

Role of the Structural Factors in Construction of Violent Extremist Thoughts

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Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to know violent extremism and its underlying factors by analyzing the perceptions shared by the students and teachers of madrasahs and universities. Violent extremism is the prerequisite of terrorism and terrorist violence. Violent extremism as a human activity including actions, attitudes, beliefs, and tactics emerges to be advocating and engaging in terrorist violence to gain its social, economic and political objectives. The focus of counterterrorism policy is to analyze how and why people develop violent extremist thoughts and actions which prepare them to involve in the terrorist attacks. This article sees the violent extremism from the perspective of social structural factors that analyzes what social conditions motivate people to adopt violent extremist thoughts. This article critically analyzes the influence of social structural variables on violent extremism by analyzing views and explanations collected from 127 students and teachers from the madrasahs and universities located in Sindh province. This study found that religion played a dominant role in shaping thinking and action patterns. Differences in religious ideologies, negative influence of political and international factors have significant impact on shaping and emerging violent extremist thoughts. Moreover, unequal and unsystematic distribution of educational, economic and political benefits has central impact on development of extremist views. Bad governance failed to address religious, social and economic issues of people provided fueling factors for violent extremism. It can be summed that ineffective and weak policies of state and wrong distribution of social benefits promoted violent extremism in the Pakistani society making all the possibilities of violence and terrorism.

Keywords: Violent Extremism, Social Structural Conditions, Religion, Marginalization, Relative Deprivation

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Introduction

The violent extremism has become so serious not only in Pakistan but across the world that much of the scholarly work has been devoted to studying it by examining the relationship of social conditions, personal thoughts, experiences, and religious ideologies with human behavior. Due to the limited attention paid to studying violent extremism arising from social structural conditions, there exists inadequate knowledge for understanding it, especially in the Pakistani context. Extremism is a phrase that describes attitudes and beliefs that are absolutely opposed to mainstream ideas and viewpoints. While the violent extremism is described as an ideological outcome manifesting itself in the form of belief and action, with various goals such as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic, and political objectives" (Martin, 2011). Violent extremism manifesting itself through violence and terrorism causes physical and psychological uneasiness, societal discord, and hatred among the general population. As a result, law enforcement authorities and bureaucratic structures face a significant problem in terms of preventing and controlling the conduct.

Violent extremism leading to terrorism and violence is critical issue in Pakistan. Since terrorist events and violent attacks especially the attack on Army Public School in Dec 2014 in Peshawar and after series of terrorist casualties during 2017, have occurred off and on. As a result, people have lost their faith in state policies and governance, and they have been in continuous fear of economic insecurity and religious intolerance (Afridi, et al., 2018). In the changing environment, after a succession of the PTI government in Pakistan and evacuation of the US military from Afghanistan, there may be changed behavior and belief of individuals and groups in Pakistan which need to be studied. The current focus of global counterterrorism operations is on anticipating the danger of terrorism. The objective is to combat terrorism by combining suppressive measures with early detection of radicalization processes that could lead to violent extremism. Understanding and analysis of terrorism is said to be difficult since its dichotomous extremes attaching negative and positive attributes to it, as, 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter' (Mythen & Walklate, 2006:381). Notwithstanding, by looking at its danger, threat and violent results, there should be a single narrative of understanding and defining it across the world. This can be controlled if people are educated and sensitive to their social conditions and develop unsupportive beliefs and actions towards terrorism and violence. Proper understanding of social conditions as some criminologists and social scientists like Rosenfeld (2004) and Freilich and LaFree (2015) suggest can provide better explanations to devise counterterrorism policies. This article,

therefore, aims to know how and why certain individuals develop violent extremist thoughts in the social environment of Pakistan.

