

## **Dynamics of Religious Extremism in Pakistan: Analyzing role of government, media and Seminaries**

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<b>Article History:</b> <b>Received:</b> 14 Sep, 2020 <b>Accepted:</b> 26 Mar, 2021	<b>ABSTRACT</b> <p>Although extremism and terrorism has long been a global threat, many countries have only just started developing systemic policies to tackle the root causes of religious extremism. Studying front-line countries like Pakistan is critical to understanding how to tackle the challenge effectively. Despite Pakistan's war with anti-government rebels like the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), Pakistan has been struggling for more than a decade to resolve the theoretical aspects of those problems. This study focused on understanding the role of government, media and religious seminaries (Madrassa System) in increasing or decreasing the religious extremism in Pakistan. The study adopted qualitative research method and analyzed the findings of previous research studies on the topic. The study revealed that though successive governments in Pakistan tried to overcome the menace of extremism, but due to certain policies of state, its lethargic approach and mistrust between government and madrasa leaders regarding reforms are major contributors of extremism in the country, while effective monitoring of media for extremist content and strict action can reduce religious extremism in the country.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Extremism, Madrassa, Mass Media, Minorities, National Security</p>
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### **Introduction**

In the material world human life is known as the most important tangible asset. The loss of innocent life is seen in Islamic society as the destruction of all mankind, or it will save one's life. For the past two decades, the world has occupied by extremism, fundamentalist, and terrorist ideologies that threaten society (Ghumro, Qureshi, & Mahesar, 2017). Even though a deviation from a standard or specification is an "extreme" collective term, the element is not a sufficient basis for explaining the threat to security

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(Baqai, 2011). Extremism, in this definition, means being done in a way that is done in the event of a particular political and religious agenda or under such two-pronged acts.

When these ideas and beliefs take shape and implement many plans and patterns, they lead to a state of fear and terrorism, influencing and not ready to accept the differences in acceptance. State radicals are individuals or groups that promote violence to further other people's beliefs, philosophies, or moral convictions. Pakistan's madrasas are seen by foreign actors as a source of extremism; such as the United States and its European allies (Khalid, 2014). Madrasa is an Arabic word, meaning "school;" however, there is no clear definition of the term madrasa (Bashir & Haq, 2019).

Although domestic terrorism was a global threat for a long time, many countries are now implementing systemic policies to address the causes of religious extremism. Studying front-line countries like Pakistan is crucial to understanding how to respond effectively to this challenge. Pakistan has begun a war against anti-Taliban militants while the ideological aspect of such threats has been struggling for more than 10 years (Malik, Zhilong, & Ashraf, 2019). Given that religious groups are responsible for all the extremism in Pakistan, the country needs to address the drivers of extremism in a transparent way.

Recently, the extremism affected country has changed its approach to the fight against terrorism and violent religious extremism which is evident in the NAP of 2015 (National Action Plan). This establishes the weaves key political priorities and contributes to a systematic strategy of force with a strategy of soft power (Yaseen & Naveed, 2018). Although the initiative has achieved political legitimacy to some extent, the government has failed to promote its peace keeping agendas and other counter terrorism measures. However, steps have been taken by Pakistani civil society to fill the gap in this area. Furthermore, Pakistan achieved modest success among numerous civil society organizations to resolve the religious aspect of violence around him.

The aim of this study is to analyze the existing literature on the subject matter, and make references, so as to understand the dynamics of religious extremism in Pakistan and the role of government, religious seminaries and leaders and media in increasing or decreasing religious extremism.

## **2. Methodology**

This study follows interpretative philosophical approach, with qualitative research method. There are different qualitative methods to study social phenomenon. The current study adopted literature research method. Literature research methodology is a method where, unlike other qualitative methods of research, the researcher relies on previous studies and their conclusions to understand a phenomenon, due to which it is also called as “non-contact method” (Lin, 2009). This study adopted narrative approach to reach at the conclusion from analyzing the currently available literature.

For a systematic analysis of literature, the researcher reviewed different studies relevant to the subject matter and reported them under different headings. Religious extremism has different aspects, and the researchers have categorized literature according to those aspects with separate headings. The rest of the article is comprised of those analyses of literature, followed by key findings from those studies. At the end the researchers provided conclusion and discussion of the findings.

## **3. Literature Analysis**

The literature analyzed in this study is presented here. Studies are categorized under various headings to present them in more systematic manner.

