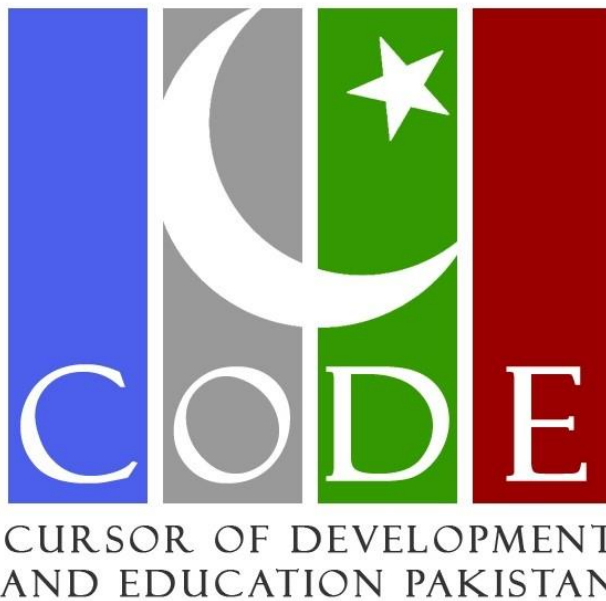


Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses: The Need for Institutionalization



CODE PAKISTAN

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Contents

List of Acronyms.....	1
Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction	6
Higher Education and Extremism	8
International Institutional Framework on Youth in Peacebuilding.....	15
The Government, Higher Education, and Extremism.....	19
Pakistan’s Legal and Policy Framework on Countering Extremism	19
Development of Some Positive Momentum.....	24
Vice Chancellors’ Conferences	24
National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines	25
Provincial Youth Policies.....	26
National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses.....	28
NACTA and HEC Memorandum of Understanding	28
Consultations on the Way Forward for the Recommendations of the NYC-CVE....	29
National Academy of Higher Education.....	30
University-Led Efforts for Countering Violent Extremism	31
Challenges Faced by Universities in Implementing on-Campus CVE Strategies....	33
Civil Society Efforts for On-Campus CVE	36
Learning from International Best Practices.....	39
Conclusion	44
Recommendations	46

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List of Acronyms

AJK	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
ATA	Anti-Terrorism Act
BUIITEMS	Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering, and Management Sciences
CODE	Cursor of Development and Education
CTC	Combating Terrorism Center
HEC	Higher Education Commission
IIUI	International Islamic University Islamabad
IRI	Islamic Research Institute
JI	Jamaat-e-Islami
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACTA	National Counter Terrorism Authority
NCEPG	National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines
NISP	National Internal Security Policy
NYC-CVE	National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PBSO	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
PECA	Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act
PPC	Pakistan Penal Code
UAF	University of Agriculture Faisalabad
UN	United Nations
UN IANYD	UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOY	United Network of Young Peacebuilders
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VC	Vice Chancellor
WG-YPB	Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding
Youth- GPS	Youth Global Program for Sustainable Development and Peace
YPI	Youth Peacebuilding Initiative

Executive Summary

The trajectory of violence perpetrated by non-state actors in the name of intolerant and extremist sociopolitical ideologies indicates that it is not just the illiterate who are susceptible to being influenced by such ideologies. Highly educated youth have been frequently reported to have joined terrorist organizations or being apprehended or neutralized by the personnel of the law enforcement agencies. The trend indicates that it is not just a lack of modern education that leads an individual toward extremism and intolerance but a host of other factors, such as global and regional politics, economic inequalities, sense of injustice among certain communities, lack of diversity, state weakness, inability to keep pace with the changes in global culture, identity issues, etc. also play their role in the drift of an individual toward violent extremism. A critical role, however, is also played by the ability of the instigators of hate and the inciters of violence to organize, propagate, and recruit on university campuses as well as through the use of modern online social media.

In the case of Pakistan, the ability of the instigators of hate and inciters of violence part is further compounded by the state's history of the use of these very non-state actors as its proxies to support its foreign policy objectives. This has given them a considerable accumulated clout to help them operate in and recruit from not only the backwater peripheries of the society but from the mainstream educated middle—and at times elite—class segments of the society. The extent of the spread of extremism in the higher education institutions of Pakistan has grabbed media and policy attention only recently but the phenomenon has developed over decades with student wings of political parties with intolerant and violent ideologies operating and violently confronting the out-groups on campuses for a long time. The intelligentsia in Pakistan is quite vocal in criticizing the education system of Pakistan for being unable to confront the onslaught of extremist ideologies in higher education institutions. While observers have blamed a lack of forethought on the part of the government and the limitations of the education system in terms of curricula and pedagogical approaches for on-campus extremism, looking ahead there is much in the policy realm that could be done to counter on-campus extremism.

Despite such a pervasive existence of violent extremism on the university campuses of Pakistan, however, there is no specific legal foundation or policy discourse in Pakistan that could lead to inclusion of the youth in peacebuilding and promotion of tolerance for diversity among them in line with the evolving international institutional framework on the subject emanating out of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 2250 of 2015, 2282 of 2016, 2354 of 2017, and 2419 of 2018. The legal and policy discourse in Pakistan remains reactive, punitive, and, contrary to the UNSC Resolution referred to above, looks at the educated youth studying in higher education institutions as a challenge subjected to regulation rather than an opportunity steered toward a peaceful society.

Since the lynching of Mashal Khan, a student of Abdul Wali Khan University in the town of Mardan who was wrongly killed by a violent mob of his own fellow students in the name of blasphemy in April 2017, some positive momentum has developed in terms of specifically addressing the issue of on-campus violent extremism. Some of those steps like the holding of Vice Chancellors' conferences on the subject, the holding of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses in July 2018, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the HEC-supported consultations with the university students and faculties on evolving practical strategies for countering on-campus extremism are, no doubt, commendable. Nevertheless, the government's efforts at including the youth in peacebuilding and promoting tolerance for diversity among them through its few initiatives have failed to gain traction primarily because of a lack of consistency in those efforts. As a result, the government has repeatedly harked back to its reactive and punitive legal and policy discourse with regard to on-campus extremism aimed at deterring terrorist acts rather than obligating state institutions to promote tolerance for diversity and counter extremism. The very fact that intolerant violent ideologies have penetrated the higher education institutions under the radar of this over-arching punitive anti-terrorism legal regime alludes toward a need for more innovative approaches to tackle on-campus extremism.

In the absence of any overarching institutional framework for countering on-campus extremism and including the youth in peacebuilding and promotion of tolerance for diversity, certain university administrations have taken initiatives to tackle the issue at the level of their individual campuses. Such initiatives have come in the shape of activities promoting cultural diversity and capacity building of students and teachers to withstand the pressures of extremist influences. Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also attempted to fill in the void left by the absence of a concrete policy framework on the subject. Such efforts, though remarkable in their own right, have remained limited and compartmentalized.

Therefore, there is a need to develop an institutionalized policy framework specifically on the subject of countering on-campus extremism that would not only draw on the lessons of the grassroots initiatives on campuses in Pakistan but the international best practices as well and would codify it into a policy guidelines document available to all universities across Pakistan to adopt in part or in full to counter extremism and promote tolerance for diversity on their campuses. Such a policy guidelines document would serve as a toolkit for university administrations determining a proactive role and accountable responsibility of each specific university official in a non-conflict, conflict, or post-conflict situation for countering social and cultural divisions that could allow extremist ideology to take hold. The guidelines could determine parameters on matters such as inclusion of mandatory courses on ethics and human rights, holding of mandatory cultural activities, establishing do's and don'ts with regard to cultural sensitivity and tolerance for diversity, screening of students and teachers for extremist

behaviors through online tests, regular trainings of teachers on identifying early signs of extremist behavior among students, setting administrative parameters for reporting of such behavior to universities' administrations, penalties against universities' administrative officials for ignoring teachers' evidence-based reported warnings about identified students, regular counseling of vulnerable cases of students and teachers, etc.

The guidelines developed and approved by a relevant government institution like the HEC with the assistance of CVE practitioners, subject matter experts on extremism and higher education, serving and retired university faculties and administrations, relevant senior-ranking government officials, and selected students from various universities from across Pakistan could serve as an effective toolkit for proactive promotion of peace, tolerance, and inclusivity on university campuses.

Introduction

The lynching of Mashal Khan at the Abdul Wali Khan University in the town of Mardan by his fellow students in April 2017 rang alarm bells about the rise of religious extremism across campuses in Pakistan. The phenomenon of the rise of religious extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan, however, has been brewing for some time. The religious identity of Pakistan as a state, its attempts at forging a national identity on the basis of religion, its past policies of supporting jihad and then confronting it, and its limited focus on education as compared to the exigencies of its security needs have had serious ramifications for the society. The youth of Pakistan, which remained in high demand for the various jihads of a myriad terrorist groups, bore the strongest brunt of the extremist propaganda churned out through online and offline messaging.

To address this neglect of a mainstay sector, the government through the Higher Education Commission (HEC) recently redirected its focus toward optimizing educational standards in higher education institutions through a three-pronged strategy of targeting access, quality, and relevance of educational service delivery. And while access to education has exponentially improved under the aegis of the HEC in the past 17 years, the latter two pillars under this strategy have dismally lagged behind leaving a significant and troubling gap in the provision of a quality education for the youth of Pakistan that ensures their subsequent integration into the social and economic landscape of the country. This gap has slowly but gradually left the younger generation susceptible to social malignancies such as violent and religious extremism. While the association of the sectarian madrassah education system of Pakistan with extremism has long been under the observation of researchers, the extent of extremist penetration in mainstream higher education institutions, such as public and private sector universities, has only recently come to light. Because of the relatively recent media attention to the problem, there is a certain lack of understanding about the phenomenon of the rise of on-campus extremism. Resultantly, the policy approaches toward addressing the problem are also in their nascent phase.

In addition, there is a lack of legal clarity about terrorism and extremism, not only in Pakistan but also globally. As a result, the legal and policy discourse with regard to extremism in Pakistan revolves around punitive measures aimed at deterring terrorist acts rather than obligating state institutions to promote tolerance for diversity and counter extremism. It is under the blanket of this over-arching punitive anti-terrorism legal regime that extremist ideologies have penetrated the educational institutions of higher learning without detection. The state's response has often come very late after terrorist acts were committed and has, of course, been punitive than corrective.

The aforementioned milieu raises several questions with regard to the problem of rising on-campus extremism in Pakistan. For instance:

- What is the level of penetration of extremist ideologies in the higher education institutions of Pakistan?
- What are the reasons for the proliferation of extremist views on university campuses in the country?
- Is there any available international framework specifically for the purpose of engaging the youth in peacebuilding?
- What is the policy response of the Pakistani state to on-campus extremism?
- What is the level of involvement of the youth in formulation of the state's policy response to on-campus extremism?
- What has been the impact of the state's response to countering on-campus extremism so far?
- How can the gaps in the state's policy response to on-campus extremism be filled in Pakistan?

This report has been compiled keeping in view the aforementioned questions. Some of these questions are answered, in part, by some previous work, while others have been left completely unaddressed. This report, while focusing squarely on the subject of on-campus extremism attempts to delve deeper into all aspects of the phenomenon. It does not cover the subject of the role of and state response toward madrassahs or the lower-level education institutions like schools and colleges.

The first chapter below discusses the interplay between education and extremism and analyze the causes and consequences of the permeation of extremist ideologies in higher education institutions of the country. The second chapter discusses the international institutional framework on inclusion of youth in peacebuilding. The third chapter provides an overview of the government's response to countering on-campus extremism. It gives a comprehensive account of not only the legal and policy discourse on counter-terrorism that directly effects on-campus counter extremism discourse but also of the various recently instituted government initiatives directly aimed at countering on-campus extremism. The fourth chapter provides instances of some locally replicable international best practices in the field. The final chapter concludes the discussion and prescribes a way forward on the basis of the findings of the report.

