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Message from the National Coordinator

The Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research (PJTR) provides a platform where scholars, practitioners and policymakers converge to comprehend the root causes of extremism and terrorism and propose constructive policy recommendations and way forward. PJTR is the only journal in Pakistan exclusively dedicated to the study of extremism and terrorism. Therefore, with every edition its significance in policy and academic circles continues to grow considerably. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) has now also formally recognized PJTR, which is a testament to the quality of research and dedication of NATCA’s Research and Development (R&D) team.

With these achievements, I present to you our highly anticipated Volume-5, Issue-II (July-Dec 2023) edition of PJTR. This issue consists of five outstanding articles that respectively take on an important facet of extremism and terrorism. Given the growing significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential for countering and preventing online extremism, two articles deal exclusively with AI and the issue of online radicalization. As with previous editions, attention has also been paid to the causes of extremism as one of the articles explores in detail the factors fueling radicalization in Pakistan. To promote comparative analysis and learn from international best practices, a comparative study of CVE practices in Pakistan and Singapore has also been conducted. Lastly, there is a fascinating piece of literary work that vividly portrays the suffering of women as victims of terrorism. The diverse themes in this edition reflect the multidisciplinary approach taken up by PJTR to understand the multifaceted nature of terrorism in the country.
I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the contributing authors, peer reviewers and the editorial team of PJTR for making this edition possible. My special thanks are also due to HEC for acknowledging the hard work, dedication and commitment of NACTA’s Research Wing and awarding PJTR its highly prized category. I am hopeful, as HEC recognized journal, the PJTR will substantially enhance quality of its publications in the years to come.

IGP Muhammad Tahir Rai, HSt, SI, PSP
National Coordinator
NACTA
Combating Online Violent Extremism through AI: Avenues for Pakistan

Nimra Javed

The article scrutinizes the dual-use predicament associated with Artificial Intelligence, wherein technology serves both advantageous and detrimental roles. It explores the potential utilization of AI as a tool to counteract online violent extremism. A crucial proposition set forth by this study involves the development of AI detection models tailored to the nuances of the Pakistani context.

Artificial Intelligence to Combat Extremism

Warisha Rashid

This research article explores the potential to recognize, understand, and block online extremist content by utilizing Artificial Intelligence’s computational power, real-time data analysis capabilities, and machine learning techniques. Since using AI also raises questions about cultural sensitivity, free speech, and privacy, the article also cautions against its highly probable ethical fallout.

Decoding the Radicalization Puzzle: Uncovering the Factors Fueling the Fire in Pakistan

Amber Javed, Dr. Noor Elahi & Dr. Bahadar Nawab

This article sets out to analyze the underlying factors contributing to radicalization in Pakistan by drawing on the perspectives and insights of experts in the field. It contends that radicalization in Pakistan stems from a complex interplay of factors, including historical context, geographical
considerations, foreign interference and a number of socioeconomic, political, and religious factors.

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Syed Saqib Ali Shah
This article provides a comparative analysis of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore. It argues that a smart and proactive CVE program built on a "whole of nation/community approach" similar to the highly successful model of Singapore can assist Pakistan in consolidating its CVE gains and fill in the gaps that continue to persist.

Silent Sufferers Unveiled: Exploring Women’s Trauma through Shahnaz Bashir’s Scattered Souls 82
Sanabil Mohsin, Dr. Mazhar Hayat & Dr. Saira Akhter
Against the backdrop of the longstanding Indian occupation of Kashmir, this paper delves into the overlooked and ignored narratives of women enduring suffering silently within conflict zones. Specifically focusing on Shahnaz Bashir's poignant collection of short stories, Scattered Souls, the paper aims to bring to fore marginalized voices that are suppressed by larger nationalist narratives.

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## Acronyms

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<thead>
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGI</td>
<td>Artificial General Intelligence</td>
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<td>APC</td>
<td>All Parties Conference</td>
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<td>ARS</td>
<td>The Asatizah Recognition Scheme</td>
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<td>AYN</td>
<td>Asatizah Youth Network</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>BLA</td>
<td>Balochistan Liberation Army</td>
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<td>CECVE</td>
<td>Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism</td>
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<td>CEP</td>
<td>Community Engagement Program</td>
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<td>Daesh-K</td>
<td>Daesh Khorasan</td>
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<td>DREP</td>
<td>De-Radicalization and Emancipation Program</td>
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<td>DGRE</td>
<td>Directorate General for Religious Education</td>
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<td>DIS</td>
<td>Directorate of Internal Security</td>
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<td>FATA</td>
<td>Federally Administered Tribal Areas</td>
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<td>GIFT</td>
<td>Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism</td>
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<td>GPT</td>
<td>Generative-Pre-Trained</td>
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<td>Inter-Racial Confidence Circle</td>
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<td>IRI</td>
<td>Islamic Research Institute</td>
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<td>ISD</td>
<td>Internal Security Department</td>
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<td>ISIS</td>
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<td>KNNs</td>
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<td>LEAs</td>
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<td>Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training</td>
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<td>MRHA</td>
<td>Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act</td>
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<td>MUIS</td>
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<td>Newly Merged Districts</td>
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<td>Paigham-e-Pakistan</td>
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<td>RRF</td>
<td>Rapid Response Force</td>
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<td>RRG</td>
<td>Religious Rehabilitation Group</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan</td>
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<td>SVMs</td>
<td>Support Vector Machines</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEVTA</td>
<td>Technical and Vocational Training Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIP</td>
<td>Threat Intelligence Platform</td>
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<td>TLP</td>
<td>Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan</td>
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Combating Online Violent Extremism Through AI: Avenues for Pakistan

Nimra Javed* 

Abstract

This research paper explores the potential utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool to counteract online violent extremism. The study specifically concentrates on the Pakistani landscape, recognizing the imperative for proactive measures due to the constantly evolving nature of violent extremism, particularly in the realm of internet and social media. It uses qualitative methodology as it relies primarily on extensive literature review and logical conclusions drawn from relevant research in the field. The primary focus of this inquiry lies in scrutinizing the dual-use predicament associated with AI, wherein technology serves both advantageous and detrimental roles. Additionally, the research delves into the strategies employed by extremist entities in exploiting online channels for recruitment and radicalization. The core purpose of this study however revolves around utilization of AI for effective identification and mitigation of extremist content. This objective is pursued through the application of sentiment analysis and threat intelligence mechanisms, which monitor activities across the dark web and offer anticipatory insights into potential threats. A crucial proposition set forth by this study involves the development of AI detection models tailored to the nuances of the Pakistani context.

Key Words: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Violent Extremism, Social Media, Sentiment Analysis, Terrorism.

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1. Introduction

The pervasiveness of social media coupled with its easy and hassle-free access has provided extremists in Pakistan and the world over with a handy tool by means of which they can promote and advertise their highly controversial and dangerous content. Many extremist organizations have quite skillfully leveraged social networking sites and video-sharing platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to disseminate their ideologies and allure prospective adherents. Owing to the user-friendly nature of these platforms, there has been an expeditious proliferation of extremist content. This content encompasses a fairly wide spectrum, ranging from expressions of hatred and fervent narratives to extremely graphic depictions of violent perpetrations.\(^1\) This online proliferation has markedly exacerbated the predicament confronted by Pakistani authorities in mitigating the surge of violent extremism.

Violent Extremists can be defined as, “individuals who support or commit ideologically motivated violence to further their political goals.”\(^2\) Violent Extremism (VE) is multifaceted as it may have various manifestations like religious extremism, anti-government, right-wing and left-wing, for which social media platforms can be conveniently used. This necessitates countering such trends through the use of technological innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI, here is understood as the narrow AI and not Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).\(^3\)

Narrow AI systems are tailored for specific tasks and lack the comprehensive cognitive abilities typically sought in AGI. In comparison, broad

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AGI systems aspire to encompass a wide array of capabilities. Narrow AI systems are engineered with the purpose of executing particular functions and often necessitate substantial reprogramming or retraining to undertake alternative tasks. The implementation of AI technology carries the potential for both positive and adverse consequences. Terrorist organizations may harness AI to amplify the dissemination of their propaganda. Conversely, government entities entrusted with law enforcing responsibilities, may leverage AI to enhance their operational efficacy and counter extremist strategies.4

To effectively combat the scourge of violent extremism, law enforcement agencies are progressively adopting AI technology. AI algorithms possess the capability to discern patterns and indicators associated with extremist behavior through the analysis of extensive volumes of online data, encompassing content from social media platforms, chat records, and websites, among other digital sources.

Machine learning (ML) based algorithms facilitate swift identification and surveillance of potentially incriminating information, thereby empowering authorities to proactively intervene and mitigate potential threats. Furthermore, the incorporation of AI-driven sentiment analysis and linguistic processing aids in deciphering the tenor and intent of online communications, thereby aiding law enforcement agents in distinguishing innocuous discourse from potentially perilous expressions. This symbiotic amalgamation of AI and law enforcement capacities augments the ability to detect and counteract instances of violent extremism, thereby enhancing the safety of both the digital realm and the society at large.5

Thomas James Vaughan Williams et al., argue that social media plays an extremely

important role in modern-day communications.\(^6\) Hanna Munden in her article similarly discusses the role of social media in transforming people’s lives and even identities.\(^7\)

This study examines the spread of violent extremism in Pakistan on social media platforms as well as discusses how AI can be used to counter violent extremism in online spaces. It is important to note at the start that AI can be used for both spreading and combating extremism online. It is crucial therefore to invest resources into not just how AI can be utilized for effectively countering violent extremism online but also how terrorist and extremist organizations can be barred from using AI for their nefarious intentions.

2. Methodology
This study takes a qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data sourced from scholarly publications, government documents, and online archives. The methods employed for data collection encompass a comprehensive literature review and thematic analysis, placing a significant emphasis on the identification and in-depth understanding of overarching themes pertinent to the study.

3. Dual Use Dilemma
Historically, the term "dual-use" has been employed to delineate technologies with the capacity to serve both civilian and military enterprises. In the contemporary technological landscape, the conundrum of dual use arises when a scientific pursuit has benevolent as well as malevolent applications. This predicament, often referred to as the "dual-use dilemma," encapsulates instances where a technological artifact,


tool, or body of knowledge could be harnessed to yield positive or negative outcomes, contingent upon its application.\textsuperscript{8}

The nomenclature "dual-use dilemma" emerges from the broader concept of "dual-use," representing a scenario characterized by the intricate interplay of two opposing applications or implications. This intricate paradox manifests when an innovation, conceived with laudable objectives in mind, inadvertently presents the possibility of being exploited or repurposed to perpetrate acts that are inherently deleterious or injurious.\textsuperscript{9}

Numerous technologies embody the potential for dual use, wielding the capacity to ameliorate human existence, advance scientific cognition, and propel economic advancement. Often borne from altruistic motives, these technologies find application in domains such as medical advancement, environmental monitoring, communication enhancement, and mitigation of the afflictions stemming from natural calamities.\textsuperscript{10}

These very technologies may be susceptible to malevolent exploitation, encompassing realms like surveillance, cyber warfare, biological weaponry, and the augmentation of numerous military capabilities, among others. The potential for detriment may arise from unforeseen consequences, malevolent manipulation of technology, or the perpetual evolution of technical prowess.\textsuperscript{11}


The ethical quandary of selecting between two divergent applications invokes moral apprehensions concerning obligation, culpability, and intent. Innovators and researchers, perhaps unwittingly, become enmeshed in endeavors yielding adverse ramifications. Deliberate ethical ratiocination becomes imperative to strike an equilibrium between the potential for positive impact and the potential for negative repercussions. The ramifications of dual-use technologies extend beyond individual ethical predicaments, imperiling global stability and security. The utilization of AI presents a dichotomy of beneficial and detrimental applications. This paradox is particularly evident when considering how an algorithm with substantial economic advantages could inadvertently lead to the creation of massively destructive weaponry. Globally, AI's misuse harbors the potential for catastrophic consequences.

4. Spread of Violent Extremism through Internet

Researchers are widely in consensus regarding the immense potential of online indoctrination. Substantial evidence indicates that violent extremist organizations exploit online channels for multifarious activities, encompassing recruitment, propagation of propaganda, community cultivation, psychological warfare, tactical planning, information dissemination, network establishment, and financial transactions. The modalities employed for these activities’ manifest variability contingent on the group’s ideology and individualistic considerations.

Extremists advocating violence are capitalizing on the facile accessibility to an ever-expanding audience facilitated by the internet, thereby recruiting, grooming, and radicalizing vulnerable individuals. Social media in particular

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Combating Online Violent Extremism Through AI: Avenues for Pakistan

allows extremist recruiters to exponentially broaden their outreach to groups and individuals hitherto unreceptive to conventional methodologies.¹³

This engenders the potential for radical recruiters to engage with otherwise inaccessible segments of the population. Their strategies involve promulgating their ideologies, fomenting antipathy towards adversaries, exhorting acts of violence, venerating martyrs, constituting virtual enclaves of like-minded adherents, furnishing religious or legal rationale for proposed actions, and interfacing with and indoctrinating novices. These activities are carried out on a range of online platforms, encompassing ordinary websites, mainstream social media conglomerates such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, alongside other digital services.¹⁴

Dissemination of incendiary content, including instructional materials elucidating bomb fabrication and weaponry operation, recordings chronicling successful assaults, discourses espousing radical doctrines, blog entries, and comments endorsing and further inflaming acts of aggression constitute prevalent strategies espoused by online extremists. Notably, terrorist entities exploit the popular online social media platform, Facebook, for confidential communication and information exchange to coordinate attacks, as well as generating pages garnering user "likes" to showcase support. Furthermore, these entities harness the likes of Twitter for disseminating propaganda and official statements, alongside uploading radical sermons and instructional videos onto YouTube.

A notable illustration pertains to the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), recognized for its adept production of sophisticated audiovisual content, extensively propagated across prominent social media avenues such as YouTube.

and Twitter. Furthermore, ISIS has adeptly assimilated emergent technologies and embraced evolving social media platforms, notably including Telegram. These endeavors collectively serve the purpose of amplifying its ideological discourse and engendering the recruitment of fresh adherents within the realm of cyberspace.15

Their interactions, networking, and message dissemination have transpired via diverse internet mediums, comprising message boards, chat rooms, and even dating websites. By establishing profiles, pages, and accounts across a spectrum of platforms, smaller organizations project an illusion of critical mass and devoted participation for their cause. Furthermore, the pervasive availability of internet connectivity across global regions amplifies the appeal of these organizations and project an impression of heightened potency.

5. Use of AI by Extremist Groups
Extremist groups may use AI for various notorious activities. Deepfakes, being one of the most stand out of such activities, constitute fabricated audio and/or visual content that has been manipulated or synthesized through the utilization of Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs). The term "deepfakes" pertains to this genre of manipulated media. Deepfakes have emerged as a prominent exemplar of the untoward employment of AI in contemporary times, garnering significant attention from media due to the conundrums they pose in distinguishing authentic renditions from counterfeit ones (a challenge encountered by both human observers and computational systems). This technology and its associated potential have cast a shadow over the landscape of information warfare, wherein deepfakes could serve as potent instruments.

The credibility of conventional, authoritative media is poised to undergo erosion in the wake of the pervasive use of deepfakes for dissemination of misleading information. The intricate task of verifying the authenticity of videos creates a situation wherein any conceivably compromising visual material can be debunked, given the plausible assertion that the audio-visual content has been synthetically fabricated. Consequently, even if the fidelity of the contested video material remains unscathed, possibility for any party to repudiate its genuineness persists, thereby enabling them to evade accountability for the objectionable actions.

Beyond the realm of audio-visual deepfake creation, AI can be harnessed for generation of tailored narratives with the intent of fomenting radicalization. Apprehensions have been raised regarding the potential exploitation of this technology for micro-profiling, micro-targeting, automatic composition of persuasive text for recruitment endeavors, and dissemination of customized counterfeit news and conspiracy theories linked to terrorism. The advent of sophisticated techniques in Natural Language Processing (NLP), notably exemplified by Open AI's prominently featured GPT-3, has further exacerbated these concerns.

The utilization of AI-fueled spurious news platforms may yield deleterious consequences, particularly considering the escalating proclivity among online readers to disseminate articles based on their headlines, often engaging in cursory perusal without undertaking substantive due diligence regarding the veracity of the sources. This trend is especially disconcerting, given its growing prevalence. Consequently, the prospect arises that extremist organizations might eventually deploy artificial intelligence systems that autonomously analyze genuine news headlines and generate succinct yet fabricated proclamations for propagation across social media and analogous conduits, furthering their ideological agenda.
6. Use of AI to Counter Violent Extremism

Automated content moderation has gained popularity as a pragmatic approach to managing the overwhelming volumes of user-generated content online and the rapidity with which specific content can attain viral status. This strategy has proven effective in addressing the extensive amounts of user-generated content online. In the realm of content curation and moderation, private organizations employ diverse automated methods that involve removal, downgrading, or redirection of viewers to alternative content. For example, Facebook utilizes ML algorithms to ascertain the priority level of each piece of content necessitating examination.