Social structural variables, political inequalities, and cultural issues

Understanding of violent extremism, and how and why it becomes developed, has received much attention in the social sciences including criminology (Mythen & Walklate, 2005; Freilich & LaFree, 2015). However, within social sciences and criminology, the violent extremism has been analyzed as emerging from disorderly social conditions. The conditions, opportunities, and responses systematically produced by a state and distributed for the social, political, and cultural well-being of its population are referred to as social structural variables. The inequality and discrimination while distributing those opportunities and social rights, on the other hand, produce disorder and anarchy, which can lead to confrontations among the social groups and communities within society. Social conditions existing outside the control of humans exert significant influence on the physical behavior and thinking patterns of individuals. The outside conditions as structural factors, as some scholars, for example, Schuurman, et al (2018), Iqbal and Lodhi (2014), and Malik, et al. (2019), admit play a crucial role in shaping motives, justifying arguments, opportunities; and prompting incentives to individuals for becoming involved in violent conflicts, violent terrorist activities, and sectarian-based insurgencies. For their influence, studies have been conducted. Many scholars used their theoretical and methodological approaches to understand the influence of social structural variables on the behavior of humans; for example, Sieckelinck and his co-researchers, by using a biographical approach attempted to know how certain individuals came to involve in terrorist conflicts and physical violence (Sieckelinck, et al., 2019). They found that poor economic conditions within the family, encouragement of family members, social media influences, and emotional attitude significantly impacted constructing their biographical accounts of violent extremism (Horgan, 2008; Schuurman, et al., 2018). In addition, the certain conditions created by state policies and biased governance expose individuals to unfair treatment, relative deprivations, and social discrimination experiences as claimed by some scholars like Agnew (2017) and Yaseen and Muzaffar (2018) constitute the behavior and thoughts of people. For example, in Pakistan, the Pashtuns and other militant groups who were involved in retaliatory terrorist activities belonged to socially and economically lower classes. Those recruited and used youth Taliban from tribal areas who highly suffered from economic deprivations, security frustrations, and social vulnerabilities (Sahill, 2018). In

addition, it was found that almost 60 percent of the populations of these areas live under the poverty line (Malik, et al., 2019).

Yet, it is equally understood that all those individuals and communities living in the poor conditions do not become influenced by them that they may become criminal and violent. For example, Piazza (2008) rejects the idea that under poor economic and political conditions all people may not turn to kill or involve in terrorist and violent disputes. However, the relative deprivation and low socioeconomic conditions including inadequate chances of employment, for example, the non-western communities or immigrants in the Netherlands who were economically deprived of their job and schooling opportunities as compared to the indigenous communities were found involved in violent gangs, violent delinquency, assaults, and violent criminal activities (Verkaaik, 2016). Therefore, it can arguably be inferred that the acute socioeconomic conditions and political inequalities created by the state policies and bad governance may impact life structure of individuals.

In the presence of the disorganized social structural conditions in a society that does not provide social and political justice to people, the sense of relative deprivation, strains, and feelings of frustration become part of the life of people. Criminologists are very much concerned that disorganized and frustrating conditions disturb people socially, morally, and politically. A significant criminologist, Robert Agnew who developed General Strain Theory (GST), sees crimes of violence including terrorism and violent extremism resulting from frustrating and uncompromising conditions. Agnew (2017) content that the individuals who experience strains in the conditions of social and violent victimization, unjust or perceived unjust, and economic and power discrimination relatively construct harmful thoughts and emotions. In such deprived conditions and social strains, self-control is lost, the ability to cope with social problems is reduced and feelings of frustrations develop which ultimately tend to support extremist motives. Therefore it is safe to say that the strains and relative deprivations developed due to experiences of the disorganized social conditions and weak justice serve to be motivational factors for extremist violence. Widespread disorganized conditions, relative deprivations, and strains create a culture of violence. Other scholars while studying violent extremism and terrorism have found other significant factors associated with them. Some researchers found a significant influence of defective education and social media on violent behavior (Ismail, et al., 2020; Abbasi, et al., 2020), While the disordered social order, broken social institutions, governance of politics and religious affairs are also associated with violent extremism and terrorism (Freilich & Lafree, 2015); while other scholars like Jensen and his colleagues studied violent extremist behavior

associated with cultural thinking patterns, community grievances, groups biases (Jensen, et al., 2020); and some other researchers strongly believed violent behavior is an interplay of socio-emotional and cultural variables (Fair, 2015). These varying arguments confuse scholars and researching individuals how to better way evaluate and examine the violent extremism in the current situations where Pakistan is changing from transition period of social and political changes. Therefore, this article attempts to know what particular social variables motivate violent extremism to emerge.

Poor governance, state response and foreign influence

In order to deal with violent extremism and terrorist involvement, though Pakistani government has initiated multiple strategies, for example, the soft “counterterrorism methodology” and media-based education (Orakzai, 2018), and the National Action Plan (NAP), but the recent terrorist acts on the Shia Hazara community and on FC checkpoints in Quetta opened a serious concern of analyzing and countering terrorism through effective and lasting policies. Such incidents portray the poor performance of the governance and fragile policies of the state for not settling their issues and removing the causes which brought incident of the terrorist attack. There seems a huge gap of understanding between the governing authorities and those governed since social problems of people are not resolved due to the poor policies of the governing authorities, irresponsible behaviour of political leadership and lust of the state agents those all further cause chaotic conditions. Some political analysts believe that ineffective governance and counter-terrorism policies have left people vulnerable to the threat of terrorism and violent extremism; and that as a result they have lost faith in the state to protect them.

