

## STRENGTHENING PAKISTAN'S COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE) STRATEGIES:TOWARD EFFECTIVE DERADICALIZATION AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

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### Abstract

*This study critically examines Pakistan's ongoing Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) measures to propose actionable strategies for effectively deradicalizing and reintegrating terrorists into mainstream society. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the roots of radicalization within Pakistan, tracing the socio-political, religious, and historical factors that have fostered extremism over time. The research evaluates existing counterterrorism (CT) strategies and deradicalization programs, identifying their limitations, particularly the overreliance on coercive, military-based approaches that have yielded short-term gains but failed to produce sustainable societal transformation.*

*Drawing upon the Saudi Arabian PRAC (Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare) model as a comparative case study, this paper highlights critical gaps in Pakistan's current framework and demonstrates how soft-power mechanisms, such as religious re-education, psychological counseling, community engagement, and socio-economic reintegration can enhance the effectiveness of its CVE initiatives. Through a qualitative comparative analysis, the study underscores the pivotal role of religious scholars, families, civil society, and educational institutions in preventing radicalization and supporting post-rehabilitation reintegration.*

*The findings reveal that a multidimensional, community-driven approach is essential to achieving lasting peace and ideological transformation. Consequently the research recommends a strategic policy shift from reactive military responses to proactive, human-centric CVE interventions that promote tolerance, coexistence, and resilience against extremist ideologies. These insights aim to inform policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking to strengthen Pakistan's national security and social harmony through sustainable deradicalization and reintegration efforts.*

**Keywords:** *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), deradicalization, reintegration, terrorism, Pakistan, PRAC model, soft power, rehabilitation, extremism*

**Introduction** Terrorism has emerged as one of the most pressing global threats of the modern era, eroding social cohesion, disrupting governance structures, and impeding socioeconomic development. It can be categorized as a product of radicalization and extremism. Whereas radicalization is the process of deviating from equilibrium thinking which can defined as agreed social and religious norms in a social environment. For instance, peaceful harmony amongst various religious factions with differing beliefs is a possible scenario of a society with equilibrium thinking. However, any deviation from this norm would result in development of religious hatred for each other and can be termed as radicalization. On the other hand, the transformation process to restore the deviated members towards the equilibrium thinking can be classified as de-radicalization. During the process of de-radicalization, the extremist and radical ideologies are countered and replaced with socially agreed norms of the society such as tolerance, harmony and co-existence. An effective deradicalization program requires participation of every individual of society including terrorists, their family members, religious scholars, educational institutions, civil society, NGOs, INGOs and members of academia (Iqbal & Salman, 2023).

Pakistan's struggle with violent extremism is a complex phenomenon shaped by decades of political upheaval, religious manipulation, and geopolitical entanglements. While the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) have succeeded in dismantling numerous terrorist networks through kinetic operations, the underlying fabric of society remains deeply infiltrated by extremist ideologies. This persistence of radical thought highlights a fundamental truth: terrorism in Pakistan is not merely a security problem—it is a societal crisis rooted in radicalization, intolerance, and ideological polarization. Addressing it, therefore, requires not just force, but foresight—a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy that couples military strength with the power of ideas, education, and community resilience.

Over the years, Pakistan has implemented various Counterterrorism (CT) and Deradicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREP) to combat extremism (Basit, 2015). However, these initiatives remain fragmented and largely dependent on coercive methods, producing temporary security but not

lasting stability. In contrast, nations such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt have adopted holistic Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) models that integrate psychological rehabilitation, religious re-education, and socio-economic reintegration to transform extremist mindsets rather than merely suppress them. Pakistan's challenge lies in evolving from a reactive counterterrorism approach to a proactive deradicalization paradigm that prevents the reproduction of extremist ideologies across generations.

The roots of Pakistan's radicalization can be traced to the military regimes of General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul-Haq, during which political repression and ideological engineering eroded democratic values and civic freedoms. Zia's policy of Islamization, compounded by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, turned Pakistan into the epicenter of a proxy jihad funded by global powers. The United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia invested billions to establish religious seminaries, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), promoting militant interpretations of Islam to mobilize fighters against the Soviets (Riedel, 2014). This state-sponsored radicalization, coupled with an unchecked proliferation of extremist narratives, sowed the seeds of long-term societal intolerance and sectarian violence.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan became a frontline ally in the U.S.-led War on Terror, suffering immense human and economic losses—over 80,000 lives and an estimated USD 120 billion (Abbasi, 2013). Yet, despite these sacrifices, extremism continues to thrive beneath the surface. The infiltration of radical ideologies into Pakistan's political discourse, educational systems, and community structures underscores the failure of force-based counterterrorism to win the “battle of ideas.”

Pakistan's current CT strategy, though effective in neutralizing militant networks, lacks the soft-power dimension necessary to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals who have succumbed to extremist ideologies. Deradicalization requires a deliberate focus on religious reformation, socio-economic empowerment, psychological rehabilitation, and post-reintegration support. Without these, the cycle of extremism will continue to regenerate. Learning from international models—particularly Saudi Arabia's PRAC (Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare) program—can provide valuable insights into building a more comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and sustainable framework for CVE in Pakistan.

This dissertation critically examines Pakistan's deradicalization initiatives and proposes evidence-based recommendations to enhance their effectiveness. By drawing lessons from comparative case studies and evaluating the role of religious scholars, families, civil society, and state institutions, the study aims to contribute to a long-term, inclusive strategy that transforms extremism into resilience and alienation into reintegration.

**Rationale:** Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts have largely relied on military operations that suppress militancy but fail to dismantle the ideological and social roots of extremism. The lack of comprehensive soft-power CVE initiatives—centered on rehabilitation, education, and reintegration—has limited the long-term success of these efforts. In contrast, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Egypt have demonstrated that sustainable deradicalization requires a holistic, community-based approach combining psychological support, religious re-education, and socio-economic empowerment.

This study seeks to reorient Pakistan's CVE strategy from a force-driven to a human-centered model, addressing radicalization at its source and promoting durable peace through effective deradicalization and social reintegration.

**Aim & Objectives of the Study:** To strengthen Pakistan's Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) framework by developing practical, evidence-based strategies for effective deradicalization and reintegration of extremists into mainstream society.

