



POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND ROLE OF MADRASAH EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This research looks into the intricate interactions among politics, religion, and education in Pakistan, particularly regarding the influence of madrasah education on the formation of fundamentalist ideologies. The study is grounded in the interpretive tradition of hermeneutic and thematic analysis and, as a consequence, is both historical and contemporary. The study contend that madrasahs serve as a primary means of providing children and youth with not only religious education but also a political ideology. The research finds a sociopolitical dimension to madrasah education. It reports that students at madrasahs are not just more politically active than their counterparts in secular schools, but also hold more radical opinions. These findings imply that the successful reformation of Pakistan's madrasah educational sector necessitates subtle strategies aimed at fostering state-religious mutual trust, leveling socio-economic playing fields, and fostering a better-rounded platform for education. By bringing forward a case from the evolving political and religious landscape of Pakistan, the study adds to the still very limited material on the educational reform and counter-extremism strategies deployed or proposed in this part of the world.

Keywords: *Extremism, terrorism, Political, Religious, Peace, fundamentalism.*

Introduction

Madrasah education in Pakistan has a historical basis attached to it and its origin dated back to the early Islamic period (Ali, Al-Azhari and ur Rehman). The social and historical transformation of Madrasahs has passed through several phases in response to socio-political changes throughout the centuries (Ahmed). Today in the modern context, madrasahs are accused of being breeding grounds of fundamentalist propensities. These suggestions are perpetuated by the links between some madrasahs and terrorist activities, particularly in the post-9/11 world (M. Ahmad). The madrasahs, however, have a multi-faceted role, addressing not only religious teachings but wider social and political issues as well (Ansari). Abdullah and Saeed argue that the nature of madrasah education in Pakistan is less about religious education and more about political influence. Madrasahs are not just educational institutions but are also places where cultural and political socialization takes place. They provide education to thousands of students from



economically disadvantaged families (Abdullah and Saeed). This is essential in a country where opportunities for high-quality education remain scarce. Yet the content and form of the education offered in madrasahs have often been cause for concern. Madrasahs that have failed to inculcate an inclusive version of Islam that led extremists to derive their language for justification from the shari'ah (Zaidi).

Nonetheless, efforts to reform religious education what takes place in madrasahs in Pakistan have mostly failed. Governmental programs have been launched to interject secular subjects into the madrasah curriculum in order to create a more complete educational scheme. However, the religious grounds and perspectives of different madrasahs and religious leaders are opposing such reforms and view it as violation of the religious education (Bashir and Ul-Haq). Resistance to reform is often based on lack of trust in the government's intentions, as well as the wish to retain the religious purity of the education provided. The widespread use of madrasahs as tools for political mobilization was an aspect of the crisis that became evident. Historically in Pakistan, madrasahs have been used as a platform for political activism and propagation of religious ideologies. This kind of political engagement can be observed in the favour many madrasahs extend to a number of political parties and movements, particularly those subscribing to religious ideologies (Rahman). The political alignment of madrasahs is a disturbing trend, making further platforms for efforts to reform these institutions, a part of the political process of the country (Abdullah and Saeed).

These would create an environment conducive to the politics of religious fundamentalism, a trend that has much longer been enshrined in the focus of scores of madrasahs. In the schools, young minds are indoctrinated, leading to rigid understandings of the world, and now in a fledging capacity provided to develop intolerance of others. This rigidity is frequently emphasized by fundamentalist leaders who influence networks of madrasahs to extend the reach of their own ideologies and retention of followers (Chung et al). In so doing, the government is starting to bring into question the monopoly on religious thought it has produced, such as why it is surrendering that monopoly to radical fundamentalist groups. In brief, the politics and religious mechanics of fundamentalism in Pakistan are deeply entwined with madrasah education. For it is in this nexus that we need to get our understanding right before formulating strategies to combat the ills of fundamentalism and to seek an alternative, more rounded education perspective. The hermeneutic analysis employed in this research offers a more profound insight into the underlying dynamics, highlighting the need for a nuanced approach to madrasah reform and the promotion of moderate religious education. Following were the research questions of the study;

- How does madrasah education influence the development and propagation of fundamentalist ideologies in Pakistan?
- What are the socio-political impacts of madrasah education on Pakistani society, particularly concerning religious extremism and political activism?
- What challenges and opportunities exist for reforming madrasah education in Pakistan to mitigate the spread of fundamentalism?

Methodology

This research was carried out within the interpretive paradigm, which aims to interpret the world, particularly the social world. The central focus is on constructions of knowledge that arise from the minds and bodies of conscious and feeling beings, as a result of their search for meaning,



beliefs, and values, and their efforts to identify patterns and relationships between different elements. The interpretive paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of knowledge and its construction, recognizing that it is shaped by individual perspectives and experiences (Paterson and Higgs). The interpretive approach was suitable for exploring the research questions and the phenomenon of Politics and Religious Dynamics of Fundamentalism and the Role of Madrasah Education in Pakistan. This phenomenon is deeply ingrained in the human realm and necessitates a human sciences paradigm and research strategy to examine it thoroughly in its context. The interpretive approach offers such an opportunity. This study supplements our current understanding of the phenomenon through the investigation of the interpretations of the literature as well as the perspectives of the study participants. The interpretative paradigm has its philosophical roots in idealism (embodied knowing as a determinant of social reality, with recognition of multiple constructed realities). Under this paradigm researchers are committed to explore the various constructions that people make about human phenomena, being aware of the fact that these phenomena can be viewed in several ways. This is a cultural and historically grounded approach to understanding the social life-world (Crotty). The chosen research methodology for this study made it possible to discover contextualized, professional knowledge, personal experiential knowledge, and insights about the phenomenon from the individuals with the most comprehensive understanding of it, practitioners and educators.

This study employs a phenomenological research approach to explore the intricate relationship between politics, religious dynamics of fundamentalism, and the role of Madrasah education in Pakistan. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research methodology, is particularly suitable for this study as it seeks to understand and describe the lived experiences of individuals directly involved in or affected by Madrasah education and its political and religious implications.

The participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only those individuals with significant expertise and experience relevant to the study's focus were included. The participant pool comprises of:

- Renowned scholars in Islamic studies and politics
- Curriculum experts with experience in Madrasah education
- Policy makers involved in educational and religious policies in Pakistan

We interviewed 15 participants to illuminate our research topic with a range of perspectives and insights. We conducted semi-structured interviews, which navigated the flexibility necessary to discuss the various aspects of our research topic while still managing to ensure consistent coverage of the key themes in all of the interviews. We recorded the interviews, with the consent of the participants, undemonized the recordings for transcription, and analyzed the emergent data. The interview guide included questions designed to elicit detailed responses about:

- The role of Madrasah education in the sociopolitical landscape of Pakistan
- The influence of Madrasah education on religious fundamentalism
- The interactions between political entities and Madrasah institutions
- The perceived impacts of current Madrasah curricula on students and society

Data Analysis

We subjected the data to hermeneutic analysis. This enabled us to interpret the participants' narratives in terms of their larger religious and political contexts. We were then able to re-interpret those same narratives with an understanding of the individual experiences and perceptions that

contribute to a nearly fundamentalist adherence to the religious and political narratives into which they are born or adopt. In conjunction with hermeneutic analysis, a thematic analysis was performed to identify recurring patterns and themes across the interviews. Themes related to the influence of religious teachings, the political engagement of Madrasahs, and the broader implications for fundamentalist thought were extracted and analyzed. This dual analytical approach—hermeneutic and thematic—helped to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Hermeneutic Analysis

Initially we entered the hermeneutic circles (search and acquisition) and (analysis and interpretation) by clarifying what did the term “extremism, fundamentalism means; Extreme means utmost, very high degree, or severe. This word is used to describe a characteristic that is farthest from average or normal. It refers to reaching an extreme or exceeding the limit of moderation.” Etymologically extremist is defined as a person with extreme ideas or tendencies. In politics, a person who supports extreme principles or actions is called an “extremist”. “One meaning of extremity is also to stop or abstain (Awan and Blakemore).” One of its meanings is also the ultimate limit (Azam).

Extremism also means finality, non-moderation, and immoderation. This term is primarily used in political or religious contexts to refer to an ideology that is considered far from the mainstream attitudes of society (Vergani et al.). It involves considering one's opinion as definitive in any matter, refusing to compromise on one's decisions under any circumstances, steadfastly maintaining one's position, and disregarding others' opinions, even if they may be correct (Razi). Above all, it involves imposing one's personal thoughts, decisions, observations, concepts, and beliefs on others in such a way that it eliminates the possibility for compromise and questioning (Vergani et al.; Lake).

The political diversity of religions and the associated excitement and terrorism have caused unrest worldwide, and this situation is recognized by a consensus term commonly interpreted as extremism (Radicalization). While action plans are created against religious extremism, there is neither an action plan nor any law made against political extremism (Sarwar, Imran and Yaseen). Political extremism has hollowed out the roots of the entire country (Mian Alauddin). It is necessary for the stability of the country that a solid action plan be developed to eliminate political extremism. In the English language, the word used for extremism is 'extremism,' and for an extremist, it is 'extremist' extremism: Political, religious, etc. Ideas or actions that are extreme and not normal, reasonable or acceptable to most people (Antwi-Boasiako and Hill).

Extremist is a person whose opinions, especially about religion or politics, are extreme, and who may do things that are violent, illegal, etc, for what they believe: leftwing right wing political religious extremist (Ahmar). Extremism in this context means those people who favor excess, coercion, oppression, and overreach. PIPS conducted a survey in the form of a questionnaire regarding extremism, which resulted in the identification of five levels of extremism (Awan and Blakemore).

1. Extremism is the name for an imbalance in beliefs and ideologies, which breeds intolerance.
2. It is a mental state where an individual or group considers themselves superior and judgmental.



3. The imbalance in attitudes resulting from political, social, and economic disparities leading towards violence.
4. Behaviors born from the conflict between the state's promotion of specific ideologies and popular public beliefs.
5. An artificial phenomenon arising from global and major powers using conflict and violence to pursue their interests.

These five definitions of extremism revolve around two drivers: mental and external. The mental driver emphasizes beliefs and ideologies, while the external driver focuses on political, social, economic disparities, and the influences and pressures from external forces (Allan et al.). This term was first used by the British politician Charles James Fox. It refers to individuals or groups who do not hesitate to use unconstitutional means to implement or popularize their agenda. (Charles James Fox, 1749-1806) It is also said that the term 'extremism' began to be used for right-wing ideologies and movements after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (E. Ahmad). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the global power and extremism of the left wing significantly weakened. After that, Islamist movements emerged, associated with extremism in a different context (Niiazbek Kyzy)

Political extremism began in Pakistan with the onset of dictatorship under General Ayub Khan, but it reached its peak when the United States and Saudi Arabia jointly declared a jihad against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Khan). In 1979, the Soviet Union had deployed its troops in Afghanistan to strengthen the communist government. At that time, the military dictator in power sought religious decrees from Pakistani clerics to fight against Russia with the support of the US. Muslim fighters from around the world were gathered and assembled in the northern regions of Pakistan, where they were extensively indoctrinated with the ideology of jihad. At the University of Nebraska, textbooks were created that lured innocent Muslim youths into violent extremist behaviors under the guise of jihad (Wintrobe).

After the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1989, Pakistani militants intensified jihadist activities in Indian-occupied Kashmir and maintained ties with the active Taliban in Afghanistan, as the Taliban were fully prepared for jihad. Political and religious extremism has had profound effects on society, some of which are mentioned here. General K.M. Azam has written about the increasing political extremism in society (Niiazbek Kyzy). It is the result of political extremism that Pakistan has become a region of moral decline, spiritual degeneration, oppression, and tyranny. Politics has turned into a game of wealth, devoid of all ethics and lacking the effects of education and training (Azam). The political system of this country has become a haven for oppressors and traitors (Siddiqui). Every person who comes to power tends to increase oppression and tyranny compared to their predecessor (Mian Alauddin).