Equally, in this regard, the social and legal institutions are blamed to be not exercising their authority for the common good of people. As a result, social anarchy, economic disorder, and violent conditions become part of the life of people. Due to the faulty governance and weak involvement of law enforcement authorities, violent victimization of some communities took place, for example, the recent killing of some members of the Shia Hazara community in Quetta in January 2021 which sparked religious and political repercussions across Pakistan (Majeed, 2021). Later on state initiated another religious policy which developed lasting sources of religious and political conflicts within the country, for example, in 1979, Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's then-chief of military staff and president, launched the "Islamization" religious and political strategy, which systematically favored one religious group, Sunni, over others (Orakzai, 2018; Malik, et al., 2019). Interference of international powers challenged the writ of the state that the 'Iran

revolution' encouraged the Shia communities for the religious and political movements which resulted in demanding of political and religious freedom. More international communities offered political and financial support to the local groups, for example, local and Saudi governments supported the Sunni communities while the international communities to Shia communities (Malik, et al., 2019; Majeed, 2021) that resulted in bringing the two involved in conflicting situations.

When the operations to combat terrorism and violent extremism failed to produce satisfactory results, then-Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Bajwa forcefully advocated for social and religious emotional transformation in society. As a result, he realized that religious, social, and political ideologies were the dominant and leading factors in the society for creating disorderly and violent conditions in Pakistan, as he stated, "a youth-driven towards extremism is a youth without a clear idea of his values and identity (Orakzai, 2018: 755)." Not properly educating youth and providing them quality education, youth may serve as a violent tool for the corrupt and inefficient religious and political leadership. It can safely be concluded that not having unified and effective state policy and public support, religious disorder, and terrorist activities can emerge for disturbing national harmony and peace. It seems youth is the prime concern of this nation; how their religious and moral values become polluted and violent should be investigated and known to better way understand how social, political, religious, and cultural policies can be made to maintain and bring a peaceful and healthy environment within the country of Pakistan. Knowing the sensitivity of the violent extremism and significance of the explanations of youth, we, the authors, therefore, find youth as a potential source of knowing their perceptions and explanations on violent extremism.

The fact that the arguments and data overlap implies that there is no consensus on what structural elements lead to the formation of extremist ideologies and narratives. The majority of the literature, however, argues that relative marginalization, religious discrimination, and weak control of state agents over the behavior of communities make a significant impact on individual and community behavior. Furthermore, religious tensions and poor governance increase the likelihood of people becoming violent and participating in religious and terrorist violence. However, the limited knowledge developed in Pakistan develops a poor understanding of the problem thus contributes to a lack of awareness of violent extremism and terrorism. In addition, significant studies have been undertaken on terrorism and violent extremism, but the criminologists such as Schils and Pauwels (2014) and Schuurman, et al. (2018) still claim that little is known about what structural characteristics encourage people to be hostile and

violent. These various arguments having inconsistencies pose a challenge for researchers for understanding violent extremism and its underlying factors; therefore, additional research is needed to learn more about how and why people develop violent extremist views. This accumulated knowledge can eventually aid in the development of substantial policy opinions and guidelines to help affected communities and the country build resilience against terrorism. We know that youth are at a phase of transition in their lives, so their perspectives and knowledge can help us better understand violent extremism. The purpose of this research is to learn about violent extremism from students and teachers of madrasahs and universities to develop an understanding of violent extremism and its underlying social structural variables.

Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives to study extremism and its underlying factors.

1. To critically evaluate the perceptions of students and teachers of madrasahs and universities on violent extremism
2. To investigate the impact of social structural factors on violent extremism.
3. To suggest policy outlines based on the findings of this research

Data collection process

For achieving the objectives, the authors were interested in meeting students and teachers in the madrasah and university institutions to collect their perceptions and explanations on violent extremism. The qualitative interviewing method was used that helped gather explanations, ideological thoughts, and experiences (McAdams, 2006; Ismail, et al., 2020) of the desired participants. Entering a madrasah may be simple, but persuading the madrasah heads to grant us an interview and allow us to speak with their pupils proved difficult. Those refused to talk to use surely we respected their refusal; while those agreed to talk to us we interviewed them. On the other hand, as we were university teachers so talking to university students and teachers was relatively easier.