Higher Education and Extremism

Religious extremism and, by extension, terrorism have been associated primarily with violent ideologies but some observers have also attributed the rise of extremist tendencies in certain segments of the society to other social causes. For instance, the role played by global and regional politics, economic inequalities in various forms, sense of injustice among certain communities, lack of diversity, state weakness, and a changing global culture have also been held responsible for the rise of extremist tendencies.¹ Others have put the issue of identity—religious, ethnic, etc.—at the core of violent movements, alongside governance issues.²

As far as the correlation between education and extremism is concerned, there is a general agreement that there is no clear link between the level and the kind of education of a person and his/her inclination toward violent extremist behavior.³ In 2016, a series of leaked entry documents belonging to the Islamic State were analyzed by the US military's Combating Terrorism Center (CTC). Inferred to be genuine, the documents revealed personal details of 4,188 militants who had joined ISIS between 2013 and 2014. In a surprising revelation, the documents indicated that a majority of the recruits were between the age of 26 and 27 at the time of their joining and in possession of a secondary education, with many of them having studied further to receive their university degrees. The entry documents showed that the third most quoted response by the recruits to the question of previous occupation was student.⁴ Extremism is, however, more prevalent in geographical regions with lower literacy rates and its rise is also attributed, in part, to the education system being "inimical to out-groups (minorities or external actors)" engendering "a general consciousness of aggression, hatred and rejection" in such regions.⁵

In Pakistan, terrorist organizations have recruited their cadres from both the barely educated and highly educated segments of the society, which has made it even more intriguing for researchers. One critical factor in the case of Pakistan is the role played by the

¹ UNDP, *Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Inclusive Development, Tolerance and Respect for Diversity: A development Response to Addressing Radicalization and Violent Extremism* (New York: UNDP, 2016), 19-22.

² H. Allan, et. al., *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review* (London: RUSI, 2015).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lizzie Dearden, "ISIS Documents Leak Reveals Profile of Average Militant as Young, Well-Educated but with Only Basic Knowledge of Islamic Law," *The Independent*, April 22, 2016. Access Link: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-reveals-profile-of-average-militant-as-young-well-educated-but-with-only-basic-a6995111.html>

⁵ Harald Thorud, "Preventing Violent Extremism," *Development Advocate Pakistan*, Vol.3, No.1 (Islamabad: UNDP, 2016), 5.

capacity of the various terrorist groups to propagate their message, organize, and recruit.⁶ Such capacity or organizational space to extremist elements is provided in Pakistan by the jihad culture associated with the Afghan Jihad and the rise of Talibanization as well as Pakistan's national narrative based on religion.⁷ Madrassahs have for long been seen associated with the rise of this jihad culture and Talibanization in Pakistan. The role played by madrassahs during the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan is well-documented.⁸ Even after the jihad years, several madrassahs were associated with militant groups and terrorist activities in the country.⁹ The critical role of madrassahs in extremism came to the center stage of national politics and world attention with the Lal Masjid episode in the federal capital Islamabad in July 2007 in which religious extremists, supported by local students of madrassahs, were threatening to take over the capital.¹⁰ Over the years, however, it has come to light that it's not only the madrassah education system that is susceptible to extremist infiltration in the country. The mainstream educational institutions like the universities and colleges have seemed to be as vulnerable to the onslaught despite the fact that education is generally associated with enlightenment. Some observers have even gone to the extent of suggesting that the government's focus on madrassahs in relation to extremism is misplaced and argue that mainstream education institutions need reform as much as madrassahs.¹¹ A study undertaken in 2013 on Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) revealed that a majority of the recruits were educated, with 63 percent having a secondary education, while a significant number of others were university students studying in undergraduate programs.¹² Similarly, a report from 2008 found that 17 percent of the members of LeT held an education at the intermediate level or higher.¹³

⁶ See Aarish U. Khan, "The Terrorist Threat and Policy Response in Pakistan" *SIPRI Policy Paper No.11* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2005).

⁷ Nadir Cheema, "Why Pakistan's official narrative is not serving it well," *The Herald*, April 2019. Access Link: <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398851>

⁸ Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008), 275-277.

⁹ See, for instance, Amir Mir, *Talibanization of Pakistan: From 9/11 to 26/11* (New Delhi: Pentagon Security International, 2009); Mujahid Hussain, *Punjabi Taliban: Driving Extremism in Pakistan* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014).

¹⁰ The episode is well-documented in Zahid Hussain, *The Scorpion's Tail: The Relentless Rise of Islamic Militants in Pakistan—And How it Threatens the World* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

¹¹ Mazhar Abbas, "Why are campuses more dangerous," *The News*, May 23, 2015.

¹² Anirban Ghosh, Arif Jamal, C. Christine Fair, Don Rassler, and Nadia Shoeb, "The Fighters of Lashkar-e-Taiba: Recruitment, Training, Deployment and Death," *Combating Terrorism Center, Occasional Paper Series* (April 4, 2013). Access Link: https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2014/07/Fighters-of-LeT_Final.pdf

¹³ C. Christine Fair, "The Educated Militants of Pakistan: Implications for Pakistan's Domestic Security," *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol.16, No.1 (March 2008), 100. Access Link: https://www.academia.edu/27314660/The_educated_militants_of_Pakistan_implications_for_Pakistans_domestic_security

Transnational militant outfits, such as al-Qaida and international Islamist activist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir also have a long history of recruiting members with an educated background.¹⁴ It is argued that university-educated recruits prove to be far more resourceful to terrorist organizations than their less privileged counterparts¹⁵ and that the more affluent segments of the society in Pakistan are found less negatively predisposed toward violent ideologies than the poorer ones.¹⁶ Ironically, all this is despite the fact that mainstream education institutions of the country, i.e., schools, colleges, and universities, especially those of girls, have frequently come under terrorist attacks.¹⁷

The Karachi chapter of the Punjabi Taliban recruited several students of the University of Karachi as its cadres are becoming more and more sophisticated at the use of internet and social media to recruit from middle class educated youth.¹⁸ The arrest for links with terrorist organization Jundullah of two doctor brothers—cardiologist Akmal Waheed and nephrologist Arshad Waheed—educated at premier medical institutions and working at prestigious hospitals of Karachi was perhaps among the first signs of the penetration of terrorist networks and extremist ideologies in higher education institutions of Pakistan.¹⁹ While Arshad Waheed was killed in a drone strike in Wana in 2008 while treating militants at his clinic in the area,²⁰ Akmal Waheed spent two years in a prison in the UAE for his links with Al-Qaeda and was arrested soon after his deportation to Pakistan in 2012.²¹ Police found links of several Islami Jamiat-i-Tulaba (IJT)-affiliated²² University of Karachi students with terrorist outfits in January 2011.²³ Another IJT-affiliated student of the NED University in Karachi was killed in a drone attack in Miranshah in North Waziristan on November 29, 2013.²⁴

¹⁴ Huma Yusuf, "University Radicalization: Pakistan's Next Counterterrorism Challenge," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Vol.9, No.2 (February 2016). Access Link: <https://ctc.usma.edu/university-radicalization-pakistans-next-counterterrorism-challenge/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Huma Yusuf, "Educated militants," *Dawn*, May 25, 2015.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Dreams Turned into Nightmares: Attacks on Students, Teachers, and Schools in Pakistan*, March 27, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/27/dreams-turned-nightmares/attacks-students-teachers-and-schools-pakistan>

¹⁸ Huma Yusuf, *Conflict Dynamics in Karachi* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), 19.

¹⁹ "Dr Akmal and Dr Arshad arrested," *Business Recorder*, July 3, 2004.

²⁰ "Dr Arshad Waheed killed in Wana," *The News*, March 23, 2008.

²¹ "Dr Akmal Waheed seeks his removal from 4th Schedule," *The News*, February 9, 2017.

²² IJT is the student wing of JI.

²³ Zia ur Rehman, "Besides madrassas, varsities also on watch list," *The News*, May 23, 2015.

²⁴ Ibid.

The level of penetration of militant groups into universities assumed the center stage of the debate once again when four prime suspects of Safoora Goth terrorist attack in Karachi,²⁵ arrested in May 2015, were found to be graduates of the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Karachi, Sir Syed University Karachi, and the University of Karachi.²⁶ The fifth accomplice of the Safoora Goth attackers, arrested a couple of weeks after the incident was also identified as a B.Com. graduate from the University of Karachi.²⁷ Mohammad Owais Raheel, who the police suspected to be leader of Al-Qaeda in the Indian sub-continent and an active member of Hizbul Tahreer upon his arrest, had an engineering degree from the NED University and an MBA degree from IBA.²⁸ In the wake of the Safoora Goth attack, Pakistan's leading daily *Dawn*, in its Editorial, commented that the arrest of university students in connection with terrorism was not a new phenomenon. It added that students with terrorist connections had been picked up in the past from several universities of Punjab as well as the federal capital.²⁹ On one occasion, a student of the Islamic University, Islamabad, blew himself up in the university cafeteria killing several people including two female students.³⁰ The Quetta Inquiry Commission, which was constituted in August 2016 by the Supreme Court of Pakistan on the terrorist attacks on lawyers in the same month found in its report that the ring leader of the attacks was an engineering graduate from the Khuzdar Engineering University.³¹ The phenomenon of extremism in higher education institutions of Pakistan has not remained limited to the male students. Female students have also been influenced by militant propaganda on university campuses. On December 2, 2015, Tashfeen Malik—a woman of Pakistani origin—and her husband killed 14 people in a mass shooting in San Bernardino, California. The brutal violence of the attack, which injured an additional 21 others, immediately made international headlines, bringing attention to Malik's Saudi upbringing and her college affiliations in Multan, Pakistan, where she graduated in 2012. In the aftermath of the incident, international media referred to Multan as the "center of support for extremist jihadist groups,

²⁵ 45 members of a minority Islamic sect were killed in the Safoora Goth locality of Karachi on May 13, 2015, when eight gunmen attacked their bus.

²⁶ Azeem Samar, "RAW's hand in Safoora Goth incident being probed: Qaim," *The News*, May 21, 2015.

²⁷ Salis bin Perwaiz, "BCom graduate turns out to be fifth suspect," *The News*, June 6, 2015.

²⁸ Salis Bin Perwaiz, "'NED, IBA graduate-turned- terrorist' held," *The News*, October 7, 2015.

²⁹ Editorial, "Militants on campus," *Dawn*, May 22, 2015.

³⁰ Mazhar Abbas, "Why are campuses more dangerous," *The News*, May 23, 2015. The university has come under criticism for spreading obscurantist views from other observers as well. See, for instance, Kamila Hyat, "The emptied barrel of hope," *The News*, May 21, 2015.

³¹ Farman Kakar, "The Terror Connection," *The News*, December 25, 2016.

including Lashkar-e-Taiba,³² and Malik's alma mater became another university where Islamic militancy had gained a foothold. Later, in April 2017, a medical student from Hyderabad named Naureen Leghari was arrested in Lahore during a shootout with security forces in Lahore in which her husband was killed.³³ While her father had reported her kidnapping to the police, investigation revealed that she had willfully traveled to Lahore to join the militants.³⁴ By far, the most glaring example of the spread of extremism on university campuses in Pakistan was the lynching of Mashal Khan on April 13, 2017.³⁵ Khan, a Muslim student of Khan Abdul Wali Khan University in the town of Mardan, was lynched in cold blood by a mob of his fellow students on frivolous allegations of blasphemy.³⁶

The involvement of students and university staff in a rising number of terrorist attacks is indicative of the mounting threat of radicalization that continues to fester in higher education institutions. The lynching of journalism student, Mashal Khan, by a mob of his peers on grounds of blasphemy, the attempted assassination of a member of Sindh Assembly by a student from a leading university with ties to the militant organization, Ansar-ul-Sharia Pakistan, and the mass killing of an Ismaili community at Safoora Goth in Karachi by another university graduate are just some of the many incidences of brutal violence that reveal a receptivity to the extremist mindset in the educated youth of today.³⁷ While the rationale for the recruitment of university students—who are better equipped to organize and plan out attacks—can be easily discerned, there remains the question of why such susceptibility exists in higher education institutions.

Some trace the roots of religious extremism among the educated youth of Pakistan to the anti-communist wave of the 1960s,³⁸ while others blame the 1984 ban on student unions in colleges and universities, the growth of loosely regulated private higher education institutions, and growing disconnect between teachers and students are causes of the rise of

³² Michael S. Schmidt and Richard Perez-Pena, "F.B.I. Treating San Bernardino Attack as Terrorism Case" *The New York Times*, December 4, 2015. Access Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/05/us/tashfeen-malik-islamic-state.html>

³³ Mohammad Hussain Khan and Imran Gabol, "Woman held after encounter in Lahore went to Syria for training," *Dawn*, April 17, 2017.