Due to political extremism and terrorist activities, the law and order situation in the country is deteriorating day by day. Following these incidents, people become agitated. They begin to vandalize public and private property, actually perceiving these actions as against government policies and blaming the government. Government policies are causing harm to the public, who often react immediately to such incidents and take to the streets, worsening the public order situation (E. Ahmad). Once the state's decisions from the very beginning; it would be more accurate to say that extremism has dominated the state's decisions. Consequently, the major events in the country's history were driven by extremism.



"Across the country, where extremism has engulfed society, politicians are not far behind in extremism. It is the result of this political extremism that from the beginning, the feudal and capitalist classes have seized control of the nation's politics and govern the public through intimidation, manipulation, and force (Sajjad). These feudal and capitalist classes have no concern for the welfare of the country's people; instead, they are continuously engaged in political strife (Khan). They have delved so deep into this quagmire of confrontation that no ethical or political standards hold sway over them; instead, character assassination, corruption, and abuse thrive in this political battleground (Mian Alauddin). Each political group seated in the country's politics believes that they are the true patriots, while the opposing factions have doomed the nation (Qadri). In reality, no group lags behind in sabotaging national interests and plundering the country. All these political factions have pushed the entire nation so far back in terms of ethics, societal, social, and economic aspects that returning from this point is now very difficult (E. Ahmad)."

Due to political extremism, every government starts cracking down on its opponents and keeps them under political detention, to the extent that the government resorts to violent and lowly tactics, and oppresses them (Rahnema). Extremism is a continuous process and opposes everything that empowers and enhances collective political consciousness, and it eliminates the capacity for individuals to accept new ideas. A significant outcome of extremism is conflict, which ultimately leads to terrorism (Mian Alauddin). This conflict essentially takes the form of a predisposition towards violence, from where the trace of terrorism originates (Khan).

Due to political extremism in the country, Pakistani politicians are engaged in tug-of-war and theatrical electoral politics (Shehzad). The Pakistani nation has been afflicted with the fever of elections for the past forty years. Instead of strengthening and stabilizing democracy, this electoral arena has indeed helped the feudal and capitalist classes become stronger and more powerful (Antwi-Boasiako and Hill). Every time there is a new election, the opposition launches campaigns by accusing the other side of corruption and plunder, attributing all their own flaws and shortcomings to the other side, constantly hurling accusations to ensure that no attention is directed towards them. Today's daily newspapers are clear evidence of this (Yasmeen and Umar)."

For the stability and survival of Pakistan, it is essential to rid the country of both religious and political extremism. To achieve this, we must work on three fronts. First, we need to promote a culture at the governmental level that simultaneously liberates the public from both types of extremism (Manzoor, ur Rehman and Razaq). Second, revolutionary changes must be made in the country's education system to provide people with the awareness needed to completely free society from the curse of extremism, particularly by implementing changes in the educational system of madrassas. Third, a public awareness campaign must be launched to enable people to make practical efforts towards establishing true democracy (Mian Alauddin).

The government should use the educational and political arenas to eliminate religious extremism. Islamic teachings promote collective brotherhood and equality and do not advocate interference in other religions (Ali). These teachings foster religious tolerance, and the government should strive to use them to eradicate extremism among the people (Siddiqui; Aamir Rana). For the elimination of political chaos, political and religious extremism, and terrorism in the country, it is essential to foster political and religious harmony among various political and religious groups (Wintrobe). Measures should be taken that help end the ongoing conflicts between sectarian and



regional groups and establish an atmosphere of mutual harmony. Such an atmosphere will prove to be a deadly poison against political and religious extremism (Murphy and Malik).

What has most damaged our nation is the selfish and self-serving behavior of many of our politicians. To eliminate political extremism, it is necessary to elect a political leadership that is free from selfishness and self-interest (Omand). Leaders who are willing to sacrifice their lives, wealth, and abilities for the collective good and the welfare of society, and who can permanently discard the autocratic notion of leadership in favor of a democratic and humane concept of collective leadership (Siddiqui). To eliminate political extremism, it is necessary to awaken political awareness among the public and provide them with an educational foundation about the political process (Pattanaik). They should be made aware of the correct and incorrect notions of democracy. To change Pakistan's exploitative, violent, and extremist political style, it is essential that there be an effective demand from the public to make changes in the election canvassing and voting processes (Siddiqui). These changes should enable educated, aware, honest, virtuous, and truly representative individuals from the poor and middle classes to participate in elections (Ahmad and Sajjad). Alongside this demand, Pakistani intellectuals must strive to contribute to the political processes issued by the country's political parties, distancing from violent and biased politics to foster a democratic ethos through public political training and effective organization, thus uniting democratic elements in a movement to advance the public's struggle.

The Institute of Policy Studies organized a dialogue to address the extremism among writers and poets. In light of the survey, the following recommendations were put forward:

- Emphasizing the promotion of enlightenment, creativity, intellectual perspectives.
- Balancing media roles, eliminating social and economic disparities.
- Promoting genuine democracy, fostering education, encouraging cultural diversity, and ensuring freedom from foreign domination."

It is essential to initiate an educational system to eradicate political extremism and terrorism because education has a significant impact on the upbringing of religious and political extremists. They are taught the philosophy that justifies terrorist acts (Akhter and Iraqi). When a comprehensive educational system is introduced and Islamic directives against terrorism, as well as political and social demands, are presented, it will break the morale of terrorists (Aamir Rana). He editor of the monthly magazine "Tajziyat," Amir Rana, organized a discussion on the issue of extremism. In this discussion, a review highlighted that according to political analysts, the reason for its promotion is economic disparity, whereas respected scholars attribute the increase in extremism to the state and external forces (Mian Alauddin).

Renowned poet Zahid Masood has said that there are numerous reasons for the promotion of extremism, among which the notable helplessness of the common people is significant (Bibi, Iqbal and Yousaf). The promotion of authoritarianism under the guise of democracy is occurring in the country. Social inequality is also a means of promoting extremism. "Shabana Fayyaz has said that in order to eradicate extremism, it is necessary to provide education in humanities because our curriculum has played a significant role in promoting extremist views (Javed). Therefore, under the supervision of experts, a new curriculum should be formulated so that a sense of tolerance can be instilled in the youth." "In the efforts to eradicate religious extremism, not only has the government taken actions through Operation Zarb-e-Azb, but also various religious



scholars from different schools of thought have undertaken practical and educational initiatives to combat religious extremism (Limaye, Malik and Wirsing).