There were 127 people from different madrasahs in Larkana, Hyderabad, and Karachi, as well as a university in Hyderabad, between July 2020 and January 2021. There were 34 madrasah male teachers between the ages of 45 and 55, two of whom were affiliated with universities; 25 madrasah students between the ages of 20 and 25; and 68 university students from various disciplines among them were 42 boys and 26 girls between the ages of 20 and 25. For knowing the background of the participants, the authors did not find it ethically suitable to ask students of the madrasahs and the university about their religious and economic

backgrounds feeling that they might take it sensitive and offensive. The participants belonged to major religious sects like Sunni and Shia, and their sub-sects, which they revealed during their talk. But in the findings, we have not mentioned their sectarian identity due to ethical considerations.

The one-to-one interviews with madrasah and university teachers took more than 50 minutes, while focus group interviews with students of madrasahs and universities comprising different number of the participants like 6 to 9 took more than one hour and sometimes nearly two hours when the Covid19 situations were relaxed. While some focus group interviews were conducted online with university students during the strict Covid19 situations. These group and one-to-one interviews were conducted with full care of SOPs of Covid19. During all the data collection process, no question sensitized any participant's emotions or made them aggressive, and there was no physical or mental harm to any researcher. The researchers belonging to this society know the language and culture of the local areas or the province; therefore, they had not difficulty in creating rapport and talking to their participants. The interviews were voice-recorded with the permission of the participants which were later on translated into English language. Each of the participants was informed about the purpose and objectives of the study. Due to confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the participants are not mentioned here but are given the letters like MT (madrasah and university teachers) MS (madrasah students), and US (university students).

Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, thematic analytical approach (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was used. This approach is widely used in qualitative research to identify and segregate the repeated patterns of significant text across the data, resulting in a logical understanding of the problem under study. The interviews were done in Sindhi and Urdu, the local languages; after translating and transcribing them into English, the entire work was reviewed and reread numerous times to ensure that the content and language material were well understood. The coding technique took great care with the entire interview text. The coding or theming process found and discovered repetitive patterns of text, resulting in the creation of the first fundamental codes or themes, which were then grouped together to form organized themes making sense of the data logically. The key themes were debated inside the circle of researchers, and there was some dispute amongst us on some of them. However, after devoting individual attention to each of the uncovered topics, we agreed on what should be included and what should be eliminated. After much discussion and attention and keeping the objectives of the study in mind, we integrated all those basic themes into bigger ones that made

sense of the data. The findings section discusses the broader patterns that emerged from the data and gave a logical understanding of violent extremism and its associated social structural elements.

The findings

The accounts of the interviewed respondents provide valuable information for understanding extremism and its associated underlying variables. The semi-structured questions were asked to the participants keeping in the objectives of the study. The data analyzed through the thematic analytical process provided multidimensional aspects of extremism, given under the following sections.

Religious identity and violent extremism

In this section, the findings of how violent extremism was presented and debated by the participants will be given. The interviewed individuals from different madrasahs and universities narrated various stories and explanations related to violent extremism. Most of them looked every problem, every act of human, from the lens of religion. The study found that Islam was highly valued as a source of moral guidance that supports peace and opposes all forms of violence and terrorism. Yet, many of the participants accepted the presence of religious and violent extremism in the society but avoided to take name of any sect as violent or extremist. One believed, “the Dean of Islam provides detailed information about doing spiritual and worldly activities...yet, there are other good acts like how to lead a life and do best performances; they are an essential part of *deen-e-Islam* (Islam)”. Some madrasah teachers valued their religious sect as peaceful while others as violent, terrorist, and involved in religious discriminatory behavior. One vehemently shared antagonistic and aggressive attitude against other’s sects by saying, “it can be understood that in other madrasahs, students are being trained for such purposes, it is taught to them on the other hand if their students become involved in the terrorist suicide bombing, they will be bestowed with beautiful ladies in the paradise. But we do not like this. Rather we teach our youth about love and fraternity, and want them to bring others in our religion because there it is a promise (in our religion) about the safeguard of identity, honor, life, and property”. Critical comparison and finding faults in others’ sects were common perceptions of many of the respondents.

While some had doubtful arguments about madrasah believing that some madrasah teachers spread conflicting views which created extremist environment within society. As they believed having no proper qualifications of madrasah teachers was like spreading false and controversial knowledge to people. One madrasa student reported:

Individuals who are spreading religious information should have certified degrees. They should not be given the liberty to spread any information which can cause religious conflicts. Religion is a sensitive field and highly required subject of study, but many of those who teach religious affairs do not have authorizations and certificates in their relevant subject (MS).

