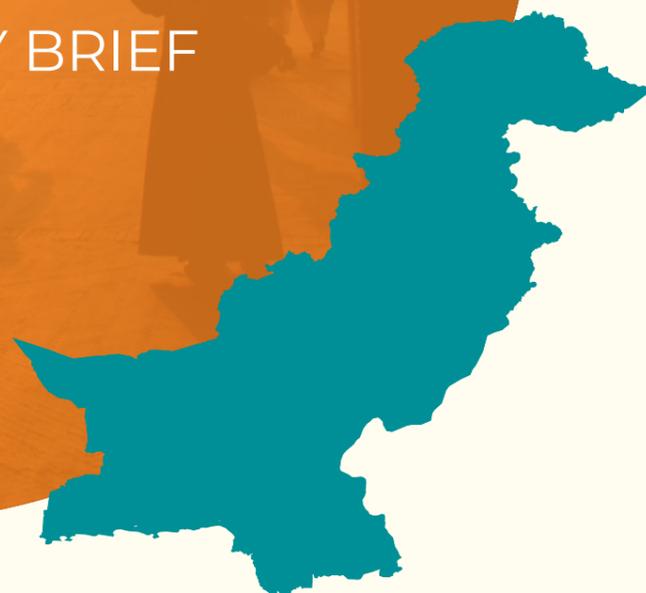
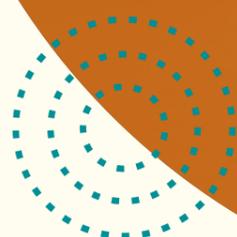
A large circular orange graphic containing a blurred photograph of a busy street scene in Pakistan, with people walking and buildings in the background.

The Status of Youth-Led PVE Efforts in Pakistan

COUNTRY LEVEL POLICY BRIEF



AMPLIFYING THE LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL YOUTH (ALLY)
IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTH ASIA



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Intended Audience and Overview

This policy brief is intended for national level policymakers in the Government of Pakistan. It may also be of interest to local elected officials, police, and other security personnel engaged in preventing violent extremism (PVE) activities.

This brief explores the underlying reasons for violent extremism (VE) in Pakistan, and recommends practices and policies to better prevent the phenomenon. The study, which resulted in this brief's policy recommendations, aimed to amplify the voices of young peacebuilders in Pakistan by advancing their views in the policy recommendations. Their experiences provide valuable data, which will help policymakers, NGOs, INGOs, and other stakeholders better understand the India VE context and hopefully implement the suggested policy changes accordingly.

Pakistan has a long history of cultural diversity but has also experienced conflict and tension between different actors. Economic and political instability and the Covid-19 pandemic have contributed to the precarious situation in Pakistan. This policy brief introduces lessons learned and best practices in order to achieve sustainable peace in Pakistan. For instance, the policy brief will review how mishandling of funding, current education curricula, lack of psychosocial support, and relevant policies could be improved or transformed to help Pakistan with its ongoing commitment to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Additionally, as the efforts of the youth in the peacebuilding field often lack support, and instead, the patriarchal structures are more prominent in Pakistan, this policy brief will illustrate the benefits of youth participation and raising awareness through campaigns and events for a pluralistic, diverse, and peaceful society



This brief provides a concise review of findings and policy recommendations related to strengthening the youth peacebuilding sector in Pakistan, as a mechanism for enhancing and broadening PVE activities throughout the country. First, it introduces concepts related to violent extremism in the context of Pakistan. Second, it explains the Participatory Action Research approach used in the base study, particularly its crucial role in illustrating the current situation through the perspectives of peacebuilders. Third, it explores the key level findings. The reader will learn the push and pull factors to VE and, on the other hand, the previous and current initiatives to prevent violent extremism in Pakistan. Together these factors provide a comprehensive picture of the peacebuilding work in Pakistan, and what could be done to improve and to support this work. Finally, this brief concludes with the recommendations that were informed by the discoveries presented here.