- Analyze key historical, political, and ideological drivers of radicalization in Pakistan.
- Assess performance and limitations of existing deradicalization and CVE initiatives.
- Compare Pakistan's CVE framework with successful international models, especially Saudi Arabia's PRAC strategy.
- Identify major policy and execution gaps in Pakistan's soft counterterrorism efforts.
- Recommend targeted, multi-stakeholder measures to enhance deradicalization and promote lasting social reintegration.

**Research Question:** Despite sustained military efforts, Pakistan’s counterterrorism approach has not succeeded in eradicating the ideological roots of extremism. The absence of soft CT measures, such as rehabilitation, education, and reintegration programs, continues to hinder national deradicalization efforts (Jawaid, 2020). In contrast, several Muslim-majority nations have achieved measurable success through comprehensive, non-coercive CVE frameworks. How can Pakistan improve its Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) measures to effectively deradicalize and reintegrate terrorists into mainstream society?

### Literature Review

#### Understanding the Roots of Radicalization in Pakistan

Radicalization in Pakistan is a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon influenced by an interplay of socio-economic, political, ideological, and psychological factors. Scholars consistently highlight that extremism in Pakistan does not emerge in a vacuum but within a landscape shaped by poverty, political exclusion, sectarianism, and weak governance. Jawaid (2020) identifies a range of structural causes fueling radical tendencies—poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and sectarian divides—that create fertile ground for extremist ideologies. These inequalities are further exacerbated by political alienation and the manipulation of religious narratives by militant organizations seeking legitimacy.

Khalid (2022) and Amin et al. (2023) add that underdevelopment and socio-economic marginalization in regions such as South Punjab and former FATA provide extremist groups an opportunity to exploit youth disillusionment. Many recruits are drawn not only by ideology but by promises of social belonging, justice, and material stability. These findings support the view that radicalization is deeply rooted in structural deprivation and perceived injustice.

From a psychosocial lens, Azam and Fatima (2017) emphasize that personal trauma and family dysfunction also play a pivotal role. They found that individuals exposed to neglect, childhood abuse, or parental detachment are more vulnerable to extremist recruitment. Similarly, Irshad and Khan (2025) demonstrate that emotional grievances—such as revenge, humiliation, or loss—often precede ideological radicalization. These psychological vulnerabilities are then weaponized by extremist recruiters who offer a sense of identity, meaning, and empowerment.

At the global level, Gunaratna et al. (2011) situate Pakistan’s radicalization within broader Muslim-world grievances. Conflicts in Kashmir, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq are used by radical clerics to craft a narrative of global Muslim victimhood. This transnational framing of jihadism allows extremist networks to align local struggles with global ideologies of resistance, transforming personal grievances into collective religious duty. Basit (2015) notes that this narrative has proven particularly effective among Pakistan’s disenfranchised youth who view militancy as both spiritual fulfillment and political resistance.

#### Recruitment of Radicalized Individuals by Terrorist Organizations

The recruitment of radicalized individuals has evolved dramatically in the digital era. Social media platforms, encrypted messaging apps, and online forums now function as primary spaces for indoctrination and mobilization. Kruglova (2022) argues that digital platforms have revolutionized extremist propaganda by providing anonymity, reach, and emotional appeal. Through curated content—sermons, videos, and online testimonies—terrorist groups create a virtual ecosystem where potential recruits feel a sense of belonging.

Bokhari et al. (2023) and Javed (2023) confirm that extremist narratives online exploit religious symbolism and selective victimhood stories to strengthen identity-based polarization. These online “echo chambers” suppress counter-narratives and amplify extremist messaging, particularly among youth seeking purpose or belonging. Khan and Waqar (2024) further note that Pakistan’s counter-narrative efforts remain fragmented and underfunded, failing to compete effectively with the sophistication of extremist digital outreach.

#### The Shift Toward Non-Coercive Counterterrorism Measures

Despite years of intensive military operations—such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad—Pakistan continues to face recurring waves of violent extremism. This persistence highlights the limitations of hard counterterrorism (CT) measures. Jawaid (2020) criticizes Pakistan’s overreliance on

kinetic operations, noting that these may dismantle militant networks but fail to address underlying ideological and social causes.

Iqbal and Salman (2023) recommend a more balanced approach: approximately 20% coercive and 80% non-coercive measures. Non-coercive or “soft” approaches emphasize education reform, vocational training, civic engagement, and ideological rehabilitation. These efforts focus on preventing radicalization before it manifests violently and on reintegrating those who renounce extremism. Nadeem (2023) highlights youth engagement programs, interfaith dialogue, and peace education as essential tools for fostering community resilience. However, the absence of sustained policy coordination and evaluation frameworks limits the long-term impact of such interventions in Pakistan.

### **Deradicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREP) in Pakistan**

Pakistan’s first formal deradicalization initiative, the Deradicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP), was launched in 2009 in Swat following military operations against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The program combined religious re-education, vocational training, and psychological counseling to rehabilitate surrendered militants (Azam & Fatima, 2017). Subsequent programs—such as Sabawoon, Rastoon, and Mashal—extended this model to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

However, Jawaid (2020) and Khan (2021) criticize these efforts as geographically limited, underfunded, and lacking inter-agency coordination. Many initiatives failed to establish long-term follow-up mechanisms to track reintegration outcomes. Irshad and Khan (2025) reveal that many rehabilitated individuals face social stigma and unemployment upon release, creating a risk of re-radicalization. Basit (2015) identifies additional structural obstacles—political polarization, sectarian fragmentation, and insufficient community involvement—that have collectively hindered Pakistan’s ability to institutionalize successful deradicalization mechanisms.

Despite these challenges, Pakistan’s experience with localized rehabilitation projects underscores an important lesson: deradicalization must be continuous, community-based, and supported by post-release monitoring and reintegration programs.

### **Lessons from Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Case Study**

Saudi Arabia’s Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare (PRAC) model represents one of the most successful global frameworks for countering violent extremism and offers valuable lessons for Pakistan’s evolving CVE landscape. Following a surge in domestic terrorism in the early 2000s, the Saudi government developed a comprehensive deradicalization strategy under the Ministry of Interior, designed to address both ideological and psychosocial dimensions of extremism (Boucek, 2008). This multidimensional framework emphasizes ideological re-education, psychological therapy, and social reintegration, rather than relying solely on coercive measures.