Instances of content that contravene the company's regulations can be flagged by users or detected by ML filters. These violations encompass a spectrum from spam to content that "glorifies violence," including expressions of hate speech. Since 2020, Facebook has chosen to expeditiously handle blatant transgressions by promptly removing the content or suspending the associated account. Human content moderators are only tasked with reviewing content when reasonable suspicion arises regarding its alignment with the company's policies.

In its campaign against terrorism and violent extremism, Facebook employs a spectrum of strategies, among which is the utilization of AI language models to comprehend content that may endorse terrorism. Such textual content is often specific to distinct languages and socio-cultural groups.

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Notwithstanding its drawbacks, automated content moderation systems are increasingly acknowledged as an imperative within the private sector. This is owing to the prodigious volume of information disseminated online daily. Given the inherent intricacies, it is unsurprising that governmental authorities traditionally possess limited influence over content moderation and removal.20 In response to mounting criticisms that social media corporations inadequately manage information proliferation within prevailing self-regulatory frameworks, several nations have endeavored to enact national legislation aimed at compelling companies to take more decisive actions.21

This could encompass regulating the pace at which content must be expunged alongside introducing incentives and penalties for violations. A notable instance of such national legislation is Germany's Network Enforcement Act, 2017. Another illustrative example is the European Union’s recent legislative measures to combat the dissemination of terrorist content online, which mandates the removal of such content within an hour of receiving removal requests.22

7. Sentiment Analysis
Individuals utilize online social networking platforms to openly express their thoughts, viewpoints, and emotions, whether positive or negative. Prior research has examined the sentiments conveyed on these platforms to investigate behaviors across diverse settings and for various purposes. Researchers have been

particularly interested in employing automated techniques to classify the polarity of public sentiments based on concise language usage in communications, such as tweets. This involves the analysis of data gathered from social media platforms to glean insights into public opinion.

Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube exemplify online social networks that have evolved into prominent platforms for millions of individuals utilizing the internet to establish and nurture interpersonal connections. The proliferation of microblogging services in recent years has significantly influenced people’s modes of thinking, communicating, behaving, learning, and conducting businesses. These widely adopted social platforms represent innovative forms of blogging developed to facilitate enhanced interpersonal communication. Users express their beliefs, ideas, and thoughts, constructively or detrimentally, whether through tweet messages, blog posts, article and video shares, or messages on social networking sites.

In their 2019 study, Ahmad et al. employed a binary classification method to detect potential extremist affiliations. The focal point of this research is machine learning classifiers, encompassing models like random forests, support vector machines (SVMs), k-nearest neighbors (KNNs), Naive Bayes, and deep learning. This investigation is structured into three primary segments, deploying emotion-based extremist categorization techniques to analyze tweets:

i. Collection of user tweets;
ii. Classification of these tweets into extremist and non-extremist groups using various deep learning-based sentiment models;
iii. Preparation and processing of the data.
These models integrate techniques such as FastText, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN/ConvNet), and Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks.\textsuperscript{23} While the study's results demonstrate the method's efficacy in enhancing precision, recall, F-measure, and accuracy, certain limitations persist—such as the classification is confined to a binary class categorization rather than a multi-class scheme. Furthermore, the process of gathering, cleaning, and storing Twitter data lacks the desired level of automation required to streamline these procedures and enhance efficiency.

In Kaur et al.'s study, deep learning is employed to automatically detect extremism. Annotators specializing in relevant themes were engaged to categorize collected data into three classes: radical, non-radical, and irrelevant. Word2Vec was utilized to generate word embeddings from the collected data. To identify extremism and classify data as radical, non-radical, or irrelevant, the study utilized LSTM. The data was labeled by specialized annotators based on attributes provided by the authors.\textsuperscript{24} These attributes encompass aspects such as mistreatment of military personnel, anti-national rhetoric, promotion of terrorism or terrorists, and incitement of others. The identification of radical content across online media employed various ML techniques including random forest, SVM, and Max Entropy. The proposed method achieved an accuracy of 85.7\%, which could be further refined by incorporating an additional layer of CNN to enhance attribute identification precision.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{25} Kaur, Saini, and Bansal, “Detecting Radical Text over Online Media,” 2
8. **Spread of Violent Extremism in Pakistan**

In the context of Pakistan's terrorist milieu, groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Daesh-Khorasan (Daesh-K) have established substantial social media propaganda operations. Despite AI-driven checks and significant purging efforts by platforms like Facebook and Twitter, TTP and Daesh-K have maintained a modest presence on these networks. Furthermore, both factions are increasingly utilizing encrypted chat platforms such as WhatsApp, Rocket Chat, Hoop Messenger, and Telegram.\(^{26}\)

To circumvent crackdowns, both TTP and Daesh-K have transitioned much of their propaganda to the dark web. However, the proliferation of social media platforms poses significant challenges in completely eradicating TTP and Daesh-K propaganda from their accounts. These groups demonstrate remarkable adaptability, continually adjusting to the evolving social media landscape. Their survival and propaganda dissemination rely on constantly seeking new, lesser-known, yet secure encrypted platforms.\(^{27}\)

While past studies have concentrated on detecting radical content or identifying social media accounts displaying radical indicators, it is paramount to underscore here the complexity of simply categorizing individuals as radical or extremist. The potential for false positives underscores the delicate nature of this task, as misclassification may subject innocents to unwarranted surveillance or policing scrutiny.

9. **Violent Extremism and AI in Pakistan**

The rise of AI and ML technologies holds both promising and challenging implications for Pakistan's efforts in countering violent extremism, particularly on


\(^{27}\) Basit, “Creating Social Firewalls against Militants.”
the dark web. Effective utilization of these technologies requires careful calibration, enabling cybersecurity and law enforcement professionals to adequately detect and mitigate threats. Although AI and ML excel in analyzing the extensive data on the dark web to identify patterns in terrorist activities and enhance real-time threat detection, their success heavily depends on a deep understanding of the local context—cultural and linguistic nuances. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy integrating technical expertise with human insight is crucial for Pakistan, acknowledging the limitations of existing AI models while maximizing their strengths to combat violent extremism effectively.

To safeguard citizens from the potential hazards posed by the dark web, law enforcement agencies must maintain a constant state of vigilance and harness evolving technologies such as AI and ML.\(^\text{28}\) AI and ML offer a diverse array of sophisticated tools and strategies that law enforcement and cyber security experts can employ to more effectively monitor and counteract the risks emanating from the dark web. These technologies can effectively be leveraged to bolster security.\(^\text{29}\)

For instance, these technologies can be adeptly utilized in the realm of threat intelligence. AI and ML can process extensive volumes of data sourced from the dark web, discerning intricate patterns and trends in criminal activities and terrorist organizations.\(^\text{30}\) This extracted information can then serve as a foundation for guiding law enforcement operations and formulating cyber security measures that exhibit heightened efficacy. Moreover, real-time threat detection, powered by


AI and ML, permits prompt identification of malicious behaviors such as malware proliferation and illicit trading of stolen data, terrorist activities and planning.\textsuperscript{31} Consequently, rapid interventions can be undertaken to mitigate the perils stemming from these illicit activities.

An additional application lies in sentiment analysis, enabled by AI techniques. This entails scrutinizing the language used within dark web forums and other online communities to ascertain the prevailing tone and sentiment of discussions. This analysis can unveil potential threats, thereby furnishing law enforcement with insights that inform their strategic responses. In parallel, predictive analytics, a feature of AI and ML involves scrutinizing dark web data to anticipate forthcoming patterns and activities. By accessing this predictive capability, authorities can preemptively identify emerging threats and initiate preventive actions.\textsuperscript{32}

In preparation for the deployment of a Threat Intelligence Platform (TIP), organizations must first delineate the specific categories of threats that necessitate monitoring. Thorough research is indispensable to select a fitting TIP that aligns with their objectives. Subsequently, a structured approach ensues, encompassing project scoping, TIP implementation, outcome assessment, action initiation, strategy review, and adaptive monitoring of the evolving threat landscape.\textsuperscript{33} Dynamically adjusting TIP parameters to align with shifting threat contexts empowers businesses to remain ahead of potential dangers, affording them the


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opportunity to refine their security architectures based on the discerned tactics, techniques, and procedures of threat actors.34

Efforts targeting the deep web take a similar methodical approach. Identifying pertinent data categories, conducting comprehensive research, selecting appropriate analysis tools, defining project prerequisites, tool configuration, result evaluation, and iterative refinement of tools contribute to an effective analysis process (in the context of AI deployment in Pakistan, it will become imperative to craft localized AI detection models).

TIP acknowledges that human expertise remains indispensable for a comprehensive understanding of the multifarious manifestations of terrorism and violent extremism across global contexts. Comparable prominent platforms, like Twitter and YouTube, similarly deploy AI mechanisms to swiftly eliminate comments that contravene their established guidelines.

The process of editing and refining content involves AI models being trained to disregard specific information based on predetermined criteria. Nevertheless, the current iterations of these models are encumbered by inherent limitations. For instance, an AI model trained to detect content from one terrorist group might prove ineffective for another due to linguistic and stylistic disparities in their propaganda. As highlighted by Karen Hao, an algorithm adept at identifying Holocaust denial might struggle to recognize, for instance, denial of the Rohingya genocide.35 Education of artificial intelligence relies on data; its ability to filter content is contingent upon the availability of such data.

34 Mario Faiella et al., “Enriching Threat Intelligence Platforms Capabilities,”.
AI also confronts substantial challenges when dealing with intricate language intricacies, notably sarcasm and humor, both of which can significantly impede the efficacy of automated content moderation. Presently accessible AI models are frequently tailored to major languages, rendering them less dependable for minority languages prevalent in regions such as South Asia and Southeast Asia. In this particular context, complete automation of content moderation is either unfeasible or inadvisable. The process of information review and decision-making necessitates human oversight.

Furthermore, the nexus between limited employment prospects for educated individuals and the propensity for violent extremism merits attention. Recent analysis of foreign recruits by Daesh reinforces this viewpoint. The study, based on a 2016 report by Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, examined data from approximately 4,000 Daesh foreign fighters, revealing above-average educational backgrounds juxtaposed with a prevalence of low-skilled employment histories.

Therefore, the amalgamation of AI and ML technologies with vigilant law enforcement efforts presents a potent strategy for mitigating the threats of the dark web. The nuanced approaches described herein encapsulate the multifaceted nature of this endeavor, highlighting the need for tailored solutions that resonate within specific contexts.

It is imperative to consider the distinct cybersecurity challenges and socio-economic factors inherent to the region when assessing the utilization of AI and ML technologies in combating dark web threats in Pakistan. The proliferation of

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dark web extremists and cybercriminals poses unique risks to Pakistan's burgeoning digital infrastructure. Therefore, a primary focus for Pakistan's deployment of AI and ML should be the development of regionally tailored detection models proficient in regional languages and dialects. This is paramount for effective sentiment analysis and the acquisition of threat intelligence from South Asian online forums and communities.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that a correlation exists between radicalization and the limited employment opportunities for college graduates. In this context, AI and ML can be instrumental in monitoring and tracking the online recruitment efforts of extremist organizations. To ensure the ethical application of these technologies and navigate the intricacies of linguistic and cultural diversity, it is imperative to establish robust regulatory frameworks and institute vigilant inspection.

The implementation of this customized approach holds the potential to enhance Pakistan's national cybersecurity and counter-terrorism operations significantly. This, in turn, will bolster the nation's capacity to proactively detect and neutralize dark web threats.

10. Conclusion
The proliferation of online violent extremism raises significant concerns across global societies, including Pakistan. Addressing these multifaceted dangers necessitates the implementation of innovative and adaptable strategies. The findings outlined in this article underscore the potential efficacy of harnessing AI and ML as pivotal instruments in counteracting the dissemination of extremist ideologies and activities within the digital realm. The escalating apprehension pertains to the expansion of extremist entities employing digital platforms for recruitment, propagandistic dissemination, and operational coordination. The recognition of the imperative to proactively confront this predicament is evident
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through collaborative initiatives, exemplified by the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, alongside the integration of AI-driven content moderation approaches by platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The paradox of AI, wherein technology devised for benevolent objectives could be exploited by extremist factions to advance their agendas, encapsulates what is termed as the "dual-use dilemma" of artificial intelligence.

This study has endeavored to explore diverse applications of AI that can be employed to counteract online extremism. Methodologies encompassing automated content moderation, sentiment analysis, and predictive analytics assume increasing significance in monitoring, evaluating, and responding to content with potential extremist inclinations. Underpinned by AI, these technologies empower law enforcement and cyber security entities to anticipate threats, discern patterns of radicalization, and promptly intervene to avert plausible violent actions.

Against the backdrop of Pakistan's protracted struggle against extremism and terrorism, the nation's context assumes pronounced relevance within this discourse. The country contends with challenges posed by terrorist groups such as Daesh-K and TTP, which have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in acclimatizing to evolving internet platforms. As per the findings of this research, extremist organizations frequently exploit encrypted messaging apps and the dark web to sustain operations beyond the reach of conventional content monitoring mechanisms. The potential application of AI technologies customized to Pakistan's unique circumstances and linguistic diversity emerges as pivotal in monitoring and counteracting such activities. Nevertheless, at the same time it also is imperative to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the utilization of artificial intelligence within this context. AI is not an infallible solution, at least not yet, and confronts intrinsic issues including linguistic nuances, cultural variations, and the potential for false positives.
Using Artificial Intelligence to Combat Extremism

Warisha Rashid*

Abstract

The spread of extremist ideologies in a time of technological advancement and interconnectedness poses a serious threat to global security and societal cohesion. This paper examines the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a potent tool to counter online extremism. The rapid spread of extremist content via online platforms has increased the accessibility of radical narratives, which has aided in the radicalization of people from a variety of backgrounds. This article will explore artificial intelligence's potential to recognize, understand, and block extremist content by utilizing its computational power, real-time data analysis capabilities, and machine learning techniques. To demonstrate the potential uses of AI in halting the spread of extremist ideologies through monitoring online platforms, analyzing digital media, and engaging users in informed discussions, a thorough review of the literature and a case study, specifically in the context of Pakistan, has been conducted. However, using AI to combat extremism also raises ethical questions about cultural sensitivity, free speech, and privacy. As a result, combining AI with anti-extremism initiatives has the potential to change how ideological conflict plays out. While AI provides unorthodox tools for quick detection and proactive intervention, it is essential to also think through its ethical ramifications. To create a safer world through AI, we must encourage collaboration between governments, technology companies, and international organizations.

Keywords: AI, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, Cyber extremism, Extremism, Pakistan, Moral Implications.

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1. Introduction

The power of technology has both enriched and challenged the global landscape in a time of unprecedented interconnectedness and rapid digital transformation. The spread of extremist ideologies has become one of the many complex problems that has surfaced during this digital age, as it poses a serious threat to both international security and societal cohesion. Radical narratives can now influence people from a variety of backgrounds across geographic and cultural boundaries, owing to the development of online platforms. Extremist content dissemination is on the rise, which presents a pressing challenge that calls for creative, flexible, and all-encompassing solutions. Counter-extremism activities have typically included police enforcement, community participation, and similar governmental initiatives to curb the spread of extremist ideology in the society.\(^1\)

However, given how quickly the digital landscape is evolving, a rethinking of these tactics is now becoming imperative. Modern tools that can match the speed and scope of online radicalization must be used in the fight against extremist narratives as the digital sphere becomes more and more important for communication, information sharing, and social interaction. Artificial intelligence (AI) integration stands out as an intriguing field for research and application in this context.

AI can completely overhaul the fight against extremism because of its remarkable processing power and ability to instantaneously evaluate vast volumes of data. It has the potential to reveal hidden patterns, interpret subtle linguistic cues, and forecast the development of extremist ideologies. AI can speed up the identification of extremist content and offer insights that let authorities proactively

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address emerging threats by combining the power of network analysis, processing natural languages, and machine learning. AI has the potential to drastically change counter-extremism initiatives due to its ability to quickly identify and demolish pre-existing extremist narratives and forecast the rise of new extreme ideologies.²

Nevertheless, as counter-extremism using AI becomes more popular, a number of complex ethical, societal, and legal challenges become apparent. The delicate balance between an individual's right to privacy and security needs becomes challenging to sustain. The combination of cutting-edge technology and a nuanced understanding of extremist narratives offers the potential to redefine the dynamics of ideological conflict in a world where extremism uses digital platforms to spread its ideologies. By highlighting the potential outcomes and difficulties that arise as AI is utilized to counter extremism in the digital age, this paper aims to contribute to the emerging discourse on the intersection between AI and online extremism.³

The intersection of AI, terrorism, and radicalization has also gained significant attention in the dynamic field of international security. The theoretical underpinnings of the terms "radicalization" and "terrorism," as well as the growing issues associated with violent extremism, particularly in relation to digital content, are examined methodically in this paper.