Key Terms: Violent Extremism, Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism, and Peacebuilding

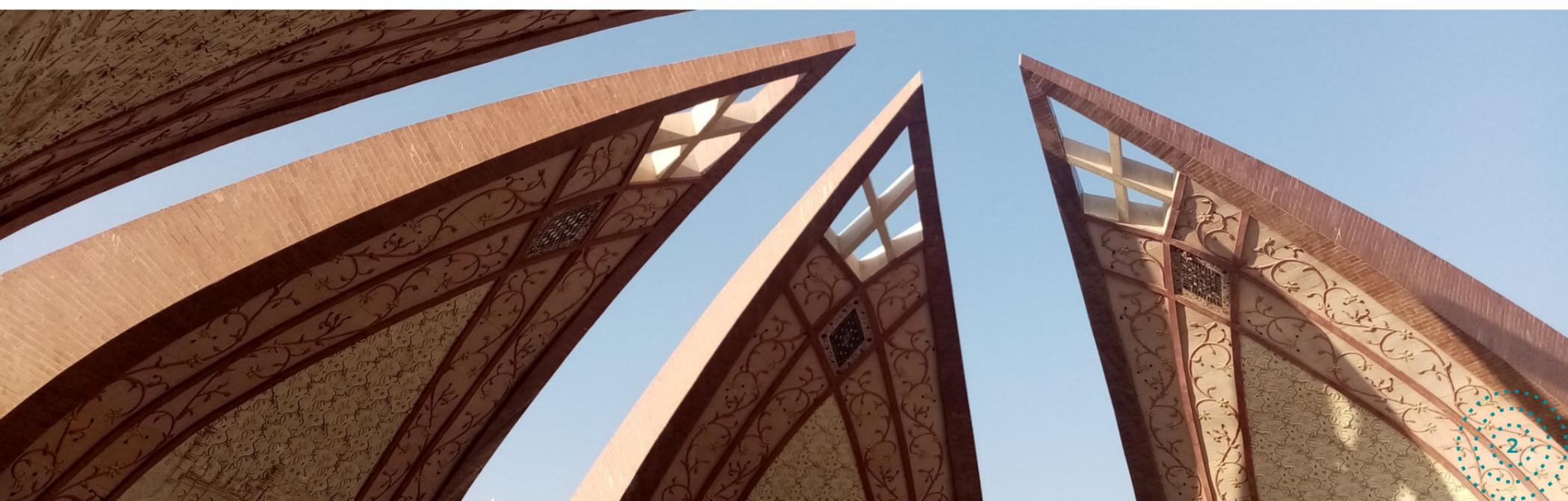
To contextualize Violent Extremism (VE) in South Asia, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of how these concepts are understood and defined on the global stage. By and large, VE and related concepts are Western in origin and perspective, originating in the United States (US) and Europe (Ilyas 2021).

While the core premises of these ideas have existed for decades, the 9/11/2001 attacks on the United States saw the US and many other Western countries invest heavily in stopping global terror threats. This period saw the concept of VE further defined and world-wide efforts to counter VE operationalized. For example, the US's Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) defines VE as the "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals" (2021). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) offers a definition of "promoting views which foment and incite violence in furtherance of particular beliefs, and foster hatred which might lead to inter-community violence" (2016). Frazer and Nünlist note that VE as a term emerged in the US initially in response to criticism of the generalist term "terrorism" to distinguish between violence as a means of spreading fear and violence as a tool for achieving political goals (2015).

In the wake of 9/11/2001, there were rapid response actions globally that relied centrally on police, military, and other covert security agencies. Despite extraordinary levels of spending and global cooperation, a decade later, serious critiques of this approach emerged. The discourse of countering violent extremism (CVE) arose as a more holistic response that recognized that structural causes of VE must also be tackled, including intolerance, government failure, and political, economic, and social marginalization (Frazer and Nünlist 2015). There are few precise definitions that distinguish between CVE and PVE.

CVE, despite having similar aims, remains a project of states, bureaucracies, and government actors. PVE, however, is typically understood as a bottom-up approach, that includes more local and civil society actors working on the ground to interrupt the process of radicalizing narratives and discourses which promote VE (UNDP 2016). PVE is an "all of society" approach (Ki-moon 2016) that engages local actors, such as religious leaders on the ground, to interrupt and challenge narratives shared at the local level to radicalize and recruit people—particularly young people—into extremist groups. Ilyas sees PVE as part of a broader movement to "decolonize" what he calls the "terrorism industry"; he argues that the field needs more localized/contextualized definitions, framings, methods, and knowledge, rather than ideas which have been imported from the West (2021).

While peacebuilding itself is a broadly defining concept, the UN emphasizes the role of local and "indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution" (2010). Youth-led peacebuilding exemplifies this focus on local capacity and action. Youth Peacebuilders (YPBs) seek to mediate conflicts, misunderstandings, and misinformation at the community level, facilitating activities which build dialogue and deeper understanding between groups with perceived differences and long-standing conflicts/tensions.