According to the participant, many religious teachers or scholars without knowing the context of verse explain sensitive issues and confidently guide people. Similarly, some other university students suggested that if the qualified teachers sit together and resolve the issues that cause conflicts between religious groups, there will be no disorder and quarrel. They suggested that the state should design an effective check and balance system on religious scholars and madrasah teachers. One teacher critically remarked that “religious scholars are not constructive in their speech these days. They only discuss the issues that favor their own sect and against others”. He complained that he did not receive any and quality religious education in school life. He admitted that he saw a religious teacher once in his class. Therefore, he claimed he had no good knowledge from the school side. He told me he was a religious teacher and *pesh imam* (clergyman) in a mosque. This madrasah teacher told about his act of destroying and breaking a statue of a Hindu temple. Proudly, he described that “once a friend of mine displayed a clip showing Muslims were being tortured. He narrated to me ‘see how Muslims are under attack and suffering huge violence. But Hindus are living here peacefully’. So I thought we would not spare them”.

Contrary to the idea that religious teachers caused religious disputes, some other claimed political powers had significant influence on the minds of people which created a tense environment within some religious groups. One madrasah teacher shared about an attack on the Hindu community by a Muslim group:

This attack was not based on differences between religions. But it was a deliberate instigation against them (the Hindus) so that they could run away from that area. Because of the presence of the Hindu communities, some feudal lords could lose their political power and seats in the coming election (MT).

The revealed findings suggest that though Islam was highly valued as a sacred and peaceful religion that opposes violence. This study finds that violent extremism was part of religious, social and political life. Moreover, the sectarian differences, wrong interpretation of religious inscriptions by religious leaders, and

the discriminatory political attitude of individuals against others determined the violent extremist attitude and views of people within the society.

Marginalization, religious conflicts and weak governance

As discussed earlier that violent extremism is a multifaceted phenomenon however it is mainly influenced by social and political inequalities and discriminatory conditions. The inequalities and unfair conditions resulting from ineffective policies of the state and weak governance shape the thinking and action patterns of individuals. The perceptions of anger, suspicion, and no faith against the behavior of the government of Pakistan were shared by many of those interviewed individuals for this research. Their perceptions suggested that the government and political leadership did not pay attention to educational and political policies that people should become properly guided for their social development. Consequently, the people lost their faith in the performance of the state and the functioning style of the government; they believed the state agents created an environment of discrimination that offered social confusion, religious insecurity, and future threats. The social discernment and decreased inclination to religion or no preference to religion were considered as an attack on the identity of Islam and Muslims. The identity of Muslims and Islam was the prime consideration for them; so any attack on them was regarded as violation of their rights. Regarding the safety of Muslims and Islam, one university student critically suggested individuals should play their role for protecting their rights, he commented:

Nowadays, a violation has increased to that much level that ignites people to be aggressive. Much is said against religion; however, every religious leader and person cannot tolerate such things. There are many ways to raise a voice against those who violate religious freedom; some write in response on social media, while some announce war against them (US).

The violation they believed was due to differences in the religion. The ideas that sectarian groups were involved in conflicting situation with each other was central in their arguments, one participant argued that a Muslim should not cross his limits prescribed by his religion. To support the views of the participant, another participant provided examples that there were certain sects or groups of people who transgressed the limits of the religion; therefore, they deserved to be punished. That university student came up with a strong notion that sometimes anger was a possible and definite response. He explained that when a certain religious sect that was officially banned from spreading their religious ideas expressed their refusal of the Last Prophet. In this situation against that group, he expressed “we must

express anger". When asked how this anger can be expressed, he confidently announced the "hang to death must be given to them".

Believing the existence of violent conflicts between different social and religious groups, many participants agreed that they should be active to safeguard their rights and identity of Islam. One of them commented, "if politicians and people in authority do not solve affairs of the 'conflict', people will surely behave aggressively in the result. The respondent told the details of the religious sect that initiated the movement of refusal of the Last Prophethood belonged to the Christians, the *Kafir* (the non-believers). He explained that the person (name) who refused the status of the Last Prophet was a clerk in a court who later on announced himself as a prophet. In this respect, he was supported on political and financial levels by some foreign countries and also by Pakistan. The respondent further argued that the "actual purpose of this movement is to stop jihad" and this is vividly explained in their book. The respondent emphasized by saying, "a matter of fact, whenever a Muslim suffers any problem, he embarks upon jihad against the *kafir* (non-believers). Otherwise, there is no other way a Muslim can become aggressive". The respondent further commented that nowadays, these people (name of the religious sect) had been recognized officially, and for them, some particular jobs have been fixed in the various departments. The official support to the promotion of the banned, disputed, and deviant religious sect, the respondents believed was like creating conflicts within religious sects and fueling anti-Islamic elements within the society.