Thus, as the digital age takes hold, the use of AI technologies is becoming more and more crucial in recognizing, disproving, countering and monitoring extreme online narratives. This paper sets out to accomplish just that.

² Arpinar, Kursuncu, and Achilov, “Social Media Analytics.”
This paper builds on new research in the field, including studies on the use of AI to combat cyber crimes related to terrorism and machine learning applications for identifying religious extremism in particular. The study also draws attention to the grave problem of online radicalization, which happens when terrorists use internet to spread misinformation, find new recruits, and incite violence. This discussion centers on the complex relationship between violent extremism and cyber terrorism, paying particular attention to the security and political ramifications of hypothetical attacks on vital internet infrastructure. In examining how AI might be utilized to recognize and neutralize various cyber threats, the literature review emphasizes the significance of sentiment analysis, predictive analytics, and bias-free training.

The study also looks into Pakistan's unique circumstances, where extremist beliefs and the dissemination of false information pose a threat to national security and cohesion. Envisioning AI-driven tools for a future that is tailored to Pakistan's language and cultural environment is essential to building a society resistant to toxic narratives and divisive propaganda.

To effectively curb the spread of extremist ideology in the digital age, the article concludes with recommendations for responsible AI usage, global collaboration, and continued research and development. In essence, this study navigates the complex interfaces between radicalization, terrorism, and artificial intelligence, offering insightful viewpoints on the challenges that currently exist as well as future prospects for maintaining a more informed, compassionate, and cohesive local and global community.

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5 Mamoon Rashid and Noor Fatima, “Role of Artificial Intelligence in Eradicating: How Artificial Intelligence Can Help to Control Crime and Terror in Pakistan,” *Global...*
2. Conceptual Foundations

It is generally believed that "violent extremism" means supporting, allowing, defending, or inciting the commission of violent acts in order to further political, religious, social, economic, or ideological objectives. In contrast, process of creating extremist ideologies and beliefs is how radicalization is typically understood.⁶

**Artificial intelligence** (AI) is the ability of digital machines and computers to perform specific tasks in a manner that is somewhat similar to that of intelligent organisms, such as planning and thinking, learning and creating, adapting and interacting, improving processes, extracting knowledge from data, diverse digital data forecasting, along with other operations requiring precise mental processes.⁷

Violent extremism online is a misappropriation of the internet to support and recruit terrorists. Internet-based propaganda is used by terrorists to radicalize individuals, recruit new supporters, and even inspire ‘lone wolf attacks’ like the Christchurch shooting. Online propaganda also helps terrorists achieve their main objective of instilling fear in the society. The online spread of violent extremist and terrorist propaganda is a persistent problem in international politics and a subject of concern for internet service providers. Terrorist groups have perfected the technique of exploiting social media campaigns to disseminate propaganda online in an attempt to win the "information war".⁸

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⁶ Rashid and Fatima, “Role of Artificial Intelligence.”
The terms "online violent extremism" and "cyber terrorism" are sometimes used synonymously. Cyber terrorism is the term for when terrorist organizations use the internet to organize and carry out both cyber and terrorist attacks. Political worries about cyber terrorism are mostly concentrated on possible assaults on the crucial infrastructure that supports society and the internet. Although terrorist organizations are unlikely to be able to conduct a large-scale cyber attack that puts vital infrastructure at risk right now, they may however likely will in the future.

"Hacktivism" or the use of the internet for political reasons, is not the same as extremist violence. Although harmful hacking techniques and tools are used in hacktivism, the goal is to disrupt daily operations rather than create major economic damage or casualties. Thus hacktivism on its own is perhaps not as alarming, however it may still be utilized as a tool by VE groups to further their agenda, which substantially alleviates its lethality.

3. Literature Review
According to Shynar Mussiraliyeva's study, "Applying Machine Learning Techniques for Religious Extremism Detection on Online User Contents", the risk of lone wolf attacks has significantly increased since 2014. The first of such instances took place when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ordered its supporters online to carry out acts of terrorism against countries that were part of or backed the international coalition against it. In response to this global appeal, a number of lone wolf attacks sporadically occurred throughout the Western world. Threat of such attacks, continue to persist till this day. Since 2000, there has been a notable rise in religious extremism i.e. the primary driver for terrorist activity in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and South Asia. This rise in

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religious extremism has greatly been facilitated by online platforms, especially the ones provided by popular social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Tiktok and Youtube.

Saja Aldera, in her article “Online Extremism Detection in Textual Content: A Systematic Literature Review” points out that automated content analysis using AI has shown to have a remarkable potential for locating extremist content on various digital platforms. The study emphasizes the value of bias-free training of AI models using diverse and sensitive cultural data. Sentiment analysis powered by AI has become an essential tool for identifying the complex language used in extremist propaganda. Sentiment analysis algorithms are created to identify changes in tone, emotion, and intent, assisting in separating sincere discussions from potentially hazardous content. Identifying hate speech, incitement, and radical narratives in text, images, and videos, researchers through image recognition and natural language processing are standout examples of machine learning approaches. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to ensure that these algorithms can be adjusted to different linguistic and cultural contexts, necessitating ongoing research into cross-cultural sentiment analysis.11

Selma Dilek in her thought provoking work, “Applications of Artificial Intelligence Techniques to Combating Cyber Crimes: A Review” notes that utilizing AI for predictive analytics enables authorities to proactively stop the spread of new extremist narratives by being able to predict when they will emerge. In order to predict the course of extremist ideologies and enable timely intervention and strategic response, researchers have investigated the use of network analysis and historical data. However, the use of AI in counter-extremism initiatives raises ethical quandaries and a number of privacy related challenges. When using AI-

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driven surveillance techniques, academics therefore have emphasized the need for transparency, accountability, and clear guidelines. Implementing AI to combat extremism still requires striking a balance between preserving individual liberties and boosting security.\textsuperscript{12}

William Marcellino, in his article "Counter-Radicalization Bot Research: Using Social Bots to Fight Violent Extremism" sets out to explain how interest in AI-driven deradicalization interventions is leading to the development of tools that can be utilized to combat online extremist influences. He points out how virtual assistants and chat bots have been developed to engage people in conversation while providing them with contrasting viewpoints and resources. However, Marcellino also warns about the efficacy and moral implications of interventions involving AI.\textsuperscript{13} As the interest in utilization of AI for countering and preventing violent extremism grows, governments, tech firms, and international organizations will have to figure out ways to work together and establish rules for ethical AI usage. Finding a harmonious balance between civil liberties protection and effective countermeasures will be a challenge in the years to come.\textsuperscript{14}

In "Categorizing Online Extremism Research: A Comprehensive Review", Fernandez and Alani divide research on online extremism into three main categories: analysis, detection, and prediction. The authors explore the complexities involved with anticipating the acceptance of extremist content and automatically identifying potential radicals. Their analysis sheds crucial light over

\textsuperscript{13} William Marcellino et al., \textit{Counter-Radicalization Bot Research: Using Social Bots to Fight Violent Extremism} (California: RAND Corporation, 2010), eBook Collection, https://doi.org/10.7249/rr2705.
the field of research on online extremism detection. The article highlights enduring issues such as the lack of verified data, poor communication between researchers, the emergence of radical terminology, and the scarcity of moral viewpoints in the field.\(^\text{15}\)

To sum up, the literature on AI and violent extremism, while still in infancy, is fully aware of not just the prospects of this research undertaking, but is also fairly apprehensive and critical of the underlying ethical considerations. As research in the field continues to grow and flourish, it will be very crucial to be wary of the ethical and moral underpinnings of this undertaking.

4. The Pakistani Context
Pakistan has experienced numerous difficulties, owing to the spread and propagation of false information and the prevalence of extremist ideologies and hate speech, on different online platforms.\(^\text{16}\) By utilizing AI-powered tools to address these problems, the nation can however effectively reduce the dissemination of harmful content and remove barriers to a more knowledgeable and tolerant society in the years to come.

In order to stay on top of the increasingly evolving social media structure and parallel forums of modern-day information mediums, know-how of AI (its mechanism and algorithms) and its widespread utilization across various agencies in Pakistan must be prioritized. Well thought out and complex AI algorithms have demonstrated unmatched accuracy in locating and classifying hate speech, conspiracy theories, and extremist content online. Real-time AI detection allows


prompt flagging for human review, thereby allowing timely intervention. Advanced pattern recognition capabilities can be added to AI-driven video analysis tools. They are adept at identifying and classifying even subtle violent or extremist symbols or messages. With increased precision, AI prompts subtle warnings and suggests a variety of debunking videos that are tailored for different user demographics.\textsuperscript{17} Given Pakistan’s immense diversity and heterogeneity, adoption of this technology would clearly yield substantial benefits.

Future AI-powered tools will be able to participate in online discussions more naturally and organically, owing to the development of advanced natural language understanding. These tools can proactively respond to people who are expressing (adequately coded) extreme views by using automated responses that are both sympathetic and convincing. Such actions would encourage constructive discussions that combat extremism while upholding users' freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{18} AI algorithms have increasingly displayed predictive capabilities that can be incredibly accurate in identifying users who may be exposed to extremist content. AI can create custom content recommendations by deciphering complex online behavior patterns, which would subsequently encourage critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding while connecting with users' interests.

AI systems over time can also learn the many intricacies and dialects found in the Pakistani language (provided of course that AI research is prioritized and pursued with due diligence). This flexibility will enable the system to precisely recognize and interpret extremist information across the many languages, assisting

\textsuperscript{17} Enrique Bermejo Nievas et al., “Violence Detection in Video Using Computer Vision Techniques,” in \textit{International Conference on Computer Analysis of Images and Patterns}, 29 August, 2011, DOI:10.1007/978-3-642-23678-5_39

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substantially in the prevention of the spread of harmful ideologies. AI-powered sentiment analysis will gradually get incredibly perceptive to Pakistan's peculiarities in culture and emotions. By recognizing the fundamental issues and psychological triggers that underpin prevailing extremist rhetoric in Pakistan, AI will be able to generate solutions that truly address indigenous issues and suppress radicalization at its source.

Lastly, future chatbots that are powered by AI can involve users in role-playing games and interactive simulations that highlight the negative effects of extremist ideologies. By offering comprehensive resources, fact-checking tools, and counter-narratives catered to people's concerns and knowledge gaps, these chatbots act as individualized virtual mentors. By combining real-time behavioral data with social interactions, AI tools can develop to identify patterns of radicalization. These sophisticated algorithms will help community organizations and mental health professionals identify at-risk individuals and offer prescriptive insights, encouraging early and timely intervention. Pakistan must support relevant start up enterprises and encourage research and innovation in the field of chatbots and virtual online games to stay on top of these crucial modern-day technological developments. Delay in the matter would allow its rivals and threatening extremist organizations to get ahead.

Thus, AI applications might also incorporate gamification and interactive simulations to provide users with a more engaging, informative and hands on experience. This strategy goes beyond mere flagging and intervention by fostering an atmosphere in which users are actively encouraged to evaluate extremist ideology through interactive experiences. By combining pleasure and instruction,

bridging knowledge gaps, and fostering empathy, these resources can effectively reach a wide spectrum of consumers.\textsuperscript{20}

A healthy AI-driven ecosystem with flexible algorithms, proactive interventions, and culturally sensitive reactions is necessary for Pakistan's future counter terrorism and extremism initiatives. As AI technologies develop, these strategies will be crucial for stopping the spread of false information online and gradually fostering a society that is more knowledgeable, caring, and united.\textsuperscript{21}

It is crucial to underline here the necessity of cooperation between AI developers, governments, and civil society organizations for the future of AI-driven solutions to combat online extremism in Pakistan. Building comprehensive databases that encompass a range of linguistic and cultural quirks unique to Pakistan should be a part of this partnership; these databases would act as the basis for continuous AI algorithm improvement, guaranteeing that the algorithms stay adaptive to the constantly changing dynamics of online discourse. AI tools would then be able to respond more intelligently by being able to recognize explicit hate speech as well as comprehend sentiments and underlying motivations.

It is worth keeping in mind that AI algorithms can also be trained to identify new extremist behavior patterns, adjusting their detection capabilities to the changing strategies used by evolving online radicalization campaigns and entities. AI, still in infancy, is not static technology. The integration of machine learning models that can decipher the context and intent of user-generated content could add another level of sophistication to real-time AI detection.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Fernandez, Asif, and Alani, “Understanding roots.”
\textsuperscript{21} Fernandez, Asif, and Alani, “Understanding roots.”

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Moving forward with Pakistan's use of AI to counter online extremism will necessitate a comprehensive, adaptable, and cooperative strategy. AI-powered tools such as Sherlock for social media analysis, Spider foot for network analysis and Epieos to trace telephonic details, can significantly contribute to the creation of a safer, more welcoming digital environment in Pakistan specifically and the globe generally by employing state-of-the-art technologies, embracing transparency, and incorporating nuanced cultural awareness.

5. Ethical Considerations, AI and Pakistan
Notwithstanding the many advantages discussed already, it is important to note that monitoring and countering extremism online via AI creates a substantial moral dilemma as it may transgress citizens’ right to privacy and free speech. As Pakistan gears up for AI transition, it is crucial to keep its constitutional obligations and the clearly laid out rights of citizens in mind as well. Rapidly advancing AI technology could easily violate legal rights and constitutional provisions. Due awareness of law and constitution must go hand in hand with all AI related governmental provisions and initiatives.

While developing AI and perfecting the necessary tools, it becomes necessary to be morally conscious and responsible towards both the public and the law of the land. One way to do that would be through ‘blockchain’ technology. Integrating blockchain technology could enhance the accountability and transparency of AI-driven interventions. Blockchain technology can be used to create an irreversible record of AI decision-making processes, ensuring the objectivity and morality of future algorithms. Transparency is critical to gaining the public's trust and reducing concerns about potential misuses of AI in the fight against extremism. The AI-driven ecosystem can be strengthened by regularly

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training and updating its systems. AI systems can be made more flexible to new
trends and emerging forms of extremist content by regularly conducting stress-
testing and simulation exercises.²⁴

Data protection concerns are inevitably raised when artificial intelligence
is used to track and examine behavior online that contains extremist content.
People may believe that their privacy is in danger, particularly if they observe
others observing them online. It becomes imperative therefore to strike a balance
between individual privacy rights and security measures. Similarly, fighting
 extremism and preserving freedom of speech at the same time also necessitates a
fine balance. Even if an opinion is controversial, AI algorithms must be able to
distinguish false statements from other acceptable statements. Furthermore,
operation of AI algorithms should be as transparent as possible.

Users and the public at large must be informed on how AI is being used to
combat extremism. Establishing clear audit trails for AI based applications is
essential to maintaining trust. Artificial intelligence algorithms should be more
transparent and straightforward. Users need to be made aware of how their
information is collected and used to combat terrorism and extremism. It is also
important to encourage people to understand the ethical implications of using AI
in the fight against terrorism. Educating the public, legislators, and AI developers
about the potential risks and benefits will foster a more informed ethical
approach.²⁵

Lastly, the rapidly developing AI technology and its potential to fight
extremism online will necessitate international cooperation, regulation and

²⁴ AlShamsi, “Artificial Intelligence.”
²⁵ Haroon Abbu, Paul Mugge, and Gerhard Gudergan, “Ethical Considerations of Artificial
Intelligence: Ensuring Fairness, Transparency, and Explainability,” in IEEE 28th
International Conference on Engineering, Technology and Innovation (ICE/ITMC) at Nancy,
France, 19-23, 2022.https://doi.org/10.1109/ice/itmc-iamot55089.2022.10
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legislation. Additionally, through the creation of an international network for the exchange of best practices in AI-driven counter-extremism tactics, countries will be able to draw from each other's experiences and enhance the efficacy of their respective programs. Consequently, moving forward with Pakistan's use of AI to counter online extremism will necessitate a comprehensive, adaptable, and cooperative strategy. These AI-powered tools can significantly contribute to the creation of a safer, more welcoming digital environment in Pakistan specifically and the globe generally by employing state-of-the-art technologies, embracing transparency, and incorporating nuanced cultural awareness.26

6. Conclusion
This article has explored the digital age nexus between radicalization, terrorism, and AI. It has argued that traditional counter-extremism strategies are increasingly being challenged by the rapidly evolving digital landscape, since many of the existing extremist ideologies have taken their content and recruiting strategies online.