### **3.1 Reform of Madrasa**

The government's efforts to reform religious schools (madrasas) are related to the history of the spread of violent religious extremism. In the 1950s and 1960s, General Ayub Khan suggested some reforms for Islamic schools (madrasas), which were generally overruled by all political entities. These reforms were designed to improve the resource and economic situation proposed by General Zia al-Haq, whose Deni Mandars national committee.

Although thousands of new Islamic schools are being promoted across the country, scholars have rejected these suggestions. The madrassa sector's neutral growth has caused concern by Benazir Bhutto's government. The PPP government closed the registration of new madrassas in 1994 as a consequence. At that time, registration of madrassas by the government was legally necessary for registration with the government under the Act 1860. Hundreds of unregistered Islamic schools have appeared in the years that followed. At the time of the 1999 re-registration, many Islamic schools were against the intervention of the government.

President Musharraf implemented many reform proposals at the beginning of the twenty-first century, including the 2002 Voluntary Registration and Control Regulations, and a five-year, \$113 million program to incorporate secular subjects into the Islamic school curriculum. Such activities earned a bit of a rash and lost funding and support. While madrassas remained largely lysed by the sphere of control or power of government (Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military, 2002). In 2005, the government introduced changes to the Act on Registration of the Association, which mandates all Islamic schools to register annually with the government, subject to financial audits and ending militancy and sectarianism. In 2005, the government introduced changes to the Act on Registration of the Association, which mandates all Islamic schools to register annually with the government, subject to financial audits and ending militancy and sectarianism.

The government has tried to engage constructively in the implementation of the measure with the National Madrasa Oversight Board (ITMD), but the contradictions already existed hindered the talks and many madrassas opposed the new rules and regulations. A few years later, ITMD and the Interior Ministry signed an agreement to collaborate jointly on crucial issues, including curriculum reform and registration.

After the agreement, the government reported a total of 8,656 schools, bringing the number of registered Islamic schools to 14,656, which is still below the more than 35,000 currently believed to exist (Dawn, 2011).

### **3.2 Religious Extremism**

There are several reasons why conservatives resist violent religious extremism as opposed to physical security, loss of religious legitimacy and traditional and customary adherence (Malik, Zhilong, & Rafay, 2019). As a result, a more active role is required to use a larger deal of social capital to turn religious conservatives into a role that can only be achieved through building trust and stable mutual relationships through a long and detailed process. Not only at the mutual level, but also at the government level, this strategy is essential.

Most madrasa leaders fear the government will use the national action plan to justify the decision and, for historical reasons, their madrassas will be attacked. Instead of listening to and recognizing the interests of these stakeholders in Islamic schools, government officials have often tried to push for rigorous reforms, including a total ban on Islamic schools in some areas. This is counterproductive and will impede long-term solutions and strain tensions already (Mahsood, 2017).

### **3.3 Combating hate speech and extremist content**

A new education policy was adopted by Pakistan in 2009 which includes a provision excluding from teaching materials controversial materials targeting any religion or minority (Nicole, 2014). The government ordered the concerned departments to take tough action against individuals who spread sectarianism on social media or mobile phones in November 2013 (Tribune, 2013). Social media will be monitored to recognize controversial statements capable of helping in a sectarian conflict and taking action against those who share those messages. Through October, the National Plan of Action's effective monitoring of progress reported that some 9,400 musketeers had been arrested for spreading sectarian hatred. About 6,504 cases were reported against religious leaders in Punjab, 1,647 in Sindh, 1,286 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and 47 in Baluchistan (Zahid, 2015).

According to a recent survey by the Ministry of the Interior and Narcotics 2,337 hate speech cases have been reported, 2,195 arrests have been made, and 73 shops have been closed. Similarly, 9,164 cases have been registered, 9,340 people have been arrested and 2,452 items of equipment have been seized for misuse of loudspeakers. In addition, these laws led to the arrest of JUI-F leader Mufti Kifayat Ullah, with "inflammatory rhetoric" (Zain, 2015) and the launch of international hate speech campaigns in 45 districts of Punjab and KPK (Dawn, 2015).