Similarly, another participant believing state as not safeguarding the religious rights of people stressed individuals should play their part of protecting their religion and religious identity. One commented:

If the state does not punish *kafirs* (non-believers), then in this situation, what will be the duty of a Muslim? What should a Muslim do then? Should he wait for the politicians to act (on awarding punishment to the non-believer)? Or what else he (a Muslim) should do? You tell me, please (US).

Apart from individual responsibility to deal with the violation of social and religious freedom, some other participants had serious arguments against the government which they believed was ineffective in eliminating anti-Islamic elements. The participants, who strongly believed the state and political powers as responsible for creating disorderly situations and the incompatible relationship between different social and religious groups, presented their annoyance and blaming attitude against those responsible authorities:

As I said, there are signs of Allah, and those must be respected. There are many signs like Makkah, Madina, graves of different prophets, and different places in Makkah. However, for those who do not have high regard for them, it is the duty of those in power to take revenge from them. They should be at the earliest take revenge from those who have disregard for those signs. Holy Prophet has given us all the instructions on how to take revenge. It is beyond understanding why politicians and leaders of our country are far away from respecting those signs and following Holy Quran. They do not have religious knowledge, do not know how to make decisions, and provide rights to others (MT).

The bad governance was believed to be responsible of creating violent and extremist conditions within the country. The present conditions were considered as worse and violent as established by the corrupt and inefficient politicians. They claimed some decades ago there was a strong dominance and power of Islam within Pakistan; the government of Pakistan and its people were doing Islamic activities. "But now, things are different," one commented. Majority of the participants viewed the political structure and conduct of government as incompetent and unjust that failed to properly administer equality within society and religious sects. The participants associated every problem with the weak performance of the government.

These days there is no peace, while sometimes ago there was order and harmony. The politicians were honest and ruled this country honestly, knowing their responsibilities. Everyone got their due rights. As people are not getting their due rights now, therefore, there is no coordination between people. People are involved in violent acts like killing and robbing. Pakistan is crossing from a very dangerous phase (MT).

Similar views were shared by other participants. Many madrasah teachers had no faith in the government and its performance rather they blamed the state being irresponsible to violent and disorganized conditions in the society.

This government is fueling sectarian conflicts and does not want to see all these religious sects should be united(MT).

Believing that state was incompetent and unjust, some had extremist and resentful attitude against it, as one said:

If we say there is a majority of bad people living in Pakistan. So we can also say that the bad system of Pakistan can be replaced with a just system. It is possible? (MT).

Similarly, the majority of the university students extracted sources of extremism from social conditions by openly admitting that Pakistan is observing a period of change from moderate and to extremist level and is having relative poverty and uncivilized attitudes. One university student shared:

It is not Jinnah's Pakistan now. Religious extremism is being supported because of various motivations in which ethnic and religious conflicts are dominant. But it should be believed that if anyone comes to adopt illegal and violent means, that is the last resort taken in compulsion; the situations like extreme relative injustice and deprivation (US).

The analyzed data show that violent extremism generated from irresponsible attitudes and ineffective policies of the state which did not address the grievances and problems of individuals and religious groups. Those interviewed people critically remarked the social, political, and religious as created by state to produce conflicting conditions between sectarian groups, hate against other religions. Most importantly, they viewed writ and response of the state as weak and ineffective for addressing social and religious conflicts between aggrieved parties.

Local and international politics and their influence on the Muslim identity

The analyzed data indicate that participants had negative and extremist thoughts for the attitude of local state authorities and international response against religious groups. Many madrasah teachers and students seriously debated about conflicting events between different political and religious groups those they meant were created by the local and foreign (external and international) elements. One madrasah teacher explained that some foreign countries (names) support one religious sect while some other countries (names) support some other religious sects. The purpose of their support was to bring those sects against each other which could systematically create disordered conditions in the country. Many of the respondents compared and distinguished the response of the local government against their sect and in favor of another sect. They criticized the impartial response of the government against certain religious groups and failed strategies to counter-terrorism. One of the madrasah teachers commented:

If any (terrorist) attack took place, it was announced that responsibility of such attack has been accepted by such and such group...but those

involved were not arrested. Because actually, they (the government) do not know who was behind this attack. If those accepted their responsibility of being involved in the terrorist attack, have been ever been disclosed on any media or before the public? Even if some groups wanted to say why they were accused of such an attack, they were stopped doing so. No chance is given to them (groups) to present their point of view against their accusation of involvement. This has happened many times. We have strong reservations against the government that why those people who (religious groups) organize their events, why there are hurdles, and all steps taken to prevent them from performing their religious rituals and activities. They (government) inform about the terrorist threat to happen but then keep silent (MT).