The paper has emphasized a number of factors that make the incorporation of AI into counter-extremism initiatives a potent weapon against the propagation of extremist ideologies in the digital era. The quick spread of radical narratives across online platforms, which cut beyond national and cultural borders, has changed the face of the world. AI holds great potential as it can quickly identify, understand, and filter out extremist content. It can also predict the emergence of new extreme ideologies. The nature of AI technology, which can swiftly read and interpret enormous volumes of data, make this possible. However, this advancement also raises ethical and social challenges, necessitating collaboration

26 Abbu, Mugge, and Gudergan, “Ethical Considerations.”
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between governments, tech companies, and international organizations to establish guidelines to ensure responsible AI use.

Since AI technology can effectively be used to counter radical extremism, therefore, it is important to address the evolving challenges and unintended consequences as the field develops. This requires ongoing research and discussions in the field of AI. AI is turning out to be a powerful weapon for counter-extremism efforts because of its capacity to alter the dynamics of ideological conflicts in the digital arena and promote a safer, more peaceful online environment.

Radical ideologies now have an unprecedented global reach owing to the digital environment, cutting across the traditional cultural and geographical barriers. The incorporation of AI offers promising ways to recognize, comprehend, and block extremist content in real-time as a response to this evolving threat. Furthermore, AI is able to anticipate the emergence of new radical ideologies through the analysis of large sets of existing data which then permits AI technology to effectively project the potential of future trends. Owing to the application of machine learning, natural language processing and sentiment analysis, it is now possible to make proactive and timely interventions.

Collaborations between governments, tech firms, and international organizations are changing the landscape of AI-driven counter-extremism efforts. To ensure responsible AI usage, continuous examination and thoughtful cross-border discussions will enable us to adapt and refine our approaches, ensuring that AI-driven solutions not only thwart extremist narratives but also uphold fundamental ethical standards and safeguard individual liberties. In this ever-changing landscape, the commitment to ongoing research and informed dialogue remains central to the successful implementation of AI in the fight against extremism.
The intersection of radicalization, terrorism, and artificial intelligence is understandably a complex and dynamic space. The emergence of extremist ideologies using internet platforms to disseminate their narratives globally has brought unprecedented challenges since the advent of digital technology. The traditional counter-extremism strategies are becoming ineffective due to the rapid advancement of the digital landscape. Since AI integration offers the computing capacity to swiftly evaluate massive volumes of data, it clearly is the right way forward for counter-extremism initiatives. AI's ability to identify hidden patterns, interpret linguistic clues, and predict the emergence of extremist views makes it a powerful tool in the fight against online radicalization.

This paper has also examined Pakistan's unique circumstances, where national security is gravely threatened by the dissemination of misleading information and widespread extremist ideologies. It therefore becomes crucial to imagine AI-driven technologies that are especially made for Pakistan's languages and cultural context that take account of the indigenous realities and generate strategies that are tailored specifically for the country.

Owing to the gravity of the threat posed to Pakistan by extremism and terrorism in general, it is imperative for the country to stay on top of latest technological tools and research that addresses this threat. As the extremist organizations are taking their content, hate speech, ideologies and recruitment strategies online, the future battle will be fought in the digital domain. This battle will be won by the actor that takes command of the most powerful weapon in this inevitable encounter, namely artificial intelligence.

7. **Recommendations**

In view of the complex interplay between counter-extremism programs and artificial intelligence, several tactical recommendations are offered to optimize AI's ability to impede the propagation of extremist ideologies.
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Technology corporations, governments, and civil society organizations should first collaborate to establish a robust framework for the ethical use of AI. To ensure that AI-driven interventions prioritize security while preserving individual privacy and upholding the fundamental right to free expression, clear guidelines and ethical principles will have to be laid out and agreed upon.27

Second, efforts in research and development must be stepped up to improve AI algorithms for sentiment analysis and content recognition across cultural boundaries and social divides. Comprehensive training data that reflect global variations in extremist narratives are required because of the variety of linguistic and cultural contexts. In order to improve accuracy and lessen biases in identifying and combating extremist content, AI models should be continuously modified to recognize subtle changes in language, emotions, and intent.28

Third, in order to stay on top of the increasingly evolving social media structure and parallel forums of modern-day information mediums, know-how of AI (its mechanism and algorithms) and its widespread utilization must therefore be prioritized. Real-time AI detection allows for prompt flagging for human review and thereby prompt intervention. Advanced pattern recognition capabilities can be added to AI-driven video analysis tools as they are extremely adept at identifying and classifying even subtle violent or extremist symbols or messages. With increased precision, AI has the capability to generate subtle warnings and suggest a variety of debunking videos that are tailored for different user demographics.29

Fourth, since future AI-powered tools will gradually be able to participate in online discussions more naturally and organically, it would be possible to

28 Soler-Company and Wanner, “Automatic Classification.”
29 Nievas et al., “Violence Detection.”
proactively respond to people who are expressing (adequately coded) extreme views through automated responses that are both sympathetic and convincing. Such actions can encourage constructive discussions that combat extremism while upholding users' freedom of expression. Increased predictive capabilities would be displayed by AI algorithms, which can be incredibly accurate in identifying users who may be exposed to extremist content. AI can create custom content recommendations by deciphering complex online behavior patterns that encourage critical thinking, empathy, and cultural understanding.

Fifth, AI-driven counter-extremism strategies ought to include mechanisms for accountability and transparency. There should be frequent audits and evaluations to ensure AI algorithms are just, efficient, and compliant with democratic principles. Incorporating a range of expertise- including social scientists, ethicists, and legal scholars- is essential to upholding ethical standards and minimizing unintended consequences and backlash.

Sixth, international cooperation is necessary to counter the global outreach of extremism on the internet. The development of comprehensive AI-powered strategies tailored for various regional contexts can be facilitated by the exchange of best practices, technological insights, and case studies between nations. Platforms like the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) are an

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example of how collective action can be used to stop the spread of extremist content internationally.\textsuperscript{32}

Seventh, counter-extremism initiatives facilitated by AI should include education and awareness campaigns. Effective AI-powered tools, like interactive chatbots that engage people in informed discussions, can be produced through collaborative efforts between AI developers, educators, and psychological experts. These tools can be crucial in battling extremist narratives and halting radicalization because they offer accurate information, alternative viewpoints, and resources.\textsuperscript{33}

Eighth, it is crucial to underline the ongoing necessity of cooperation between AI developers, governments, and civil society organizations insofar as the future of AI-driven solutions to combat online extremism in Pakistan is concerned. Building comprehensive databases that encompass a range of linguistic and cultural quirks unique to Pakistan should be a part of this partnership as these databases will act as the basis for continuous AI algorithm improvement, guaranteeing that the algorithms stay adaptive to the constantly changing dynamics of online discourse. AI tools would then be able to respond more intelligently by being able to recognize explicit hate speech as well as comprehend the sentiments and underlying motivations.\textsuperscript{34}

Finally, in the face of developing extremist tactics, long-term commitment and dedication to ongoing research and dynamic adaptation of AI is crucial. AI innovations should be regularly updated to take into account new trends and make


Sure that countermeasures are still applicable and efficient.35 Academic institutions, tech firms, and decision-makers should work together more frequently to develop and deploy AI tools that can effectively stop the spread of extremist ideologies.

To sum up, the incorporation of AI into counter-extremism initiatives has the power to fundamentally alter the nature of ideological conflict in the digital age. Pakistan and the global community in general can harness the transformative power of AI to fight extremism and build a safer and more peaceful digital environment by upholding ethical standards, encouraging collaboration, improving AI algorithms, and placing priority on transparency.36

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36 Fernandez and Alani, Artificial Intelligence and Online Extremism.
Decoding the Radicalization Puzzle: Uncovering the Factors Fueling the Fire in Pakistan

Amber Javed*, Dr. Noor Elahi** & Dr. Bahadar Nawab***

Abstract

Radicalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has become increasingly prevalent in societies worldwide. In Pakistan, the emergence of various extreme ideologies and groups has highlighted the pressing need to understand the underlying factors contributing to radicalization. This study aims to comprehensively examine the factors that contribute to radicalization in Pakistan by drawing on the perspectives and insights of experts in the field. It employed qualitative research approach, utilizing semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gather data from a diverse range of experts in the field, including academics, journalists, policymakers, countering violent extremism experts, and representatives of government and non-government organizations. The study contends that radicalization in Pakistan stems from a complex interplay of factors, including historical context, geography, security considerations, geopolitical influences and foreign involvement. The study identifies specific socioeconomic, political, and religious factors as the most prominent drivers of radicalization in Pakistan, which can have a cascading effect on one another. The interconnected nature of these factors highlights the need for a holistic approach when addressing the issue of radicalization in Pakistan. Policymakers and practitioners need to focus on developing trend-specific deradicalization strategies that consider the unique aspects of radicalization in Pakistan.

Key words: Pakistan, Radicalization, Economic Factors, Socio-Political Factors, Extremism, Drivers.

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1. Introduction

The world has recently witnessed a surge in violent extremism, resulting in the loss of innocent lives from various races, religions, and nationalities. Radicalization, a significant precursor to violent extremism, is on the rise globally. Individuals of different age groups, religious beliefs, literacy levels, employment statuses, and genders are all susceptible to radicalization.\(^1\) Radicalization refers to the process by which an individual or group adopts increasingly extreme political, social, or religious beliefs and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or modern national conceptions and expressions.\(^2\) It is important to note that radicalization may not always lead to violence in its early stages, and therefore, a country may undergo a prolonged process of radicalization without realizing its severity or the seriousness of the situation.\(^3\)

The origins of radicalization are complex and multifaceted, and there is no one-size-fits-all definition or paradigm for it. Nonetheless, there are some recurring themes that can be used to make broad generalizations about the process. Radicalization involves the internalization and reinforcement of extreme ideological beliefs, which can eventually lead to violent actions, although the path is not always linear. Extreme ideologies often justify the use of violence as a means of achieving political or religious goals, and external networks and groups can play a significant role in the radicalization process.\(^4\) Radicalization can be defined as the process by which an individual gradually adopts extremist views and moves

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towards engaging in violent behavior.\(^5\)\(^6\) However, predicting who will become radicalized and when they will resort to violence is difficult, as there is no single profile that can be used to anticipate such behavior.\(^7\) This makes the study of radicalization a challenging field.\(^8\)

The number of fatalities caused by hostile and violent behavior has surged in recent years. The Institute for Economics and Peace\(^9\) reported that the number of deaths attributed to such actions increased from 3,329 in 2000 to 32,685 in 2014. This illustrates the devastating impact that extremist ideologies can have on people from diverse backgrounds, nationalities, ethnicities, and religions. These ideologies, whether based on religion, race, or other factors, often glorify the dominance of a particular group and reject more inclusive and accepting social orders. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the root causes of extremism and take action to counter it.\(^10\)

The aftermath of 9/11 saw the emergence of new security threats in the form of individuals and groups that hold or support extremist views on religion and ideology.\(^11\) In Pakistan, these threats manifest in various forms, such as terrorism, violent extremism, and ethnic and sectarian violence. A 2013 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that 93% of Pakistanis consider radicalization and

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\(^10\) UNDP. “Preventing Violent Extremism.”
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terrorism to be the country's biggest problems. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Pakistan is the third-most affected country by terrorism, surpassed only by Iraq and Afghanistan. These figures demonstrate the devastating impact of radicalization and extremism on the country and its people. However, it is important to note that these numbers likely underestimate the actual death toll. Furthermore, according to the parliamentary secretary for commerce and investment Pakistan has thus far incurred $152 billion in economic losses since the beginning of the war on terror 20 years ago.

For a long time, Pakistan, a largely Muslim country, has been struggling with the issue of radicalization. However, the time period following 9/11 has fanned the flames. There has been a rise in anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in the country as a result of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent drone strikes in Pakistan. This situation has been exploited by extremist organizations, resulting in the radicalization of society at large. Among the most tragic incidents was the 2014 Peshawar school massacre, which claimed the lives of 145 people, mostly students. This event served as a wake-up call for the Pakistani government, prompting renewed efforts to tackle extremism and terrorism.

Radicalization has played a significant role in the current state of militancy in Pakistan, making it a crucial issue in the country's fragile security environment.

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16 USIP, “Countering Violent Extremism.”
17 USIP, “Countering Violent Extremism.”
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The impact of radicalization can be seen in various aspects of Pakistan's socio-political and economic environment. Injustice and intolerance toward people of other religions are among the factors that fuel radicalization. The lack of justice for the impoverished and the abuse of the legal system by the privileged class that further contribute to this issue. Radical groups, which frequently encourage violence in society, can easily influence this marginalized group.18

Understanding the diverse trends and patterns of radicalization and their underlying causes is particularly challenging in the context of Pakistan. The country is ethnically diverse and divided along ethnolinguistic, ideological, sectarian, and political lines.19 Radicalization-related behaviors and attitudes vary greatly at subnational levels. Although there may be some striking similarities between extreme trends and patterns in some regions and those elsewhere in the country, it is difficult to describe radicalization in Pakistan using a single approach. It can be seen as a multifaceted issue that is influenced by political, religious, and social contexts.20 The root causes of radicalization in Pakistan are numerous and complex. Some possible factors include political exclusion, poverty, economic instability, social injustice, sectarian conflicts, illiteracy, the role of madrassas, and the indoctrination strategies of militant organizations.21

The phenomenon of radicalization in Pakistan can be viewed from two perspectives: firstly, as part of a larger global trend and exploring regional and international connections; and secondly, by examining potential religious links to radicalization. The impact of radicalization on Pakistan has been severe, fundamentally altering its social structure and political system. Factors such as

18 USIP, “Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan.”
19 USIP, “Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan.”
21 International Crisis Group, A New Era of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan (South Asia: International Crisis Group, April 18, 2005).
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Religion, politics, ideology, economics, and social structures play a crucial role in the formation of Islamic militancy and religious radicalization in Pakistan.\(^\text{22}\)

Research into the underlying causes of extremism has mostly concentrated on its core challenges, and neither academics and analysts, nor policymakers completely understand the factors that lead to extremism. However, existing research suggest challenges like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, poor health, etc. are significant contributing factors to radicalization.\(^\text{23}\) Access to guns and ammunition, weak governance, marginalization of rural areas, and limited access to justice have also been significant contributors to terrorism and extremism.\(^\text{24}\) Additionally, because of the fragile geopolitical climate, the country is vulnerable to a variety of terrorist threats.

Radicalization in Pakistan is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that has been extensively studied in recent years. Most of the researches have focused on areas affected by militancy and terrorism, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). A more comprehensive understanding of the issue can be gained by studying radicalization at the sub-national level and examining various trends and patterns across different regions and communities in Pakistan. This paper aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the drivers and factors contributing to radicalization in Pakistani society, drawing on the insights and expertise of field experts with extensive experience in researching and addressing this issue.


2. Methodology
The methodology for this study employed a qualitative research design, this enabled the use of flexible data collection methods and facilitated the ongoing evaluation of research methodologies throughout the fieldwork. This approach was deemed appropriate due to the sensitive nature of the research and its stated objectives. The primary data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and using audio recordings and concurrent notetaking methods.

2.1. Material
To collect qualitative data and gain detailed information about trends and patterns, 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with experts in the field. The respondents were representatives from the media, academia, and experts in countering violent extremism. The sample size was determined based on the principle of saturation, where data collection continued until no new insights or themes emerged from the analysis. The sample size was deemed adequate to achieve the research objectives and provide a comprehensive understanding. Including participants from various regions, occupations, and areas of expertise ensured the diversity and richness of the data collected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession/Category of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countering Violent Extremism Experts</td>
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Table 1.1. Distribution of Participants by Professions for In-depth Interviews

2.1.1. Academia
Eight interviews were conducted from academia. The participants included Associate Professors and Professors of Peace and Conflict Studies, International
Relations, and Media and Communication Studies from Pakistan's leading universities.

2.1.2. Media
Eight interviews were conducted with representatives of the media. The media participants were affiliated with some of the leading newspapers and electronic news channels, including Dawn, The News, Express Tribune, Frontier Post, PTV News, Geo News, Samaa, BBC Urdu, and Express News. In addition, representatives from the Parliament of Pakistan and the Federal Ministry of Information were also interviewed.

2.1.3. Countering Violent Extremism Experts
The eight participants were directors or heads of institutions involved in countering violent extremism in Pakistan. These were the directors, CEOs, or heads of government and non-government organizations working on countering violent extremism in Pakistan. These organizations included the National Counter Terrorism Authority, the United States Institute of Peace, the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, the International Research Council of Religious Affairs, the Council of Islamic Ideology Pakistan, Representatives of Law and Enforcement Agencies/Police, and the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan.

2.2. Methods
During the interviews, open-ended questions guided discussions, encouraging participants to share thoughts and experiences on radicalization. Audio recordings and concurrent notetaking ensured data accuracy and completeness. Participants provided voluntary consent after receiving detailed study information, assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. Verbal consent was obtained before digitally recording interviews.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data obtained from in-depth interviews. This method identified patterns, themes, and meanings,
allowing exploration of participants' perspectives on radicalization factors in Pakistan. Data were coded, organized into themes, and iteratively reviewed and refined until a final set was identified. The analysis uncovered recurrent patterns and meanings within the qualitative data.