At the heart of the Saudi approach lies a holistic rehabilitation process. Moderate religious scholars work directly with detainees to correct misinterpretations of Islamic teachings, particularly concerning jihad and martyrdom (Combes, 2013). Parallel to this, psychological counseling is provided to address issues such as trauma, identity crises, and social alienation—factors often underpinning extremist behavior. The inclusion of family engagement and post-release monitoring through the “aftercare” component ensures continuous support, thereby reducing relapse into extremist networks. This integrated model underscores the Saudi belief that deradicalization requires not only intellectual correction but also emotional healing and social belonging.

Riedel (2014) attributes much of the PRAC model’s success to its multi-tiered prevention structure, which extends beyond prisons to encompass education reform, youth engagement, and community outreach. These preventive mechanisms are designed to inoculate society against radical influences by promoting critical thinking, civic values, and moderate religious understanding. Casptack (2015) praises Saudi Arabia’s program as the longest continuously running deradicalization initiative globally, citing its notably low recidivism rates among participants. However, Combes (2013) warns that the model’s heavy financial and institutional requirements—including extensive counseling infrastructure and long-term aftercare—make it difficult to replicate wholesale in developing states such as Pakistan.

Despite these constraints, several transferable principles from the Saudi experience could significantly enhance Pakistan’s counter-extremism architecture. Bhatti (2025) argues that Pakistan can

benefit from adapting psychological counseling, vocational reintegration, and religious dialogue within a coordinated, nationwide CVE framework. Integrating these soft-power components into Pakistan's deradicalization policies could shift the current emphasis from military suppression toward preventive, rehabilitative, and community-centered approaches.

Moreover, Saudi Arabia's focus on youth empowerment through sports, arts, and education provides a replicable blueprint for preventive intervention in Pakistan. Programs that channel youth energy into constructive outlets can mitigate the socio-economic frustrations that extremists exploit for recruitment. Additionally, engaging moderate religious scholars, teachers, and social workers in counter-narrative dissemination could strengthen community resilience against extremist ideologies.

Comparatively, Pakistan's counterterrorism approach remains overly reliant on hard security measures, such as military operations and intelligence-led crackdowns (Jawaid, 2020; Iqbal & Salman, 2023). While such measures have been successful in disrupting terrorist networks, they have done little to address the root causes of radicalization, such as poverty, political marginalization, and ideological manipulation. The lack of systematic deradicalization and reintegration programs, particularly outside of conflict zones like Swat and FATA, further limits the long-term impact of Pakistan's efforts (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Basit, 2015).

Therefore, adapting a context-sensitive version of the Saudi PRAC model could bridge critical gaps in Pakistan's CVE strategy. Such an approach would entail establishing institutionalized deradicalization centers under civilian oversight, ensuring inter-agency coordination, and embedding educational, psychological, and vocational interventions into national CVE policy. The Saudi experience demonstrates that ideological correction, social support, and continuous aftercare—when implemented in tandem—can significantly reduce recidivism and foster sustainable reintegration.

In conclusion, the literature highlights that while Pakistan's counter-extremism framework has traditionally been reactive and militarized, sustainable peace requires a paradigm shift toward proactive and human-centered CVE policies. Lessons from Saudi Arabia underscore the need for a balanced approach—one that combines coercive deterrence with non-coercive, community-based rehabilitation. Embracing these principles could enable Pakistan to move beyond episodic counterterrorism operations toward durable deradicalization and social reintegration, ensuring long-term national stability.

### **Institutional and Policy Gaps in Pakistan's CVE Framework**

Although Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) serves as the central coordinating body for CVE, research indicates persistent institutional fragmentation. Irshad (2025) describes Pakistan's CVE landscape as suffering from "policy drift," where symbolic religious decrees replace actionable programs. Provincial CVE centers remain under-resourced and lack standardized evaluation metrics. Furthermore, Ghalib (2022) argues that reliance on traditional tribal mechanisms (e.g., Jirgas) without modern reintegration systems limits program sustainability.

Shah and Uzair (2025) highlight another critical dimension—education. Pakistan's school curricula often reinforce sectarian narratives and militarized worldviews rather than promoting tolerance and critical thinking. Thus, curriculum reform and teacher training are indispensable for preventing ideological indoctrination. Addressing these structural and ideological gaps requires a coordinated approach that links state institutions, civil society, religious authorities, and local communities.

### **Toward an Integrated CVE and Deradicalization Strategy**

Synthesizing insights from the literature, an effective CVE strategy for Pakistan should rest on six interconnected pillars:

- **Prevention and Education:** Addressing socio-economic disparities, promoting civic values, and revising curricula to encourage pluralism.
- **Ideological Engagement:** Empowering moderate scholars to lead counter-narratives and challenge extremist interpretations.
- **Psychosocial Rehabilitation:** Providing trauma counseling, identity restoration, and family-based support.
- **Social Reintegration:** Ensuring access to employment, housing, and community acceptance post-rehabilitation.

- **Institutional Coordination:** Strengthening NACTA's role and promoting collaboration among state, religious, and civil society actors.
- **Evaluation and Sustainability:** Establishing long-term monitoring systems to measure program outcomes and reduce relapse rates.

In short, the literature reveals that Pakistan's counter-extremism efforts have long been dominated by militarized approaches with limited success in addressing ideological and psychosocial roots. Comparative insights—particularly from the Saudi model—demonstrate that sustainable deradicalization requires a balance between coercive and non-coercive measures, emphasizing education, psychological support, and community reintegration. Transitioning from reactive counterterrorism to proactive CVE remains essential for achieving lasting peace, national security, and social cohesion in Pakistan.