³⁴ Mohammad Hussain Khan and Imran Gabol, "Woman held after encounter in Lahore went to Syria for training," *Dawn*, April 17, 2017; Mohammad Hussain Khan, "Police claim Naureen divulged links to IS to a friend before disappearance," *Dawn*, April 18, 2017.

³⁵ Mohammad Jamal Hoti, "Student lynched on campus over allegations of blasphemy," *Dawn*, April 14, 2017.

³⁶ Editorial, "The darkness within," *Dawn*, April 15, 2017.

³⁷ Ameen Amjad Khan, "Universities Told to Step Up Anti-Extremism Measures," *University World News* (September 2017). Access Link: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20170922134250561>

³⁸ Mazhar Abbas, "Why are campuses more dangerous," *The News*, May 23, 2015.

extremism on campuses.³⁹ Some criticism is also directed against the curricula of the education institutions in Pakistan, which, to them, seem to draw a line between the “believer” and the “infidel” and the “patriot” and the “traitor” in order to “foster nationalism.”⁴⁰ For instance, Saroop Ijaz expresses his disappointment with the content of the curriculum in Pakistan in the following words:

The slant of historical education is that the ‘Hindus’ are sympathetic towards India and the ‘Christians’ towards the West. And yet we act shocked each time an attack on minorities occurs.⁴¹

There is a very strong perception among the intelligentsia in Pakistan that the country’s mainstream education system has been unable to inculcate critical thinking and tolerance for diversity among its students. Saad Rasool expressed his disenchantment with the country’s education system in the following words:

For the longest time, we have been told – by politicians, social-workers, and intellectuals – that education is the silver bullet against militancy, intolerance and extremism. That with education, will be able to overcome the menacing problems that our nation faces today, and graduate to a life in the promised sunlit uplands of democracy. But if Al-Qaeda members are being arrested from the graduate schools of Punjab University and NUST, if lawyers are showering rose petals at Mumtaz Qadri, if political science students from Karachi University are suspects in ethnic target killings, then we must concede that our educational curriculum and institutions are failing in eradicating the evils of our society. The silver bullet, is just a myth. And those of us who still have faith in the future of this country, are simply deluding ourselves. To stem the rot, and cure an already cancerous malady, our educational curriculum and culture must change. And this debate starts now!⁴²

Commenting on the subject in its editorial, a leading English-language daily of Pakistan *Dawn* expressed similar views:

For several years it has been recognised that terrorism and extremist mindsets are to be largely witnessed in the ranks of the uneducated, unemployed and underprivileged. Indeed, much to the contrary and as exemplified by the men now in custody, an advanced education seems to be a distinct advantage if a career in terrorism is to be pursued. It is also illustrative of the pervasiveness of terrorist and extremist mindsets nationally, and that within the universities of Pakistan which are happy hunting grounds for those of an extreme ideology. Every stratum of our society has been permeated, and the divisive and sectarian nature of the national curriculum

³⁹ Mazhar Abbas, “Why are campuses more dangerous,” *The News*, May 23, 2015.

⁴⁰ Saroop Ijaz, “Textbook killing,” *The Express Tribune*, May 24, 2015. See also, Nadir Cheema, “Why Pakistan’s official narrative is not serving it well,” *The Herald*, April 2019. Access Link: <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398851>

⁴¹ Saroop Ijaz, “Textbook killing,” *The Express Tribune*, May 24, 2015.

⁴² Saad Rasool, “Back to school,” *The Nation*, January 11, 2015.

and some of the textbooks our children learn from does much to prepare the ground for the sowing of extreme paradigms.⁴³

While all the aforementioned reasons are important, one significant factor is that the student wings of religious organizations like the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) have over the years established a strong presence in several universities and colleges across Pakistan where they have confronted, at times violently, the student groups disagreeing with their ideology.⁴⁴ These student wings provide terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda with conduits to penetrate the universities for recruitment and support.⁴⁵ The result is that extremism has permeated into the educated segments of the society with ramifications for national security. The assassinated Pakistani journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad has also documented the jihadi recruitment even from within the ranks of the military in Pakistan.⁴⁶

This growing trend of radicalization in the society over the past few years, points to an undisputable need for change in Pakistan's policy paradigm. The security-centric counterterrorism policy of the past decade, while successful in eliminating terrorist elements detrimental to the national security of the country, seems to have overlooked the actual source of the problem—the spread of a violent and extremist ideologies. We have seen signs of a surfacing realization among national actors for a policy shift that focuses on countering and preventing extremism by building natural resilience to radicalization and nowhere is this need more urgent than in the higher education institutions of Pakistan where extremism has seen an unprecedented rise in recent years. A strong international institutional framework has also evolved in recent years, which could provide a solid foundation to policy approaches in Pakistan to countering violent extremism on university campuses.

⁴³ Editorial, "Cautious congratulations," *The Express Tribune*, May 22, 2015.

⁴⁴ Pamela Constable, *Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War with Itself* (New York: Random House, 2011), 137.

⁴⁵ Zia ur Rehman, "Besides madrassas, varsities also on watch list," *The News*, May 23, 2015

⁴⁶ Syed Saleem Shahzad, *Inside Al-Qaeda and the Taliban: Beyond Bin Laden and 9/11* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 72-103.

International Institutional Framework on Youth in Peacebuilding

The rising phenomenon of violent extremism is affecting an escalating number of young people worldwide and the advent of the internet has only exacerbated the issue with digital radicalization, as militant groups utilize the online platform to identify, groom, and recruit young people. In 2015 alone, ISIS was operating 70,000 Twitter accounts and tweeting 200,000 messages a day.⁴⁷ At times, violent extremists appear better educated on the use of technology than governments and are able to design highly sophisticated online systems for attracting and recruiting young people. The end result is a growing number of youth-led terrorist attacks.

Whether it's the 22-year old Manchester Arena suicide bomber,⁴⁸ the San Bernardino shooters,⁴⁹ the 22-year old driver who mowed down and killed 16 people in the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks,⁵⁰ or the 15-year old girl who stabbed a police officer in Germany,⁵¹ the younger generation of the world today is becoming increasingly radicalized and involved in a cycle of violence aimed at inducing fear and terror. Such incidents suggest that the post-9/11 approach of securitization in society may have had an adverse effect on curbing extremism. By adopting extraordinary measures to control and regulate their surrounding environments with militarized presence, increased surveillance, and a security-centric argument for encroaching on privacy rights,⁵² governments have created an environment that promotes marginalization, scrutiny, and suspicion: an environment where resentment and hate can easily fester and turn into something much more dangerous.⁵³

⁴⁷ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security," *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), 29. Access Link: <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

⁴⁸ Martin Evans, Victoria Ward, Robert Mendick, "Everything we Know About the Manchester Suicide Bomber Salman Abedi," *The Telegraph*, May 26, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/26/everything-know-manchester-suicide-bomber-salman-abedi/>

⁴⁹ Michael S. Schmidt and Richard Perez-Pena, "F.B.I. Treating San Bernardino Attack as Terrorism Case" *The New York Times*, December 4, 2015.

⁵⁰ "Barcelona and Cambrils Attacks: What We Know So Far," *BBC News*, August 27, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40964242>

⁵¹ "German Girl Jailed for IS Attack in Hanover," *BBC News*, January 26, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38757039>

⁵² "Rethinking Radicalization," *Aljazeera*, December 18, 2018. Access Link: <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/radicalised-youth/radicalised-youth.html>

⁵³ Emilia Aiello, Lidia Puigvert, and Tinka Schubert, "Preventing Violent Radicalization of Youth through Dialogic Evidence-Based Policies" *SAGE Journals* (May 23, 2018). Access Link: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0268580918775882>

However, recent years have seen a change in the global perspective on tackling violent extremism among the youth as policies have shifted to endorse a more preventive and socially inclusive stance. These policies invoke the need for community-based engagement and, more importantly, investment in youth to combat violent extremism and terrorism. 46 percent of the world's population is under the age of 25, presenting the youth as a formidable force whose potential for effecting change is just now being realized. And to steer that change for the better, progressively more people from the international community are visualizing the youth as an asset in the fight against radicalization rather than as a risk. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reflected this very sentiment when he stated, "Violent extremist groups target and invest in young people because they are aware of their potential and their strong desire for change." He further asserted that those from the younger generation were the leaders not of tomorrow but of today and that it was the responsibility of governments and society to support and encourage them to confidently take up this mantle in fighting against violent extremism.⁵⁴

The 2015 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on youth, peace, and security was the first official landmark introduction of a new narrative that recognized the youth as essential to the international peacebuilding process and urged member states to actively engage the youth in preventing and countering violent extremism.⁵⁵ The resolution was precipitated by the adoption of the Amman Youth Declaration as a product of the 2015 Global Forum on Youth, Peace, and Security hosted by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Global Forum was a milestone that set the stage for dialogue on bringing down exclusionary barriers that restrict the potential of the youth in contributing to peacebuilding efforts. The declaration pressed for a more formal acceptance of this resolve by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which then occurred later that year.⁵⁶

Later resolutions that have highlighted the need for effective participation of youth in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts are UNSCR 2282⁵⁷ adopted in 2016 on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture, the UNSCR 2354⁵⁸ adopted in 2017 on the implementation

⁵⁴ UN News, "Global Youth Must be Empowered to Combat Terrorism, UN Forum Declares," (April 12, 2018). Access Link: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/04/1007191>

⁵⁵ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2250 (2015) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7573rd meeting on December 9, 2015. Access Link: [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250\(2015\)&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2250(2015)&referer=/english/&Lang=E)

⁵⁶ Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security, "Amman Youth Declaration on Youth, Peace and Security" (August 22, 2015). Access Link: https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2016-10/AMMAN%20YOUTH%20DECLARATION%20%28English%29_0.pdf

⁵⁷ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2282 (2016) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7680th meeting on April 27, 2016. Access Link: [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2282\(2016\)&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2282(2016)&referer=/english/&Lang=E)

⁵⁸ Resolution 2354 (2017) adopted by the Security Council at its 7949th meeting, on May 24, 2017.

of the comprehensive international framework to counter terrorist narratives recognizing the significance of the youth's role in denying space to extremism and terrorism through effective counter-narratives, and the more recently instituted UNSCR 2419 of 2018 on youth, peace, and security.⁵⁹ The latter reaffirms the commitments of resolution 2250 and emphasizes the urgency for greater youth representation in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. It further encourages governments, international organizations, and civil society to include the youth in national processes for building and sustaining peace.⁶⁰

To strengthen this new narrative of youth inclusion in peacebuilding, resolution 2250 mandated that a study be undertaken to understand the potential for contribution in peace efforts by the youth and the disadvantage of policy approaches that label the youth as challenges. This study was to additionally identify strategies for supporting the youth in taking leadership roles at decision making levels and to provide an execution framework for the implementation of the resolution 2250. Published in 2018, the report titled *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* referred to the viewpoints of 4,230 young people from a total of 153 countries.⁶¹

The report highlights the need for a realignment in policy approaches of "governments and the multilateral system" to accommodate a shift "from reactive and remedial security responses to a comprehensive violence prevention approach with young people at its center."⁶² The report further encourages governments to adopt a policy attitude that focuses on the positive resilience of the youth and promotes government partnerships with youth-led and driven organization on youth-centric issues. One of the main recommendations of the study was regarding the need to invest in the youth by funding, supporting, and encouraging initiatives led by them and by creating greater opportunities for their inclusion in peace-based efforts. The study also submitted the importance of youth participation in the social, political, and economic sectors of national infrastructures to ensure greater involvement of this population group in decision making. The significance of creating collaborations with young partners at national, regional, and global level was another suggested recommendation, which the report further elaborated on.⁶³ The report created a framework of guidelines for

Access Link: <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2354>

⁵⁹ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2419 (2018) Adopted by the Security Council at its 8277th meeting on June 6, 2018. Access Link: <http://unoy.org/wp-content/uploads/UNSCR2419.pdf>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security," *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), p.132. Access Link: <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

⁶² Ibid., 116

⁶³ Ibid., 117

governments to follow in line with Resolution 2250 for building on youth engagement in national peace and security efforts.