The Research Approach

The findings and recommendations contained in this brief were produced through the ALLY project, which seeks to amplify youth voices and actions dedicated to PVE in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The project aims to increase the knowledge of the push and pull factors, enhance the multidimensional capacity and strategies of youth leaders, as well as strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships to prevent VE in South Asia.

The aim of this study include:

- Highlight the experiences and perspective of YPBs in South Asia.
- Document the factors behind youth engagement with regional violent extremist discourses.
- Examine youth-led innovative approaches to PVE in South Asia.
- Analyze impacts of youth-led initiatives and constructive narratives on individuals, communities, and institutions across South Asia.
- Contribute to an increasingly evidence-based approach to policies and programs related to PVE by deepening the existing knowledge-base of youth-led peacebuilding.

This research was conducted using an alternative methodological approach known as participatory action research (PAR). PAR focuses on collaborative, bottom-up knowledge production with community members and other stakeholders who possess the daily, lived experience of the issues at hand. The PAR approach necessitated that experienced YPBs comprise the core of the research team. Eight YPBs were chosen to form the core research team, with two researchers from each country, including two YPBs from Pakistan. The researchers completed eight weeks of research training in participatory research methods. During this time, each team collected publications, newspapers articles, video clips, and other media documenting VE and PVE activities in Pakistan. The team of researchers also reviewed several policies, reports, articles, and research papers to develop a holistic understanding of the Youth Peace and Security Sector (YPS) sector. The YPS discourse originated with the UN's Security Council Resolution 2250 (UN 2015). UNSCR2250 calls on governments to recognize the role of youth in peacebuilding and PVE activities and to actively support and enhance the opportunities for youth to engage in these activities.

The ALLY project research team collected data for YPBs in Pakistan to better understand the current state of the YPS sector and to produce recommendations for strengthening the sector so that YPBs can contribute more extensively and effectively to PVE activities and to community level peacebuilding as well. The youth researchers in Pakistan surveyed and interviewed 20 YPBs – 9 women, 10 men and 1 non-binary – to develop an in-depth understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and limitations faced by YPBs across Pakistan. The research specifically targeted early career peacebuilders, those under thirty years of age with work articulated as peacebuilding and PVE.

Additionally, another five non-youth stakeholders were also interviewed, all of whom are actively engaged with the youth peacebuilding sector in Pakistan. Such stakeholders include religious leaders, government officials, parents, journalists, civil society leaders, police officers, and senior peacebuilders, among others. ernment officials, parents, journalists, civil society leaders, police officers, and senior peacebuilders, among others.

Summary of Key Country-Level Findings

Peacebuilder' Perception of VE in Pakistan

Years after the start of the US-led “War on Terror”, Pakistani youth are familiar with the societal cost of extremism, whether it be in their own country or a neighboring one. YPBs refuse to accept these conditions and want to work to change their present and future by promoting tolerance and peace. For this research, when asked on a scale of one to ten (ten being high and one being low), “what is the level of risk of radicalization for members of the communities you work with?”, all the interviewed YPBs perceived the risk of radicalization to be high (six or above). On a scale of one to five (five being greatly increased and one being less increased), YPBs were asked “has the risk of radicalization increased or decreased over the past five years in your view?”, all the interviewed YPBs perceived the level of radicalization to be increasing (3 or above). Non-youth stakeholders interviewed for the research expressed similar views regarding the state of VE.

Peacebuilders are concerned about the growing violence and extremism in society and are troubled that extremism goes generally unacknowledged at the national level. Different efforts at national and local levels focus on counter terrorism. These counter terrorism policies, strict actions, and measures, however, only stop the direct violence. Political instability and economic conditions in Pakistan during and following the “War on Terror” created disparities, grievances, and social polarization. Religious extremism has not only reduced safe spaces but also created intolerance and disharmony among civilians on a larger scale.

VE has received attention at the national level as a serious concern, yet it requires more focus and policy planning than it currently receives. Though young people are the main focus of PVE initiatives, they are largely disregarded as an important part of the process. In urban areas, YPBs have more opportunities for education, awareness, and exposure. In rural areas, youth – girls in particular – are exposed to fewer opportunities. Most YPBs and stakeholders interviewed believe mainstream religious institutions must upgrade and modernize to fill the gap between religious and conventional education systems. They also thought misinterpretation of religious content, as well as religious and political hate speech (through social media) are making society increasingly exclusive.