Coded data were compared with relevant secondary literature sources like institutional reports, policy reports, newspapers, research articles, and books. This comparative analysis revealed recurrent themes and significant literature gaps, offering a comprehensive understanding of radicalization and violent extremism approaches in Pakistan.

3. Results and Discussion

This section provides a comprehensive examination of the findings from the primary data collected from respondents with diverse backgrounds. The analysis delves into the various factors that contribute to radicalization in Pakistan. The study participants shared their perspectives on the various pull and push factors that contribute to the radicalization in Pakistan. Although not all forms of radicalization are harmful, radicalization can make individuals more susceptible to extremist ideologies and increase the risk of violence and terrorism. In Pakistan, the process of radicalization is complicated and influenced by a variety of factors, including historical background, geography, security dynamics, geopolitics, socio-economic conditions, political instability, and religious or ideological beliefs. Following are the key findings of the research:

3.1. The Complex History of Radicalization: Factors, Events, and Impacts

Although Pakistan's priority after independence was to solidify its identity as a Muslim-majority state, nevertheless, a number of elements have combined through time to fuel the nation's growing radicalization. Whether internally or externally, conflicts have always existed within the state of Pakistan. Beginning with Kashmir, there has been a protracted battle between Pakistan and India over the region of
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Jammu and Kashmir. Owing to Indian aggression and complete disregard of the Muslim majority of Kashmir, the region has been a source of conflict and instability since its independence from the British colonial rule in 1947. The conflict has resulted in numerous battles and military encounters between the two countries, notably the Kargil War (1997–1998), the Second War (1965), and the First Kashmir War (1947–1948).

During discussions of the significant events that have contributed to or resulted from radicalization in Pakistan, a respondent argued that the Soviet-Afghan War, which lasted from 1979 to 1989, was a notable event that significantly contributed to the spread of extremism in Pakistan. At the time, Pakistan backed Afghan Mujahedeen fighters who were fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan with financing and training by the United States and Saudi Arabia. Many of these fighters became radicalized during the conflict and returned to Pakistan after the Soviet-Afghan war.

According to some key informants, Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan during the 1990s was another significant event that contributed to the rise of radicalization in Pakistan. Intersection of Afghan, US, and Taliban factors has been instrumental in shaping perception towards extremism, just as it highlights the role of external actors in exacerbating domestic radicalization in Pakistan.

During the 1990s Pakistan supported the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, owing to the long-drawn civil war in the country and a lack of viable political alternatives. When US forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to overthrow the Taliban, many of the former Afghan battle-hardened combatants escaped to Pakistan, where they came together to create new extremist organizations. Radicalization in Pakistan has also been significantly impacted by the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, as well as the War on Terror that the United States initiated in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. US drone attacks, special
operations and pressure on Pakistan, all led to a rise in anti-American sentiments in public which inadvertently caused radicalization of many individuals and groups.

According to a respondent who reported extensively on militant conflicts in Pakistan, the 2007 Lal Masjid operation was a significant turning point in the country's radicalization during the early 2000s. Islamabad's Lal Masjid, also known as the "Red Mosque," has a long history of being a hub of radicalization. The government's decision to storm the mosque and arrest its leaders sparked intense resentment and anger among radical groups in Pakistan. Following the Lal Masjid operation, a number of militant organizations (mostly from Pakistan's tribal areas) emerged, posing serious security threats to the government. The operation also polarized the public and sparked discussions on the use of force against religious institutions, which accelerated radicalization and the dissemination of extremist ideologies. With many incidents of violence and extremism, including suicide bombings, targeted killings, and assaults on religious minorities, radicalization has significantly impacted Pakistani society.

3.2. The Role of Socio-Economic Factors
For nearly three decades, Pakistan has been in a constant state of turmoil. The rise in extremism and radicalization observed recently can be attributed to various factors. However, the economic drivers have been identified by the majority of respondents as a major contributor to the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism in Pakistan. The root causes of this phenomenon include poverty, a lack of access to education and employment opportunities, and corruption. This has led to a sense of frustration, desperation, and hopelessness among many Pakistanis, which has been exploited by extremist groups that offer a sense of purpose and belonging.
Economic factors play a significant role in shaping the nature of extremism in Pakistan. The lack of economic opportunities, the disparity in wealth between different classes, and the high levels of unemployment among marginalized communities all contribute to the mindset that can lead individuals to engage in terrorist activities. Inequality and economic instability contribute to a sense of desperation that can make individuals more susceptible to radicalizing ideologies. A key informant noted that poverty and underdevelopment have greatly aided in the radicalization of people. Pakistan currently has a large population of young people, yet the country offers limited opportunities for them. Youth unemployment and a lack of opportunities can lead to frustration and hopelessness, increasing the likelihood of radicalization. Radicalization of youth is the process through which ideological devotion causes sentiments of discontentment, anger, and hatred to progressively develop in a young person or group of young people. Radicalization of young population in Pakistan is highly influenced by socioeconomic variables including poverty, unemployment, and a lack of education.

The findings of this research support Azam and Fatima who analyzed the profiles of 47 former militants undergoing deradicalization program in Swat and found that poverty and a lack of economic opportunities were major factors that led them toward extremism. Participants came from families with low socioeconomic status, lacked formal or informal education, and were often unemployed or working low-wage manual jobs before joining the militants. Their study highlights the importance of addressing underlying socio-economic issues for preventing radicalization in the society.

25 Makki and Akash, “Poverty, Regional Inequalities.”
26 Tanoli, Jaffry, and Ali, “Socio-Economic Factors.”
28 Azam and Fatima, “Mishal.”
In our study, some key informants described the relationship between economic factors and extremism as "vulnerability". Because of their vulnerability, people who lack basic financial resources and opportunities become more susceptible to radicalization, intolerance, and extremism. While unemployment, poverty and Madrasah education are often cited as causes of radicalization, it is not limited to these groups. Individuals from all backgrounds, including the wealthy, elite university students, and professionals such as doctors and engineers, can also become vulnerable to radicalization.

Vulnerability, rather than any specific factor, is the primary cause of intolerance, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism. Smith & Nolan for instance argue that a significant number of terrorist attacks have been carried out by individuals who are well-educated and from middle-class backgrounds, which suggests that there is no direct correlation between low socio-economic status and the risk of terrorism. Piazza argues in his study that countries with higher levels of poverty do not necessarily experience higher levels of terrorism. However, socio-economic disadvantages or inequalities can contribute to radicalization by exacerbating perceptions of injustice. Our research supports the "relative deprivation" theory, which argues that when people are aware that others have better material circumstances or higher social standing than they do, then they perceive these disparities as unfair.

Relationship between socio-economic class and the emergence of extremism has also emerged as a standout theme. One respondent argued that poverty, inequality, and weak government institutions in lower-class communities could lead to religious-based sectarian violence. In contrast, middle-class individuals are often driven by political motivations, with jihadism serving as a manifestation of these factors. Feelings of social alienation and seclusion heavily influence the upper middle class and elite members of society. Researchers have identified socio-economic factors as the most crucial factors in radicalization process in Pakistan. Radicalization process is greatly influenced by important elements such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and a severe sense of deprivation.

A key informant argued that horizontal inequalities and unequal distribution of resources have the power to split nations, which Pakistan has already experienced in the past in the form of East Pakistan separation. Therefore, radicalization and extremism may result from a collective sense of marginalization and lack of inclusion. The respondent stressed that the rising insurgency in Balochistan is a critical issue in Pakistan, highlighting the challenges of political and economic marginalization that certain groups in the country face. Pakistan's largest province, Balochistan, is the most underdeveloped and impoverished province of the country. High levels of poverty and unemployment in the province result from inadequate investment, unequal resource distribution, and a lack of resources overall. This has led to widespread resentment and frustration, which in turn are exploited by the likes of Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a designated terrorist organization known for extreme violence and sabotage in the province.

32 Irfan Tanoli et al., "Detection of Radicalisation and Extremism Online: A Survey," Research Square (2022), https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1185415/v1
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Findings of this research support the view that income disparities, the breakdown of the social contract (i.e., the government's inability to provide for basic needs), a sense of deprivation and exclusion, differences in regional or provincial economic growth and development, disparities in educational facilities, and in some cases, disparities in the percentage of land ownership, are some of the most significant recurring patterns. These patterns interact to contribute to the rise of extremist ideologies and an increase in violence and terrorism, which can destabilize the country and hinder its economic development.

3.3. The Role of Socio-Political Factors

A key finding of the study is that socio-political elements have greatly influenced the radicalization of Pakistani society. Pakistan, since its inception, faced a multitude of challenges that hindered its development as a nation. These challenges included economic turmoil, high levels of unemployment, the persistence of feudal structures, inter-ethnic tensions, and ongoing conflicts with neighboring countries. Furthermore, political leaders and influential members of the clergy, who had been among the strongest supporters of Pakistan's creation, often found it advantageous to exploit religion as a means of public and political mobilization. Pakistan is diverse, comprising individuals from a wide range of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. Despite this diversity, the State has historically sought to promote a singular national identity based on religion, often at the expense of recognizing and acknowledging the unique cultural identities of different ethnic groups. As a result, the proliferation of extremism within the nation can also be seen as a consequence of the State's inability to celebrate diversity and multi-culturalism.

A respondent also alleged that the composition of the State of Pakistan appears to have a bias towards treating individuals from different ethnicities and

regions differently. The most powerful State institutions in the country are primarily composed of Central Punjabi and male members of society. This dominance in power structures leaves people from regions such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Southern Punjab and other remote regions of Pakistan feeling economically and politically excluded from the State, making them more susceptible to extremist ideologies and more likely to embrace extremist tendencies.³⁴

Furthermore, socio-economic and political horizontal inequalities push certain communities backward, making them feel excluded from political representation. Political exclusion leads to individuals becoming radicalized as they question the government's legitimacy. Examples of political factors that contribute to radicalization include domestic and international political shifts and the spread of radical narratives by extremist organizations on media. These radicalization cores serve as the foundation for militant groups operating in the country.

A key informant argued that weak judicial systems and a lack of swift reforms were the two main factors contributing to the nation's governance crisis. Real and perceived historical injustices and weak institutions breed mistrust in society, leaving citizens feeling vulnerable and frustrated. Law Enforcement in Pakistan also remains largely inadequate. Pakistan's administrative institutions have been identified as ineffective at implementing laws according to the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, which ranked the country 130th out of 139 nations in regulatory enforcement and among the lowest in upholding the rule of law.³⁵ The findings of the study supported Makki and Akash who identified

³⁴ Public Policy Expert, Interview by the Authors, October 2, 2022, Islamabad.

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ineffective law enforcement as a key contributor to the proliferation of violent extremism in the country.\footnote{Makki and Akash, “Poverty, Regional Inequality.”}

In a nutshell, findings suggest that socio-political drivers play a significant role in shaping the radicalization of society. For a society to be secure and peaceful, there must be political stability, democratic values, strong institutions and governance, and equal access to resources and representation. Certain individuals or groups may become more vulnerable to radicalization when these factors are not present. According to Philip Edwards, radicalization should be viewed as a process taking place within the political sphere of society rather than just within an individual. He suggests that societies with low levels of accountability, engagement, and accommodation of conflict in their political spheres are highly susceptible to radicalization.\footnote{Philip Edwards, “Antagonism, Conflictuality and Resilience: A New Model of Societal Radicalization,” \textit{Journal for Deradicalization} 21 (2019). \url{https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/id/eprint/624657}}

3.4. \textit{The Role of Religion: From Unity to Extremism}

Generations of Pakistani leaders have attempted to utilize Islamic ideology to persuade its diversified population to support national unity and fend off external threats since the country was founded in the name of religion. Zia ul-Haq's Islamization effort, resulted in the Islamic radicalization that subsequently continued to thrive, resulting in the promotion of extremism. In addition to internal destabilization, religious militancy and terrorism have negatively impacted Pakistan on the national and international levels.\footnote{Steven Gan, et al., \textit{Asian Cyberactivism: Freedom of Expression and Media Censorship} (Bangkok: Friedrich Naumann Foundation: Bangkok, 2004).}

According to a respondent with expertise in policy, Pakistan is a nation that is deeply divided along ethno-linguistic, ideological, sectarian, and political lines. Instead of embracing this diversity, and undemocratic political elites have sought
to create a common identity to unite the nation. This has led to the use of religion as a tool to establish a national narrative and promote national unity.³⁹

Following independence, prolonged periods of authoritarian rule allowed widely dispersed Islamist groups to have a stake in the political apparatus, as the dictators relied on the legitimacy of religious parties to maintain power.⁴⁰ As a result, religious parties with a confrontational strategy against the West rose to prominence in Pakistan. This strategy had its own repercussions, as religious extremism promoted religious concepts of national identity that politically mobilized people and acted as a benchmark for the legitimacy of governments. Subsequently, democratic actors also contributed to the religious radicalization of society by using religious sentiments for their political gains. Political parties used religious slogans for political rhetoric. This supports Bajoria, who found that in Pakistan, the blending of religion and politics has allowed radical groups to exploit religious feelings and build a narrative that justifies the use of violence to achieve their goals. Due to the State's inability to counter these extreme narratives effectively, extremist groups have been able to attract young people towards their extremist ideologies.⁴¹

The Islamic-Western Capitalist nexus played a crucial role in shaping global politics during the Cold War. To wage jihad against communism, Islamist movements in the twentieth century formed alliances with the Western Capitalist bloc, which led to the emergence of Islamist militancy as a significant force in world politics. The collaboration involved recruiting, training, and deploying non-state actors in the name of religion for jihad against Soviet Union. This led to the rise of these powerful non-state actors, who developed their own identities and

³⁹ Public Policy Expert, Interview by the Authors, September 28, 2022.
political economies. By raising funds globally in the name of jihad, these groups gained substantial social prestige, funds, authority, and influence, to the point where they began challenging the State's authority.42

While discussing the factors of radicalization in Pakistan, Abbas argued that another key factor fueling radicalization in Pakistan is religious extremism, particularly Islamic fundamentalism. Shia-Sunni tensions were stoked, and the sectarian disputes were further radicalized by Zia's divisive religious policies. The utilization of religion as a political tool in State policy has led to the mainstreaming of extremist tendencies within society. During an interview, a CVE expert based in Islamabad stated:

The State has seen an increase in religious fundamentalism, particularly during the Zia era. The religious interpretations used to fulfill political needs were often based on violence. Religious interpretations promoted by states, institutions, and the media have frequently emphasized violence and exclusivity over inclusivity.44

Madressahs and Islamic religious schools are often considered as nurseries of religious radicalization.45 One of the respondents argued that the State used Madrassas for its vested interests during the Afghan war, giving them tremendous social power. Handing over control is always easy, but taking it back can be fairly tricky. The State gave these madrassahs so much power that it redefined their role in the society. Another respondent emphasized the crucial role that the educational system, teachers, and curriculum play in fostering extremist ideologies, which furthers the spread of radicalization in society. This highlights the importance of addressing the propagation of intolerance in schools and the curriculum to prevent

42 Policy Maker, Interview by the Authors, September 24, 2022.
43 Hassan Abbas, Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2005).
44 CVE expert, Interview by the Authors, September 25, 2022.
the growth of radicalization in the country. Several researchers, including Christine Fair\textsuperscript{46}, argues that Pakistan's intolerance problem extends beyond madrassahs. Fair argues that the public school system in the country, through its curriculum, has the tendency to promote intolerance and encourage resolution of disputes through violence, thereby potentially fostering extremist ideologies.\textsuperscript{47}

4. Conclusion

The phenomenon of radicalization in Pakistan is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors, such as historical background, geography, geopolitical dynamics, and the influence of foreign powers. This research has identified that economic, socio-political, and religious factors as the most critical drivers of radicalization, which contribute to a sense of exclusion, escalating grievances, and the violent mobilization of ethno-religious identities. Economic disparities and political exclusion, including horizontal inequalities, injustice, and a weak justice system, play a significant role in making society prone to radicalization. Religious fanaticism has been a common denominator in all observed trends and patterns of radicalization in Pakistan, highlighting the need for further research to better understand the role of religious factors.

This highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and inclusive policies to address economic inequality and political marginalization, for promoting peace & stability and tolerance in Pakistan. There is a need to collectively consider political, economic, and religious factors to declare trend-specific deradicalization strategies rather than relying on vague approaches. Moreover, addressing economic, socio-political and religious factors are necessary to effectively reduce the risk of radicalization and fragmentation in the Pakistani society.