Some of the respondents highly condemned the role of the local government dragging youth to criminal and violent opportunities. They believed the ineffective countering and monitoring role of official authorities has created chances of religious violence and extremist thoughts. They believed that youth are exposed to various conflicting and violent contents, which molded their mind to go against others and caused the creation of contradictory views within them against different religious and social groups in society. One madrasah teacher held the state responsible for sowing the seeds of extremism and violence:

Suppose we believe youth possess religious extremist views. In that case, the reality that religious extremism shown on social media is monitored by the government deeply influences youth. But, why is the government not controlling it effectively? Only it is verbally instructing other people not to propagate hateful material and not act on religious extremism. There are many social media channels (which spread such information of hate and sectarian extremism); are there any rules and regulations for them (government) to work effectively (to control social media)? (MT).

The West and its policies spread through social media and literature were highly criticized by the interviewed respondents. They assessed the Western policies are against Islam and Muslims, and those mean to destroy the identity and image of Islam. Some blamed killing of Muslims is due to the Western scheme. One madrasah teacher shared the resentful strategy of the West for creating systematic hate against Muslims:

We have seen many things or programs of the West in which they ask their children different questions like some children are asked; 'By

looking at a Muslim, do you feel anger?' The answer comes 'Yes'. They are training their children to be against Muslims and this training is making them extremists. But nothing is said against and about them. Who are called terrorists and religious extremists? There is no clear knowledge about them. Our six famous religious scholars were killed on the road in daylight but the murderers are not arrested still; where are those (murderer criminals)? (MT).

The West was blamed for deforming the social and religious outfits of Muslim society, particularly Pakistani. Some shared the fear that due to the acts of the West, the population of Muslims will be decreased to face more troubles, particularly by the youth in the coming years. One of the madrasah teachers referring to the Western countries commented:

Their recent attempt to destroy Muslims is the vaccination of Covid19 that is designed to destroy the sex cells within men and there will be no chance of conceiving children. The Muslim youth will be in great trouble in the future if they will have no potency of sex for conceiving children (MT).

Some participants claimed that more than social and political problems, the respect of the religion was the most necessary to be protected. A participant who feared the identity and sanctity of Islam was in danger, commented:

No one has come out for their social rights; they protest if they see the signs of Allah are insulted and the current government must take revenge. Allah has given the power to the people of Pakistan. Pakistan is the only country in the world that has been given power by Allah so it must take vengeance. Pakistan became atomic power. Now Pakistan has more power but...for the protection of the respect of the signs of Islam (MT).

Violent extremism as learnt existed within the society in the forms of religious, political and social thoughts. It can be said those violent extremist thoughts as highly ideologically motivated stood in negation and rejection of others views and actions. The thoughts and perceptions possessed potential risks for violent deviance and violent reactions. Disordered conditions created by religious differences, the attitude of people, unjust policy of the government, discriminatory role of international powers expressed through behavior against Muslims, biased literature, and social media became the potential factors for generating violent extremism. Religious parameters were used a way of analyzing and criticizing religious, social and political conditions. Therefore, it can be analyzed that any threat to religious identity could generate violent extremist

thought leading to react in violent manner. This violent reaction as resulted from the religious strains and disorganized conditions in society can further cause violent conflicts. In this respect, as learned from the analyzed data, it can be said that the ineffective role of the state in addressing social, political, and religious differences and conflicts mainly cause strains, frustrations, and relative deprivations within the affected population.

Discussions and conclusion

The main aim of the article was to learn about violent extremism from the perspectives and experiences of the students and teachers of the madrasahs and universities. This research as understood by other scholars like Miller (2013) and Ismail, et al. (2020) sees violent extremism as an ideologically motivated thought and action that can result in violence or terrorist violence. The data reveals that the sense of sectarianism, relative marginalization and victimization were common ideological foundations shared by majority of the participants. Overall the collected perceptions indicate the violent and religiously motivated extremism was not an individual or personal responsibility, as one interviewee believed “we are humans, Shaitan is with us; due to the influence of Shaitan” individuals become involved in harmful acts.