All respondents acknowledged the efforts and resilience of YPBs and seem very hopeful. Respondents believe that YPBs need to build capacity to improve their efficacy and impact. Respondents also expressed concerns regarding community trust and support during initial stages of PVE initiatives. Though YPB use bottom-up approaches, they are also eager to collaborate with government institutions and other organizations to enhance their efficiency and to create a larger impact in society.

Push, Pull, and Other Factors Contributing to Violent Extremism

One of Pakistan’s most at-risk demographics is the country’s youth. Faced with a lack of opportunities to give back to their communities, or the skills to contribute to decision-making within their communities, Pakistan’s youth provides a fertile territory for VE groups to exploit and conduct their recruitment. With various communities and ethnicities in Pakistan often living in isolated enclaves, VE groups perpetuate divisive narratives of hate and foment discord amongst the youth. The problem of youth is to be identified and able to express themselves. It is also affirmation in the puberty age that they are entitled to feel this way and that they are worthy. Therefore, their energy should be channeled into positive things to express their feelings – either through sports or creative arts. The core challenge is the wrong use of skills and knowledge, which is due to the lack of social activities in society. Once their abilities are acknowledged and they have a critical perspective, they will not succumb to the extremist tendencies and rebellion for the sake of joining a community or a safe-space. These issues can be well addressed by setting good examples, taking youth in the right direction, and providing avenues for the productive use of skills and knowledge.



Religious Misinterpretation and Manipulation

Religious fragmentation and misunderstandings of religion have given rise to extremism. Extremists, in turn, give rise to polarization within society. Extremist views are mostly due to misinterpretations and manipulations of religious teachings based on poor education and lack of awareness at the individual level, and/or non-peaceful interpretations of religious text. At a group level, extremism is often due to radical agendas, support of violent actions, and authoritarian leadership.

Unchecked religious misinterpretations also became part of common narratives. These common narratives promote hate towards other sects, religions, and groups. Religious accusations are often used for the sake of political or personal gain. Sectarian differences may be used to create unrest in society just like ethnic and linguistic differences. Mob lynchings, for example, have occurred in Pakistan based on hateful interpretations of religious texts (Al Jazeera 2019).

Education and Schools

There are three school systems in Pakistan—public schools, private schools, and Islamic religious schools (otherwise known as madrasas). Their different curricula create unequal opportunities for students and encourage intolerance and narrow worldviews. Textbooks are also problematic, as they may include hate speech and inspire prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination towards women, religious minorities, as well as other ethnicities or nations (USCIRF 2016). There are not enough narratives of peace, tolerance, and harmony, nor civic education and comparative religion in school curricula. These deficiencies in education create gaps in society and a lack of opportunity. Rural areas have less opportunities in civic education than urban centers. Recently, the government adopted an initiative to revise and develop a single national curriculum, but it has yet to be implemented.

Social Media

Social media plays a big role in spreading hate speech, intolerance, conspiracies, false news, and unchecked religious material. There are innumerable cases in which individuals spread hate and hurt others through misinformation and the manipulation of incidents and facts (Anthony and Hussain 2018). Extremist organizations often build and spread extremist narratives through social media platforms.

Socio cultural, political and economic factors

Patriarchal structures, gender inequality, discrimination, caste discrimination, and peer pressure are just some of the social factors behind the extremism. Exclusion based on social marginalization, injustice, and bureaucracy give way to identity crises, rampant corruption, human rights violations, extremism, and social unrest. Women and other marginalized groups experience many barriers. Religious minorities are largely excluded and overlooked, which can exacerbate disparities and grievances. Individuals with disabilities are often patronized or discouraged from participating in social, economic and political life. Poverty not only deprives individuals from basic necessities like food, shelter, education and health care but can also lead to social problems including exclusion, mistrust, hopelessness, chaos, apathy, and sense of deprivation.

Youth Peacebuilding Sector Analysis

The peacebuilding sector is relatively new to Pakistan. Youth peacebuilding, in particular, only started about seventeen years ago, following the Afghan war, when border areas of federally administered tribal areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) were greatly impacted. Initially, peacebuilding was limited to CVE strategies led by government departments in conflict zones. Later CSOs expanded PVE to other areas and garnered awareness, especially among young people. Religious harmony, gender rights, and tolerance were the main areas of focus.