### Theoretical Framework

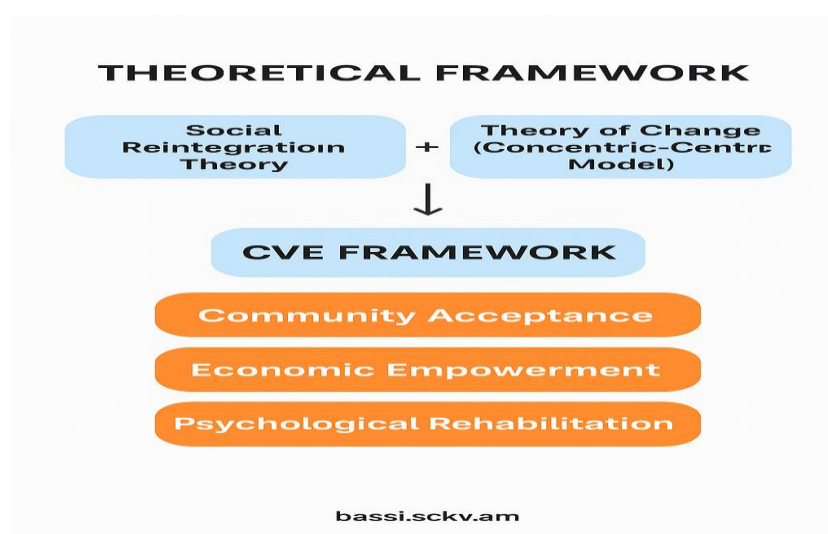
This study is grounded in Social Reintegration Theory and the Theory of Change (Concentric-Centric Model), which together explain the transformation of radicalized individuals into peaceful, law-abiding citizens. The framework underscores that deradicalization is not merely about ideological reform but about social acceptance, psychological healing, and economic empowerment.

According to Kolstø (2019), Social Reintegration Theory emphasizes the collective role of the community, family, state institutions, and civil society in facilitating the smooth reintegration of former extremists. The theory highlights three essential dimensions:

1. **Community Acceptance:** Rebuilding social trust through active interaction with family and community members, despite stigma or fear associated with the individual's past.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Providing education, vocational training, and employment opportunities to ensure financial stability and prevent re-engagement in extremist networks.
3. **Psychological Rehabilitation:** Delivering continuous counseling and mental health support to help individuals overcome trauma, guilt, and extremist conditioning.

The Theory of Change (Concentric-Centric Model) complements this by mapping the progressive transformation process from ideological disengagement to social reintegration, through targeted interventions at individual, community, and institutional levels.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens to analyze Saudi Arabia's PRAC model, which integrates social support, economic reintegration, and psychological care. This framework is particularly relevant for Pakistan, where existing deradicalization programs lack sustained community participation and aftercare mechanisms. Applying these theories can thus guide the development of holistic, sustainable, and context-sensitive CVE strategies that promote long-term peace and social cohesion.



### Research Methodology

**Research Design:** This study employs a qualitative case study approach to critically examine Pakistan's ongoing Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategies, with a specific focus on

deradicalization and social reintegration programs. The *Saudi Arabian deradicalization model* has been selected as the central case study to provide a comparative framework for identifying gaps, strengths, and transferable best practices relevant to the Pakistani context.

The rationale for adopting a case study methodology lies in its ability to explore complex, context-specific phenomena within real-life settings (Yin, 2009). Radicalization and deradicalization are multidimensional processes influenced by religious, socio-political, and cultural factors, which cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods alone. Therefore, this qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of how deradicalization strategies function across two Muslim-majority states with comparable ideological and socio-political environments.

By analyzing Saudi Arabia's comprehensive soft counterterrorism (CT) measures, including prevention, rehabilitation, and reintegration, the research aims to identify lessons applicable to strengthening Pakistan's CVE framework. The comparative analysis highlights how contextual adaptations can enhance Pakistan's current deradicalization programs, moving from a predominantly militarized CT model toward a balanced approach that emphasizes community engagement, ideological reform, and social inclusion.

**Research Approach and Rationale:** The study's *comparative case study* approach enables a critical juxtaposition of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's deradicalization experiences. The rationale for selecting Saudi Arabia as a model rests on several key similarities:

- Both countries have faced persistent challenges of religiously *motivated extremism*.
- Each has implemented *state-led deradicalization programs* with varying degrees of success.
- Both societies are *Muslim-majority nations* with religious institutions playing a central role in shaping social and ideological discourse.

These parallels make Saudi Arabia a relevant and insightful case to draw lessons from, particularly in the realm of *soft CT measures* such as rehabilitation, religious re-education, and aftercare support for former militants. The analysis of Saudi Arabia's PRAC (Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare) model provides a practical lens through which Pakistan's limited soft CT interventions can be assessed and potentially enhanced.

**Data Sources and Collection:** This research relies on *qualitative data* derived from both *primary and secondary sources* to ensure methodological rigor and analytical depth.

**Primary Data Sources** include official reports and policy documents from Pakistan's *National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA)*, *Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)*, (to take official figures, such as data shown in Chart-1) and other governmental publications that provide insights into national CVE strategies.

**Secondary Data Sources** consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference papers, documentaries, think-tank analyses, and credible online databases. These materials offer comparative and theoretical insights into deradicalization frameworks and CVE practices across different contexts.

The data collection process followed a *systematic review strategy*, ensuring the inclusion of diverse scholarly perspectives on radicalization, deradicalization, and social reintegration. The analysis also considered cross-national reports from international bodies such as the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)* and the *Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)* to situate Pakistan's CVE efforts within global best practices.

**Data Analysis:** The collected data were subjected to *thematic and comparative analysis*. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to radicalization causes, intervention models, and reintegration strategies. Comparative analysis was then used to examine key differences and similarities between Pakistan's and Saudi Arabia's deradicalization frameworks. This dual-layered analysis provided a structured understanding of:

The *ideological, social, and institutional drivers* of radicalization in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia;

The *design and implementation* of their deradicalization programs; and

The *strengths, weaknesses, and transferability* of the Saudi model to Pakistan's socio-political context.

This methodological approach ensures that recommendations emerging from the research are grounded in empirical evidence, cross-contextual learning, and practical feasibility.

**Ethical Considerations:** As this research is based on publicly available and secondary data, it does not involve direct human participation. Nevertheless, all sources have been carefully cited and credited in accordance with *APA ethical and referencing standards*. The study maintains academic integrity by ensuring objectivity, avoiding political bias, and respecting cultural and religious sensitivities surrounding the topic of violent extremism.

**Structure of the study:** The research is organized into three main sections following the introductory section:

**Section 1:** Provides an overview of the nature, causes, and evolution of radicalization and extremism in Pakistan. It critically examines Pakistan's existing deradicalization programs and the extent to which soft CT measures have been integrated into its broader CVE framework.

**Section 2:** Offers an in-depth exploration of the *Saudi Arabian deradicalization model*, tracing its evolution, structure, and implementation strategies. This chapter also presents a critical analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, focusing particularly on the PRAC strategy and its outcomes.