\textsuperscript{47} Fair, “Islamist Militancy.”
Comparative Appraisal of CVE Initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore

Syed Saqib Ali Shah*

Abstract

Violent extremism is the most serious threat amongst the numerous drivers of terrorism that is damaging the tolerant cultural and religious ethos of the Pakistani state and society. It is also understandably having a negative impact on the development and progress of the entire nation as a whole. This paper seeks to analyze the phenomenon of violent extremism and the factors leading to it with particular reference to the case studies of Pakistan and Singapore. The critical review includes a comparison of the Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore. It attempts to highlight the lessons Pakistan can draw from Singapore, so as to meet the formidable challenge of CVE at home. It is argued that a smart and proactive CVE program built on a "whole of nation/ community approach" similar to the highly successful model of Singapore can assist Pakistan in consolidating its CVE gains and filling in the gaps that continue to persist.

Keywords: Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Terrorism, Radicalization, Singapore, Pakistan.

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1. **Introduction**

Violent extremism is a complicated phenomenon that is defined and examined by analysts and policy makers in a number of ways. The US Department of Homeland Security for instance describes violent extremists as, “People who advocate or engage in violent acts motivated by ideology in order to further political objectives.”\(^1\) The Homeland Department further goes on to describe the causes of extremism as, “the spread of beliefs and narratives that capitalize on grievances, place blame and justify the use of violence against those judged guilty, are all aspects of radicalization that lead to violent extremism.”\(^2\)

The terms "violent extremism" and "terrorism" are also often used synonymously. Academics and researchers typically perceive radicalization and radicalism as separate from extremism and terrorism. Schmid for instance distinguishes between radicalism and extremism as, “Radicals are typically open-minded egalitarians, while extremists are closed-minded supremacists”.\(^3\) Consequently, radicalization carries both positive and negative meanings. However, this does not preclude radicals from becoming extremists or terrorists since radicalization can result in extremism.\(^4\)

The steps taken by the governments and civil society organizations to limit, prevent, and ultimately address the underlying causes of violent extremism is referred to as countering violent extremism. The balance between the kinetic (hard) and non-kinetic (soft) sides of counterterrorism is provided by CVE measures.

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which are believed to be essential for long-term counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts. The primary objective of any CVE policy is to counteract and preferably prevent extremist thoughts and beliefs from taking hold over the society at large.

The primary objective of this article is to compare and contrast the CVE methods/models of Pakistan and Singapore and to determine whether Pakistan can implement and utilize the successful features of the Singapore's CVE model. This research is organized into three main parts. Theoretical framework of the overall research will be discussed in the first section. The second section discusses the history, drivers, and causes of violent extremism in Pakistan and the subsequent CVE programs and policies undertaken by the Pakistani State. The third and final section of this article analyzes the challenges of violent extremism in Singapore, its CVE policies and strategies and the lessons that can be learnt.

Before we move on to the CVE initiatives in Pakistan and Singapore, it is important to first discuss the theoretical framework that will be utilized in this research.

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1. General System Theory

General systems theory was created by German philosopher Niklas Luhmann. According to Luhmann the systems theory is "the method by which researchers apply system analysis to comprehend the structures and ways by which to reconstruct the societal system". General systems theory can be used to analyze and examine the interpersonal, inter-group, and international relations systems. The postmodern paradigm, which includes the systems theory, has contributed a new viewpoint to literature by allowing us to view the State or the world from a

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perspective that focuses both on individuals and the prevailing systems.

The general system theory is used because it gives researchers a theoretical framework for examining the arrangement and reconstruction of societal systems. This paper aims to use this theory for understanding and explaining the interpersonal, inter-group and institutional/organizational relations in order to determine the adaptability and effectiveness of the measures taken for CVE in Pakistan and Singapore.

2.2. Theory of Rationalization

Max Weber, a German academician who developed the theory of rationalization claimed that modern society (although his focus was the Western world) is exponentially rationalized. He asserted that theoretical rationalization gives the understanding about how the world operates and/ or should operate. It necessitates the use of logic, an understanding of social setting and the capacity to give meaning to symbolic arrangements.\(^6\) Kalberg simplifies formal rationality by asserting that this type of rationality consists of how individuals make judgments based on ‘universally applied rules, regulations and laws’. According to him, theoretical rationalization necessitates that “people be able to give sense (logically) to a world that may appear chaotic”.\(^7\)

Theoretical rationalization is a brain-based intellectual process, whereas substantive rationality is connected to an individuals’ personal beliefs, their particular set of values and is what enables them to function in society throughout the course of the day, particularly when they have to make decisions. Through the theory of rationalization, scholars can examine how human behavior fits into the larger context of meaning and reason. This theory has the potential to explain the


choices, decision and action made for CVE in Pakistan and Singapore and to comprehend the institutions in the societies of both countries.

3. **Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan: Challenges and Counter Initiatives**

3.1. **Background**

Since its independence, Pakistan has seen different but interlinked ethnic, sectarian and religious tensions that have occasionally escalated into violence. Internal and external entities for certain vested interests, often covertly support the ethnic and religious radicalization in Pakistan by providing both a narrative and funding. However, for its own part, Pakistan worked with the US in the latter's goal to counter the advancement of communism in Afghanistan, which inadvertently contributed to the first substantial rise of violent extremism in the country. Following the Soviet-Afghan war debacle, the broader effects of 9/11 attacks, Pakistan's compulsion to participate in the US 'War on Terror' as a front-line ally and the recent rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan have had an immense toll on the country.\(^8\) Both the intensity and the scope of violent extremism have constantly been on a rise.

3.2. **Challenges for CVE in Pakistan**

Pakistan confronts multiple challenges from the global, regional and internal environments. Some of these are a product of intolerance, extremism, militancy and terrorism from domestic circumstances, while others are influenced by its past interactions with regional and extra-regional powers.\(^9\) Additionally, economic crisis, political instability, weak leadership, sectarianism, competition among provinces and illiteracy are important factors contributing to Pakistan's internal

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security issues. Pakistan is approximately a nation of 240 million people who represent a variety of religious, regional and national identities. Intersection between these diverse socio-religious groups often generates friction that leads to societal intolerance and inter-communal conflicts.

3.2.1. *International and Regional Dimensions*

Pakistan's societal structure is being disrupted by the revival of ethnic and religious violence by terrorist organizations and their affiliations to inimical foreign agencies which is negatively impacting the country's economy and growth. The escalating ethnic unrest has consistently provided fertile ground for hostile foreign forces to worsen the security situation, as was the case with East Pakistan's secession and the ethnic conflicts in Sindh and Balochistan. Additionally, Yemen, Syria, and other Middle Eastern nations that are prone to sectarian violence, wherein the sectarian proxies of Iran and Arab states continue to fuel and sustain the decades long conflicts, have also negatively affected Pakistan. Recently, three dossiers have been shared with UN by Pakistani government on the evidence of Indian intervention in Balochistan, Karachi and the Newly Merged tribal Districts (NMDs), erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), fueling ethnic and religious violence. All of this has contributed to the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in the country.

3.2.2. *Domestic Predicament*

In Pakistan, a number of local factors have also contributed to the rise of radicalization and extremism. For instance, in the Zia era, sectarianism rose concurrently with the process of Islamization, which caused Shia-Sunni sectarian

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Madaris, at the time, were urged to preach, promote and encourage the Afghan Jihad struggle against the Soviets with full assistance and support of the US, Saudi Arabia, and Gulf States, thus encouraging militancy and injecting religious extremism in the society. Over time, students at these madaris went on to participate in the war in Afghanistan and after the war either joined or created a number of terrorist organizations.

The events that unfolded in NMDs after 9/11 when the US invaded Afghanistan are another major cause of radicalization and violence. The majority of the Taliban from Afghanistan, Central Asia, as well as the leadership of Al-Qaeda managed to escape and establish new bases in the NMDs. They went on to pose a major challenge to the Pakistani military and the society at large as they gained a strong foothold in the region. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged from this intersection between Al-Qaeda fugitives, Taliban relegates and local extremist sympathizers. The TTP would go on to pose the most significant terrorist threat to the Pakistani society. As a strong proponent of violent and extremist ideology with a radical interpretation of Islam, the TTP has long strived to impose its repressive ideology and its very restrictive version of sharia law on Pakistan. The group continues to pose a serious threat to the Pakistani youth and has remained fairly successful in recruiting young people from marginalized communities, particularly from the NMDs.

In the beginning, the majority of terroristic violence was primarily initiated by Deobandi Sunni groups, primarily Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its lethal faction Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). In the prevailing terrorist landscape, two of the most eminent extremist groups are Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the local

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branch of ISIS, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Both of these groups, appear to have taken the lead from SSP and LeJ, and are dominating the prevailing terrorist landscape of Pakistan. Despite being predominantly from Deobandi background, many former LeJ militants have reportedly joined the Salafi movement of ISKP and have substantially contributed to the terroristic activities of the group in Pakistan. ISKP notoriously claimed responsibility for the March 4, 2022 attack in Peshawar that targeted a Shia mosque and claimed 60 innocent lives.

Extremism by a group that was long thought to be of moderate Barelvi sect is also becoming increasingly concerning. Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has thus far been involved in a number of agitative acts of sectarianism and religious extremism since it gained prominence in 2017. Its supporters are especially rallied around protests for alleged desecration of the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The tragic mob lynching of a factory manager from Sri Lanka on December 3, 2021 after he was falsely accused of blasphemy is the most violent result of TLP's extremist mindset so far. Similar other instances and threats thereof have been witnessed all over the country, suggesting that a new chapter in the nation's sectarian and extremist violence has tragically begun.

3.3. Pakistan’s Initiatives to Counter Violent Extremism

In the context of Pakistan, CVE can primarily be described as effective challenging/countering of radical narratives that militant and radical groups propagate in order to promote intolerance resulting in extremism and violence.

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Over the past nine years, the government of Pakistan, through NACTA and the Armed Forces, has started numerous CVE initiatives to reconstruct and rebuild the societal systems in accordance with the General System Theory (outlined earlier), including deradicalization and rehabilitation programs, the introduction of a national narrative, madaris reforms, policies and notable legal measures.

3.3.1. De-radicalization and Rehabilitation Programs for Ex-Militants

Pakistan’s CVE initiatives include a number of engagement and deradicalization programs. A youth rehabilitation program was launched under the supervision of the Pakistan Army after the defeat of TTP in Swat. Similar programs were also launched in some parts of Punjab through Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in coordination with various non-governmental groups.17

Following the conclusion of the 2009 military operation Rah-e-Rast against the TTP in Malakand Division, Pakistan Army also initiated a program for jailed militants, namely, De-radicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP).18 At the Rastoon Center, militants were treated, the Sabawoon Center concentrated on de-radicalizing teenagers (suicide bombers) and the Mishal Center collaborated with the militants’ families that then went through a specially designed deradicalization program in coordination with a local NGO, Hum Pakistan Foundation (HPF).19

A related initiative was also taken up by CTD Punjab in 2011 with the support and assistance of the Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), which provided technical and vocational training to more than 300

18 Basit, “Countering Violent Extremism.”
former members of banned militants and sectarian outfits. Following the Rah-e-Rast and Rah-e-Nijat military operations, two additional programs were also initiated in the remote districts of Bajaur, NMDs and Tank of the KP province. The Bajaur Center released 47 Ex-Taliban fighters in October 2013 after completion of their vocational training course under the Navi Sahar program.

3.3.2. CVE related Reforms and Legislation in Pakistan

In January 2018, the Government of Pakistan through the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the Islamic Research Institute (IRI) took another set of measures by launching a national narrative, ‘Paigham-e-Pakistan’ (PeP). PeP was a joint declaration and a decree (Fatwa) of Pakistan’s leading Ulema-o-Mashaikh from all religious schools of thought against terrorism, suicide bombing, self-proclamation of jihad, sectarianism, violent extremism and accusations of blasphemy. The document was signed and endorsed by more than 1800 Ulema-o-Mashaikh. PeP to date, is the only document of its kind and represents a substantial landmark in the country’s effort to counter and prevent violent extremism. Its full impact on the society and its true potential is yet to be realized.

In order to address violent extremism at the provincial level, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has recently established a Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism (CECVE). CECVE is a research institute that will help prevent, monitor, and counter violent activities,
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hate speech and violent extremism in the province of KP.24

Similarly, in August 2019, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFE&PT) and a consortium of five madaris boards, Ittehad Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP), signed the first successful Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bring about the much needed madrassa reforms. A Directorate General for Religious Education (DGRE) was subsequently founded in September 2019 along with 16 regional offices.25 Moreover, 10 new educational boards for madaris were established that had registered more than 5000 madaris till May 2021.26 The 2019 consortium represents an important step forward and its impact on the society at large will become evident in the years to come.

Periodic revisions were also made to the pre-911 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) of Pakistan in 2014 and again in 2015 to give Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) more authority and freedom in the fight against terrorism. In 2014, for instance, the Protection of Pakistan Act was passed, which greatly empowered the LEAs.27 In 2014, 21st Constitutional Amendment was also made that established the Military Courts for two years. The term of courts was extended for an additional two years in 2017 following the passage of 28th Amendment Bill, which was understandably met with criticism from human rights watchdogs. Despite all these efforts there is much that still needs to be accomplished.

3.3.3. Legal Instrument/ Policy Measures in Pakistan

The government of Pakistan also initiated policy measures specifically related

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to CVE and a National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was founded in 2008 with a specialized directorate for CVE but it took another five years for NACTA to become effective owing to the delay in the passage of the concerned bill in the parliament. Another step was the issuing of the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) for the period of 2014-2018, which provided a clear roadmap for the creation of the federal Rapid Response Force (RRF) and Directorate of Internal Security (DIS), for the prevention of cyberspace abuse and modernization of the entire criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{28} In order to counter the risks to internal security, the government has additionally strengthened the existing policies with two more NISPs (2018-2023 & 2022-2026). Their subsequent impact on the entire counter terrorism and violent extremism efforts remains to be seen.

The National Action Plan (NAP) similarly was also a significant milestone towards effective CVE initiatives and reforms in Pakistan. It was ambitiously and determinately launched following the horrific attack of TTP on the Army Public School Peshawar in 2014, which claimed the lives of over a hundred innocent children. It unified the nation like never before in its resolve to fight the forces of terrorism and violent extremism. The All Parties Conference (APC), including the government and all opposition parties, unanimously reached an agreement on 20 policy issues for hard and soft counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization measures, as it made a solemn resolve to take action against hate speech, register all unregulated madaris and take steps against all prevailing radical ideologies.\textsuperscript{29} In 2021, NAP has been revised and now includes fourteen core points for implementation to effectively tackle the menace of extremism and terrorism,

However, NAP has only partially been implemented which in part explains its limited success.

4. **Countering Violent Extremism: Challenges and Initiatives in Singapore**

4.1. **Background**

After September 11 attacks, under the influence of Al-Qaeda/ISIS ideology, many countries witnessed a major surge in violent religious extremism. The region of South East Asia that are host to a number of conservative belief systems, were no exception.

The Islamic State terrorist group (IS), in particular, actively set out to establish an "East Asia Wilayat". Extremist groups from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines gathered in the Southern Philippines in 2014 after the emergence of ISIS in Southeast Asia. Subsequently, Southeast Asian countries had to enact and enforce a number of counter extremism and terrorism policies and strategies. In this regard, strategies and policies enacted by Singapore to counter terrorism and extremism can be considered a benchmark, especially insofar as the social reconstruction in accordance with the Systems Theory are concerned. With major innovations and modifications in its CVE programs and an effective combination of kinetic and non-kinetic measures, Singapore has effectively implemented a noteworthy policy that has yielded tremendous results for the country.

4.2. **CVE Challenges in Singapore**

In December 2001, Singapore authorities uncovered an affiliate and AQ local partner terrorist organization namely, Jemaah Islamia (JI), which had planned to carry out numerous bombing operations in Singapore. In fact, a number of JI bomb plots planned to target foreign embassies in Singapore were effectively foiled by Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD). In 2001, thirteen JI

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members were successfully apprehended, however, it was not until late 2006 that the government was able to effectively dismantle intricate JI terrorist network.\(^{31}\)

The threat of terrorism nevertheless, persisted both within and outside the region, particularly following ISIS's emergence in 2014 and its active use of social media to spread its erroneous extremist Islamist beliefs. Some of the former ideologically dedicated ISIS members from Southeast Asia returned to their countries from Iraq and Syria. Subsequently, incidents like the suicide bombing in Surabaya, Indonesia, in May 2018, and the five-month armed occupation in the Southern Philippines’s city of Marawi in 2017 transpired.\(^{32}\) Around this time, authorities in Singapore detained a woman for radicalizing an assistant and a Managing Director of a company, who made numerous attempts to join ISIS in 2017.\(^{33}\) Similarly, in August 2018, an engineer was detained after being radicalized by ISIS propaganda.\(^{34}\)

Beginning in 2017, Singapore faced the greatest threat from terrorism in its recent history. The radicalization of its citizens were eventually attributed to three main sources: social media content, online radical preachers and “influencers” who persuade others to adopt their viewpoint. It is worth noting here that since 1980s, religious communities in Singapore had grown more fervent and forceful which subsequently paved the way for radical extremist ideologies to thrive in some sectors of an otherwise fairly liberal and secular society.