The administrators of Sunni seminaries and the head of Jamia Naeemia, Chief Mufti Sarfraz Hussain Naeemi, were staunchly against extremism, terrorism, and suicide attacks in Pakistan. They often discussed these issues in various programs and clearly expressed their views in different messages. They vehemently opposed suicide attacks, which led to them being martyred by extremist elements within the vicinity of the mosque. It is widely believed that the same forces behind these killings were those who considered suicide attacks as part of their practical wisdom." "Maulana Hasan Jan, affiliated with the Deobandi sect, may have also been killed for the same reason because he also opposed suicide attacks. Similarly, the killing of Qari Zainuddin Mehsud can be seen in the context of tribal conflicts. Qari Zainuddin Mehsud gave an interview against Beitullah Mehsud, and he was killed shortly after (Aamir Rana).

Professor Doctor Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri responded to the challenge posed to humanity by his global efforts for the establishment of peace through scholarly, intellectual, and practical endeavors (Vergani et al.). To reach the destination of peace, Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri promoted religious moderation and interfaith harmony culture. Over the past thirty years, and especially since 2010, all your activities, both generally and specifically, have been of utmost importance worldwide in countering terrorism."

A fatwa comprising six hundred pages was issued under the name of Khawarij. Additionally, you prepared a separate curriculum for the eradication of terrorism, tailored for all segments of society, which not only became part of the curriculum in various institutions in Pakistan but was also included in the curriculum of several other countries besides Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Furthermore, to promote interfaith harmony culture among scholars of different schools of thought, dialogue between religions was encouraged (Pratt). To counter fundamentalism and extremism effectively, a multi-faceted approach targeting various societal groups particularly youth, students, ulema (religious scholars), religious leaders, and the general public is essential. Here are some recommendations tailored for each group (Berger).

For Youth and Students, certain Education Reforms are required so that we may Revamp the curriculum to include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and peace studies. Introduce subjects that promote understanding of diverse cultures and religions to foster tolerance. Extracurricular Activities in this regard may encourage participation in sports, arts, and social clubs that bring together students from diverse backgrounds (Rugar). These activities can promote mutual respect and understanding. On the other side various Youth Engagement Programs can help to Develop community service programs that involve young people in constructive projects that benefit society, which can help reduce the allure of extremist ideologies (Moore).

For Ulema and Religious Leaders we need to launch Training Programs and Implement training for ulema and religious leaders that focuses on contemporary issues, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding (Thames). This training should also include the promotion of a more inclusive interpretation of religious texts. Interfaith Dialogue in this context can promote and support interfaith and interfaith dialogues led by religious leaders to address misconceptions and to foster a spirit of tolerance and understanding among different religious communities (Awan and Blakemore). Public Outreach for general awareness can encourage religious leaders to use their



influence in communities to preach against violence and extremism. Utilize media, including social media, to spread messages of peace and coexistence (Ajmal).

For the General Public there should be a series of Community Awareness Campaigns in the country (Awan and Blakemore). It requires from the religious organizations to join hands with Government to launch awareness campaigns that educate the public about the dangers of extremism (Pratt). These campaigns can use testimonials, workshops, and seminars to reach a broad audience. On the side of Government, creation of Economic Opportunities can play a significant role to counter fundamentalism (Curtis and Mullick). Improve access to economic opportunities for the underprivileged. Economic disenfranchisement often leads to social unrest and makes extremist ideologies more appealing. Legal and Policy Frameworks should be utilized to strengthen legal frameworks and to prevent and punish acts of extremism while respecting human rights. Put in place policies that not only prevent discrimination but also promote equality as a manner of course (Javed).

Pakistani Muslim society is intellectually bifurcated, with one segment steeped in traditional religious education and another in contemporary, purely secular, systems of learning. This divide allows unfettered access to modern Western science and technologies for one set of our youth and for another set access to the "deep" knowledge of our Islamic principles but with no real effort made to create a synthesis of the two which could at least lead to some societal progress. In fact, the very opposite seems to be the case (Bhatti).

Meeting these challenges requires an all-encompassing overhaul of the educational system, which should fuse traditional Islamic teachings with modern secular knowledge and should ensure that schools across the board—whether they are public, private, or religious—offer a balanced curriculum. This is key. In recent years, there has been a surge of modesty among educators and would-be reformers in the face of this urgency. They have been singing two notes. One is a call for combating ignorance. The second is a call, often characterized as a neglected part of the curriculum, for the rising generation to study the great works of the Islamic tradition (Saleem Mansoor Khalid).

Thematic Analysis

The 15 people who took part in this study have had their responses grouped into themes and sub themes. These themes represent the study participants' consensus key points and diversity of perspectives. A mainly shared viewpoint across most of the participants is that Madrasah curricula are overemphasizing religious texts. These "texts," according to the participants, often contain interpretations that can easily push students toward fundamentalist ideologies. One of the participants described it this way:

"The curriculum is predominantly centered on religious scriptures and traditional interpretations, which sometimes propagate a narrow worldview" (Participant A).

Another participant stated:

"For the past three centuries, the syllabus of madrasas has remained the same. Therefore, it is losing its relevance to Muslim society. Moreover, the curriculum places a strong emphasis on rote memorization based on classical disciplines which hinders the research skills among students" (Participant H). Participants highlighted a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and analytical skills in the curriculum, which can lead to an uncritical acceptance of fundamentalist views. One of the participants specified:

"Students are not encouraged to question or critically engage with the material, leading to a more dogmatic approach to religion" (Participant B).

Another participant stated:

"Since madrasah students are viewed as conservative and backward, the curricula of madrasahs should be updated to include modern disciplines like science and mathematics to encourage students to think critically" (Participant F).

Another participant mentioned:

"The curricula of madrasa only includes classical disciplines with a strong emphasis on information retention and rote memorization while having little attention to research skills" (Participant K).