Following the groundwork laid out by resolution 2250, several mechanisms have been operationalized to promote the implementation of its objective. The Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding (WG-YPB)⁶⁴ is a consortium of civil society organizations, UN entities, donors, intergovernmental bodies, academics, and youth-led organizations that provides guidance for the implementation of youth-based initiatives for peace and security. The WG-YPB has produced a set of guiding principles, which outlines nine key principles to promote young people's participation in peacebuilding.⁶⁵ Other such mechanisms involve the Youth Peacebuilding Initiative (YPI) that supports activity for youth empowerment in societies,⁶⁶ the UNDP's Youth Global Program for Sustainable Development and Peace (Youth-GPS) 2016-2020 that addresses factors that undermine sustainable peace for youth,⁶⁷ the Youth4Peace Global Knowledge Portal for supporting youth involvement in peacebuilding,⁶⁸ the UN's Youth Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY) that fosters and consolidates work on youth led peacebuilding,⁶⁹ and the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) work on the need for empowering youth in conflict ridden countries.⁷⁰ In its youth strategy (2014-2017), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) also emphasized the youth as leaders for social change in society.⁷¹

⁶⁴ WG-YPB is part of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD), co-chaired by the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the United Network of Youth Peace-builders (UNOY), and Search for Common Ground.

⁶⁵ See "Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding." Access Link: https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2016-10/Guiding%20Principles%20on%20Young%20People%E2%80%99s%20Participation%20in%20Peacebuilding_1.pdf

⁶⁶ For more detail on the Peace Building Fund's YPI, visit <https://www.pbfgyipi.org/>

⁶⁷ For more detail on the Youth Global Program for Sustainable Development and Peace | Youth-GPS 2016-2020, visit <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/Youth-GPS.html>

⁶⁸ For more detail on Youth4Peace, visit <https://www.youth4peace.info/>

⁶⁹ For more detail, visit <http://unoy.org/en/>

⁷⁰ For more detail, visit <https://www.unfpa.org/>

⁷¹ UNDP, *UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-17: Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future* (New York: UNDP, 2014), 5.

The Government, Higher Education, and Extremism

Contrary to the international momentum toward the involvement of youth in development and implementation of countering violent extremism policies, the legal and policy approach in Pakistan toward counter-extremism remains grounded in the top-down counter-terrorism framework. Such a framework seems to perceive the youth as a challenge and is very high on regulation, rather than inclusion and participation, of the youth for countering extremist tendencies among them.

Pakistan's Legal and Policy Framework on Countering Extremism

Pakistan's existing legal/policy structure on counter-extremism is principally based on the anti-terrorism legal framework, which has been heavily militarized in the recent past by the establishment of a parallel military justice system.⁷² The legal framework of Pakistan does not refer to extremism as a specific crime, but recognizes other related criminal offences, such as crimes against the state, incitement to violence, and creation and dissemination of hate speech, all of which are provisioned for in the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997, the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) 1860, and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016.⁷³

Keeping in mind that radicalization of the society today is not restricted to the traditional offline space but, through modern advances in technology, has infiltrated the digital infrastructure as well, laws have been made to address the changing trends in the spread of extremism. The government's efforts have been aimed at regulating cyber content to curb online extremism with the introduction of several legal and administrative measures, such as ban on media programs and advertisements whose content contains or encourages terrorism,⁷⁴ ban on glorification of terrorism/terrorists/terrorist organizations,⁷⁵ ban on hate speech preparation and dissemination⁷⁶ ban on recruitment, funding, or planning of terrorism,⁷⁷ confiscation of print, audio, and digital material promoting terrorism,⁷⁸ cancellations of declarations of press on publishing content that aids, abets, or promotes terrorism,⁷⁹ penal action against press without declaration on publishing content that aids,

⁷² M. Zaidi, "Laws Against Terrorism" *Dawn*, December 31, 2012. Access Link: <https://www.dawn.com/news/775178>

⁷³ Tariq Ahmed, "Legal Provisions on Fighting Extremism: Pakistan" *The Library of Congress* (September 2015). Access Link: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/fighting-extremism/pakistan.php>

⁷⁴ Section 20-C of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance, 2002.

⁷⁵ Section 9 of PECA, 2016.

⁷⁶ Section 11 of PECA, 2016.

⁷⁷ Section 12 of PECA 2016.

⁷⁸ Section 11-E-1-(d) and Section 11-W of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997.

⁷⁹ Section 19 of the Pakistan Press, Newspaper, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance (PPNNAB), 2002.

abets, or promotes terrorism,⁸⁰ and the powers of the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) to receive, collate, and share data and information with relevant stakeholders to counter terrorism and extremism.⁸¹ The application of the regulatory legal approach directly on the university students and teachers in the absence of any obligation for affirmative action for the promotion of tolerance has created its own problems. The court cases, after a crime is committed or even an allegation is made in sensitive matters like blasphemy, may take years to decide. For instance, Junaid Hafeez, a visiting lecturer at the Bahauddin Zakaria University, was arrested for blasphemy on March 13, 2013. He is still languishing behind bars after more than six years, while his court case has not concluded.⁸² Had there been internal mechanism at the university levels to address the matter before its escalation to the level of the court as a criminal case, the situation might have been different.

Implementation of the laws has also been a problem for the government, especially in case of laws related to cybercrimes. While laws have been enacted to regulate the dissemination of content on digital and media platforms, the government faces several challenges with regard to the implementation of these laws. One, the law enforcement agencies dealing with counter-extremism face institutional capacity challenges. Two, the efforts aimed at countering violent extremism and hate speech need to be balanced with allowing freedom of expression as enshrined in Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Three, with the scale of content and traffic on social media, it is not only difficult to control it but complicated to educate its users on its responsible use. Four, the GOP still seems to have a long way to go to promote positive use of social media as a CVE tool and to ensure that positive messages reach its targeted audiences, especially in peripheral parts of the country.

The Supreme Court defined the role of the media in the case of *Liberty Paper Mills vs. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan*⁸³ in which it held that, like persons and individuals, institutions including the media were also subservient to the Constitution of Pakistan and under liability to fulfil their constitutional obligations. The judgment held that the media played a vital role in reshaping political and social life and was required to refrain from irresponsible and unauthentic reporting and publication.

The courts have also made efforts to regulate the irresponsible use of social media platforms such as Facebook as seen in *Mohammad Munir vs. State*⁸⁴ where the Peshawar High

⁸⁰ Section 26 of the PPNNAB Ordinance, 2002.

⁸¹ Section 4 of the NACTA Act, 2013.

⁸² "Prosecution seeks forensic audit of laptop of blasphemy accused Junaid Hafeez," *Dawn*, September 12, 2019.

⁸³ PLD 2015 SC 42.

⁸⁴ PLD 2017 Pesh 10

Court (PHC) denied bail to a person who had made a fake Facebook profile, through which he was uploading pictures without permission. The PHC held that making profiles with fake names was cheating by impersonation and constituted an offence under sections 36 and 37 of the Electronic Transactions Ordinance, 2002. This case was decided on August 21, 2015, before the enactment of PECA, 2016.

Similarly, in *Mohammad Ayub vs. Federation of Pakistan through Ministry of Interior*,⁸⁵ the Lahore High Court (LHC) took notice of the inflammatory and blasphemous material displayed on Facebook and held that freedom of speech and expression should not be allowed to hurt the religious feelings of others. Such material was declared as another form of terrorism that should be realized by the international community. The LHC directed that the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) should exercise its power under section 37 of PECA 2016 to block such accounts or the information system involved in nefarious activities. The LHC further directed the Ministry of Interior to present a Bill in the parliament aimed at empowering the PTA to block the information system, should service providers fail to remove blasphemous material from social media.

Observations and judgments of the courts in the aforementioned cases reveal that over-regulation has blurred the lines between constitutionally mandated freedoms of expression and the need for counter-balancing it with deterring hate speech and other related content. The fact remains that challenging extremism is an effort that cannot rest on strategies such as censorship that encroach on the right for freedom of expression, especially when those perpetrating extremism are proficient in the rules and regulations of cyberspace that allow them to circumvent the barriers to get their message across nonetheless. Alternatives are needed that tap into the resources of civil society to multi-dimensionally target and counter violent extremism using technology, creativity and connectivity for ideas that have the potential for sustained impact.

While the government's legal framework has been squarely directed at regulation for countering extremism, its policy approaches toward countering extremism have had limited impact by way of including and encouraging the youth in proactively countering violent extremism and promoting tolerance for diversity. Given that the youth represents 64 percent of the overall population of Pakistan,⁸⁶ it is strategically beneficial for the government to incorporate the youth in the national policy plan as it exponentially broadens the outreach and therefore potential impact of state sponsored or led action for countering extremism. Unfortunately, many of the government's initiatives so far have made little headway in terms

⁸⁵ 2018 PCrLJ 1133

⁸⁶ UNDP, "Development Priorities for Pakistan," *Development Advocate Pakistan* 5:3 (January 25, 2019), pp.8. Access Link: http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/development_policy/dap5-vol2-issue3-pakistan-development-priorities.html

of impact as implementation of the agreed upon strategies remains weak.⁸⁷ One of the oft-repeated criticisms of the initiatives aimed at countering on-campus extremism in recent years has been the lack of any tangible follow-up. While there have been numerous interminable discussions in recognition of the problem of extremism and its prevalence in higher education institutions, there has been little in the way of follow-up action of measurable effect. One of the participants from the Vice Chancellor's Conference in 2017 was noted to have stated, "(as a nation), we talk a lot without looking at the concrete outcomes,"⁸⁸ while another participant felt that the stakeholders involved in the efforts aimed at countering on-campus extremism "have to take practical steps towards materializing plans."⁸⁹ While the importance of dialogue in resolving matters cannot be denied, such discussions must not conclude in talk alone but rather in the conception of strategies and mechanisms for implementing agreed upon ideas and plans.

Part of this non-implementation inertia can be attributed to the lack of clarity regarding where the *de facto* authority lies in matters of higher education. In 2010, the 18th Constitutional Amendment Act (Act No.10 of 2010) devolved specific powers from the central government to the provinces, granting them authority over areas such as higher education. However, the Federal Legislative List⁹⁰ also refers to higher education as a federal issue, which is where the confusion arises as it creates uncertainty as to whether the supervisory role for higher education rests with the federal or the provincial government. In conformity with the 18th amendment, the provinces of Punjab and Sindh have established provincial HECs that oversee higher education matters with a representative from the federal HEC sitting in to ensure that the provinces remain consistent with the directives of the central government on the subject. And while this allows for the development of a uniform policy on higher education to be applicable throughout Pakistan, it also circumvents provincial autonomy on the matter as in cases where inconsistencies exist, the federal HEC's directive will take precedence. To ensure administrative ease between institutions and therefore in the regulation and effective management of important matters, such as on-campus extremism, it is necessary that this ambiguity be removed from the administrative structure for the division of powers.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Discussion with students from LUMS during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 8, 2018.

⁸⁸ Riazul Haq, "VCs Fail to come up with conclusive strategy for countering extremism," *The Express Tribune*, November 21, 2017.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Fourth Schedule, Part II, Item No.12.

⁹¹ Naazir Mahmood, "Higher Education: Federal or Provincial" *The News*, September 29, 2018. Link Access: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/374268-higher-education-federal-or-provincial>

In the absence of institutional clarity and a policy framework that provides a codified and comprehensive guideline structure for dealing with on-campus extremism, the relied upon instrument for guidance in such circumstances is the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG).⁹² And while the document and the proceedings leading to its development were inarguably a great initiative aimed at eliminating extremism through civic engagement, the policy guidelines are not specific to on-campus extremism and, therefore, do not address the subject with the detail necessary to bring in the needed change. More so, the mentioned recommendations regarding extremism in higher education institutions do not provide direction in the form of an execution strategy, and without such a mechanism, implementation cannot be effective.