More importantly, for the constructed violent religious thoughts and actions, they held society including social conditions and political authorities as responsible. The majority of the participants directly or indirectly saw the current social conditions as discriminatory and repressive in society. Many participant people were concerned about social and political discrimination and victimization, which they saw as negative and detrimental against their religious identity and social status. These findings support the literature that due to discriminatory attitude of political leaders for not resolving socioeconomic issues of people and religious, political and regional differences perceived by social groups (for example, see Malik et al., 2019; Sahil, 2018) reinforce extreme beliefs, values and actions to reduce their uncertainties and protect their life. As the data reveals, the participants perceived that on the basis of their religious differences, they faced obstruction of their religious freedom, limited opportunities of employment, and violent victimization of their people and leaders. That is the reason as data reveals some individuals developed collective strains of being looked down upon as not useful citizens but rather miscreant in the society. Scholars like Agnew (2001) and Freilich and Lafree (2015) admit that those who experience not equal attitude from authoritative agents and social structural agents develop ‘collective strains’ and in the result, extremist views and aggressive attitude become part of their life.

The findings imply that they were highly critical of the government's performance for not resolving their basic needs and grievances. They debated with confidence how the government established such conditions of relative impoverishment and marginalization within the certain individuals and social groups received more positive attention as compare to others from the political and official sides, while certain groups were put to social and violent victimization while others enjoyed social favors. Some participants strongly condemned the government for "fueling sectarian disputes" and "creating disorderly conditions" which disturbed the social harmony and coexistence within the society. Scholars share the concern that when government responses and policies that do not address effectively the people's rights and basic needs, they become motivated and encouraged to be think extremely for their desired goals (Agnew, 2017; Akers & Silverman, 2014; Jensen, et al., 2020). Due to poor performance and reluctance of the state for resolving uncertainties within the communities, the findings display people have lost all their faith in Pakistan's social and criminal justice systems. The indifferent and extremist attitude of people as Sahil (2018) believe scan be generated from when found state response not adequate to resolve complaints of people.

Moreover, the Western policies as learnt harmed the identity of Muslims and caused extremist results. The similar ideas like these findings are shared by many other scholars that accusing Muslims as terrorists and blaming madrasahs and universities producing extremism and terrorist trends cause the development of the violent extremist attitudes actions against the West (for example, see Mahood & Rane, 2017). This can be understood that the policies of the West, for example, after the invasion of the Soviet Forces in Afghanistan, and the attack on the Twin Towers in Oklahoma City created the phenomenon of social, political, and religious insecurities within the Muslim countries. The participants shared their concerns that the Western and foreign countries supported some political and religious sects through moral and financial support against others, while the political governance of Pakistan helped them to do so that created environment of religious and political conflicts. These perceptions, experiences, and observations had a dominant influence on the formation of the conflicting and extremist views between different groups in Pakistan, which as a result created a culture of terrorist and sectarian violence in Pakistan.

It may be inferred and concluded that in Pakistan, socioeconomic structural factors have a significant role in how a person thinks and behaves. Relative deprivation on the grounds of religious, social, and political levels can encourage development of violent extremist thoughts which can further be used for the fulfilment of their identity and desired goals. Religious extremist

views emerge from a variety of factors, including experiences of social and criminal victimization by one religious community against another, negative labeling against people by the local and international communities, and social discrimination and victimization within the society. This study asserts that unjust and ineffective governance and justice systems encourage angry and violent thoughts among religious and social groups. As a result, when the government fails to respond to citizens' grievances and difficulties, people are more likely to think violently and aggressively. Furthermore, local and international communities' contemptive, disrespectful, and disparaging attitudes provide fertile ground for creating social and political strains, religious fanaticism, and bloodshed. However, the reviewed data shows that violent religious extremism is mostly caused by the conflicts between sectarian ideologies, a lack of effective dealings of the government for addressing social, political, and religious matters, and the Western propaganda for stigmatizing Muslims as terrorists.

Based on the findings and inferences of this article, it can be suggested the government of Pakistan should adopt effective and result-oriented policies to solve the social, economic, and political challenges of social groups. Understanding of why certain individuals, including social, religious, and political groups, become aggrieved and how they develop violent attitudes and behaviors should be given the utmost attention to study and derive meaningful results for the policymaking outlines. Moreover, the education system and its quality should be improved by designing unbiased and unprejudiced curriculum across the country, and the quality education should be advanced and encouraged that people should not bear in their minds the differences of being poor and deprived, and the controversial sectarian differences. Therefore, for addressing and controlling disputes and differences, the role of the social institutions should be highlighted and a strong writ of the state should be maintained by strengthening all the components of criminal justice and ensuring social justice across the country.

The government of Pakistan should be serious about tackling these messy and anarchic structural problems that contribute to violent extremism resulting in disorderly and dangerous conditions. Pakistani state should develop positive relations with the international communities to devise constructive and friendly approaches for creating a peaceful and resilient environment within the Pakistani society.

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