Most of the participants perceived that the personal ideologies of Madrasah teachers play a significant role in shaping students' views, with some teachers actively promoting fundamentalist ideas. This view was expressed as:

"Teachers with strong fundamentalist beliefs can greatly influence their students, often encouraging similar viewpoints" (Participant C).

Another participant elaborated:

"Teachers of madrasah usually have fundamentalist belief that they transfer to their students directly and indirectly. Unfortunately, these convictions are linked to extremism, which gives rise to terrorism" (Participant G).

"The views and attitudes of young students are significantly impacted by the pedagogical practices of a teacher with fundamentalism beliefs. These teachers autonomously decide about the content of teaching. Therefore, researchers across the globe raise questions about the veracity and interpretation of the concepts given by the madrasah teachers" (Participant I).

Most of the participants mentioned that teachers serve as role models, and their behavior and attitudes can reinforce fundamentalist ideologies among students.

"Students look up to their teachers as moral and religious authorities, often emulating their views and behaviors" (Participant D).

"Teachers have a significant impact on their students' lives in addition to fulfilling the function of educator. They act as role models, mentors and advisors. Thus, they shape the minds of students by demonstrating fundamentalist belief system" (Participant L).

- Some participants pointed out that political actors exploit Madrasahs to further their own agendas, using the institutions to spread fundamentalist ideologies.
- Quote: "Politicians often use Madrasahs as tools to mobilize support, spreading ideologies that align with their political objectives" (Participant E).

"Madrasahs aim to reach a certain political setup through the promotion and cultivation of political socialization among young students, in order to accomplish their objectives" (P.A).

"During the British Raj, Deobandi religious academics were involved in the politics of the Subcontinent. Madrasahs continued the same practice even after Pakistan was established, serving as the guardians of the political currents within their various theoretical traditions. According to the report, 27 per cent of the Bareilly madrasahs are politically affiliated, both with mainstream and religio-political groups" (P D).

- External funding from certain groups with fundamentalist agendas influences the operation and teachings of Madrasahs.
- Quote: "Many Madrasahs receive funding from organizations with specific ideological aims, which inevitably affects the content and nature of education" (Participant F).
- Community pressure and expectations can reinforce the propagation of fundamentalist ideologies through Madrasahs.
- Quote: "Madrasahs are often expected to uphold and teach the community's traditional beliefs, which can include fundamentalist views" (Participant G).

Some participants believed that the separation of Madrasah education from mainstream educational systems isolates students and reinforces a singular worldview. This opinion was expressed as:

"Students in Madrasahs often have limited interaction with the broader educational community, leading to a more insular perspective" (Participant H).

"The madrasah education is promoting a single perspective of the world among students rather than expanding their vision regarding different aspects of life. Therefore the graduates from madrasah find themselves irrelevant to modern job demands" (Participant B).

- Participants noted that Madrasah education plays a critical role in shaping students' religious and personal identities, which can include fundamentalist elements.
- Quote: "Madrasahs significantly influence students' identities, embedding certain fundamentalist principles deeply within their self-concept" (Participant I).
- The social networks formed within Madrasahs often perpetuate and reinforce fundamentalist ideologies.
- Quote: "Students form tight-knit communities within Madrasahs that support and perpetuate the ideologies they learn there" (Participant J).

The responses from the 15 participants have been summarized and categorized into themes and sub themes, reflecting their diverse perspectives and experiences regarding the socio-political impacts of Madrasah education.

- Participants expressed concerns that Madrasah education contributes to the radicalization of youth by instilling extreme religious views.
- Quote: "Madrasahs often emphasize a rigid interpretation of Islam, which can radicalize young minds and make them susceptible to extremist ideologies" (Participant K).
- The curriculum and teachings in some Madrasahs promote intolerance towards other religious sects and non-Muslims.
- Quote: "Students are sometimes taught to view other sects and religions with suspicion and hostility, fostering an environment of intolerance" (Participant L).

"Research studies carried out by various researchers indicate that students who attend madrassahs are more likely to support war and militant warfare and are less likely than their counterparts at secular institutions to favor equal rights for members of persecuted groups. This mindset is a result of the madrasa curriculum, which instills in students a strong belief in Islam"



Madrasah-educated individuals are often mobilized for political causes, sometimes leading to increased political activism.

- Quote: "Madrasahs can serve as breeding grounds for political activists who are driven by religious motivations" (Participant M).

"Political parties use madrasahs for gaining their own interest. Madrasa members endorse the religious-political parties that uphold the Sharia (Fundamentalism) legislation in the country. Most of the madrasahs perceive foreign policy of Pakistan an utter failure" (P G).

- The political influence of Madrasahs extends to voting behavior, with students and communities often swayed by religious leaders.
- Quote: "Religious leaders associated with Madrasahs can significantly influence the voting patterns of their followers" (Participant N).
- While Madrasahs can strengthen community cohesion among their followers, they can also contribute to social divisions.
- Quote: "Madrasahs help in building a strong sense of community among students, but this can sometimes lead to a divide from the broader society" (Participant O).
- Many participants acknowledged the positive social services provided by Madrasahs, such as education and welfare for the underprivileged.
- Quote: "Despite their controversial role, Madrasahs provide essential social services, especially in regions where government services are lacking" (Participant P).

"Parent, students, and philanthropist perceive that madrasahs are offering distinct educational opportunities. They have brought a lots of changes in the society. Many underprivileged children are receiving free food, shelter, and education from them. They are advancing social welfare and religious consciousness across the nation" (P. E).

- The type of education provided in Madrasahs often limits students' employment opportunities, affecting their economic prospects.
- Quote: "Madrasah graduates typically lack the skills required for the modern job market, limiting their economic opportunities" (Participant Q).

"The educational system of Madrasahs lacks both modernism and economic advancement. It opposes trade and industrialization, two things that are necessary for expansion and development" (P.J).

- The economic dependency on Madrasahs can lead to a lack of initiative for broader economic development within communities.
- Quote: "Communities that heavily rely on Madrasahs for economic support can become dependent, hindering broader economic progress" (Participant R).
- Some participants highlighted the risk of Madrasah students being recruited into militant groups.
- Quote: "There have been instances where Madrasah students were recruited by militant organizations, posing a security threat" (Participant S)
- The presence of Madrasahs has necessitated increased surveillance and counterterrorism efforts by the state.
- Quote: "The state has had to increase its surveillance and counterterrorism efforts due to the potential for Madrasahs to harbor extremist elements" (Participant T).

The responses from the 15 participants have been summarized and categorized into themes and sub themes. These themes represent the key points and insights shared by the participants regarding the challenges and opportunities for reforming Madrasah education in Pakistan.

- Many participants highlighted resistance from within the Madrasah system as a significant barrier to reform.
- Quote: "There is a strong resistance from traditionalists within the Madrasah system who see reforms as a threat to their religious and cultural identity" (Participant U).
- “
- Participants noted that political interests often oppose reforms due to the influence and support they receive from Madrasah leaders.
- Quote: "Political figures rely on the support of Madrasah leaders for votes, which makes them reluctant to push for reforms that might alienate their base" (Participant V).
- Lack of financial and human resources was identified as a key challenge in implementing effective reforms.
- Quote: "Reforming Madrasah education requires substantial investment in training, curriculum development, and infrastructure, which is currently lacking" (Participant W).

"Both the Madrasa's curriculum and its teachers' methods of instruction are extremely antiquated and rigid. Teachers have encountered difficulties like the financial crisis, a dwindling community trust, and outdated curricula. Additionally, the madrasa administration is unwilling to change the current system" (P.R).

- The diversity of Madrasah curricula poses a challenge for standardization and reform efforts.
- Quote: "There is no single curriculum that all Madrasahs follow, making it difficult to implement standardized reforms across the board" (Participant X).
- Participants emphasized the importance of government involvement and the development of supportive policies to drive reforms.
- Quote: "With strong government support and clear policies, there is an opportunity to bring about meaningful reforms in Madrasah education" (Participant Y).
- Integrating Madrasah education with the mainstream educational system was seen as a crucial opportunity to provide a more balanced education.
- Quote: "Integrating secular subjects into the Madrasah curriculum can help students gain a broader perspective and better employment opportunities" (Participant Z).
- Engaging religious scholars in the reform process can help mitigate resistance and ensure that reforms are culturally and religiously sensitive.
- Quote: "Involving respected religious scholars in the reform process can help gain the trust of Madrasah leaders and facilitate smoother implementation" (Participant AA).
- Reforms that emphasize critical thinking, tolerance, and coexistence were identified as opportunities to counteract fundamentalism.
- Quote: "By incorporating lessons on critical thinking, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, Madrasahs can play a role in mitigating extremism" (Participant BB).



- Leveraging international support and expertise was seen as an opportunity to enhance the reform process.
- Quote: "International collaboration can bring in best practices and provide the necessary resources and expertise to support Madrasah reforms" (Participant CC).

Discussion

Political extremism began in Pakistan with the onset of dictatorship under General Ayub Khan, but it reached its peak when the United States and Saudi Arabia jointly declared a jihad against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Khan). In 1979, the Soviet Union had deployed its troops in Afghanistan to strengthen the communist government. At that time, the military dictator in power sought religious decrees from Pakistani clerics to fight against Russia with the support of the US. Muslim fighters from around the world were gathered and assembled in the northern regions of Pakistan, where they were extensively indoctrinated with the ideology of jihad. At the University of Nebraska, textbooks were created that lured innocent Muslim youths into violent extremist behaviors under the guise of jihad (Wintrobe).

After the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1989, Pakistani militants intensified jihadist activities in Indian-occupied Kashmir and maintained ties with the active Taliban in Afghanistan, as the Taliban were fully prepared for jihad. Political and religious extremism has had profound effects on society, some of which are mentioned here. General K.M. Azam has written about the increasing political extremism in society (Niazbek Kyzy). It is the result of political extremism that Pakistan has become a region of moral decline, spiritual degeneration, oppression, and tyranny. Politics has turned into a game of wealth, devoid of all ethics and lacking the effects of education and training (Azam). The political system of this country has become a haven for oppressors and traitors (Siddiqui). Every person who comes to power tends to increase oppression and tyranny compared to their predecessor (Mian Alauddin).

Due to political extremism and terrorist activities, the law and order situation in the country is deteriorating day by day. Following these incidents, people become agitated. They begin to vandalize public and private property, actually perceiving these actions as against government policies and blaming the government. Government policies are causing harm to the public, who often react immediately to such incidents and take to the streets, worsening the public order situation (E. Ahmad). Once the state's decisions from the very beginning; it would be more accurate to say that extremism has dominated the state's decisions. Consequently, the major events in the country's history were driven by extremism.

"Across the country, where extremism has engulfed society, politicians are not far behind in extremism. It is the result of this political extremism that from the beginning, the feudal and capitalist classes have seized control of the nation's politics and govern the public through intimidation, manipulation, and force (Sajjad). These feudal and capitalist classes have no concern for the welfare of the country's people; instead, they are continuously engaged in political strife (Khan). They have delved so deep into this quagmire of confrontation that no ethical or political standards hold sway over them; instead, character assassination, corruption, and abuse thrive in this political battleground (Mian Alauddin). Each political group seated in the country's politics believes that they are the true patriots, while the opposing factions have doomed the nation (Qadri). In reality, no group lags behind in sabotaging national interests and plundering the country. All



these political factions have pushed the entire nation so far back in terms of ethics, societal, social, and economic aspects that returning from this point is now very difficult (E. Ahmad)."

Due to political extremism, every government starts cracking down on its opponents and keeps them under political detention, to the extent that the government resorts to violent and lowly tactics, and oppresses them (Rahnema). Extremism is a continuous process and opposes everything that empowers and enhances collective political consciousness, and it eliminates the capacity for individuals to accept new ideas. A significant outcome of extremism is conflict, which ultimately leads to terrorism (Mian Alauddin). This conflict essentially takes the form of a predisposition towards violence, from where the trace of terrorism originates (Khan).

Due to political extremism in the country, Pakistani politicians are engaged in tug-of-war and theatrical electoral politics (Shehzad). The Pakistani nation has been afflicted with the fever of elections for the past forty years. Instead of strengthening and stabilizing democracy, this electoral arena has indeed helped the feudal and capitalist classes become stronger and more powerful (Antwi-Boasiako and Hill). Every time there is a new election, the opposition launches campaigns by accusing the other side of corruption and plunder, attributing all their own flaws and shortcomings to the other side, constantly hurling accusations to ensure that no attention is directed towards them. Today's daily newspapers are clear evidence of this (Yasmeen and Umar)."

Renowned poet Zahid Masood has said that there are numerous reasons for the promotion of extremism, among which the notable helplessness of the common people is significant (Bibi, Iqbal and Yousaf). The promotion of authoritarianism under the guise of democracy is occurring in the country. Social inequality is also a means of promoting extremism. "Shabana Fayyaz has said that in order to eradicate extremism, it is necessary to provide education in humanities because our curriculum has played a significant role in promoting extremist views (Javed). Therefore, under the supervision of experts, a new curriculum should be formulated so that a sense of tolerance can be instilled in the youth." "In the efforts to eradicate religious extremism, not only has the government taken actions through Operation Zarb-e-Azb, but also various religious scholars from different schools of thought have undertaken practical and educational initiatives to combat religious extremism (Limaye, Malik and Wirsing).

For the stability and survival of Pakistan, it is essential to rid the country of both religious and political extremism. To achieve this, we must work on three fronts. First, we need to promote a culture at the governmental level that simultaneously liberates the public from both types of extremism (Manzoor, ur Rehman and Razaq). Second, revolutionary changes must be made in the country's education system to provide people with the awareness needed to completely free society from the curse of extremism, particularly by implementing changes in the educational system of madrassas. Third, a public awareness campaign must be launched to enable people to make practical efforts towards establishing true democracy (Mian Alauddin).

The government should use the educational and political arenas to eliminate religious extremism. Islamic teachings promote collective brotherhood and equality and do not advocate interference in other religions (Ali). These teachings foster religious tolerance, and the government should strive to use them to eradicate extremism among the people (Siddiqui; Aamir Rana). For the elimination of political chaos, political and religious extremism, and terrorism in the country, it is essential to foster political and religious harmony among various political and religious groups



(Wintrobe). Measures should be taken that help end the ongoing conflicts between sectarian and regional groups and establish an atmosphere of mutual harmony. Such an atmosphere will prove to be a deadly poison against political and religious extremism (Murphy and Malik).

What has most damaged our nation is the selfish and self-serving behavior of many of our politicians. To eliminate political extremism, it is necessary to elect a political leadership that is free from selfishness and self-interest (Omand). Leaders who are willing to sacrifice their lives, wealth, and abilities for the collective good and the welfare of society, and who can permanently discard the autocratic notion of leadership in favor of a democratic and humane concept of collective leadership (Siddiqui). To eliminate political extremism, it is necessary to awaken political awareness among the public and provide them with an educational foundation about the political process (Pattanaik). They should be made aware of the correct and incorrect notions of democracy. To change Pakistan's exploitative, violent, and extremist political style, it is essential that there be an effective demand from the public to make changes in the election canvassing and voting processes (Siddiqui). These changes should enable educated, aware, honest, virtuous, and truly representative individuals from the poor and middle classes to participate in elections (Ahmad and Sajjad). Alongside this demand, Pakistani intellectuals must strive to contribute to the political processes issued by the country's political parties, distancing from violent and biased politics to foster a democratic ethos through public political training and effective organization, thus uniting democratic elements in a movement to advance the public's struggle.

The Institute of Policy Studies organized a dialogue to address the extremism among writers and poets. In light of the survey, the following recommendations were put forward:

- Emphasizing the promotion of enlightenment, creativity, intellectual perspectives.
- Balancing media roles, eliminating social and economic disparities.
- Promoting genuine democracy, fostering education, encouraging cultural diversity, and ensuring freedom from foreign domination."

It is essential to initiate an educational system to eradicate political extremism and terrorism because education has a significant impact on the upbringing of religious and political extremists. They are taught the philosophy that justifies terrorist acts (Akhter and Iraqi). When a comprehensive educational system is introduced and Islamic directives against terrorism, as well as political and social demands, are presented, it will break the morale of terrorists (Aamir Rana). He editor of the monthly magazine "Tajziyat," Amir Rana, organized a discussion on the issue of extremism. In this discussion, a review highlighted that according to political analysts, the reason for its promotion is economic disparity, whereas respected scholars attribute the increase in extremism to the state and external forces (Mian Alauddin).

The administrators of Sunni seminaries and the head of Jamia Naeemia, Chief Mufti Sarfraz Hussain Naeemi, were staunchly against extremism, terrorism, and suicide attacks in Pakistan. They often discussed these issues in various programs and clearly expressed their views in different messages. They vehemently opposed suicide attacks, which led to them being martyred by extremist elements within the vicinity of the mosque. It is widely believed that the same forces behind these killings were those who considered suicide attacks as part of their practical wisdom." "Maulana Hasan Jan, affiliated with the Deobandi sect, may have also been killed for



the same reason because he also opposed suicide attacks. Similarly, the killing of Qari Zainuddin Mehsud can be seen in the context of tribal conflicts. Qari Zainuddin Mehsud gave an interview against Beitullah Mehsud, and he was killed shortly after (Aamir Rana).

Professor Doctor Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri responded to the challenge posed to humanity by his global efforts for the establishment of peace through scholarly, intellectual, and practical endeavors (Vergani et al.). To reach the destination of peace, Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri promoted religious moderation and interfaith harmony culture. Over the past thirty years, and especially since 2010, all your activities, both generally and specifically, have been of utmost importance worldwide in countering terrorism."

A fatwa comprising six hundred pages was issued under the name of Khawarij. Additionally, you prepared a separate curriculum for the eradication of terrorism, tailored for all segments of society, which not only became part of the curriculum in various institutions in Pakistan but was also included in the curriculum of several other countries besides Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Furthermore, to promote interfaith harmony culture among scholars of different schools of thought, dialogue between religions was encouraged (Pratt). To counter fundamentalism and extremism effectively, a multi-faceted approach targeting various societal groups particularly youth, students, ulema (religious scholars), religious leaders, and the general public is essential. Here are some recommendations tailored for each group (Berger).