**Section 3:** Presents a comparative analysis of Pakistan's and Saudi Arabia's deradicalization programs. Drawing from the Saudi model's best practices, this chapter proposes policy recommendations aimed at strengthening Pakistan's CVE strategy and enhancing its deradicalization and social reintegration mechanisms.

In essence, this research adopts a *context-driven qualitative case study* to explore how lessons from Saudi Arabia's experience can inform and strengthen Pakistan's counter-extremism and deradicalization landscape. By blending analytical rigor with comparative insight, the methodology facilitates the development of evidence-based recommendations to advance Pakistan's transition from reactive counterterrorism to proactive and sustainable Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) strategies.

## Result

### Section 1: Current Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Measures and Deradicalization Programs of Pakistan

**Historical Context of Radicalization in Pakistan:** Pakistan's creation in 1947 on religious grounds made Islam central to its sociopolitical identity. However, decades of political instability, military interventions, authoritarianism, and regional conflicts notably the Afghan-Soviet war—fostered an environment conducive to extremism (Basit, 2015). General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies and U.S.-backed jihad against the Soviets catalyzed the rise of radical networks, heavily financed by external actors, such as Saudi Arabia. Religious seminaries proliferated, spreading militant ideologies that gradually embedded extremism in Pakistan's social fabric (Iqbal et al., 2019).

**Underlying Drivers of Radicalization:** Post-1989, Pakistan's society became deeply polarized due to sectarianism, weak governance, corruption, illiteracy, and poor economic conditions (Basit, 2015). Military operations, U.S. drone strikes, and global jihadist narratives further fueled resentment. Religious seminaries and social media continue to serve as breeding grounds for extremist indoctrination (Kruglova, 2022; Zahid, 2017).

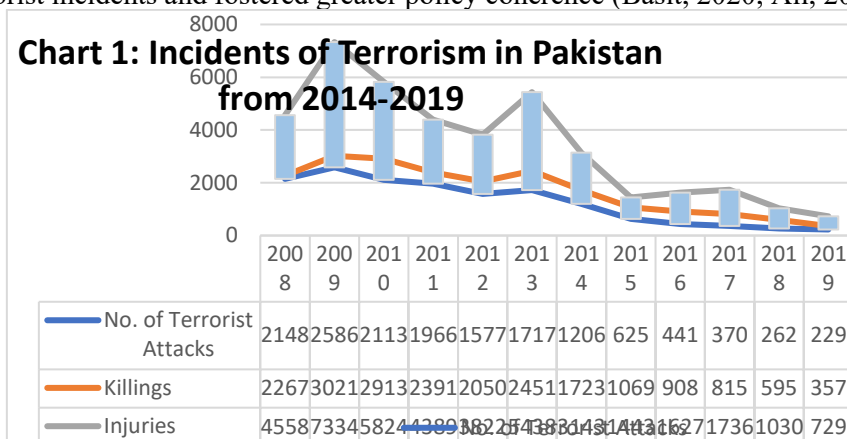
**Extent of Radicalization:** Radicalization in Pakistan manifests through religious intolerance, mob violence, and sectarian hostility. [High-profile incidents](#), such as the assassination of Governor Salman Taseer (Basit, 2015) and repeated mob lynchings of minorities (Cai & Wright, 2023) underscore the normalization of extremism. The intensity and nature of radicalization vary regionally, driven by ideological, economic, and political grievances.

**CVE Measures and Deradicalization Programs:** Pakistan's counter-extremism approach has long been militarized, with limited success in changing extremist mindsets. Following major operations in Swat and FATA, Deradicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREPs) were launched in 2009 through civil-military collaboration (Noor, 2013). Programs such as *Saboon* and *Rastoon* in Swat offered religious counseling, psychological support, formal education, and vocational training, emphasizing rehabilitation and reintegration (Basit, 2015; Azam & Fatima, 2017).

In Punjab, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) initiated a PRAC-inspired program in 2011, integrating prevention, rehabilitation, and aftercare, though it was later discontinued (Zahid, 2017). Similar efforts in Balochistan, including *Darpesh* and *Umeed-e-Nau*, aimed at reintegrating insurgents into society through counseling and vocational training (Basit, 2015).

**Formulation of Counter-Narratives:** Pakistan has struggled to develop a unified counter-narrative to extremist ideology. Initiatives, such as the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* (PEP) fatwa, endorsed by over 1,800 religious scholars, represented significant progress by declaring terrorism un-Islamic (NACTA, 2014). However, weak dissemination and limited public engagement hindered its impact (Iqbal et al., 2019).

**National Action Plan (NAP):** Following the 2014 Army Public School attack, Pakistan adopted the National Action Plan (NAP) a comprehensive CVE policy integrating security, governance, and ideological measures. NAP targeted terror financing, hate speech, madrassa regulation, and institutional strengthening through NACTA and provincial CTDs (NACTA, 2014). It contributed to a measurable decline in terrorist incidents and fostered greater policy coherence (Basit, 2020; Ali, 2023).



**Note:** Source: Data obtained from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' *Pakistan Security Reports* (2008-2019) (PIPS, 2014-2019)

The analysis of data obtained from the *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies* (PIPS, 2014–2019) reveals a substantial decline in terrorism-related incidents, killings, and injuries across Pakistan between 2008 and 2019. The year 2009 marked the peak of terrorist violence, recording 2,586 attacks, 3,021 fatalities, and 7,334 injuries, reflecting the intensity of insurgent and extremist activities during this period (Zahid, 2017). However, a consistent downward trend is evident thereafter, particularly following the introduction of Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 and the launch of major counterterrorism operations, including Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad (Basit, 2020; NACTA, 2014).

These military and policy measures effectively dismantled militant networks and disrupted their operational capacities, reducing terrorist incidents from 1,206 in 2015 to only 229 by 2019 representing a more than 90% decline within a decade. This downward trajectory demonstrates the success of Pakistan's kinetic counterterrorism measures, which significantly improved internal security conditions (Jawaid, 2020).

However, while these operations yielded notable short-term security gains, the persistence of latent radical ideologies and sporadic extremist violence underscores the need for complementary non-kinetic approaches, including deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs to consolidate peace and prevent relapse into extremism (Iqbal & Salman, 2023; Kolstø, 2019). Thus, the data highlights the importance of transitioning from a predominantly militarized response toward a comprehensive Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) framework that integrates community engagement, education, and soft power initiatives for sustainable peace and societal resilience.