\(^{31}\) Gavin Chua Hearn Yuit, “Singapore’s Approach to Counterterrorism,” *Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point* 2, no. 12 (December 2009), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/singapores-approach-to-counterterrorism/


\(^{33}\) Mokhtar, “Looking Ahead to 2018.”

4.3. **Singapore’s Measures to Counter Violent Extremism**

Singapore's CVE approach is primarily centered on preventing racial and religious strife alongside building social resilience. Building such societal resilience is of foremost importance because Singapore is among the countries with the greatest religious diversity in the world.\(^{35}\) The government of Singapore released a “White Paper” document in 2003, stating that "Inter-religious and inter-racial relations are severely harmed by terrorism, if committed in the name of a faith".\(^{36}\) This was an effort to prohibit terrorists’ elements from sowing discord between different communities. According to Kalberg, theoretical rationalization compels people to provide meaning to a world that may seem chaotic. Demonstrating great foresight, Singapore rationally set out to develop a complete set of CVE strategies that involve combating extremist ideology, terrorist rehabilitation and reintegration, and community participation.

4.3.1. **Countering Extremist Ideology**

Singapore's CVE approach places a strong emphasis on combating extremist ideology since terrorist ideologues routinely disseminate inaccurate and misleading radical ideas. According to terrorist propaganda, to build or defend an Islamic state, Muslims must move to areas of conflict and engage in military jihad against Christians, Jews and all others that oppose their ideology. Additionally, they provided false interpretations of Islamic ideas, stating that declaring infidel or killing of those who disagreed with them and did not share their beliefs was not only acceptable but also a sacred religious duty.

Singapore has put a lot of effort into exposing these false doctrines and

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preventing them from gaining hold. The government has collaborated with Muslim scholars and community leaders who are at the forefront of these efforts. A group of Muslim clerics, established the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in 2002 and volunteered their services to offer religious counselling for terrorist captives and their families.\(^{37}\) RRG worked together with psychologists and counsellors offering accurate and ratified interpretation of Islamic doctrine.

The Asatizah Recognition Scheme (ARS) was also created at a community level in partnership with a reputable Muslim NGO PEGAS (Association of Singapore Islamic Scholars and Religious Teachers). It works under the statutory board, the Singapore Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) that oversees matters pertaining to Muslims in Singapore.\(^{38}\) The ARS was established in 2005 to provide requisite credentials and training to religious teachers and to make sure that religious instruction does not foster societal division or support extremist ideas. In 2017, the ARS made it necessary for all Muslim religious educators to be registered with the concerned authorities.

MUIS has produced texts for Friday sermons at mosques in order to educate worshipers about the perils of religious extremism and the value of developing religious harmony. Additionally, MUIS increased its outreach activities, offering a platform for youth through the Asatizah Youth Network (AYN) where teachers answer questions about terrorism and extremism-related issues.\(^{39}\) MUIS also announced a number of meetings at designated mosques to offer advice and answer questions concerning exclusivism and armed conflict through trained Asatizah for the benefit of young people on social media.


In respect of outreach initiatives, the RRG has done much more than just provide counseling to prisoners. It organizes public education exercises for both Muslims and non-Muslims and publishes material that effectively dismantles extreme ideologies and narratives. Additionally, it also operates a Resource and Counseling Center for clarifications on extremist ideology as well as a website with material to challenge and disprove extremist doctrines. The media frequently publishes articles that encourage tolerance, religious moderation, inclusivity and pluralism. The scholars also interact with the locals through speeches and visits to schools.

4.3.2. Community Engagement

In order to foster communal peace (which given the diversity of Singapore is a crucial undertaking), the Community Engagement Program (CEP) was introduced by the government of Singapore in 2006. The strategy was followed by the July 2005 London bombings, which increased the risk of domestic terrorism and the ensuing spike in hate crimes against Muslims.40 The CEP strives to unite Singaporeans hailing from various groups and to establish response plans to assist in resolving potential inter-communal conflicts. Additionally, it strives to maintain society's strength and cohesion following a terrorist attack so that people can go about their regular lives in peace and harmony and not target others for their individual identities.

Following 9/11 attacks and the JI arrests, CEP established a number of groups to make their individual communities' networks and affiliations stronger. These groups included (a) religious and ethnic organizations, (b) welfare organizations, (c) educational facilities and (d) trade unions.41 Another initiative was the foundation of Inter-Racial Confidence Circle (IRCC) in 2002, as a forum

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41 Latif, “Hearts of Resilience.”
to encourage interfaith dialogue and confidence building. A National Steering Committee (NSC) was also set up for giving general direction to IRCCs on how to strengthen communal and religious bonds through events like history trails, interfaith discussions, and numerous other festivals.  

MUIS had also launched another program in 2006, namely The Harmony Center to foster broader understanding of Islam and encourage interfaith engagement in and around the country. Approximately 40,000 visitors, many of whom were foreigners visited this Center between 2006 and 2013. Another significant project, the SG Secure national movement, was introduced in 2016 with the goal of educating, preparing and enlisting Singapore’s community to help prevent and respond to terrorist attacks by practicing community vigilance, cohesion and resilience. It highlights the common ground necessary to foster respect and understanding of each other’s belief systems. 

4.3.3. **Reforms and Legislation in Singapore**

Singapore has relied on clearly articulated laws, policies and procedures to keep peaceful ties intact between the different races and religions of its inhabitants. It has several laws in existence to restrict actions that might cause racial and religious conflict before the religious-based terrorism even emerged. After the passage of Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA) in 1990, the government has created Presidential Council for Religious Harmony. The Act specifies that a restraining order may be issued against any religious leader whose conduct creates hate, anger, or antagonism. He/she would also be prohibited from speaking publicly or in writing and from holding public office. The MRHA policies successfully restrained religious activism and disagreements that

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42 Gavin Chua Hearn Yuit, “Singapore’s Approach to Counterterrorism.”
typically pave way for violent religious extremism.

Any individual whose deeds or arguments create sense of enmity and hatred between different racial or social groups is subject to prosecution under the Sedition (Repeal) Act 2021. In recent years, several offenders have been charged with crimes and found guilty for denigrating other religions. The Undesirable Publications Act, 1967 forbids the dissemination, importation or printing of materials that incite animosity, hatred, or hostility between groups based on their race or religion. Similarly, other laws have also been used by the government to prevent foreign religious preachers from entering Singapore if they are known to fuel animosity between various religions.

5. Conclusion
The Pakistani government has initiated a number of CVE measures. Yet, there is need to coordinate the efforts for improving implementation process through regular evaluation. The difficulties in implementing CVE measures must be examined thoroughly by Pakistani policymakers and government officials.

Though Pakistan has achieved some success in establishing DGRE (an autonomous body for registration of madaris), it should also establish an organ under DGRE in line with the Asatizah Recognition Scheme (established by the statutory board of Singapore’s MUIS). The registration of all religious teachers in Pakistan must be made mandatory under ARS and necessary qualifications and training must be given to ensure that religious teachings do not promote violent or extremist ideologies. However, if any individual is found to be involved in extremist/ violent activities, the registration should immediately be cancelled and he/she should be banned from teaching/ addressing public gatherings or holding
any government or public office.

Extremist and ultra-sectarian forces have long posed a major challenge to Pakistan, as they remain fairly successful in radicalizing and recruiting people, particularly the youth. Pakistan therefore has to invest considerable efforts for bringing forward the volunteer group of influential religious clerics (Ulema-o-Mashaikh) to expose the distorted teachings of Islam, on the lines of RRG working voluntarily in Singapore.

Finally, the religious decree enshrined in Paigham-e-Pakistan should be given full social projection and legal protection to penalize any offenders. The Federal and Provincial governments of Pakistan need to enact legislation on the fatwa sought to counter terrorism and extremism. Moreover, following the example of KP government, the CECVE should also be established in all federating units of Pakistan at the earliest to help prevent violent activities, hatred and extremism.

Pakistan, being the Muslim majority state is quite different from religiously diverse Singapore having 14.3% Muslims population, but the nature of threats from terrorism and violent extremism is quite similar. Pakistan has arguably made relatively moderate progress in the CVE domain, however there is still plenty that needs to be accomplished. Pakistan stands to learn substantially from the proactive, prudent and successful CVE approach of Singapore, since the process of indoctrination by terrorist and extremist organizations tend to significantly overlap.

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Silent Sufferers Unveiled: Exploring Women's Trauma through Shahnaz Bashir's Scattered Souls

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Abstract

Since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir has been subjected to aggression and state terrorism. Narratives are abundant with sombre and unresolved stories due to the ominous presence of violence. The aftermath of this violence significantly affects ordinary citizens who are the ‘insignificant others’ of society and unnoticed victims. Their suffering remains unspoken, untold and obscured in comparison with grander political narratives. The paper delves into the overlooked and ignored narratives of women enduring suffering silently in the face of state violence, specifically focusing on Shahnaz Bashir's poignant collection of short stories, Scattered Souls. Against the backdrop of the longstanding illegal occupation of Kashmir, the research underscores the unvoiced trauma experienced by women who bear the brunt of violence and loss. Drawing from Cathy Caruth's Trauma theory, the study centers on Bashir's vivid accounts of women's distressing experiences, encompassing the loss of family members and vanished husbands. This research aims to bring to the fore these marginalized voices that are suppressed by larger nationalist Hindutva narratives. Bashir's stories, acting as conduits, offer a glimpse into their concealed struggles, revealing the suppressed emotions and resilience of Kashmiri women in the face of occupation.

Keywords: Kashmir, Trauma, Narratives, Conflict, Resilience, Memory.

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1. Introduction

Trauma, frequently identified as an emotional reaction to unfortunate occurrences such as catastrophes, assaults, or natural disasters, leaves permanent traces on its victims that appear as agitation, unanticipated sentiments, hallucinations, strained relationships, and seizures. In addition, trauma may be experienced collectively by diverse cultural groups and even subsequent generations. This phenomenon is especially prominent in nations besieged by sorrow and conflict, such as occupied Jammu & Kashmir, where people have undergone decades of Indian-orchestrated cruel mass executions, imposed disappearances, sexual assaults, and repression of free speech. Contemporary literature emerging from Indian-occupied Kashmir successfully depicts the intricacies of life-threatening conditions caused by communal disparities, cultural breakdown and conflicting geopolitical forces.

In the shadow of the protracted conflict that has marked the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir since the subcontinent's partition in 1947, an intricate and often-overlooked narrative comes into existence, one that concentrates on the silent, yet unwavering women caught in the turbulent flows of violence and unpredictability. This research analysis dives into the psychological portrayal of women's trauma in areas of contention, especially in the backdrop of Shahnaz Bashir's compilation of short stories, *Scattered Souls*. The historical context of conflict-ridden regions is replete with unidentified and unsolved narratives emerging from the volatile undercurrents of bloodshed. The experiences of those caught up in such confrontations have enormous weight within the cacophony of political narratives. Within this chaotic historical and sociopolitical background, the tales told in *Scattered Souls* offer a justified tribute to Kashmiri women's forbearance of unspoken aches and sufferings. The era of the 1990s, when the freedom movement was at its peak, gives evidence to the women's silent fortitude – a moment when their lives were forever scarred by the death of their sons, orphaning of children, and disappearance of their husbands.
As Shahnaz Bashir painstakingly constructs each account, a subtle but profound link develops, unwinding these women's buried sorrow, strength, and agency. Bashir pulls back the layers of trauma by weaving together their personal stories, showing the terrible emotional repercussions of violence. The purpose of the article is to find out how Bashir's storytelling provides an avenue through which these silent victims gain a voice, providing a look into their marginalized and subaltern histories that are frequently excluded from conventional historical records. This particular critical endeavour intends to expose the power of literature in revealing the true stories of individuals who have been marginalized and ostracized eventually compelling us to confront the human cost of war and the resilience of those who have been sidelined and silenced.

2. Literature Review

Given the primary focal points of the study, the literature review section engages in an examination of literature encompassing trauma theory, Kashmiri literature, and evaluations of Bashir's literary contributions.

2.1. Trauma Theory in Historical Exploration and Literary Portrayals

The role of trauma theory is central to the exploration and understanding of historical occurrences, as well as their portrayal in literary works. The origins of trauma analysis can be linked to the concepts put forth by Sigmund Freud, which developed during the latter part of the nineteenth century in his psychological and psychoanalytic discussions. In the words of Caroline Garland, trauma can be seen as a “kind of wound”, drawing from the ancient Greek concept of “piercing of the skin”. Sigmund Freud metaphorically employed this term to emphasize “how the mind, too, may be pierced and wounded by events.”¹ In psychiatric literature, Cathy Caruth has conceptualized trauma as “a wound inflicted on the mind.” She further

elaborates that trauma emerges from a jarring encounter with an unforeseen or catastrophic incident, or a series of such incidents, resulting in responses that materialize as “delayed, uncontrolled, and repetitive manifestations like hallucinations and intrusive phenomena.” These encounters do not immediately integrate into the mind but resurface later as recurring nightmares, hallucinations, flashbacks, and similar experiences. Caruth also identifies Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a term encompassing a constellation of symptoms that arise in survivors sometimes after a traumatic event or severe incident.

Kali Tal’s ground breaking work, “Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma” has garnered global acclaim, acting as a cornerstone in the field of Trauma Studies, regularly referred to, quoted, and mentioned. As a mentor and editor, Tal worked with several Vietnamese veteran authors and trauma sufferers. Her important engagement includes consultation duties with the Oral History Archives, to which she spent a considerable period of her life. Tal defines suffering as a uniquely personal experience, claiming that people who go through transition seldom return to a prior condition of anguish. She notes that the investigation of clinical data pertaining to victims of distressing situations has enabled psychiatrists to rigorously characterize the symptoms, especially those connected to PTSD, proving a relationship between war trauma and future PTSD.

Historical trauma is an aspect of psychological despair experienced by nation-states, communities, or ethnic populations. A number of scholars provide viewpoints on historical trauma in Yael Danieli’s “International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma”, examining it as the result of a “collective,

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2 Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
historical, and cumulative psychic wounding of a nation or tribe over a long period of time.”

This type of trauma has an impact on numerous generations, appearing in the form of bodily illnesses, disruptive emotions, and aberrant conduct in both present and future generations.

A disturbing tendency occurs in conflict-torn places devastated by the ravages of war: a disproportionate number of women endure the weight of traumatic experiences. This heart breaking fact highlights the gendered dimension of conflict-related suffering, as women are frequently the major victims of violence, displacement, and loss. The trauma caused by such conditions has a permanent influence on these women's mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This troubling tendency highlights the critical need for more attention to the special issues that women experience in war-torn places. Olff contends that “women have a two to three times higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to men.”

2.2. Kashmir Valley's 70-Year Evolution in Fortification and Conflict

Over the course of seventy years, the Kashmir Valley has evolved into a fiercely fortified territory rife with violence, ranking among the world's most heavily guarded enclaves. Within the compilation “Kashmir: New Voices, New Approaches”, expertly edited by Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Bushra Asif, and Cyrus Samii, prevalent misconceptions regarding the contestation over Kashmir are steadfastly rejected. Kashmir, often termed the planet's most perilous locale, defies these common stereotypes. This region has borne witness to an unparalleled

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The assertive actions of India in Kashmir have imperilled the stability of a region of significant strategic importance, leaving its residents traumatized. In “Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War”, Victoria Schofield delves into the turmoil prevailing in Kashmir, stemming from widespread killings, torture, sexual assault, and authoritarianism. She underscores that incidents of human rights violations are now making global headlines, recounting tales of indiscriminate shootings, abuse, and torture.\footnote{Victoria Schofield, \textit{Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War} (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2003).}

\textbf{2.3. Critical Appraisal of Bashir's Work}


According to Soni Wadhwa, Bashir's contribution to the discourse on Kashmir enriches the body of literature capable of dispelling the prevailing uninformed, deeply ingrained, and exaggerated portrayal of Kashmir, along with the burdens its inhabitants bear daily. Wadhwa observes that the narratives within \textit{Scattered Souls} unveil glimpses “from the lives of Kashmiris that are not otherwise accessible in the news stories of firing or attacks.” In a climate dominated by statistics and distorted realities, these stories depict the humanity often obscured behind mere numerical figures, casualties reduced to statistics or labelled as 'militants.' “The spectrum of the characters follows an arc of being hounded — not
in the sense of some stories being more graphic or more tragic than the others, or in the sense of leaving the readers more affected than the others.”