### **3.4 Penal justice system in Pakistan**

Before the National Plan of Action was implemented, Pakistan's criminal justice system was facing grave challenges in resolving the problems of dealing with violence incidents. Around 5,000 alleged terrorists and suspects have been arrested by Operation Karachi, most of whom will trial for counter-terrorism trials (Imtiaz, 2014). While struggling with a large number of cases, witnesses and prosecutors are often threatened, making it impossible for those cases to be prosecuted. The 2014 Pakistan Protection Act seeks to address this issue by strengthening witness protection, judges, and other related judicial personnel (Asad, 2014). While those pressing issues persisted after the National Action Plan was initiated, no significant change had occurred (Zeeshan, 2015). There was a close connection between the religious extremism and the status of Pakistan as an Islamic state (Ahmad, 2007).

### **3.5 Modern Extremist**

Now that most modern extremist and terrorist groups receive micro and macro-level support from deprived, isolated, vulnerable and angry minorities within the State, as well as from those with good relations on weapons, the speed of communication and

global influence, which makes them even more dangerous, these small groups are gaining increasing strength and prominence (Botticher, 2017).

### **3.6 Political Extremism**

Political extremism is pushing the people of Pakistan to take a divisive path due to a lack of confidence between the people and politicians (Montero, 2007). Social interaction between the public and the political leaders is changing conduct in society. The Pakistani public lacks confidence in politicians because the elected leaders have broken their promises repeatedly. Even the fundamental problems of ordinary citizens have not been resolved by the Pakistani Government, all of which promote a radical approach. The general public feels robbed of their fundamental rights, and they are trying to find new ways of meeting life's needs. Public leaders and people communicate with a social system, and that's why, within a system, they affect one another.

The reality that we have recognized from our social environment is political extremism. Our political leaders' ideals and personalities are strengthening political extremism within Pakistan. Politicians have not addressed citizens' fundamental problem and the general public has lost faith in them. The public at large thinks they don't have any government advantages like food. Sometimes that sense of institutional incompetence and marginalization causes powerful efforts to move away from the sense of disenfranchisement. Thus, our domestic environment and the character of our politicians influence Pakistan's policy, and that sense of deprivation in Pakistan is causing extremism.

### **3.7 National Security of Pakistan**

Terrorism and extremism are the most complex issues of national security in Pakistan and need to be tackled by effective policy formulation and implementation. Such concerns affect not only international affairs but also domestic stability leading to social instability and terrorism. Legislation requires exchange of information and exchanging best methods to manage them properly, since these problems represent a varied and complex national security threat. Pakistan is at a crossroads as a result of the suffering of this violent extremism which poses a serious threat to its socio-political peace. Only peace can bring about social harmony, and violence, fear, and devastation can lead to insecurity, pressure, and weakening of different institutions (Hafeez, 2008).

### **3.8 Afghan Taliban Support**

During the 1990s, when Pakistani strategic planners in hopes of keeping India out of Afghanistan supported the Afghan Taliban, radicalism intensified because Pakistan allowed them to use their tribal territory as haven (Malik, & Zhilong, 2019). The side effect is that tribal people have become radicalized, where the militants have gained

considerable influence and formed their own, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in 2007, which started opposing U.S. operations in Afghanistan and also against the military operations of Pakistan in FATA. They commenced suicide bombing of civilians and troops. We are Islam's Deobandi edition, and have close ties to Jamita Ulema-Islam in Pashtun (Joshi, 2019).

### **3.9 Various Forms of Extremism**

Extremism is a multi-dimensional, various phenomenon that discusses different definitions of extremism. The famous scholar Moonis Ahmar has divided extremism in Pakistan into different types. Extremism in Pakistan can be divided into different types:

- Class extremism.
- Racial extremism
- Sectarian extremism.
- Gender extremism.
- 5. Religious extremism (Hasan, 2005)

### **3.10 Tough challenges**

The Government of Pakistan faces many difficulties in addressing the religion of violent extremist organizations. Perhaps critically, there is no legitimacy at all for the government to properly control those at risk of radicalization. Several Pakistani sources highlighted the question, and were even recognized by the Interior Ministry itself. The ministry claimed that "religious scholars, teachers, educational institutions, and media are key partners in nationwide news creation and dissemination." Constructive collaboration with Pakistan's civil society (Johnston, McDonnell, Burbridge, & Patton, 2016).