The fact of the matter remains that the public, and more specifically the youth, cannot combat a phenomenon that they do not have an understanding of. For this understanding to manifest, the institutional powers of the country must come to a consensus on what the term entails. This would require the legislative, judicial, and executive functions of the state to work against extremism under an agreed upon definition and update that definition to reflect the changing trends of extremism in society today. As such, the government initiatives to address on-campus extremism must not only have a comprehensive component for dissecting the concept of extremism as a subject but they should also include a communication strategy for educating the youth on the topic.⁹³

One of the more serious challenges to government attempts at combating on-campus extremism has been the rapidly evolving use of digital technology in spreading extremist content and the difficulties in regulating the far-reaching infrastructure of the online space. In the digital era of today where content can instantaneously be shared at a global scale, the potential risk of abuse and severity of damage could be incalculable.⁹⁴ And while there is relevant legislation that addresses the issue of online extremism as it pertains to hate speech and incitement to violence among other things, the problem lies in the missing link between the laws and the awareness of their existence. Most people are simply not cognizant of the legal parameters that define criminal offences associated with online extremism and the attached penalties. As a result, such offences are committed among students and others in

⁹² Details of NCEPG in the next section below.

⁹³ Discussions on impact of social media and other online content on youth from day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

⁹⁴ Discussions on impact of social media and other online content on youth from day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

ignorance with no effected repercussions as even the university administrations are unaware of the laws on this matter.⁹⁵

To some extent, NACTA did attempt to engage the youth in curbing online hate speech through the Tat'heer drive,⁹⁶ and its associated online reporting portals—Chaukas and Surfsafe—but the initiative never gained any traction due to a considerable lack of awareness about it among the target population. Not to mention, there was much ambiguity about what follow-up action was taken against websites reported for carrying hate content through the portal.⁹⁷

Development of Some Positive Momentum

While progress has been gradual, the government has taken certain initiatives for wider participation in the national struggle to counter the extremist narrative in Pakistan. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP) framework devised by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in 2014, and later revised in 2018, was crucial in that it prioritized youth mobilization for achieving peace and stability in Pakistan by empowering the youth of the country to participate in all social, economic, and political spheres.⁹⁸ Since then, the government has made some efforts to develop a strategic response for addressing extremism on campuses.

Vice Chancellors' Conferences

The first Vice Chancellors' (VCs) conference on countering on-campus violent extremism was organized by the HEC in May 2017 in the wake of the lynching of Mashal Khan in Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. Ironically, the conference focused more on the abuse of social media rather than the extremism resulting in a cold-blooded mob-lynching.⁹⁹ In September, however, the HEC followed up the conference with a letter to the universities to institute protocols to counter radicalization on their campuses.¹⁰⁰ Evidence of the institution of such protocols in universities, however, has not surfaced so far. On November 20, 2017, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) worked in collaboration with the Islamic Research Institute (IRI) and the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) to organize another

⁹⁵ Discussion with students from LUMS University during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 8, 2018.

⁹⁶ An initiative by NACTA in the form of a multi-pronged cyber counter-terrorism drive which includes mapping of radical content available on internet/social media.

⁹⁷ Afeera Firdous, "Counter Extremism Drives in Pakistan" *The Nation*, May 2, 2018. Access Link: <https://nation.com.pk/02-May-2018/counter-extremism-drives-in-pakistan>

⁹⁸ Ministry of Interior, "National Internal Security Policy 2014-2018." Access Link: <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/National-Internal-Security-Policy-2014.pdf>

⁹⁹ Editorial, "Deradicalisation needs clarity," *Daily Times*, May 15,

¹⁰⁰ "HEC stresses need to curb radicalisation in universities," *The News*, September 8, 2017.

conference that brought together Vice Chancellors from universities across the country to discuss the role of universities in advancing a national narrative to counter violence, extremism, and terrorism.¹⁰¹ Over 80 university heads attended the conference, which concluded with a draft of a joint declaration that endorsed the need for immediate measures to realign institutional approaches for countering violence, extremism, and terrorism.¹⁰² Among other things, the declaration highlighted the need for promoting diversity, tolerance, and civilized discourse by protecting freedom of speech on campuses and by educating students on the ethics of disagreement. More so, it was agreed that inter-faith learning and dialogue was essential for nurturing an environment of peace and harmony on campuses with the administration making a concerted effort to discourage intolerance and extremism of any kind. The declaration also underlined the importance for enhanced faculty-student interaction to remove the disconnect students may feel with the faculty and suggested the introduction of teachers training centers for university staff to provide courses relevant to national policies and the contemporary challenges of the educational sector in Pakistan. The focus on student wellbeing was integral to the objective of the declaration, which concluded with the need for mentoring and counselling facilities for students in universities and encouraged extracurricular activities to keep students positively engaged.¹⁰³ Once again, however, there has been little progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the declaration through institution of institutionalized frameworks in university campuses.

National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines

Introduced in January 2018, the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG) were aimed at holistically addressing the issue of extremism in Pakistan through an approach that relied not only on government efforts but also on those of the people of Pakistan to deny space to extremists and extremism. The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) led the initiative by bringing together more than 300 stakeholders in an interdisciplinary consultative process that encompassed over 34 rounds of deliberations and culminated in the development of the NCEPG with the help of all relevant stakeholders, including government officials,

¹⁰¹ Higher Education Commission, Pakistan “Draft of the Joint Declaration of National Vice Chancellor’s Conference on the Role of Universities in Advancing National Narrative to Counter Violence, Extremism and Terrorism” (November 20, 2017). Access Link: <https://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/Pages/Joint-Declaration.aspx>

¹⁰² Riazul Haq, “VCs Fail to Come Up with Conclusive Strategy for Countering Extremism.” *The Express Tribune*, November 21, 2017 . Access Link: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1563946/1-vcs-fail-come-conclusive-strategy-countering-extremism/>

¹⁰³ Higher Education Commission, Pakistan “Draft of the Joint Declaration of National Vice Chancellor’s Conference on the Role of Universities in Advancing National Narrative to Counter Violence, Extremism and Terrorism” (November 20, 2017).

representatives of the civil society, subject matter experts, and other relevant stakeholders.¹⁰⁴ The NCEPG was one of the first policy documents in Pakistan to touch on the issue of extremism in higher education institutions with recommendations on promoting interaction via debate between the various education streams in Pakistan on issues dealing not only with religion and ideology, but also modern day problems.¹⁰⁵ The NCEPG guidelines referred to the need for national and international academics and religious scholars to visit higher education institutions to encourage informed discourse on religious issues.¹⁰⁶ Internship programs for university students with government institutions were also suggested to minimize the disconnect between the two.¹⁰⁷ The policy guidelines further submitted the need for a counter-narrative library equipped with relevant and comprehensive literature on issues pertaining to history, religion, and other scholarly subjects for students seeking information on such topics.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the need for acceptance and respect of diversity was identified as essential in higher education institutions through avenues such as the promotion of inter-provincial cultural exchanges to promote cultural assimilation and an environment of greater tolerance.¹⁰⁹

Provincial Youth Policies

In 2008, The federal cabinet of Pakistan approved the National Youth Policy formulated by the Ministry of Youth Affairs. But it could not be implemented due to the passing of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, which led to the dissolution of the Ministry of Youth Affairs in 2010 and devolved the decision-making powers of the central government on youth affairs to the provinces.¹¹⁰ The policies that were formulated on a provincial level as a result stressed, alongside other aspects, on the resolve of the provincial governments to implement strategies aimed at promoting peace and tolerance among the youth. Following the constitutional amendment, Punjab was the first province to introduce the Punjab Youth Policy¹¹¹ in 2012, the mandate of which is, inter alia, to facilitate, groom, and guide the youth to

¹⁰⁴ National Counter Terrorism Authority, "National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines" (January 2018). Access Link: <https://nacta.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/NCEP-Guidlines.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Point No.23 under Educational Reforms from the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, 28.

¹⁰⁶ Point No.29 under Educational Reforms from the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, 30.

¹⁰⁷ Point No.28 under Educational Reforms from the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, 30.

¹⁰⁸ Point No.30 under Educational Reforms from the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, 30.

¹⁰⁹ Point No.41 under Promotion of Culture from the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines, 36.

¹¹⁰ "Cabinet approves devolution of seven ministries", *Dawn News* (June 28, 2011). Access link: <https://www.dawn.com/news/640139>

¹¹¹ Youth Affairs, Sports, Tourism and Archeology Department, Government of Punjab, "Punjab Youth Policy 2012". Access link: https://youth.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab_Youth_Policy_2012.pdf

live in peace and harmony.¹¹² The strategic action plan laid down in the policy emphasizes the importance of uniform basic and secondary education to promote integration and social cohesion in conjunction with the need and vitality of a safe and violence-free campus.¹¹³ The policy further issues guidelines for youth development, which include youth-led mass campaigns for inter-faith and intra-faith harmony and strict implementation of laws against hate speech.¹¹⁴

Later in 2016, the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) followed suit to present and approve the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Youth Policy.¹¹⁵ The policy firmly outlines its aim to socially empower the youth and lead them toward being tolerant, non-violent, and peaceful citizens.¹¹⁶ To counter the issue of increasing radicalization amongst the youth, special importance has been given to the promotion of peace education through the up-gradation of the curriculum, which, according to the policy, is central to bridging gaps among different religions, sects, ethnic groups, and to bring harmony and develop tolerance among the youth of the province.¹¹⁷ In terms of strategies to implement, the policy proposes strict implementation of laws against hate speech and encourages youth-led mass campaigns against hate speech and the creation of spaces and platforms for the youth at the local level to build a culture of peace, positive self-image, and national identity.¹¹⁸

In 2018, with support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),¹¹⁹ the Sindh Youth Policy¹²⁰ was introduced, which, in line with the counter extremism efforts of other provinces, also aims to promote peace, tolerance, and cultural diversity and strategizes to engage the youth in discouraging hate speech and ensuring strict implementation of laws against hate speech. It also aims to cascade training programs on “youth engagement in peace

¹¹² Ibid., 7.

¹¹³ Ibid., 17-18.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁵ Department of Tourism, Sports, Culture, Archeology, Museums and Youth Affairs, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, “Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Youth Policy 2016”. Access link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B87Q5xpOZG30aXdvYUs5WDFheDA/view>

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 14

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 36.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 51-52.

¹¹⁹ “Sindh gets its first ever youth policy”, *Daily Times* (May 26, 2018). Access Link: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/244882/sindh-gets-its-first-ever-youth-policy/>

¹²⁰ Department of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Sindh, “Sindh Youth Policy 2018”. Access link: <https://www.youthaffairs.gos.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Sindh-Youth-Policy-2018.pdf>

processes” to support youth-led mass campaigns for interfaith and intra-faith harmony and to include peace education in school curricula.¹²¹

The Balochistan Youth Policy, however, has yet to be tabled in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly and be officially approved.¹²²

National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses

In July of 2018, NACTA, HEC, and CODE PAKISTAN collaborated in organizing the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses (NYC-CVE) in furtherance of existing efforts to bring together federal and provincial stakeholders—including faculty members and students from 45 universities from across Pakistan and 5 madrassahs—to formulate a set of key policy recommendations for countering on-campus extremism. The two-day event covered a range of ten thematic areas specific to countering on-campus extremism in an overarching effort to encourage dialogue that holistically addressed the subject from all angles. The conference concluded with over 40 policy recommendations that offered comprehensive solutions for preventing and countering extremism on the campuses of higher education institutions. The NYC-CVE was a stepping stone for the government to further cooperate with universities and madrassahs in a national endeavor to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions to combat extremism.

NACTA and HEC Memorandum of Understanding

Flowing from the NYC-CVE, NACTA and the HEC entered into an agreement on October 25, 2018, to formalize their intention to pursue a joint partnership for combating extremism through research and collaboration. The effort is aimed at promoting research in the public sector that could translate into generation of evidence-based information and facts to support the policymaking process. As part of this partnership, NACTA will identify topics of relevance, which the HEC will then undertake research on with the help of affiliated universities. Through this research and other activities, NACTA and the HEC will promote awareness on topics of extremism and terrorism in higher education institutions to build the resilience of students and staff members against extremist ideologies. As per the MOU signed, the following are the highlighted areas for cooperation:

1. Joint Research Collaboration: NACTA will provide the basic themes and sub-topics and HEC will undertake the research through its affiliated universities;
2. Consolidating Existing Research: Both the Parties will take measures to consolidate research work in the areas of counter extremism and terrorism.

¹²¹ Ibid., 42-43.