#### National Internal Security Policy (NISP) and Critical Review of DREPs

In 2014, the Government of Pakistan under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif introduced the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) the country's first comprehensive framework for countering violent extremism and ensuring internal stability. NISP emphasized three strategic pillars: dialogue, deterrence, and capacity building (Ali, 2023). It sought peaceful negotiations with militant groups, strengthened the operational capacity of security institutions, and launched decisive military actions to dismantle terrorist networks.

Although initial peace talks with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) failed due to continued violence, Operation Zarb-e-Azb effectively neutralized militant strongholds in the former FATA region.

Importantly, NISP introduced the soft power dimension to Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy, focusing on preventive and rehabilitative measures previously absent in national policy.

### **Critique of Deradicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREPs)**

Despite promising beginnings, Pakistan's Deradicalization and Emancipation Programs (DREPs) have remained ad hoc, reactive, and unsustainable (Azam & Fatima, 2017). Lacking institutional continuity and nationwide expansion, these initiatives were largely post-conflict responses rather than long-term CVE strategies. Key shortcomings include:

1. **Absence of Preventive Measures:** Unlike Saudi Arabia's *PRAC model*, Pakistan's DREPs neglected public awareness campaigns, educational reforms, and cultural initiatives that foster community resilience against radicalization.
2. **Lack of Aftercare Support:** Without structured post-rehabilitation mechanisms, such as financial aid, psychosocial support, and community reintegration many participants risk recidivism.
3. **Weak Family Involvement:** The exclusion of families and community networks undermined the sustainability of reintegration outcomes.

The Paigham-e-Pakistan (PEP) initiative, endorsed by over 1,800 religious scholars, remains the most comprehensive national counter-narrative. However, its poor dissemination with limited integration into school curricula or media—has constrained its potential impact (Basit, 2015, 2020).

### **Institutional Gaps and Policy Inconsistency**

Programs such as the Punjab DREP, launched by the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in collaboration with TEVTA and Punjab Police, were among the most holistic—featuring prevention, psychological counseling, and vocational training (Basit, 2015). Yet, their discontinuation after limited implementation reflects Pakistan's reactive policy culture, where major reforms follow crises like the 2014 Army Public School (APS) attack but lack sustained execution.

To achieve meaningful deradicalization and social reintegration, Pakistan must institutionalize continuity in its CVE frameworks, ensuring that NISP, NAP, and DREP initiatives are consistently refined, adequately funded, and nationally integrated rather than reactive and episodic (Basit, 2020).

### **Section 2: Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization Program: The PRAC Strategy**

Radicalization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) emerged primarily after its involvement in the Afghan Jihad (1979–1989), when thousands of Saudi youth joined the fight against Soviet forces. Initially endorsed by the Saudi state and society, these fighters later turned against the government when Riyadh allied with the United States during the Gulf War, sparking internal ideological conflict and anti-state extremism (Casptack, 2015; Kolsto, 2019). This trajectory mirrors Pakistan's experience, where state-sponsored jihad later mutated into domestic terrorism.

A key driver of extremism in KSA was the rigid interpretation of Islam known as Wahhabism, which promoted takfiri (excommunication) ideology against Shiite and Sufi Muslims, legitimizing violence under distorted theological justifications (Casptack, 2015).

### **Evolution of Saudi Arabia's Deradicalization Efforts**

Following the 2003 Riyadh bombings, the Saudi government recognized the limitations of purely coercive counterterrorism measures and shifted toward a soft power approach. Under the leadership of Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, the Advisory Committee for Counselling and Care was established in 2004 to rehabilitate extremist offenders through religious re-education and psychosocial support (Boucek, 2008). These efforts later evolved into the Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare (PRAC) Strategy, now considered a global model for deradicalization (A. F., 2008).

### **The PRAC Framework**

#### **1. Prevention: Countering Early Radicalization**

The Prevention phase targets vulnerable individuals—especially youth—through education, civic engagement, and community programs. The Ministry of Education leads nationwide initiatives such as anti-extremism debates, curriculum reforms, and awareness campaigns highlighting the incompatibility of terrorism with Islam (Casptack, 2015). Public outreach through slogans like "*Islam Rejects Terrorism*" and online campaigns such as Tranquility counter extremist propaganda and recruitments on social media (Boucek, 2008). Family welfare support is also provided to prevent secondary radicalization among relatives of detainees.

## 2. Rehabilitation: Re-Education and Reintegration

The Rehabilitation phase operates primarily through the Mohammad bin Nayef Centre for Counselling and Advice, where detainees undergo intensive programs blending religious counselling, psychological therapy, vocational training, and recreational activities (CBS Mornings, 2014).

The program is managed by four subcommittees:

- **Religious Subcommittee:** Corrects theological misconceptions through dialogue.
- **Psychological and Social Subcommittee:** Addresses trauma, behavior, and family welfare.
- **Security Subcommittee:** Assesses risk and monitors post-release behavior.
- **Media Subcommittee:** Promotes counter-narratives and public education (Almiman, 2022).

## 3. Aftercare: Sustained Reintegration

Upon successful completion, participants receive financial assistance, employment support, housing, and even marriage aid to ensure stability and deter recidivism (Casptack, 2015). Released individuals remain under surveillance and receive continuous mentorship from counsellors and community leaders.

### Critical Assessment of PRAC

While the PRAC strategy is widely regarded as the most comprehensive deradicalization model in the Muslim world, it faces criticism for being cost-intensive and limited mainly to low-risk offenders (Williams & Lindsey, 2014). Some critics argue that the program achieves behavioral disengagement rather than complete ideological transformation. Nonetheless, PRAC's holistic approach—combining religious, psychological, and socioeconomic interventions—has significantly reduced recidivism and inspired similar programs in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Egypt (Boucek, 2008).

The Tranquility Campaign further distinguishes PRAC by targeting digital radicalization an increasingly vital front in modern counterextremism (Casptack, 2015). Despite its limitations, PRAC demonstrates how soft counterterrorism tools, when integrated with state authority and religious legitimacy, can yield sustainable deradicalization and reintegration outcomes.

### Section 3: Comparative Analysis: PRAC Strategy of Saudi Arabia and DREP of Pakistan

Both Saudi Arabia's PRAC strategy and Pakistan's DREP aim to counter terrorism and extremism; however, their scope and depth differ significantly. The PRAC model adopts a comprehensive and holistic framework, addressing prevention, rehabilitation, and aftercare. It targets not only detainees but also at-risk individuals through religious re-education, psychological counselling, and social reintegration with family support (Boucek, 2008). In contrast, Pakistan's DREP is limited to convicted militants and emphasizes vocational training over ideological reform. The absence of preventive and aftercare components narrows its long-term impact (Zahid, 2017).

- **Participation and Implementation:** In Saudi Arabia, participation is largely mandatory for detainees except for hardcore extremists, while in Pakistan, state authorities select participants without assessing their willingness or readiness for change. This lack of voluntary commitment weakens rehabilitation outcomes (Noor, 2013).
- **Success and Impact:** Saudi Arabia's PRAC program has achieved measurable success, with recidivism rates as low as 2–3% among 3,200 participants (Casptack, 2015). Its effectiveness is strongest among minor offenders, while hardcore militants remain resistant. Pakistan's DREP, though initially effective in Swat—rehabilitating around 2,500 individuals, failed to expand due to financial and administrative limitations. The program's short-term, localized impact and absence of monitoring mechanisms hinder sustainability.
- **Reactive vs. Proactive Approach:** PRAC represents a proactive, long-term strategy, integrating prevention, education, and social reintegration. Conversely, DREP is reactive, launched primarily after conflict or crisis, without institutional continuity or preventive design (Basit, 2015).
- **Cultural and Religious Context:** Saudi Arabia's homogeneous society allows for a unified religious approach to deradicalization. Pakistan's sectarian and cultural diversity demands tailored strategies addressing varied extremist ideologies across regions, which DREP currently lacks (Zahid, 2017).

- **Prevention and Community Engagement:** PRAC invests heavily in youth engagement, education reforms, sports, and media campaigns to deter radicalization. Pakistan lacks such proactive initiatives due to limited funding and institutional neglect, leaving youth vulnerable to extremist narratives (Boucek, 2008).
- **Aftercare and Reintegration:** The aftercare component is a defining feature of PRAC, providing financial, social, and emotional support to facilitate reintegration and prevent recidivism. Pakistan's DREP lacks any structured aftercare system due to resource constraints and scale of radicalization (Casptack, 2015).
- **Target Population and Customization:** PRAC targets a broad audience from convicted militants to potential recruits and religious influencers. DREP, by contrast, remains confined to post-conflict detainees, ignoring broader radical tendencies within society (Azam & Fatima, 2017). Moreover, Pakistan's one-size-fits-all approach fails to address individual drivers of radicalization, unlike the individualized frameworks seen in KSA and Europe (Jawaid, 2020).

### Lessons and Recommendations for Pakistan

The comparative analysis between Saudi Arabia's Prevention, Rehabilitation, and Aftercare (PRAC) model and Pakistan's Deradicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP) highlights critical lessons for strengthening Pakistan's Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy. Saudi Arabia's success stems from a proactive, multidimensional approach combining ideological re-education, psychosocial therapy, and community reintegration (Boucek, 2008; Combes, 2013). Conversely, Pakistan's current framework remains fragmented, reactive, and overly reliant on military interventions (Jawaid, 2020; Basit, 2015). The following recommendations outline actionable steps to improve Pakistan's deradicalization and reintegration mechanisms based on these insights.

#### 1. Adopt PRAC-style Community Outreach and Education Programs

Pakistan should establish community-centered prevention programs modeled after Saudi Arabia's PRAC framework, focusing on early detection and intervention among vulnerable youth populations. These programs should engage teachers, social workers, and local leaders to identify early signs of radicalization and offer educational workshops promoting critical thinking, religious tolerance, and civic responsibility. Structured youth initiatives—such as mentorship schemes, sports leagues, and arts programs—can channel youthful energy toward constructive social engagement. As evidenced in Saudi Arabia, such community outreach not only prevents extremist recruitment but also builds long-term societal resilience (Riedel, 2014; Bhatti, 2025).

#### 2. Launch a Digital CVE Campaign Modeled on Saudi Arabia's "Tranquility" Initiative

In the digital era, online radicalization has emerged as a major driver of extremism (Kruglova, 2022). Pakistan should therefore initiate a national digital CVE campaign, inspired by Saudi Arabia's Tranquility Initiative, to counter extremist narratives across social media platforms. This campaign could employ digital influencers, moderate religious scholars, and youth ambassadors to produce counter-narrative content highlighting peace, empathy, and interfaith harmony. Collaborating with major technology firms to flag extremist content and promote verified counter-messaging can further reduce the reach of online propaganda. This digital resilience strategy must be embedded within Pakistan's broader CVE policy framework.

#### 3. Strengthen Partnerships with NGOs, Religious Scholars, and Media

A multi-stakeholder approach is essential for the success of deradicalization and reintegration programs. The government should strengthen coordination with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), moderate religious scholars, and media outlets to amplify moderate Islamic discourse and promote community resilience (Basit, 2015). Religious leaders can play a transformative role in dispelling extremist interpretations of jihad, while media campaigns can normalize peace-oriented narratives. Establishing joint task forces and public-private partnerships can enhance program reach and credibility, ensuring community ownership of CVE efforts.

#### 4. Integrate Family Counseling and Support Mechanisms into DREP

Deradicalization is not solely an individual process; it must involve familial and social reintegration. Incorporating family counseling and post-release support within Pakistan's DREP can

help rebuild social bonds, address emotional trauma, and reduce recidivism (Noor, 2013). Saudi Arabia's PRAC model demonstrates that involving families in rehabilitation—through counseling sessions, visitation rights, and social support—strengthens post-program adjustment. Establishing family liaison units and community aftercare networks could bridge the gap between deradicalized individuals and mainstream society, preventing social alienation and relapse into extremist groups.

### **5. Improve Prison Conditions and Expedite Judicial Processes**

Prisons in Pakistan have become breeding grounds for further radicalization due to overcrowding, poor rehabilitation facilities, and prolonged detentions (Basit, 2015). Reforming the penitentiary system is therefore vital. The government should establish segregated rehabilitation centers for extremist detainees, offering counseling, education, and vocational training rather than punitive isolation. Expediting judicial processes and ensuring transparent trials would further reduce resentment and prevent ideological exploitation by extremist recruiters within prisons. Adopting these reforms aligns with PRAC's principle of treating radicalized individuals as rehabilitatable subjects rather than permanent threats.

### **6. Enforce Consistent Proscription of Extremist Organizations**

While Pakistan has banned several extremist groups, inconsistent enforcement of anti-extremism laws has allowed rebranded organizations like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to reemerge under new identities (Basit, 2020). The state must ensure strict and uniform implementation of proscription laws, accompanied by financial monitoring, social media regulation, and legal accountability. Effective enforcement would not only deter recruitment but also reinforce public trust in the rule of law. Transparency in enforcement decisions can also mitigate perceptions of political bias, which extremists often exploit to legitimize their cause.

### **7. Establish a Unified National Stance on Jihad and Extremism**

Ambiguity in religious discourse has perpetuated confusion around the concept of jihad in Pakistan's sociopolitical narrative. To counter this, policymakers, scholars, and clerics must collaborate to develop a clear, unified national stance on jihad and extremism consistent with Islamic teachings on peace, justice, and coexistence (Iqbal & Salman, 2023). This doctrinal clarity should be integrated into sermons, school curricula, and national policy frameworks. Such a unified stance would lend ideological legitimacy to deradicalization programs and counter extremist narratives that misuse religious concepts for political or violent ends.

### **8. Institutionalize and Disseminate "Paigham-e-Pakistan" Nationwide**

The Paigham-e-Pakistan fatwa, endorsed by over 1,800 religious scholars, offers a strong theological foundation for rejecting extremism and promoting harmony. However, its limited dissemination has constrained its potential impact (Winter, 2015). Institutionalizing Paigham-e-Pakistan across educational curricula, media platforms, and mosques could mainstream its message of peace and tolerance. Public awareness campaigns, interfaith dialogues, and educational integration would reinforce a national narrative of unity and pluralism—complementing the ideological correction and prevention components of a PRAC-inspired CVE model.

Saudi Arabia's PRAC framework offers Pakistan a tested, structured, and preventive model for deradicalization and social reintegration. By combining soft-power tools—education, counseling, community engagement, and aftercare—with robust legal and institutional reforms, Pakistan can transition from a reactive counterterrorism stance to a proactive CVE strategy. The success of this transition depends on political will, sustained funding, and inter-agency coordination. Adopting a contextually adapted version of PRAC could transform Pakistan's fragmented initiatives into a coherent, nationally integrated system capable of fostering enduring peace, stability, and social cohesion.

## **Discussion**

This study's comparative analysis confirms a recurrent theme in the literature: deradicalization succeeds when states pair coercive measures with sustained, multi-dimensional soft interventions (Boucek, 2008; Iqbal & Salman, 2023). Saudi Arabia's PRAC model demonstrates that an integrated package — prevention, rehabilitation and aftercare — reduces recidivism among low- to medium-risk offenders and protects vulnerable populations through proactive outreach (Casptack, 2015; Boucek, 2008). Pakistan's DREPs, by contrast, have largely been reactive, geographically limited, and short-

lived, producing localized gains but failing to produce durable societal change (Azam & Fatima, 2017; Noor, 2013; Zahid, 2017).

### Interpretation of Key Findings

First, the scope of PRAC — addressing at-risk youth, families, clerics, prisoners, and online audiences — contrasts sharply with Pakistan’s narrower focus on detained militants. This difference matters: prevention and aftercare close the “leakage” through which new recruits and recidivists emerge (Combes, 2013; Boucek, 2008). Second, PRAC’s multidisciplinary design (religious scholars + psychologists + social workers + security oversight) mirrors best-practice recommendations in CVE scholarship and contributes to lower recidivism rates (Williams & Lindsey, 2014). Pakistan’s programs often lack that interdisciplinary integration and continuous monitoring (Basit, 2015; Jawaid, 2020).

Third, the political and social context conditions program transferability. Saudi Arabia’s religious authority and centralized resources facilitate nationwide curricula reform, clerical engagement, and family support packages — capacities Pakistan struggles to match due to political fragmentation, sectarian diversity, and resource constraints (Kolstø, 2019; Basit, 2015). As Kruglova (2022) and others have shown, the internet further complicates recruitment dynamics; Pakistan’s weaker digital counter-messaging leaves youth exposed to transnational narratives (Kruglova, 2022).

### Alignment with Existing Research

The findings corroborate prior analyses arguing that hard power alone is insufficient and can be counterproductive without complementary soft measures (Jawaid, 2020; Iqbal & Salman, 2023). They also validate Boucek’s (2008) conclusion that effective deradicalization must be context-sensitive but comprehensive, combining theological correction, psychosocial care, vocational opportunity, family engagement, and post-release monitoring. Pakistan’s NAP and NISP represent important policy advances (NACTA, 2014; Ali, 2023), but their inconsistent implementation supports Basit’s (2020) observation that policy discontinuity undermines long-term CVE outcomes.

**Policy Implications:** Following are the possible implications based on this research:

1. Pakistan should scale school-based curricula reforms, youth engagement activities, and community outreach to protect the most vulnerable (Combes, 2013).
2. Establish counseling centers with religious scholars, psychologists, and social workers—paired with standardized risk assessment and aftercare planning (Boucek, 2008; Williams & Lindsey, 2014).
3. Family support and economic assistance reduce recidivism and are low-cost multipliers of program success (Noor, 2013; Azam & Fatima, 2017).
4. Institutionalize and widely disseminate Paigham-e-Pakistan through curricula and media campaigns (NACTA, 2014; Iqbal et al., 2019).
5. Launch an online counter-radicalization campaign modeled on Saudi “Tranquility” to reclaim cyberspace (Casptack, 2015; Kruglova, 2022).

**Limitations:** This analysis relies mainly on secondary and open-source material and comparative case interpretation; empirical validation (e.g., longitudinal recidivism tracking or participant interviews) is limited. Also, Saudi PRAC’s resource intensity presents realistic constraints for Pakistan’s replication without phased adaptation and international support (Casptack, 2015).

**Future Research:** Empirical evaluation of pilot PRAC-inspired initiatives in Pakistan (e.g., a provincial aftercare pilot, a school curriculum intervention, or a digital counter-messaging campaign) would provide evidence on scalability and cultural fit. Longitudinal studies tracking recidivism and social outcomes of rehabilitated individuals would strengthen policy design.

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