Youth-led peacebuilding is comprised of a number of individual YPBs who work at small scales. YPBs work on immediate pressing issues with limited resources or community support. In conflict-affected areas, individuals personally affected by trauma (such as loss or displacement) often undertook initiatives for community rehabilitation. Minority youth who have suffered heinous acts by fundamentalists may advocate for minority rights or work to create tolerance and harmony.

In other areas, students may form youth groups to address pressing social issues and garner community support, small grants, or seed funding for local projects. Such work is concentrated in urban areas and relies heavily on seed funding and sponsorship by local communities and organizations. The research identified some youth-led initiatives which were able to register as NGOs and scale to different areas. Other small organizations have been founded solely on the personal motivation of local YPBs. However, the government's strict measures against CSOs limit YPBs' efficacy and progress as they have not been able to get international funds and support until recently.

There are contextual and regional differences in peacebuilding in Pakistan. Pakistan is an agriculturally centered country, with about 63 percent of its population living in rural areas. Such communities are often less developed than urban counterparts in basic facilities including health, education, and peacebuilding. In urban areas, education, awareness, and exposure initiatives help build conducive environments for social and peacebuilding work. Secular communities are more inclined to work on social issues like human rights and gender equality. On the other side of the spectrum, followers of fundamentalist religious views are less accepting to PVE and peacebuilding work, considering initiatives as part of a suspicious foreign agenda. YPBs have observed more female participation in peacebuilding work in urban areas, but women everywhere face many challenges for this work at home and society level.

Primary Motivations

Young people who experienced injustices, personal traumas in conflict zones or minority-based violence can be drawn to peacebuilding and development sectors, starting initiatives in their own capacities.

Peacebuilding seeks to address the underlying causes of conflicts and help people resolve differences. In Pakistan, CSOs play a very important role in this regard. They not only highlight and advocate for social issues, but also engage young people in peacebuilding work. After the ban on student societies in the 1980s – ostensibly because of extreme politicization which resulted in violence (Shah 2015) – there were no platforms for youth participation, so CSOs filled this gap and provided forums to raise voices and engage young minds in development work. Civil society has raised awareness among youth and capacitated them to counter VE issues in their respective domains and communities. Additionally, Pakistan has a culture of voluntary and philanthropic work which keeps youth engaged in positive platforms.

In urban areas, better facilities and scholarship opportunities help open the door to higher education for more people. In addition, international scholarship and cultural exchange programs provide opportunities and exposure to youth on working towards peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

Primary Impacts and Examples

Most YPBs and youth groups center their peacebuilding efforts on capacity building. Dialogues, advocacy workshops, and social awareness campaigns are also common peacebuilding initiatives in Pakistan. Social media campaigns often attract government attention and inspire policy interventions on human rights and gender-based violence.

Local Level: Young people, especially students and university youth groups, work to counter hateful narratives and prevent violent extremism in society. They use art, music, theater, sports, literature, rallies, candlelight vigils, and community service towards underserved communities and for interfaith harmony. YPBs also create opportunities for fellow youth through capacity building and awareness campaigns. Some examples include:

- **Give Peace a chance:** A group of students from Azad Jammu and Kashmir collaborated with another group from South Punjab, using cricket as a tool to unite the two very diverse groups. With the technical and financial support of Pakistan Youth Change Advocates, qualifying cricket matches were held regionally in the city of Multan and Muzaffarabad between different teams belonging to both madrasas and universities.
- **A Theater on Peaceful Co-Existence:** Students from the University of Karachi collaborated with a local theater group called “Team Khwab” to write and produce a play that educated people on topics such as peaceful co-existence and the benefits of mutual cooperation.
- **A Documentary on Sufi Mystics, Preserving Temple:** Students from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan produced a unique documentary titled “Tu Bhi Shams, Main Bhi Shams” (We are all light). The film highlighted the role of Sufi mystics in the promotion of peace and tolerance in Multan. The documentary featured both Shia and Sunni scholars and reached more than two-hundred-fifty community members through various screenings around Multan. Following the screenings, audiences showed visible changes in attitudes and behaviors towards peace-building and interfaith co-existence.
- **Youth Creative Expression Fest:** Through this festival, two hundred people were engaged in different activities, mushairas, debates, and musical programs. Renowned authors, poets, artists, musicians, and cultural activists joined from across the country. Youth cultural associations, literary organizations, and music academies shared their work, stories, and ideas. Folklorists, story tellers, musicians of traditional and modern instruments, and theater groups performed.
- **Paint to Peace:** A project in the Mariabad area of Quetta, