslims do not want to feel this way, but they are repeatedly reminded that they are step-children of Pakistan. This makes me feel so helpless. My ancestors were born here and died here. They equally rendered sacrifices for the freedom movement." —*A Christian former parliamentarian*

A young Hindu activist said that if the trust of the marginalized communities in the state and state functionaries was to be restored, they had to have a feeling that Pakistan was their state too. Usually it was the society that constructed narrative. In the case of religious minorities, the state constructed the narrative and implemented that. He said that if the narrative only considered Muslims as citizens and only owned them, it would be difficult for those belonging to other faiths to believe that they too had a role, stake or value as a citizen.

"We know what authority parliament has to make decisions. Everyone knows that. Where will the political commitment come from? A strong civil society is the spine of a society. When will ours be vibrant. We hear that there is a huge majority that is pro-minority and liberal minded. The problem is that that they are silent. What does the 97% majority fear from 3% minority? The only solution is education. It is a long-term policy." —*A civil society representative from Balochistan*

The Quaid-e-Azam had asked people of all faiths to join the Pakistan struggle and assured them that in Pakistan they would get equal rights and a dignified life. A Christian activist said that citizens other than Muslims were forced to ask where that dignified life was. She felt that the biggest thing was whether the society was ready to accept that in Pakistan anyone other than Muslims existed. Civil society representatives said that religious minorities needed more than religious harmony; Pakistan needed religious freedom. The constitution was contradictory; Article 25 said one thing and elsewhere in the constitution there are things that were diametrically opposed to the Article 25 guarantee.

"The seeds of radicalization and extremism were sown three decades ago; we are now reaping the yield of that. If we start today, it will take another 30 years to change that mindset. But when will we begin? There was a slogan of Single National Curriculum and religious minorities heard that they could teach their children about their own religion. But on the other hand, under the same Single National Curriculum the material on Islamic teachings and ideology in compulsory books, which all children have to read, has been doubled. Is this not a violation of the constitution? Forcing children of other religion to study a religion other than their own? When I call someone I find that the ring tone I hear is a *na'at*. Is it only my duty to know about the majority religion? Why should the majority religion not know about other religions? Members of religious minorities are so scared by these cases of blasphemy and desecration of religious books that they do not even touch them. I tell my children not to even talk about religion. What way is this to lead a life? You have terrified people." —*A Christian former parliamentarian*

It had taken 70 years for Hindu family laws to be adopted in Pakistan and rules were yet to be framed and rights activist and the minority community were knocking on every door. If there was a sincere wish to give this community their religious rights, then rules should be framed and they should be given the same space that the Muslim community enjoyed. Lack of registration of marriage caused great peril and anxiety to Hindu women. They felt unsafe. Forced change of religion and forced marriage might also be curbed to some extent if the Hindu family laws were implemented.

> "I wonder if the fault lies with us. Maybe we sometime miss a point. Should we approach the state and ask what its compulsions are? We are ready to create space to understand the state's compulsions. Let us say that the state has not created this environment intentionally. If the state shares with us what compulsions hobble its basic functions we would very much like to know that." —*A Christian civil society representative*

Referring to the recent torching of a Hindu temple in Rahim Yar Khan and how new construction at the site had led to the attack, a rights activist wondered if there was any law in Pakistan that said that new worship places of religious communities other than Muslims could not be built. She recommended if such a prohibition was not written into any law then the implementation of what was written in the statute books should be ensured.

Survey respondents' perspectives

In finalizing the data collection tools for this study, the regional consultation was considered essential for gathering the depth of information and direct interaction with and among the stakeholders. Reliance on a perception assessment survey was considered important not only for determining respondents' opinion but also measuring how strongly a view was held.

As with the consultations, the survey respondents were also informed that all the data would be anonymized. They were not required to mention their name or any other identifying characteristic and could decline to answer any question without assigning a reason. This section offers analysis of the answers provided by 50 respondents of the survey.

Unsurprisingly, nearly half the respondents (49%) thought that the emphasis of Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism in recent years had been on hard military options. A little more than a quarter (29%) believed that a combination of both hard and soft approaches had been adopted. Only 6% of the respondents thought that Pakistan had dealt with terrorism and CVE exclusively through softer approaches. An Islamabad-based rights activist emphasized the importance of clearly distinguishing terrorism from violent extremism. According to her, the state institutions had only used hard military solutions against terrorist groups which was partly why there had been no recent gains in the fight against violent extremism, which she said had kept growing.

To another question, again nearly half the respondents (48%) attributed the recent gains in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism to the use of force. Another 28% thought that softer approaches had been instrumental to some extent in the efforts to curb terrorism and violent extremism.

Alarmingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, over two-third of the respondents (71%) were of the view that Pakistan's approach against terrorism and violent extremism had not focused on countering the militant narratives. Another 22.5% contended that Pakistan's approach had had that focus.

An overwhelming majority (93.5%) of the respondents stated that the gains against terrorism would not be sustainable with the reliance continuing to be on the use of force alone.

As many as 64.5% of the respondents were of the view that an associated impact of the use of hard approaches had been civilians suffering including economic losses and casualties. Out of the total, 45% of the respondents thought that a related impact had been internal displacement or other human rights concerns. As many as 39% believed that these approaches had caused alienation and sentiments of revenge among the affected population. As many as 35% of the total respondents thought that steep financial cost of security operations and casualties among security personnel were associated effects of the use of hard approaches.

Asked whether they could recall any instance when Pakistan had employed softer approaches in its campaign against terrorism and violent extremism in recent years, 58% of the respondents could recall such instances while 22.5% could not. The rest chose not to answer this question.

Many respondents mentioned examples of use of softer CT and CVE approaches in recent years. One respondent shared that Pakistan had dealt with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, and Maulana Aziz of Islamabad's Lal Masjid using softer approaches. Other examples cited were offers of amnesty to militants, investment in war-affected areas, merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, initiation of Pakistan Expanded Regional Stabilization Initiative, and use of digital media campaigns to counter violent extremism narratives. Additionally, respondents thought that banning of extremist publications, negotiations with the Baloch insurgent groups, initiation of programs such as Paigham-e-Pakistan and judicial reforms were also examples of soft approaches.

Asked in which part of Pakistan had the efforts against terrorism and violent extremism relied the most on soft approaches, most of the respondents said that they did not know the answer to this question. Out of those who gave an answer, the highest proportion (26%) thought that such approaches had been relied on the most in Punjab, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (19.5%), Balochistan (16.1%), Gilgit Baltistan (6.5%) and Azad Kashmir (6.5%). No respondent mentioned the use of such approaches in Sindh.

When requested to comment on how significant a role soft approaches had played in Pakistan's CT and CVE efforts in recent times, 39% of the respondents considered the role had been "somewhat important", while 19% argued that it had been critical.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, 22.5% of the respondents considered that the use of soft approaches had been "somewhat unimportant", and 12.9% contended that it had been "not important at all".

Asked to predict the importance of soft approaches in making sustainable gains against CT and CVE in the future, nearly three quarters of the respondents (74%) considered the role would be "very important". Another 16% thought that would be "somewhat important". Only one respondent said that the use of soft approaches in making sustainable gains in the coming days would be "not important at all".

The respondents could choose multiple options in answering why they thought soft approaches has not had a more prominent role in Pakistan. The majority (64.5%) believed the reason to be absence of long-term planning. Other respondents imagined the reason to be the authorities' desire to achieve immediate results (42%), lack of imagination (32%) and CT efforts being led by actors trained only in the use of hard power (39%). One respondent attributed lack of a prominent role of soft approaches to lack of will among the political leadership. Another believed the reason to be a lack of coordination between the counter-terrorism departments and the national and provincial governments.

A number of respondents suggested structural changes at the policy level to improve the role of soft approaches in CT and CVE in Pakistan. One of the key suggestions emphasized strengthening the counter narratives through reforming the curriculum, increased public discussions on the issue, and introducing cultural constructs and symbols to attract youth towards peace. Another suggested supporting civil society organizations and initiatives aimed at fostering peace in the county. Some of the respondents thought that what was needed was for the government to set its priorities straight in terms of dealing with terrorism and violent extremism.

Most of the respondents suggested that parliament and the political parties should have the central role in devising policy regarding the use of softer approaches in CT and CVE. Some respondents thought that civil society alongside parliament, political parties, and other state functionaries should be given the central role in this respect.

Asked to suggest what effective soft approaches could be used in Pakistan, the respondents suggested awareness programs, narrative building through exchange programs, media training, sports and arts events. They also underlined the importance of providing equal opportunities to the people to progress and achieve wellbeing. Other softer approaches suggested included introducing gender sensitive programming in CVE policies and curriculum reform.

A clear majority of the respondents (64.5%) thought that there might be resistance to increased reliance on softer approaches to counter violent extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. Another 26% did not think that there would be any such resistance.

In a follow up question, when asked for the reasoning of their belief, the respondents cited a range of reasons. One of the responses highlighted the military as a barrier to implementing softer approaches. A respondent thought that the reason was the concept of 'soft approaches' being too abstract and emanating

from the rule of law and the legal system. A respondent thought that there would be resistance to introduction of the softer approaches because of lack of consensus among various stakeholders in CT and CVE. Another believed that clergy as well as the armed forces might also resist the change as she believed that they were the beneficiaries of the terrorism and violent extremism narratives. One of the respondents thought that there would be resistance to adopting softer approaches because of the persistent inclination towards the already tried approaches, including the use of force. Institutional conflict of interest was also cited as a reason. One of the responses cited a lucrative war economy as the main cause of resistance to introducing softer approaches.

The respondents could pick as many of the multiple options they wanted or suggest other factors that they thought constituted key challenges to introducing / expanding soft approaches in Pakistan. The key challenges highlighted by the respondents included an inclination to persist with the tried methods, lack of expertise of the governments, specific difficulties in a particular region, a polarized Pakistani society, lack of will on part of the ruling elite, and limited understanding of softer approaches at a societal level.

The respondents also highlighted the ways through which they believed these challenges could be overcome. For instance, a respondent emphasized the need to persuade the political leadership to counter hate speech and incitement to violence promoted by religious leaders. Another respondent suggested that policymaking should be confined to the experts in the domain of CT and CVE. Another suggestion was the adoption of a fully backed national action plan with the consensus of all major stakeholders in the country including the political leadership, military, civil society, etc. A respondent considered that more investment in softer approaches would lead to the removal of barriers in countering violent extremism and terrorism.

The majority of the respondents contended that there were no regions of Pakistan where specific constraints could impede introduction of soft approaches. However, some of the respondents thought that in some regions there were particular constraints, as the social ethos and cultural practices varied across regions. They suggested that diversity at the regional level and within regions must be taken into consideration while adopting softer approaches. Citing an example, one respondent argued that Diamer district in Gilgit Baltistan had a markedly different context than the rest of the region. To overcome such difficulties, the same respondent suggested the creation of model townships in such areas where medical, educational, and other facilities were available. That would help wean the people away from regressive traditions, he theorized. Some of the respondents regarded the former FATA districts to be more difficult as they considered that it might not be possible to engage with women there. Another respondent thought the same about southern Punjab. In such regions, according to one respondent, a policy that prioritized persistent attention to local problems with an honest intention of resolving grievances, coupled with providing a counter-narrative, might prove beneficial.

Chapter V: Conclusions and recommendations

This study was aimed at identifying the most efficient path towards holistic and sustainable peace in Pakistan and to explore the value that softer approaches could offer in that endeavor.

It is not as if the challenges to peace and security in Pakistan, or even the critical need for addressing those are not well articulated. However, what necessitated the present study was the largely one-dimensional kinetic approach that Pakistan has consistently and almost exclusively opted for in its CT and CVE measures.

Building on the analysis of the primary data in the previous section, exploring some international best practices for devising soft approaches would be useful. The following section is an attempt to capture the essence of these best practices, before proceeding to other conclusions and recommendations.

International best practices

While looking to other countries for inspiration, it is not uncommon to succumb to the "cut-and-paste mentality"[30] and while there are "countries presenting individual policies that appear to tick many of the good practice boxes, but that, taken as a whole, fall short of a coherent, integrated, and fundamentally strategic response to the problem."[31] Although there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to CVE programming, countries should "develop and adopt their strategies in line with some basic, universal standards of procedural practice that reflect a valid and inclusive approach".[32]

For instance, while developing a national strategy on preventing and countering violent extremism, one of the core documents for reference is the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which calls on the countries to " take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not just ongoing,

[30] "Ensuring an Inclusive Approach to the Development and Implementation of National P/CVE Action Plans: The Role of Civil Society" (Prevention Project, 18 December 2017) <http://www.organizingagainstve.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Meeting-Summary_Ensuring-an-Inclusive-Approach -to-the-Development-and-Implementation-of-NAPs.pdf>.
[31] Sebastian Feve and David Dews, "National strategies to prevent and counter extremism" (Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2019) < https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf>.
[32] Sebastian Feve and David Dews, "National strategies to prevent and counter extremism" (Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2019) < https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf>.

essential security-based counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures which directly address the drivers of violent extremism that have given rise to the emergence of … new and more virulent groups."[33] This plan of action is used as a reference guide by numerous countries to develop their domestic approach and, though it has generated mixed feedback from the policy community, its emphasis on the "mainstreaming of preventive approaches" is widely accepted by the international community.[34]

The best practices that have emerged from the work in the field over the past few years can provide some guidance for Pakistan to refine its national CVE strategy, or CVE components which may be a part of the wider counter-terrorism strategy or framework. Research suggests that **all successful CVE programs have the following three features**:

1. **Strong evidence base supporting program design and delivery:** Programs are most robust when building on existing knowledge to justify the relationship between aims, methods, and outcomes. Drawing on parallel areas can strengthen the uneven evidence on violent extremism:
    a. Academic research in fields such as criminology, psychology, or peace studies.
    b. Experienced practitioners hold important practice-based knowledge.
    c. Community leaders and members have valuable understanding of local dynamics.
    d. International organizations play an important role in developing networks and consolidating expertise.
2. **Collaboration between community organizations and statutory agencies:** CVE interventions demand multiple types of expertise and different kinds of resources. These are rarely found in individual organizations, making cooperation among multiple actors important. Collaborations need to demonstrate credibility and foster trust.
3. **Ongoing evaluation and review:** CVE interventions are delivered in a dynamic environment, they also have the potential to produce unintended, negative consequences. Programs should ensure they are responsive to emerging issues that may influence their work, such as international events and changes in local attitudes towards CVE.[35]

Similarly, Hedayah center[36] has done some credible research in this field, and it elaborates the **good practices and principles which are to be followed when drafting a country's CVE strategy**. These include the following:

1. A national CVE strategy that is comprehensive and integrated into a wider counter-terrorism strategy framework should include all relevant government (both national and sub-national) and

[33] UN General Assembly, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674, 24 (December 2015, para. 6)
[34] Sebastian Feve and David Dews, "National strategies to prevent and counter extremism" (Global Center on Cooperative Security, September 2019) < https://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GCCS-2019-National-Strategies-Prevent-Counter-Violent-Extremism-Independent-Review.pdf>.
[35] "Introductory guide: countering violent extremism" (Centre for research and evidence on security threats, nd) <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/countering-violent-extremism/>
[36] Hedayah is a UAE-based international organization that provides technical assistance for governments to develop national action plans to prevent and counter violent extremism.

non-government actors to address the complex and transnational challenges posed by contemporary violent extremist groups.

2. An agreed mechanism and platform for flexible and responsive coordination and communication is critical to addressing what may be a rapidly evolving challenge.
3. An effective dissemination plan for the CVE strategy must ensure consultation and engagement with critical stakeholders including local governments, communities, and partners.
4. It is important to focus CVE national strategies and prioritize based on a well-informed threat analysis of identified drivers, the nature and level of the threat as well as available resources.
5. Trust-building and respect between governments and communities is crucial to developing a comprehensive national CVE strategy and successful programming at the grassroots level.
6. National strategies may be sector-specific and include non-traditional stakeholders in counter-terrorism, such as the private sector, human rights NGOs, grassroots organizations, religious leaders, etc.
7. It is important to ensure that national strategies are developed with due consideration of regional and international strategies that aim to prevent and counter violent extremism.
8. National CVE strategies should ensure that they are also in alignment with other national action plans and strategies that are related in terms of common objectives or stakeholders.
9. When creating and implementing a national CVE strategy, it is important that governments adhere to their international law obligations, including those under international human rights, refugee, and humanitarian laws, as underscored by the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[37]

Such good practices and principles can serve as a guiding force in drafting, implementing, and/or evaluating the CVE efforts and frameworks in Pakistan.

The Way forward

The present initiative endeavored to bring together stakeholders from regions across Pakistan to brainstorm and share experiences on the theme as well as suggest the way forward. The primary data derived from the research pointed to a demand for urgently dealing with the challenges associated with violent extremism.

One of the most stark conclusions to emerge out of the report, especially given the recent reemergence of violence in Pakistan, is that 93% of the people consulted for this research believed that the gains made against terrorism and extremism were unsustainable without deploying soft approaches.

Despite the earnest and constant fight being waged against these tendencies at least since the December 2014 APS attack, this realization in 2021 is significant. It might have been obvious to many people already,

[37] "Guidelines and good practices" (Hedayah Center, September 2016) <https://www.hedayahcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/File-1792016192156.pdf>.

but given the timing and the fact that it is substantiated by data, it could be instrumental in formulating an appropriate discourse.

With extremist organizations known to be inspired by one another, the research participants readily shared their concern that Pakistan could face new challenges with the Taliban back in power in Afghanistan, and amid indications of talks with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) by Islamabad. The fact that even the broad parameters of any engagement with the TTP had not been shared with the people or parliament further fueled unease. An oft-repeated civil society concern found expression in the stance of the consultation participants who believed that throughout history, extremist organizations had gained much more benefit through peace agreements than governments and people, as such pacts allowed them to regroup and increase their strength. The research participants stressed that they were not opposed to negotiations, but added that much foresight and seriousness was needed to see them through. They were certain that even if a pact held for some time, by the time the state would wake up to violation of its terms, the TTP and the like would have radicalized and enlisted many more people. In the perspective of deradicalization, it was emphasized that even in the presence of peace, giving the former militants a free hand or an open field would make the prevailing challenge even more complex.

Furthermore, it is worth reiterating that the CT and CVE efforts are strengthened on account of the legitimacy offered by public support and is these are undermined without that backing. When a strategy to use state power to put down extremism started in Swat in 2007-08, a concerted effort was visible to build legitimacy for that. That effort found traction also because the war in Swat was very public and people knew what was going on. As one consultation participant put it, Swat had become Pakistan's Vietnam as the war had affected every family, which helped galvanize a consensus. That support seemed to have become muted presently as it had become unclear how that war was being waged in different parts of the country and what were the contours of any negotiations being contemplated with militants.

Equally importantly, even as the Swat campaign had widespread support, the deradicalization structure tried there had not yielded promising results. So little information about that had been shared publicly that it was difficult to know whether the authorities planned to abandon that effort, improve it or maintain status quo. Transparency and openness could only benefit such efforts.

While the research participants voiced a clear need for civilian ownership of the CVE policy, it was also readily acknowledged that the civilian leadership in Pakistan had long outsourced CVE and CT. Some of the reasons for that were obvious even if others were slightly more complex. In some ways, it remained a real chicken-and-egg conundrum. Greater civilian role in decision making was unlikely to emerge without democratic consolidation and political consensus remained difficult in the absence of real civilian say in the decision-making.

The significance of resisting an overly simplistic view of violence was emphasized time and again by the research participants. It was stated that the various drivers of extremism and violence needed to be accurately identified and appropriate remedial measures planned in each instance for the entire value chain. Wherever relevant for the purpose of diagnosis or analysis, the global evidence of various causes of extremism, including the factors and structural drivers in the context of other countries, could be assessed and recommendations and actions tailored according to Pakistan's own context.

There was complete consensus among the research participants that only the state had and should have the sole monopoly on the use of force. Civil society representatives were particularly disappointed over an apparent lack of the State's resolve to implement the constitutional prohibition on private militias.

There was grave concern that repeated state capitulation to mobs engaging in violence, organizing mass roadblock, sit-ins or marches on the federal capital emboldened the so-called politics of mobs and incentivized the creation and use of street power to press for demands. It was equally concerning that the effect such policy had both on the morale of law enforcement personnel and brutalization of society was also routinely ignored.

Several participants in the consultation and the survey expressed alarm over what they called the state's selectiveness in who it engaged or compromised with or gave concessions to. They said that it was difficult to even imagine the state engaging in negotiations in the same manner with those struggling for rights in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as it had dealt with the TLP. It was emphasized that anyone hoping for sustainable peace in society or seeking to gauge the direction of the state would struggle to ignore the manner in which the state had reached an agreement with the TLP.

A number of participants pointed to a very interactive relationship between the state and society. It was stressed that as much as the extremist mindset needed be addressed, the society would not change on its own. State policies had in the past promoted extremism through curriculum and other measures. A jihad narrative had been built and radicalized groups patronized, which had gradually led to trends of radicalization in society. In order to challenge that and undo past mistakes, the State had to let go of such policies and civil society had to become stronger to persuade and partner in such an endeavor. Civil society needed to see how to unite and strengthen the democratic forces in order to implement changes that could reverse the damage done.

The focus on youth is particularly relevant for Pakistan in view of its large young population. The main takeaway from the research included two particularly significant points. Firstly, in engaging the youth, civil society organizations often considered educational institution campuses as the biggest area where work needed to be done. However, leaving the abysmal state of higher education in the country aside for a moment, only around five percent of Pakistani youth between 18 and 25 years of age ever managed to enroll in universities. The trajectory of the fight to prevent and tackle extremism would depend much on how

the remaining 95% are effectively reached in order to prevent them from being affected by adverse influences.

Secondly, the primary data from this research identified that many youth movements active in Pakistan stood for values such as equality, strengthening democracy and human rights, ideas which were naturally linked to soft approaches and which made them the natural allies of civil society, including political parties. It was stressed that the mainstream should talk to student and youth movements rather than waging campaigns against them.

In addition to the these thoughts, a Charter of Peace derived from the research findings, which is included as Annexure I, further consolidates the recommendations. An effort to create a vision for peace in the country, the Charter of Peace is envisaged as a living document. Endorsement and support would be sought from key stakeholders such as political parties and other civil society actors for implementation of the Charter to ensure holistic efforts for tackling violent extremism and achieving sustainable peace in Pakistan.

Annexures

Annex I

Charter of Peace

The research participants from various parts of Pakistan that gathered in Islamabad in November 2021 for regional consultations to brainstorm on achieving holistic and sustainable peace in Pakistan as well as respondents for a survey resolve as under:

We, the people of Pakistan:

- *Acknowledging that the pursuit of goal of comprehensive peace called for joint and urgent action:*
- *Call upon the authorities to demonstrate unambiguously, through words and actions, that respect for humanity, rule of law and protection and promotion of human rights is the basic philosophy of the state.*
- *Underline that in the people deserve that in dealing with extremism, the state prioritizes soft/non-violent/peaceful measures.*
- *Emphasize that even when compelled under its obligation to safeguard the lives and rights of citizens, all use of force is authorized by law, and proportionate to the seriousness of the threat to human lives and rights*.
- *Demand that the use of soft measures is not be selective, but holistic and in furtherance of a well thought-out overall policy.*
- *Strongly advise that that all policy and strategy on countering terrorism and extremism is formulated with input and backing of parties across the political spectrum and civil society to ensure legitimacy, broad ownership and effective implementation*
- *Call for an audit of all past soft/non-violent counter-extremism initiatives to measure their impact and identify shortcomings that inform future policy.*

Furthermore, the people demand that the state fulfils all constitutional obligations and all relevant stakeholders play their due role for peacebuilding, with particular focus on the following:

Constitution

- Uniform application of the Constitution in all parts of Pakistan.

- Protection of all citizens' constitutional rights, irrespective of their religion, gender, race, place of domicile or political views.
- Elimination of political, economic and social discrimination on any ground.
- Promotion of the values derived from the constitution, including through enhancing constitutional literacy among the people, particularly among the youth.
- Resolution of social, economic and political deprivation of all regions in an inclusive manner.
- Establishment of the rule of law in such a manner that the state does not appear to be weak, indecisive or selective.
- Enforcement of the constitutional prohibition on private militias without compromise or exception.
- Use of the power and resources at state disposal to provide and expand space to transform society rather than leaving a vacuum that other elements exploit.

Parliament

- Make parliament the center of collective decision-making.
- A clear stance of parliament on terrorism, extremism, hate mongering and discrimination and legislation and policy making reflects that stance.
- The elected representatives of the people engage in finalizing Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, and indeed towards all of the country's neighbors.

Political parties/politicians

- Religious and political parties adopt solely constitutional and legal avenues for acceptance of their demands.
- Political parties do not seek assistance from extremist groups in the electoral process, nor use them for political purposes.
- Political parties articulate their vision for addressing the challenges facing Pakistan, present their ideas for countering extremism and terrorism .
- Political parties empower the youth and benefit from their energy by offering them space, leadership and forums for discussion.
- Democratic reforms are introduced in the interest of the people.

Citizens & civil society

- The civil society serves as a bridge between communities and the state, with the state treating it as a partner rather than an adversary.
- The state lends support to civil society and religious scholars to ensure maximum advantage from all soft measures and to enforce such measures.
- Facilitation of active citizenship, which guarantees a peaceful society.
- Promotion of greater sensitivity about extremist forces and attitudes.
- Responsible use of the social media.

Religious leaders & madrassas

- Religious leaders promote the values of love for humanity, unity and harmony and curb hatred and hate-based narratives.
- Madrassas serve as the vanguard in confronting extremism with zero tolerance for sectarianism.
- Madrassas endorse and own the Paigham-e-Pakistan initiative.
- Madrassas promote the values of dialogue, rather than engaging in divisive discussions or *manazaras*

Education

- Reform of extremist attitudes to be the focus, objective and principle of curriculum formation.
- Focused efforts for creating in schools, colleges and universities an environment conducive for promotion of research, dialogue and critical awareness.
- Biased, discriminatory or insensitive material against other faiths present in public curriculum are weeded out.

Marginalized segments

- Protection of the rights and interests of marginalized segments and creation of favorable environment for their development.
- Prioritizing proactive measures to safeguard marginalized communities including women and religious minorities from violence.
- Expansion of the shrinking spaces for marginalized communities.

- Furnishing focused measure to ensure access to justice is not undermined due to any vulnerability.

Religious minorities

- No citizens is denied any constitutional rights on account of her or his religious faith.
- Suitable environment for the protection of the rights and development of citizens from religious minorities.

Women

- Protection of the economic, social and political rights of women and prioritization of steps for their participation in all spheres of life
- Facilitating women's role in weakening extremism.
- Removal of discrimination against women in various laws for equality of rights and opportunity to all citizens.
- Particular focus on ensuring women's access to education

Youth

- Urgent provision to youth of access to paths for personal progress in order to deny other elements space to attract them towards violent ideologies and extremism.
- Prioritizing provision of access to quality education and health for youth.

Culture

- Creation of conducive conditions for the advancement of all cultural identities of Pakistan.
- Promotion of a culture of book-reading.
- Enhancing cultural and educational connections with the neighboring countries and ease of travel for that purpose.
- Facilitation of dialogue among various segments to stem disharmony, intolerance and uncivilized behavior.
- Promotion of cultural values as the priority means of communication.
- Acknowledgment and celebration of diversity and harmony by recognizing the region's own culture, civilization and heroes.

Annex II

Perception assessment survey

Section 1 **Extent & impact**

Q 1. In your view, the predominant emphasis of Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism in recent years has been on which of the following? *(Only select one option)*

☐ Hard / military approaches

☐ Soft approaches

☐ A combination of soft and hard approaches

☐ Not sure

Q 2. To what extent have the recent gains in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism been dependent on the use of force? *(Only select one option)*

☐ To a great extent

☐ To some extent

☐ To very little extent

☐ Not at all

Q 3. Has Pakistan's approach against terrorism and violent extremism focused on reducing the appeal of militants' ideologies or their re-integration into society?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 4. Do you believe that such gains would be sustainable with the reliance continuing to be on the use of force alone?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 5. In your view, what have been some of the associated impacts of employing hard approaches in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism? *(Select all options that apply)*

☐ Prompt results

☐ The gains made have been sustainable

☐ Internal displacement/ other human rights concerns

☐ Civilians suffering economic losses and casualties

☐ Sentiments of alienation and revenge in affected population

☐ Economic cost of security operations & casualties among security personnel

c Others: (Please elaborate) ----------

Q 6. In your view, has Pakistan used soft approaches at all in its efforts against terrorism and violent extremism in recent years?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 7. If yes, do you think this use of soft approaches has been: *(Only select one option)*

☐ Extensive

☐ Frequent

☐ Minimal

Q 8. Do you recall any instance or example of soft approaches being employed in countering terrorism and violent extremism anywhere in Pakistan in recent years?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 9. If yes. Please elaborate: ----------

Q 10. In which area of Pakistan have the efforts against terrorism and violent extremism relied the most on soft approaches? *(Only select one option)*

☐	Azad Kashmir	☐	Balochistan
☐	Gilgit Baltistan	☐	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
☐	Punjab	☐	Sindh
☐	Don't know		

Q 11. In recent years, the role and use of soft approaches in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism has been: *(Only select one option)*

☐ Critical

☐ Somewhat important

☐ Somewhat unimportant

☐ Not important at all

Section 2 Scope & prospects

Q 12. In your view, in order to make sustainable gains in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism, the role and use of soft approaches will be: *(Only select one option)*

☐ Very important

☐ Somewhat important

☐ Somewhat unimportant

☐ Not important at all

Q 13. Why do you think soft approaches has not had a more prominent role in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism? *(Select all options that apply)*

☐ Desire to achieve immediate results

☐ Absence of long-term planning

☐ Lack of imagination

☐ Counter-terror effort being led by actors with expertise in use of hard power

☐ Other reasons: (Please elaborate) ----------

Q 14. What can be done to give it a more prominent role?

Q 15. Which institution should have the lead or central role in policy making regarding the use of soft approaches in dealing with terrorism and violent extremism? *(Only select <u>one option</u>)*

☐ Parliament

☐ NACTA

☐ Ministry of the Interior

☐ National Security Council

☐ Armed forces

☐ Political parties

☐ Civil society organizations

☐ Others: (Please elaborate) ----------

Q 16. What may be effective soft approaches in Pakistan's context?

Section 3 **Challenges & the way forward**

Q 17. Do you think that there might be resistance to introducing/enhancing reliance on soft approaches in Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and violent extremism measures?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 18. Why? Or Why not? (Please elaborate briefly) ----------

Q 19. What are the key challenges that you imagine may be encountered in introducing / expanding soft approaches in Pakistan's efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism? *(Select all options that apply)*

☐ Lack of expertise/capacity

☐ Inclination to persist with tried and tested approach

☐ Specific difficulties in a particular region

☐ Results emerging over a long period

☐ Others: (Please elaborate) ----------

Q 20. Briefly, please share how you believe these challenges may be addressed.

Q 21. Do you think there are any regions of Pakistan where any constraints may make it particularly difficult to introduce/expand soft approaches?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Q 22. If yes, please mention region/s, the difficulties and advise how such these may be overcome.

Q 23. Which stakeholder's support do you feel can be counted on the most for introducing/expanding soft approaches and why?

Q 24. Which stakeholder's support do you feel would be the most crucial in the efforts for introducing/expanding soft approaches and why?