Shekhar characterizes *Scattered Souls* as a collection of narratives that intricately depict the trauma stemming from, “assault, terrorism, and growing up amidst everyday violence.” He goes on to assert that Bashir effectively amplifies the voices of “other people, other souls, trapped in the turmoil in Kashmir.” Shekhar suggests that within the backdrop of profound suffering, pain, and perseverance, Bashir has crafted a narrative that encapsulates an oddly placed sense of hope.

According to Suraya Jan, Shahnaz Bashir used a straightforward storyline and permitted the book to infiltrate a very literal streak of fact and with the help of his characters clearly illustrated the wistful state of Kashmiri people. Rather in his article “Conflict in Paradise and Victimised Women: An Analysis of Select Short Stories from Shahnaz Bashir’s *Scattered Souls*” contends that “Bashir has painted the picture of pain of the women in Kashmir. The conflict has rendered them useless and stripped them of their dignity. They are harassed and put to shame all the time by the security forces.” Chishti & Saxena assert that “the selected stories poignantly reflect on all the atrocities women have gone through in the conflict of Kashmir, which are not heard or recorded in mainstream narratives.”

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13 Asma Jeelani Chishti and Dr. Shweta Saxena, “Conflict and Women in Jammu and Kashmir:A Study of selected short stories from Shahnaz Bashir's *Scattered Souls*.”
Shahnaz Bashir adeptly portrays the challenges faced by marginalized women, particularly within these narratives.

To sum up, the comprehensive examination of the mentioned works from diverse angles, encompassing trauma, historical, cultural, ethnic, and feminist viewpoints, lays a solid foundation for the exploration of trauma experiences in females within the chosen narrative.

3. Materials and Methods

The proposed research encompasses a qualitative evaluation of Shahnaz Bashir's *Scattered Souls* through the perspective of Trauma Theory, employing textual analysis as the method of investigation. Extracts from the text are chosen based on their alignment with the primary research inquiries. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory serves as the underlying theoretical framework for this study. Caruth's trauma theory is a well-known concept in literary and psychological studies that investigates how people perceive and respond to traumatic situations. Her work has had a significant impact on comprehending the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma, and it has been of particular benefit in analyzing traumatic events in literature and storytelling.

At the heart of Caruth's trauma theory lies the notion of “delayed understanding” or “deferred action,” as she expressively enunciates: “What characterizes this type of traumatic experience is not exactly what happens there, in the violent or destructive event, but rather the way in which what has happened there comes back to haunt the survivor later on.” Caruth proclaims that over recent decades, there has been a bigger concern regarding “the suffering entailed in trauma.” People have realized the significance of learnedness more and more about the survivors’ feedback on the intense traumatic incidents. Now there is a desire to

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attain the methods “of helping to alleviate the suffering” of survivors. Such methods are estimated to distribute the connections within “both individual and group trauma” and consequently back the elucidations of the cognitive anomalies of persons and nations suffering from the after-effects of vicious episodes. For that reason, the drive of the research and investigation of trauma is “to understand the nature of the suffering and to help relieve it” through catharsis in the form of narration.

Traumatic events, Caruth contends, frequently transcend an individual's cognitive and emotional capacity at the time of occurrence. Instead, the full impact of trauma is typically delayed, appearing later in fragmented and disconnected ways. This delayed comprehension is a hallmark of trauma, and it is typically accompanied by symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and obtrusive ideas. Caruth's statements capture her attention on the significance of language and story in trauma healing and portrayal: “It is the story that becomes the site of the survivor's own belated sense of knowing, and it is the story that, after the fact, comes to bear witness to the history that has not yet been known.” She contends that trauma survivors frequently suffer from the inability to describe what they have gone through. This battle is profoundly represented in their tales, which are distinguished by gaps, silences, and repeats as individuals grapple with the ineffable nature of their traumatic experiences, according to Caruth.

In addition, Caruth's remarkable understanding of the function of empathy and bearing witness can be observed in the remarks she makes: “The traumatic history of another can suddenly become the traumatic history of the listener”. She proposes that bearing witness to another person's tragedy might operate as a type of catharsis, assisting the survivor in dealing with their own trauma. This component of her theory has been critical in understanding the therapeutic power of storytelling and the need to actively listen to trauma survivors' experiences. In the scenario of Shahnaz Bashir's *Scattered Souls*, an in-depth evaluation through
the lens of Caruth's trauma theory would entail investigating how the characters, particularly female characters in the stories react to and cope with their traumatic experiences, how their accounts express the put-off understanding of trauma and the role of narrative and language in their recuperation and healing processes. These accounts would be analyzed for how they represent the delayed comprehension of trauma, which is frequently reflected in Caruth's argument that “the history that has not yet been known” surfaces through storytelling. It would also evaluate the role of empathy and witness in the tales, both in terms of the interactions of the characters and their possible influence on readers.14

4. Textual Analysis

The thirteen narratives in the compilation of Scattered Souls have a fundamental link. Bashir's storytelling abilities are reflected through the narrator's voice carrying the weight of personal memories that serve as the cornerstone of his storylines. Shahnaz Bashir's stories focus on the human toll exacted by the battle, graphically illustrating the long-term effects of the struggle and militarization in Kashmir, with a special emphasis on the agony faced by women. Stories about the trials and tribulations of women take center stage. A good example is the story “Psychosis”, which continues the plot from the previous story, “The Ex-Militant”. The awful conditions encountered by Sakeena, the wife of former fighter Ghulam Mohiudeen, during her husband's captivity, are shown in the latter.

Sakeena, the narrative's heroine, is sexually assaulted one night in her Srinagar shanty by five men, four of whom are Indian military troops even as “the whole neighbourhood seemed to be alert and listening” and “a contingent of troops cordoned the shanty off”. Sakeena’s husband, Ghulam Mohiudeen, an “ex-militant” who had “decided to strike out on his own and earn his livelihood by

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driving an auto rickshaw”, went missing one evening. Sakeena had anticipated his return when the intruders forcibly entered her residence. The men did not let Sakeena go for an hour. ‘Your husband is with us so, take care’, they said while leaving.\footnote{Shahnaz Bashir, \textit{Scattered Souls} (India: Harper Collins Publishers, 2016).}

This agonizing reminiscence manifests through the human presence in the shape of her son, Bilal. She is now caught in a grave quandary, having to confront societal shame and rejection on one hand while rearing her kid born out of wedlock on the other. Sakeena is admitted to the Government Psychiatric Diseases Hospital as a result of PTSD induced by the sexual assault, “the only one of its kind in the valley of Kashmir”, an institution “she has been visiting for the last six years”. During this journey, she nearly loses her state of mind and is forced to seek help from a doctor. Sakeena had already been thrown into upheaval, resulting in her diagnosis of cycloid psychosis and hospitalisation six years prior for “acute onset of confusion, delusions, hallucinations, altered behavior, pan anxiety...with her bleeding, razor-nicked wrists- she had to be literally tied to her bed”.\footnote{Bashir, \textit{Scattered Souls}.}

Her mental health and sense of safety deteriorate as a result of the distressing trauma she suffered due to a heinous act of sexual violence. She emphasises that: “The nightmares have become infrequent. Now I don’t see my body rolling down the riverbank. Nor does my bloody shalwaar appear. But the smell of sperm barely leaves me. Even pleasantly scented things smell dirty to me”.

She becomes prey to severe “onset of confusion, delusions, hallucinations, altered behavior, pan anxiety, elation, happiness or ecstasy of high degree, self-blaming and mood swings”. All these excruciating recollections and nightmares stimulate her to commit suicide.
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Even at the hospital, we witness a mother who has been a victim of the struggle, having witnessed her son's death before her eyes. The author argues that no matter where we go, we will come across women who have been directly or indirectly influenced by the issue at hand, which often results in serious emotional and psychological pain. She has to struggle to queue up behind a morose old woman whose son, Sakeena learnt, has been killed in front of her eyes.

Sakeena accepts her widowhood and exposes her heart to the therapist. However, her past continues to haunt her, and despite six years of treatment, Sakeena's pain is not alleviated. Her son, Bilal, is another cause of pain for her since he acts as a continual reminder of that fatal night when he was conceived. The narrative also depicts the maternal emotions and soppiness of Sakeena, who gives birth to Bilal, the rape-born bastard. She tries everything she can to get rid of Bilal, who she thinks “is the human shape of a painful memory”. Sakeena's predicament and misery as a woman are emblematic of the worldwide issue of gender subservience and discrimination that women face in a phallocentric environment.17

The accounts of Sakeena and Bilal display light on the multiple sacrifices that people in the Kashmir Valley are forced to make. Typically, these concessions go unmentioned, having been ingrained in one's everyday life. Half-widows, in particular, live a deeply stressful existence, caught between despair and hope. They are in an even worse condition of being powerless and melancholy-ridden than widows since their lives revolve around a meaningless and never-ending wait. Despite knowing her spouse was dead, Sakeena was hesitant to embark on a new marriage. When the doctor proposes that Sakeena should remarry, she responds, “I can’t.... I am still waiting for him”.

17 Bashir, Scattered Souls.
The narrative of Sakeena and Bilal further emphasizes the pervasive societal stigma in our culture. Instead of extending empathy to the victims, they are unfairly accused and held responsible for transgressions they did not commit. Sakeena’s recurrent nightmares, where her husband Ghulam Mohiudeen implores her to care for their daughter Insha and herself, vividly illustrate the enduring emotional burden borne by individuals in such circumstances.

Bashir has skilfully depicted the horrible sorrow felt by women in occupied Kashmir. The battle has reduced their lives to agony, sorrow, and a loss of basic poise. They are always surrounded by dread and a tremendous sense of impotence in the face of humiliation delivered by law enforcement officials. Sakeena encounters this as she visits an army barrack in quest of information about her missing husband. She is not only chastised but also assaulted by security forces soldiers stationed at the Sonawri camp, despite having bribed the guards with Rs. 5,000 to gain information about her husband. This encounter left her feeling quite embarrassed as “the guards demanded that she sleeps with them. Sakeena left crying”.

Bashir examines the predicament of the lost generations, particularly the conditions that have given rise to Kashmir’s half-widows, through Sakeena’s tale. These people are dealing with terrible recollections of the past, a horrific present, and an ominous future. Their lives are marked by an abundance of pain, an overpowering sense of hopelessness, and a never-ending tale of humiliation. They live a dreadful existence fraught with severe sorrow that alters their very identities. These half-widows are exposed to cruel torture while searching for their lost spouses. Even their foolish expectations only serve to darken their lives more. They relentlessly pursue answers from numerous sources, only to return empty-handed, with no sign of their loved ones. “There was no such army camp, no interrogation
center, no jail that Sakeena did not knock the doors of while searching for Ghulam Mohiudeen. But she found nothing”. 18

When a household’s solitary earner goes missing, the entire family suffers. Circumstances drive the children to assume tasks for which they are unprepared. This familial conflict caused by the loss of the key contributor is addressed further in the narrative “Theft”. Bashir demonstrates the manner in which the loss of the family's lone breadwinner forces incompetent family members who are not yet ready for such duties to participate in menial labour for survival. For more than three decades of strife, Kashmiri women have been subjected to these horrific conditions. The violence in Indian-occupied Kashmir has had a devastating impact on ordinary people, splintering Kashmiri society and shattering families.

In the narrative, Insha grapples with the challenge of determining meaning in her life and asserting her existence amidst societal repression and doubt. This struggle intensifies following her father Ghulam Mohiudeen's disappearance and her mother's ordeal at the hands of law enforcement officers. While working as a salesgirl in a cosmetic shop, Insha faces contempt and humiliation; she is even accused of theft. “For the girl whose father was an ex-militant, whose prematurely aging mother has got this and that about herself, whose brother is this and that. You must know you don’t stand a chance. As if it were your fault to be what you are”.

The short story titled “The House” offers an accurate representation of how conflict has the potential to rip apart even the happiest of families. This story, which follows Zareena's life and death, draws emphasis on individuals who are both directly and indirectly touched by the conflict, particularly women. Women in Kashmir frequently lose kids, sons, husbands, fathers and sadly even their own

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18 Bashir, Scattered Souls.
lives. Women carry the bulk of the burden, regardless of the conditions. Zareena, a simple lady, is described as more virtuous than her husband: “Zareena kept the house lively. Unlike Farooq who wanted the house to be grand yet inhospitable. Zareena would try to draw people in”.

A conflict has the capacity to bring down even the most haughty and egotistical people. The breakdown of Farooq Ahmad Mir's family following his wife's terrible death in an army firing incident exemplifies this transition. Zareena died tragically, even though she had done nothing wrong. Her death did not just damage her physical body; it also unconventionally affected her entire home. Despite her loving and welcoming Kashmiri persona, she was ruthlessly murdered. Nevertheless, on a terrible day in May 1999, forces killed her within her own compound: “...but before they could reach the gate, the Army was already inside the compound, furious and desperate. The troops fired indiscriminately and Zareena was hit”.

The passing away of a woman is equivalent to the death of the entire family. Those who have been bereaved or affected create an ensemble of fragmented individuals living in a sense of hollowness. Even the pompous Farooq is severely affected by his wife's death, leaving his enthusiasm for life entirely depleted. Zareena's death caused a split in their family unit: “without Zareena Farooq’s family began to disintegrate and he grew more and more lonely, frustrated and deeply forlorn. He missed Zareena and would often stay indoors and cry secretly in her memory”.

In Scattered Souls, the sad and disturbing story of Ayesha's tragedy in “The Woman Who Became Her Own Husband” gives a clear picture of how a damaged woman tries to recreate her brighter past. Ayesha and Tariq formerly had a happy

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19 Bashir, Scattered Souls.
marriage, referred to by Bashir as an “extraordinary couple,” but the pair's joy was broken when Tariq was tragically killed during an armed forces operation at Residency Road in Srinagar. Ayesha's mental stability declines as a result of this traumatic occurrence, resulting in a psychiatric ailment. As a result, following her husband's death, she begins to mimic his behavior and virtually becomes her own spouse. The story's narrator describes this transformation:

She stood on the verandah, leaning on the railing over the grille the way Tariq did, smoking a cigarette exactly in his style. Standing in the same posture and in the same manner as that of Tariq, she greeted me in a man’s tone. Some days later, I saw her hair cut like Tariq’s. She paced the verandah, limping like Tariq.

Ayesha's miserable story represents the worldwide tragedy of sorrow, agony, and trauma experienced by the Kashmiri people, particularly women facing continuous occupation and aggression by occupied Indian forces. Her life is continually overshadowed by an existential crisis, leading to psychological pain and odd, unrealistic conduct.

Ayesha never recovers from the trauma, and her departure from Anantnag to Sojourn Khan's apartment is ineffective in terms of her recuperation. She is in a chronic state of mental agony and her state of mind never improves. As the narrator describes it, she becomes a subject of sympathy for everyone:

The ladies in the flat tried their best to keep her indoors because day by day Ayesha was turning into a spectacle for the neighbourhood. Another day I found her dressed in Tariq’s navy-blue suit...wearing his pair of brogues, carrying his leather briefcase, limping down the lane for office.20

Bashir skilfully integrates the terrible events of the last two and a half decades into each of the short stories, tragedies that have been firmly etched in Kashmir's collective psyche. Bashir recounts a story that embodies a distinct feeling of optimism through immense agony, sadness, and struggle using this storytelling

20 Bashir, Scattered Souls. 
method. In some ways, it is like giving a voice to the many voiceless people whose tales have gone unheard, buried behind the flood of reporting on violence and politics emanating from Kashmir.

5. Conclusion
To conclude, Shahnaz Bashir's *Scattered Souls* reveals the significant and often disregarded trauma faced by women in the Indian occupied valley of Kashmir. This study explored the pushed-back comprehension and distorted narratives that define the mental and emotional consequences of war through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Bashir's stories serve as an agonizing witness of Kashmiri women's individual and communal suffering, paying attention to their ignored hardships beneath the weight of cultural prejudice and grief.

The tales recounted go beyond Kashmir, compelling us to think about the widespread effect of trauma on people and societies wrapped up in conflict. *Scattered Souls* encourages us to think outside statistics and tabloids and to develop empathetic feelings for people who have been victims of violence and terrorism. As we strive for a world with greater connectivity, these accounts remind us of the critical importance of promoting their voices, recognizing their ability to persevere, and working toward a peaceful future.
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NACTA was established in 2008. Since then, it has played an important role to understand the dynamics of terrorism and extremism in Pakistan. It has made different policy interventions for countering terrorism and violent extremism. The NACTA has also taken substantial measures to advise the Government in devising strategies to counter terrorist activities in the country. Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research is a peer-reviewed, bi-annual research journal published by the National Counter Terrorism Authority. The Journal provides a forum to the leading scholars and professionals in the field of counter extremism, counter-terrorism, security studies and peace studies. The NACTA has the sole copyrights of all the contributions and distribution of Pakistan Journal of Terrorism Research.