### **3.11 Minority Discrimination in Pakistan**

Recently Pakistan was ranked 3rd in the Global Terrorism Index of the Institute for Economics and Peace, and the country's terrorist occurrences have also involved religious minorities (Dawn, 2014). Talibanisation in Pakistan has largely posed threat to the ethnic minorities of the region. While the majority of Pakistanis are victims of terrorist attacks, religious minorities, especially Ahmadi, Shia, Christian and Hazaras, are being targeted by militant and religious clusters (Ispahani, 2013). Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LEJ) is a banned militant group engaged in shia attacks while The Jedullah Hazara is involved in Shia brutal treatment. The TTP is Pakistan's most infamous militant group, not only in violence on Christians but in all major Pakistani cities as well.

Many minority communities, especially the Hindus, leave for safe land. Between January 2013 and June 2014, 3,753 Pakistanis, especially Hindus, yielded their passports, and long-term visas were granted for travel to India (Mansoor, 2014). Gregory

(2012) referred to several well-known anti-Christian attacks including the 2002 assault on a Christian church in Murree, the September 2002 murder of seven Christian employees at a welfare agency in Karachi and the 2004 execution of two underage girls. Massie was murdered in Lahore, Samuel Masih was killed in 2004 for blasphemy, a Christian social worker was killed along with his driver in 2005 in city of Peshawar, and a Christian stonemason was attacked in 2006 by a mob.

A Christian youth gang-raped by 30 people for declining to adapt to Islam, one mob, among other incidents, burned down more than 40 houses in Gojra in 2009. Such events lead to the belief that ferocity against Christians is not restricted to an area or a community (Gregory, 2012). Violence towards minorities always goes hand in hand with their settlement. In Sindh, where the Hindu minority is founded, the oppression incidence is much lower than in Punjab, against Christians. Therefore, Punjab is more conservative than Sindh (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2019).

### **3.12 Forced Exchanges and Marriages**

A prominent example of such cases was the kidnapping of Anjali Kamari at the age of 12 and consequently she was forced into exchanges and marriages. Parents of Kumari in Sukkur's hometown of Kumari claim Kumari is a 12-year-old minor who is unable to marry and convert to another faith (Memon, 2014). It is also believed that economic and social fronts have chosen to deliberately change the religion of the majority in Islam, and gain more opportunities (Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions in the Christian Community of Pakistan, 2014).

## **4. Major Findings of the Study**

From the above analysis, the researchers extracted the following major findings which are important to the phenomenon under study.

- Successive governments in Pakistan have tried to introduce reforms in Madrasa system, which meet with resistance from the religious sectors. However, in the course of history Pakistan has introduced certain reforms in Madrasas to keep check on extremist ideologies and sectarianism.
- Government and madrasa leaders mistrust each other which hamper the process of regulating Madrasas.
- By taking rigorous action against hate speech particularly on media and online social networks, government affectively acted against extremist elements promoting hate against minorities in the country.

- Due to incomplete implementation of National Action Plan, particularly by not introducing judicial reforms, the current justice system did not help in overcoming violent extremism in Pakistan.
- The extreme and hardline narratives and behavior in politics are also responsible for religious extremism in Pakistan.
- Extremism is also a bigger challenge to the national security of Pakistan, and Pakistan cannot afford to live with violent religious extremism for long.
- The history of state's support to different violent extremist groups like Afghan Taliban, also gave rise to extremism in the country.
- The policies of discrimination at state level against religious minorities lend support to heightened religious extremism in the country.

## **5. Conclusion**

Although terrorist violence in Pakistan may have diminished in recent years, violent extremist religious groups have become a cornerstone of Pakistani society (Johnston, McDonnell, Burbridge & Patton, 2016). In order to combat this threat more security measures are needed. This needs profound changes in society, religion and politics.

This study found that though government attempted to overcome the problem of religious extremism, but its efforts were not much successful due to mistrust between government and Seminary's leaders, problems and weaknesses in legal system of Pakistan, attitude of state and religious leaders towards religious minorities and not implementing National Action Plan with letter and spirit. (Ispahani, 2017; Fazli, 2012) identified that state promoted certain religious ideologies, which give rise to religious intolerance against non-Muslims as well as against minority sects within Islam. The legal system of Pakistan is also biased against certain religious ideologies, and when state failed to implement those laws, extremist elements took law in their hand which started a trend of violence in religious extremism (Khan, 2019). Wibisono (2019) suggested that mass media play vital role in increasing or decreasing extremist ideologies. When media stop propagating religious based hate, it can have effects on the society as well (Wibisono, 2019).

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