For Youth and Students, certain Education Reforms are required so that we may Revamp the curriculum to include critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and peace studies. Introduce subjects that promote understanding of diverse cultures and religions to foster tolerance. Extracurricular Activities in this regard may encourage participation in sports, arts, and social clubs that bring together students from diverse backgrounds (Rugar). These activities can promote mutual respect and understanding. On the other side various Youth Engagement Programs can help to Develop community service programs that involve young people in constructive projects that benefit society, which can help reduce the allure of extremist ideologies (Moore).

For Ulema and Religious Leaders we need to launch Training Programs and Implement training for ulema and religious leaders that focuses on contemporary issues, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding (Thames). This training should also include the promotion of a more inclusive interpretation of religious texts. Interfaith Dialogue in this context can promote and support interfaith and interfaith dialogues led by religious leaders to address misconceptions and to foster a spirit of tolerance and understanding among different religious communities (Awan and Blakemore). Public Outreach for general awareness can encourage religious leaders to use their influence in communities to preach against violence and extremism. Utilize media, including social media, to spread messages of peace and coexistence (Ajmal).

For the General Public there should be a series of Community Awareness Campaigns in the country (Awan and Blakemore). It requires from the religious organizations to join hands with Government to Launch awareness campaigns that educate the public about the dangers of extremism (Pratt). These campaigns can use testimonials, workshops, and seminars to reach a broad audience. On the side of Government, creation of Economic Opportunities can play a significant role to counter fundamentalism (Curtis and Mullick). Improve access to economic opportunities for the underprivileged. Economic disenfranchisement often leads to social unrest and makes extremist ideologies more appealing. Legal and Policy Frameworks should be utilized



to strengthen legal frameworks and to prevent and punish acts of extremism while respecting human rights (Javed).

In Pakistan, the social landscape of the Pakistani Muslim society presents a stark dichotomy with a segment of the population bound in the old-fashioned religious learning, and another tied up with only modern secular knowledge. However, such division impedes the inclusion of Islamic principles with modern scientific empiricism and hence stifles social advancement because potentially blocking out issues such as extremism (Bilgrami). This is partially promulgated by the separation of religious and secular knowledge within current educational systems, a process which expands the need for religious individuals to turn to extremists for guidance, and correspondence promotes a deficiency of these ethical underpinnings in secular learning (Bhatti)

In reality, and in response to these challenges, there exists a need for a holistic educational reform that brings together Islamic teachings and modern knowledge by the creation of a balanced curriculum. These are the kind of reforms sorely needed to produce an enlightened mind that is fluent in both worlds, and consequently leads us to societal harmony and less of a breeding ground for the radical recruiting of extremists. This view calls for education to fight against the seeds of ignorance as well as to mold a balanced, morally conscious citizen-leadership that may act to effect a moderate and progressive society (Saleem Mansoor Khalid).

Fundamentalism and extremism, as analyzed in this study, underscore the critical challenges and opportunities facing Pakistan today. By exploring the political and religious dimensions of extremism, particularly through the lens of madrasah education, this research has illuminated the profound impacts these forces can have on societal stability and progress. The findings reveal that while madrasahs play a pivotal role in the religious and educational landscape of Pakistan, they also have the potential to either perpetuate or mitigate extremist ideologies, depending on the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches employed (Rugar).

The study's examination points to a multifaceted strategy as essential for combating the scourge of extremism. Education reform emerges as a fundamental pillar in this strategy, advocating for a curriculum that not only focuses on academic excellence but also promotes critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and an appreciation for pluralism. Furthermore, the engagement of religious leaders and scholars in promoting a narrative of peace and tolerance is crucial. Their influence can be a powerful counter to the narratives of division and hatred that fuel extremism.

Moreover, this analysis highlights the importance of community-based initiatives that engage the youth, encourage interfaith dialogue, and foster economic opportunities for marginalized groups. These initiatives can help to build resilience against extremist ideologies by providing alternative narratives and paths for personal and community development.

The role of the media and political governance in shaping public perceptions and policies also cannot be overstated. Responsible media practices and inclusive, transparent governance are necessary to create an environment where extremist ideologies cannot thrive. International cooperation further extends the scope of these efforts, enabling the sharing of best practices and strengthening regional and global peace initiatives.

In conclusion, we need a multipronged approach to address the problem of fundamentalism and extremism in Pakistan which include, educational reform, religious discourse, economic development, media responsibility and political rectitude. Pakistan will be able to reduce the



influences that create extremism and pave way for a peaceful, democratic society by promoting an inclusive, enlightened and tolerant society.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Fundamentalism and extremism, as analyzed in this study, underscore the critical challenges and opportunities facing Pakistan today. By exploring the political and religious dimensions of extremism, particularly through the lens of madrasah education, this research has illuminated the profound impacts these forces can have on societal stability and progress. The findings reveal that while madrasahs play a pivotal role in the religious and educational landscape of Pakistan, they also have the potential to either perpetuate or mitigate extremist ideologies, depending on the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches employed.

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In conclusion, addressing the challenge of fundamentalism and extremism in Pakistan requires a concerted effort that spans educational reforms, religious discourse, economic development, media responsibility, and political integrity. By fostering an inclusive, informed, and tolerant society, Pakistan can hope to diminish the influences that breed extremism and instead cultivate a landscape where peace and democracy flourish. This is not just a policy challenge but a moral imperative to ensure the future stability and prosperity of the nation.

Media Role: Encourage media to play a constructive role in countering extremism by avoiding sensationalism and instead focusing on balanced and informative reporting. **Political Stability and Governance:** Promote transparent and inclusive governance. Political disenfranchisement can lead to radicalization; thus, it's crucial to involve all stakeholders in the political process. **International Cooperation:** Engage in international cooperation to tackle cross-border extremism. Sharing best practices and learning from the experiences of other nations can be beneficial (Rugar).



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