¹²² Mir Behram Baloch, “Balochistan Youth Policy hangs in balance,” *The Balochistan Point*, March 24, 2017. Access link: <http://thebalochistanpoint.com/balochistan-youth-policy-hangs-in-balance/>

3. Awareness Activities amongst Students: Both the Parties with mutual collaboration and support will undertake awareness programs and activities for the students in the areas of counter extremism, de-radicalization and counter terrorism through seminars, workshops, essay competition, debates, sports events, dramas, cultural activities and social media etc. The FM radio channels of the universities will also be utilized for the purpose.
4. Teachers' Sensitization: Both the Parties with mutual cooperation will undertake workshops, seminars, discussions and other sensitization for teachers.
5. Review of Existing Curriculum: Both the Parties will take steps to review the existing curriculum and make recommendations for its improvement to counter extremism, hate material, radicalization and terrorism.
6. Madrassah Students: Both the parties will find ways and means to bring madrassah and university students closer for fight against extremism and terrorism. Academic, sports and extra-curricular activities will be chalked out for the purpose.¹²³

Consultations on the Way Forward for the Recommendations of the NYC-CVE

The specialized consultations were conducted in pursuance of implementing the recommendations generated from the NYC-CVE through specific action-plans for countering on-campus extremism that were derived from discussions with faculty and student members from individual universities. Spearheaded in 2018 by the HEC and CODE PAKISTAN, with the support of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the process involved detailed deliberations with 15 of the most reputable universities across Pakistan over a period of three months that started in October.

To ensure that the action plans authentically represented the views of Pakistan as a whole, the universities that were engaged in the consultations were from all four provinces, the Federal Capital Territory, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). In addition to a good geographical spread, gender representation was also prioritized to accommodate the development of localized and culturally sensitive action plans for countering on-campus violent extremism. To further understand the predominant perceptions on the causes and consequences of on-campus violent extremism, a student perception survey was conducted with a sample size of 1,179 students from the 15 universities as part of the consultative process. The survey entailed a structured questionnaire that covered numerous topics - ranging from the need for greater university-madrasah interaction, the impact of politically affiliated student groups on campus life, access to higher education, exposure to diversity as a contributor to countering violent extremism, the need for a compulsory course on ethics and humanism in university syllabi, adequacy of administrative oversight of student dormitories in universities,

¹²³ National Counter Terrorism Authority, "NACTA and HEC Sign M.O.U" (October 25, 2018). Access Link: <https://nacta.gov.pk/nacta-and-hec-sign-m-o-u-on-prevention-awareness-on-combating-extremism-and-terrorism-2/>

the need for stress management counselling at universities, and the need for social cohesion in Pakistan – that provided vital data for understanding student perceptions on violent extremism and for determining what on-campus initiatives would be supported by the students of specific universities.¹²⁴

Subsequent to the conclusion of the specialized consultations, 14 action plans were submitted by the universities on countering on-campus violent extremism. These action plans along with the proceedings of the NYC-CVE, the deliberation of the deep-dive sessions with the 15 universities, and the findings of the student perception survey were compiled into a single comprehensive report titled *Youth Outreach at Universities for Countering Violent Extremism* and submitted to the HEC as a baseline document for research and policy development on the issue of countering on-campus violent extremism. Several of the action plans that were submitted have garnered donors' programmatic interest for implementation. The submission by NED University on the responsible use of social media among the youth for promoting peace and tolerance on campuses has already gained traction and is in the process of being operationalized. Another idea by the name of Amplifying Female Voices for Peace is also under consideration for implementation.¹²⁵

National Academy of Higher Education

In June of 2019, the HEC introduced an enterprising initiative targeted at improving the academic governance system of Pakistan through the establishment of the National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE). Having identified the gaps in service delivery of education, the government has shifted its attention to building the capacity and skill level of its educators by providing an avenue for the development of quality in teaching, learning, and research in higher education institutions. This is an effort to address the need for improving the leadership and administrative capabilities of those in management positions at higher education institutions. NAHE has been mandated with the responsibility to enhance the governance and academic prowess of the management and teaching staff in higher education institutions through "generic and need-based capacity building and training programmes in teaching and research for faculty, and academic governance and leadership for faculty and management." These trainings would highlight aspects for education reform and touch on the subject of contemporary issues such as countering violent extremism on university campuses. Through the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other system regulating

¹²⁴ See CODE PAKISTAN, *Youth Outreach at Universities for Countering Violent Extremism* (2019), 32.

¹²⁵ The project on Amplifying Female Voices for Peace is under consideration for programmatic implementation. The project is in collaboration with Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) and will entail the use of the studio and on-campus radio station of FJWU to initiate regular programming that will feature female leaders voicing their views against extremism and in favour of promotion of peace, tolerance, and inclusivity in society.

mechanisms, NAHE has been tasked with upgrading the standard for academic governance in Pakistan.¹²⁶

An additional component of the government's effort to improving the academic governance system of higher education in Pakistan was the institution of an Education Testing (ETC) Council by HEC in 2018 to regulate the entry of students into higher education institutions. Applicable for both public and private universities in Pakistan, the purpose of the ETC is to ensure that a "uniform, accessible, and competitive" mechanism for standardized testing is administered for admission to universities.¹²⁷

University-Led Efforts for Countering Violent Extremism

While the government has slowly been shifting its priorities to encompass the issue of on-campus extremism, the initiatives undertaken by the government to address the problem have only recently been instituted and their impact has been limited in effect. But media reporting of violence and extremism on campuses and the realization of the problem at national level has spurred many universities to take independent action to address the issue.

The dissemination of counter extremism narratives has been an informal channel adopted by the faculty members of universities to educate their students on the dangers of an extremist mindset and to teach them the importance of respecting diversity of cultures and views. The willingness of the teachers to undertake such an initiative in cognizance of the fact that their surrounding environment is one of insecurity and bigotry speaks of their dedication to building a strong foundation for tolerance in their students and in society.¹²⁸

Alternatively, universities have also adopted the more formalized approach of introducing a course on counter terrorism and extremism to provide students with an academic understanding on the subject.¹²⁹ As part of the program, guest lecturers with knowledge on the theme have also been invited to share their expertise on the matter.¹³⁰ Given the dearth of research material available on extremism, university administrations have further

¹²⁶ Higher Education Commission Pakistan, "National Academy of Higher Education." Access Link: <https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/faculty/NAHE/Pages/default.aspx>

¹²⁷ Higher Education Commission, "Education Testing Council" (November 6, 2018). Access Link: <https://hec.gov.pk/english/services/students/etc/Pages/default.aspx>

¹²⁸ Discussions with faculty from Khyber Medical University in Peshawar during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on October 29, 2018.

¹²⁹ Faculty at Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore revealed that a module on counter terrorism and extremism was offered to students in their seventh semester of BS by the political science department.

¹³⁰ Discussion with faculty at Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 8, 2018.

established strategic working groups and student study circles to focus on the academic research of extremism and terrorism as a topic of study.¹³¹

Equally important have been the efforts of several university administrations to establish a basis for inclusive and peaceful co-existence among students by engaging them in a wide array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that range from sports, music, theater and social activities to student societies for debating and poetry. Such activities have the positive impact of promoting trust and bonding between students regardless of religious, cultural, or ethnic differences, along with building confidence and encouraging unprejudiced thinking. The wide-scale adoption of such an endeavor by other universities could go a long way in building resilience among the youth against extremism and radicalization.¹³² In certain areas, the community at large has also invested in such exercises by sponsoring events and thereby encouraging students to participate in activities.¹³³

Other ideas implemented by universities have been the institution of skill development centers for students to explore their interests through entrepreneurial opportunities that help them gain clarity regarding their future and their careers. The impact of such an initiative has been to remove the fear and uncertainty that exists for many students regarding their futures, and in the absence of this insecurity, students are less likely to fall prey to whispers that preach of brotherhood and belonging through violence and death.¹³⁴ Universities have also embarked on collaborative projects with international organizations that offer inclusive cross-border trainings, such as that for Afghan teachers on instructing students in Afghan refugee schools or in teacher training exercises with international universities to improve national standards of teaching.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Discussion with students at UAF in Faisalabad during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on December 3, 2018.

¹³² Discussion with faculty at Islamia College in Peshawar during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 15, 2018.

¹³³ Discussion with students at UAF in Faisalabad during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on December 3, 2018.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Discussion with faculty at BUIITEMS in Quetta during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 22 2018. The faculty revealed that BUIITEMS had partnered with UNHCR in a capacity-building and skills development program that was in its second year of providing training to 61 Afghan teachers on subjects relevant for teaching at Afghan refugee schools, such as crisis response and child psychology. The faculty further informed that at the end of program, teachers received certificates authorized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and BUIITEMS to verify the quality of training, which was undertaken by qualified instructors with technical expertise in various fields. The faculty further shared that in an effort to consistently improve teaching standards, BUIITEMS was collaborating with the University of Nebraska where faculty members from BUIITEMS were trained in pedagogy.

Time and again students have expressed discontent regarding the disconnect that exists between them and the university administration. The gap is often so wide that the administration functions with little understanding of what the problems are that students face and therefore with no resolution to fix them. To address this issue, one of the initiatives introduced has been the empowerment of student committees to take part in the policy making process of the university. This has had the benefit of bringing student representation to the management level so as to ensure that the student voice is not left unheard.¹³⁶

Challenges Faced by Universities in Implementing on-Campus CVE Strategies

In response to the threat of increasing radicalization on campuses today, universities have undertaken singular initiatives to protect the youth under their guardianship and to strengthen their resilience to extremist ideologies. Unfortunately, the success of these endeavors has been limited by certain challenges that universities throughout the country continue to face.

The lack of sufficient funding has been one of the main structural challenges faced by universities in Pakistan, hindering the implementation of on-campus counter extremism efforts. According to reports, several universities are undergoing a financial crisis, which has been attributed to financial cuts in educational grants. In response to the HEC's request for Rs.103.5 billion from the federal government for education-related programs in the country, a sum of only Rs.59 billion was approved.¹³⁷ Provincial governments have similarly had to cut down on funding for higher education. Budget documents of the KP Government for 2018-19 indicate a difference of Rs.3.37 billion between what was allocated for the higher education sector and what was actually released.¹³⁸ For some universities, the situation has become so dire that all development projects have been halted while they struggle to compensate staff for their services, while others have been taking loans from banks to meet salary payments.¹³⁹ The issue at its source has been attributed to governance practices in mismanaging the allocation of funds for the education sector. Without a proper system in place to assess where the need for an inflow of capital for improving service delivery of education actually lies, the funds apportioned for the education sector are being poorly utilized and in many cases essentially wasted.¹⁴⁰ The problem of insufficient resources is not restricted to funding for the

¹³⁶ Discussion with students at UAF in Faisalabad during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on December 3, 2018.

¹³⁷ Wisal Yousafzai, "With Budget Cuts, UoP Runs into Financial Troubles" *The Express Tribune* (August 3, 2019). Access Link: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2026889/1-budget-cuts-uop-runs-financial-troubles/>

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Yousaf Ali, "Three Leading KP Universities Facing Severe Financial Crisis" *The News*, August 9, 2019. Access Link: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/510312-three-leading-kp-universities-facing-severe-financial-crisis>

¹⁴⁰ Razeshta Sethna, "Education: Where Does All the Money Go?" *Dawn epaper*, (June 22, 2016). Access Link:

higher education sector but also encompasses staffing issues, which is especially detrimental in the case of appointments regarding the heads of universities. An estimated 21 universities in Pakistan were noted to be operating in the absence of permanent heads.¹⁴¹ In Punjab alone, 70 percent of universities had been reported to be functioning without the leadership of a Vice Chancellor for the past three years and since the interim leadership in such cases is hesitant to pursue new initiatives or programs, important on-campus issues such as that of student radicalization are left to fester without check. In the absence of direction provided by a Vice Chancellor, some universities have closed down their ongoing programs and development projects, while also reducing the number of seats allocated to students per department as faculty numbers have also fallen.¹⁴² This attempt to lessen the gap in the ratio of students to teachers remains ineffective as the disproportionality between the two is already so wide that it fosters an increasing disconnect as teachers are unable to provide individualized care to students and therefore, are unable to identify any signs of concern for distress in students.¹⁴³

The lack of sufficient resources in funding and human resources also means that university administrations cannot operationalize facilities to address the needs of the students on campuses. On campus grievance redressal mechanisms¹⁴⁴ and counselling services¹⁴⁵ cannot be sustained in the absence of qualified staff who would inevitably require monetary compensation for services delivered. Similarly, projects aimed at stocking libraries with an extensive collection of well-rounded literature,¹⁴⁶ and facilitating on-campus extra-curricular activities¹⁴⁷ cannot be supported without an influx of necessary funds.

Such limitations inevitably effect the administrative capabilities of the universities in effectively managing the regulation of students, especially in providing them with safe and

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=22_06_2016_003_003

¹⁴¹ Riazul Haq, "21 Public-Sector Varsities Operating without VCs" *The Express Tribune*, September 17, 2017. Access Link:

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1508786/21-public-sector-varsities-operating-without-vcs/>

¹⁴² "State of Education: 70% of Punjab's Universities without VCs," *Global Village Space*, October 4, 2018. Access Link: <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/state-of-education-70-of-punjabs-universities-without-vcs/>

¹⁴³ Discussions regarding the ideological imprint of extremist organization in educational institutions from day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Discussion with students from IIUI during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on October 30, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Discussions on peacebuilding through on-campus extra-curricular activities from Day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Discussion with students from IIUI during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on October 30, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Discussion with students from Islamia College Peshawar and Islamia University, Bahawalpur during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 15, 2018 and December 14, 2018, respectively.

supervised accommodation facilities. As reported by students themselves, university hostels are in dire need of better oversight mechanisms to safeguard the wellbeing of their residents. More so, university administrations need to prepare better protocols to cater for students in need of accommodation that cannot be provided for on-campus. As the situation currently stands, many universities accept students in need of accommodation without being able to provide the facility themselves. In such cases, students then have to seek off-campus lodging where university administrations have no regulating authority, leaving these students vulnerable to influence from those that target such students for grooming and recruitment into militant groups.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, a weak administrative unit hinders the ability of the university to monitor drug trafficking on campuses.¹⁴⁹ While efforts for drug control have been introduced on several campuses, the university administrations have not been able to sustainably implement them with any force. Ease of availability, accessibility and affordability have transformed universities into one of the main trafficking grounds for drugs and other illegal substances with students fast becoming the biggest clientele.¹⁵⁰ Already, one out of every 10 students in higher education institutions in Pakistan is addicted to drugs.¹⁵¹ Given the effect of such substances in the marginalization of students and in increasing the risk of their susceptibility to influence, drug control on campuses is a serious concern for which better deterrence mechanisms need to be instituted.¹⁵²

There have also been some concerns regarding the curricular format in the higher education sector. To be more precise, it is the lack of prioritization given to subjects - such as the arts, humanities and social sciences - that engender critical thinking and an increased tolerance for divergence that has become a cause for unease.¹⁵³ And validly so, as more and more reports show a technical background in education of students that have fallen victim to

¹⁴⁸ Discussion with students from IIUI during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on October 30, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Discussion with students from IBA University, Karachi during the specialized consultations on the way forward for the recommendations of the NYC-CVE on November 23, 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Discussion on the ideological imprint of extremist organizations in educational institutions from day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Muhammad Qasim, "Drug Abuse in Pakistani Youth Reaches Alarming Levels" *The News*, June 26, 2018. Access Link:

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/333733-drug-abuse-in-pakistani-youth-reaches-alarming-levels>

¹⁵² Discussion on drug abuse on campuses; role of university administrations and law enforcement agencies in eradicating the menace from Day 1 of the *National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses* on July 11, 2018.

¹⁵³ Faisal Bari, "Thinking Critically - Really?" *Dawn*, October 20, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364911>

the extremist mindset. This is not to say that the sciences and other technical subjects do not allow space for disagreement but the standard of instruction is such that it fails to nurture independent and critical thinking. Similarly, subjects relating to civic engagement are often overlooked in university curriculums without thought to their significance in teaching students their civic rights and responsibilities. Courses taught at university should expose students to a wide-range of subjects and ideas from modules on comparative theology and gender equality to extremism and peace studies. The current lack of access to such knowledge and skill building has been attributed as one of the causes for radicalization in students.¹⁵⁴

Academics aside, university administrations need to broaden their priorities to include personal and behavioral development. Several universities have already initiated a transition in their internal policies - to take into account the importance of extra-curricular activities in facilitating personal growth, strengthening student relationships and as a means to positively engage students—but the majority still maintain a single-minded preoccupation with the pursuit of academic excellence to the exclusion of all else.

Civil Society Efforts for On-Campus CVE

A weak administrative infrastructure has hindered the capacity of many universities in Pakistan to support and operationalize programs that effectively engage the youth in peacebuilding. Civil society organizations have intervened to fill in this gap by collaborating with universities to introduce and implement projects on campuses that address their needs. While still a fledgling movement, civil society engagement for youth peacebuilding is gaining momentum as more and more think tanks, NGOs, and international organizations are venturing into the effort for countering violent extremism on campuses.

Many civil society organizations have taken the route of awareness raising to facilitate greater responsiveness among the youth. Conferences and workshops have been organized to create an understanding among students and university administrations on the importance of countering extremism through pluralism and tolerance of diversity. The London-based think tank, Quilliam Foundation, has provided training workshops to over 5,000 university students at 21 different universities from various cities across Pakistan.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the Pakistan Young Leaders' Conference in Islamabad was organized by the National Union of Pakistani Students and Alumni (NUPSA) to promote youth participation in society.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Discussions on the role of faculty and student forums in countering violent extremism from Day 1 of the National Youth Conference on Countering Violent Extremism on Campuses on July 11, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Quilliam, "Quilliam Roundtable on Pakistan: Identity, Ideology and Beyond." November 2, 2009. Access Link: <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/quilliam-roundtable-on-pakistan-identity-ideology-and-beyond/>

¹⁵⁶ Quilliam, "Maajid Nawaz speaks at the Pakistan Young Leaders' Conference." February 16, 2010. Access Link: <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/maajid-nawaz-speaks-at-the-pakistan-young-leaders-conference/>

More in-depth awareness-raising sessions have also been instituted by organizations such as peace without borders through creative avenues that simultaneously engage student interest and communicate relevant messages of peace and tolerance. Their initiative for peace camps are organized on campuses and ensure that 100-150 students are educated on peace development and countering violent extremism through techniques such as performing arts, live theatre and open dialogue.¹⁵⁷

In an effort to involve the senior leadership of universities in understanding and addressing violent extremism on campuses, Quilliam Foundation and Bargad organized a conference in March 2009 on “Youth Extremism and Peacebuilding at Campuses.” The event provided Vice Chancellors from different universities with the opportunity to learn from each other on the subject and to share ideas for effectively tackling extremism on campuses.¹⁵⁸

The importance of dialogue in surmounting the growing polarization in society today is also being realized by civil society organizations that have started to employ the use of interactive forums to facilitate positive discourse between different social groups. In 2013, the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) collaborated with Khudi Pakistan to arrange a day-long event to encourage an exchange of ideas between students of madrassahs from various cities in Pakistan and those from Quaid-e-Azam University on topics pertaining to the challenges and solutions to contemporary issues in Pakistan.¹⁵⁹ CODE PAKISTAN had conducted a similar relatively longer term activity in late 2015, wherein it provided a platform for constructive engagement between university and madrassah students.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, peace without borders has used their platform of “Guru Talks” to bring together students from universities and madrassas to engage them in discussions that inspire critical thinking on cultural, folk and spiritual based topics.¹⁶¹

Following the same idea on an international scale, NAPSA initiated a campaign called “Pehchan Pakistan” to provide an interactive bridge-way between local university students and those studying in a foreign country. In collaboration with 12 universities in Pakistan, the

¹⁵⁷ Peace without Borders. “AMNQALAAB - Peace Camps.” Access Link: <http://peacewithoutborders.pk/peace-amnqalaab>

¹⁵⁸ Rameez Ahmed Sheikh, “Review of Peace Education Activities in Pakistan,” *Global Campaign for Peace Education* (March 15, 2016), p.14. Access Link: <https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Paper-of-Peace-Education-by-Rameez-Ahmed-Sheikh.pdf>

¹⁵⁹ PIPS, “Reconstruction of the National Narratives and Counter-Violent Extremism Model for Pakistan,” p. 37. Access Link: <https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PIPS-National-Narrative-CVE-Model-1.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ For details, see <https://codepak.org/university-madrasah-interaction-program/>

¹⁶¹ Peace without Borders. “AMNQALAAB – Guru Talks.” Access Link: <http://peacewithoutborders.pk/peace-amnqalaab>

campaign aimed at conducting a series of synergistic activities, such as workshops, seminars, conferences, career counselling sessions and stage performances with the underlying objective of eliminating on-campus social divisions and barriers based on ethnic, political and social grounds.¹⁶²

Capacity building through skills development has been significantly effective in building the resilience of the youth against violent extremist narratives. Such exercises engage the youth in a positive manner by introducing them to skills that subsequently elevate their confidence in themselves and in their abilities. The method is also one that has successfully been utilized by several civil society organizations.¹⁶³

Such capacity building initiatives have not been limited to students alone, faculty members have also been engaged in training activities conducted by civil society organizations. The significance of the role that teachers play in creating a social environment that promotes cohesion and inclusivity among students cannot be taken lightly.¹⁶⁴

Some NGOs have conducted research on the subject of on-campus extremism. For instance, the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) carried out a research based activity through their CVE initiative—Pakistan Center for Excellence (PACE)—to determine how prevalently critical thinking is promoted in higher education institutions.¹⁶⁵ Peace & Justice Network Pakistan (PJN) has worked with universities in South Punjab to strengthen the functionality of the existing peace clubs and societies on campuses and by establishing additional peace clubs that involve students in peacebuilding activities.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Sehrish Wasif, "Student Initiative for Harnessing Local Talent," *The Express Tribune*, September 18, 2010. Access Link: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/51549/student-initiative-for-harnessing-local-talent/>

¹⁶³ See Bargad, "Youth Leadership on Campuses: 5-Day Value Clarification Workshop" (June 21, 2019). Access Link: <http://www.bargad.org.pk/youth-leadership-on-campuses/> and Peace Insight, "Youth Engagement Services (YES) Network Pakistan" (March 2019). Access Link: <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/pakistan/peacebuilding-organisations/yes-network/>

¹⁶⁴ See PIPS, "Reconstruction of the National Narratives and Counter-Violent Extremism Model for Pakistan," 38. Access Link: <https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PIPS-National-Narrative-CVE-Model-1.pdf>; PIPS, "Teachers Must Respect Diversity in Classrooms: PIPS Workshop," (May 22, 2017). Access Link: <https://www.pakpips.com/article/277>

¹⁶⁵ See Center for Research & Security Studies, "Why De-Radicalization and CVE Remain Major Challenges for Pakistan?" May 17, 2018. Access Link: <https://crss.pk/story/why-de-radicalization-and-cve-remain-major-challenges-for-pakistan/>

¹⁶⁶ Peace & Justice Network Pakistan "Tajeed-e-Ehad Project." Access Link: <https://pjn.org.pk/home/page/63>

Learning from International Best Practices

The education sector has been internationally recognized as one of the main areas for action.¹⁶⁷ Given the vulnerability of the youth to radicalization, many of the traditional polices have relied upon repressive measures for increased security in educational facilities. This often translates into a curtailment on student activism,¹⁶⁸ and over-policing of spaces that in many cases leads to increased polarization among students.¹⁶⁹ More recent policies advocate a proactive approach to countering extremism by building the capacity of the youth for resilience. As such, educational institutions would become one of the front-liners in preventing the spread of violent extremism among young people. Such a process would entail curriculum additions that endorse education on human rights and civic responsibility as essential learning material for the youth. According to Mercy Corps in Somalia, understanding such concepts through formal education and putting them into practice through civic engagement “fulfill a common desire among youth – the desire to do something positive, meaningful and impactful.”¹⁷⁰ And through positive engagement, the youth becomes less vulnerable to the influence of violent and extremist ideologies.

More than just the material itself, there is also a need for change in the method of teaching with focus redirected to “building key skills and competencies—such as critical thinking, dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution” in order to “empower youth to reflect, interact with others, peacefully channel and express their opinions, reject calls for violence and intolerance and/or unlearn violent behavior.”¹⁷¹ Such introductions in the environment of educational institutions could be instrumental in bringing about an identity shift not based on divisions but on commonality inspired by human value. It has further been suggested that for

¹⁶⁷ See the section “International Institutional Framework on Youth in Peacebuilding” above for details.

¹⁶⁸ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, A Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Center of Excellence, “Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs.” (March 2016), 23. Access Link:

https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_SurveyingCVMetrics_March2016.pdf

¹⁶⁹ Julie M. Norman and Drew Mikhael, “Youth Radicalization is on the Rise: Here’s what We Know about Why.” *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2017. Access Link: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/25/youth-radicalization-is-on-the-rise-heres-what-we-know-about-why/>

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security,” *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), 91.

¹⁷¹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), “Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Report on Findings and Recommendations,” Joint OSCE Secretariat-OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtable on October 23-24 2012 (July 2013), pp. 5-6. Access Link: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/103352?download=true>

these efforts to be effective, teachers and other key figures in educational institutions need to be routinely trained on the subject of human rights, gender-sensitivity and relevant others to prevent, and where necessary, respond to occurrences of violent extremism. The trainings would be guided and updated as necessary through the development of tools for outlining and provisioning the technicalities.¹⁷² The effectiveness of locally supported educational projects for preventing violent extremism could further be enhanced through synergies with state institutions and specialized organizations that could provide expertise and direction in their design and implementation.¹⁷³

Aside from the educational component, emphasis has also been placed on the importance of sports, arts, and other social engagement activities to increase youth participation in society in a positive and constructive manner. Within the context of both educational institutions and community-based work, activities of this sort can act as the foundational blocks in introducing new skills and building existing ones, thereby developing youth confidence in themselves and cementing their understanding of their value to their communities. Arts and sports programs have especially proven effective in bridging divisions between different groups through neutral activities. The Somali Youth Development Foundation has used competitive sports to facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and to engage young community members at risk of joining violent groups.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, recreational platforms provide the youth a friendly and safe outlet for expressing their frustrations and grievances. As an example, community-based theater programs in post-conflict regions have brought together young people from different groups to examine and discuss conflict stories and resolution strategies in their own productions. Similarly, in Guatemala, poetry was used to express the challenges and human rights violations faced by the indigenous population of the country during a time of internal conflict.¹⁷⁵ Such channels of engagement also foster a relationship of trust between the youth and those supervising the activities, thereby creating an environment conducive to informal conversation, which if necessary, can later be translated into a more focused discussion. For

¹⁷² Ibid., 12.

¹⁷³ "Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism," Global Counterterrorism Forum, 2.

¹⁷⁴ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), "The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security," *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), 56.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

this reason, it is vital that supervisory figures be trained to tactfully and knowledgeably address relevant conversations.¹⁷⁶

While the positive impact of the youth in peacebuilding is unquestionable, at times there is a need to create space for their participation. Community-based projects to empower the youth from conservative regions require community level intervention for sensitization. In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the inclusion of young women in peacebuilding was precipitated by the training of their parents and community leaders to help them understand the value of said participation.¹⁷⁷ But once again, such work cannot be undertaken in silos. To ensure that the individual components of community-based engagement work for youth empowerment meet its intended result in a holistic and sustainable manner, it is important that subject matter experts be consulted strategizing and executing social engagement projects and that synergistic relationships are fostered at different national and international levels.

Given the rise in digital radicalization, the need for internet literacy and greater understanding on the ethics of digital discourse have become increasingly necessary for the youth of today. The Swedish Government has diligently taken up this task by introducing an agency called the Media Council that functions to “promote the empowering of minors as conscious media users and to protect them from harmful media influences.”¹⁷⁸ It does so by compiling relevant research and circulating it among its target audience of the youth, parents, educators, and people who interact with the youth through their profession.¹⁷⁹

In realization of the need for greater digital literacy, Facebook has also introduced a new concept of “digital citizenship,” which pertains to the privileges and obligations of those occupying the online space. The “We Think Digital” project provides educational resources for responsibly interfacing in the digital world.¹⁸⁰

As it is, the internet has become a common platform for spreading hate speech, for cyber bullying, and for sharing derogative material aimed at inciting hatred and violence. In response, education on internet literacy should focus on transforming the online space into a tool for promoting a counter narrative to the content disseminated by extremists, and on

¹⁷⁶ OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR, “Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Report on Findings and Recommendations,” Joint OSCE Secretariat-OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtable on October 23-24 2012 (July 2013), 9-10.

¹⁷⁷ UNFPA and the PBSO, “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security,” *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), 96.

¹⁷⁸ Statens Medierad, “About the Swedish Media Council,” (2018). Access Link: <https://statensmedierad.se/ovrigt/inenglish.579.html>

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Facebook, “A Better Digital World Starts With Us,” *We Think Digital*. Access Link: <https://wethinkdigital.fb.com/>

equipping the youth to undertake the task of using the online space for promoting positive messages. The “My Friend” campaign launched by a group of young human rights advocates from Yangon is an ideal example of a youth-led effort for positive online messaging. The campaign encouraged young people to upload pictures of themselves in the company of other diverse groups of young people with the hashtag “#myfriend.” Created as a small online initiative to counter the widening divisions and escalating tensions between ethnic groups in Myanmar by promoting peace and diversity, the campaign developed into a wide-scale network of youth members who remain associated with the campaign.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the “Open Mind” project launched in Morocco and implemented by a local radio broadcasting network encouraged cultural diversity through social media to build resilience against radicalization among the youth.¹⁸² Such projects have had great impact in building an awareness among the younger generation on the positive uses of social media to engage in efforts for the promotion of peace.

The limitless potential of the internet as a tool for communication cannot be disregarded. And while this understanding has long been exploited by violent extremists in their recruitment efforts, proponents for preventing and countering violent extremism have also begun to utilize the digital space. As a networking tool, it has been suggested that the online platform can also be used to connect former violent extremists and survivors of terrorism with young people to share their stories and discourage them from following a path of violence. Furthermore, the capacity of these survivors and former violent extremists can be built to use the online space to refute the narratives of violent extremists.¹⁸³

Given the relative novelty in the understanding of the role of young people in the peace process, policies on the subject at both national and international levels are constantly evolving. Nevertheless, by virtue of the ‘tried and tested’ theory, certain best practices have come to the forefront as effective strategies for youth engagement in preventing and countering violent extremism. The shift in the underlying approach towards the youth as assets and resources that need to be empowered could potentially change the level of risk presented to them by violent extremist groups, and therefore gradually weaken the influence of such groups who depend on the younger generation to reinforce their authority. But for such a scenario to come about, governments need to create a socially, politically and economically

¹⁸¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), “The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security,” *Youth Peace and Security* (2018), 53.

¹⁸² European Commission, “STRIVE for Development: Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism,” (2019), 40. Access Link: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/strive_brochure_for_web.pdf

¹⁸³ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), “Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Report on Findings and Recommendations,” Joint OSCE Secretariat-OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtable on October 23-24 2012 (July 2013), 7.

conducive environment that supports youth participation and acknowledges their potential as leaders for change. And while Pakistan has already taken the first steps in this direction, it still has a long way to go before international standards can be satisfied in this regard.

Conclusion

A considerable amount of evidence has surfaced recently indicating toward terrorist recruitment from highly educated segments of the society not only in Pakistan but internationally as well. Terrorist organizations like the IS and Hizb ut-Tahrir make very effective use of the modern communication technologies and social media to attract even the educated young minds toward their cause. In Pakistan, the situation for the youth is compounded by the fact that various terrorist organizations have long enjoyed a physical and ideological space in the country for a few decades now. Some political parties with extremist ideologies like the JI have well-established student wings on several campuses across the country, which pave the way for penetration of terrorist propaganda and recruitment. The intelligentsia in Pakistan is quite vocal in criticizing the education system of Pakistan for being unable to confront the onslaught of extremist ideologies in higher education institutions. A lack of forethought on the part of the government and the limitations of the education system in terms of curricula and pedagogical approaches are held responsible for the drift of a good number of university students and graduates toward extremist ideologies and even terrorist acts. For this purpose, the government needs to take the first step in revisiting its educational policy to coincide with a long-term approach that is apolitical, nonpartisan, and remains consistent irrespective of changes in the country's administration.

Although a strong international commitment toward inclusion of youth in peacebuilding has emerged through international legal instruments like the UNSC Resolutions 2250 of 2015, 2282 of 2016, 2354 of 2017, and 2419 of 2018, Pakistan's counter-extremism regime is still heavily tilted toward regulation rather than encouraging participation and promoting diversity. Unlike the evolving international momentum toward seeing the youth as an opportunity rather than a challenge, Pakistan's coercive counter-terrorism legal regime could curtail spaces for freedom of expression for the students, thus, limiting tolerance for diversity and potentially leading to increased polarization among them. Some of the innovative policy approaches adopted by the government to counter extremism through an inclusive participatory process have failed to gain traction because of a lack of consistency.

The NCEPG document developed by NACTA in January 2018 after a long deliberative process could provide an ideal foundation for grounding future on-campus CVE efforts in. The reason is that it is one of the first policy documents of the country to acknowledge the prevalence of extremism in higher education institutions and gives recommendations for countering it through dialogue and participation of the students. It has already provided a foundation for steps in the right direction like the holding of the NYC-CVE, MOU between the HEC and NACTA, consultations with universities on soliciting practical action plans for countering violent extremism, etc. More could still, however, be done in terms of leading all these efforts toward greater long-term sustainability.

Several initiatives implemented internationally—like building the capacity of the youth for resilience through addition of courses on human rights, civic responsibility, and tolerance for diversity, capacity building of teachers in improved pedagogical skills for developing critical thinking and tolerance for diversity among their students, developing partnerships between the government and non-government sectors for on-campus CVE, promoting tolerance through art and culture, inclusion of women in peacebuilding, social media education, etc.—are being experimented with in Pakistan either by certain individual universities or by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in partnership with universities. There is a need, however, for an institutional framework within universities that would provide sustainability to all these useful contributions.

The lack of a counter-extremism policy framework specific to campuses means that higher education institutions do not have administrative measures in place to deal with incidences of extremism and violence on-campus. There are no structured guidelines for these institutions to follow for reporting such cases and for administering disciplinary action. Consequently, it is the existing legal regime on the subject that is relied on. There is some concern that the punitive measures demanded by the law may exceed the necessary with regard to students who face criminal charges before a court of law and could ultimately drift them further toward extremist narratives than away from them. Moreover, legal instruments aimed at countering hate speech are open to abuse and could lead to minimization of space for freedom of expression for the youth.

Recommendations

- The government, preferably under the auspices of the HEC, should hold a series of in-depth consultations with CVE practitioners, subject matter experts on extremism and higher education, serving and retired university faculties and administrations, relevant senior-ranking government officials, and selected students from various universities from across Pakistan to develop a university-level institutional policy guidelines that would intervene between the punitive legal framework under various laws related to terrorism and incitement to violence and the piecemeal efforts on the part of the universities.
- The policy guidelines should capitalize on the work already being done at the universities and draw on international best practices in the field. It should also capitalize on the work already being done at the universities in Pakistan, including the HEC's directive to the universities on instituting CVE protocols on their campuses¹⁸⁴ and the MOU between NACT and the HEC.
- The Policy Guidelines thus developed should be approved by the highest-ranking relevant authorities and would incorporate guidelines for university administrations in a non-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations, with clearly defined roles and sanctioned responsibilities of various university officials on proactive action against social and cultural divisions that can allow extremist ideology to take hold. Such roles could include regular screening of students and teachers for extremist behaviors through mandatory online tests, setting administrative parameters for actions that could be taken against students and teachers failing the screening, regular trainings of teachers on identifying early signs of extremist behavior among students, setting administrative parameters for reporting of such behavior to universities' administrations, penalties against universities' administrative officials for ignoring teachers' evidence-based reported warnings about identified students, regular counseling of vulnerable students and teachers, etc.
- The policy guidelines framework thus developed should be approved by the highest-ranking authorities of a relevant government institution like the HEC and would serve as an effective toolkit for proactive promotion of tolerance for diversity, promotion of peace, and countering extremism.

¹⁸⁴ For details, see the section on VCs' Conferences above.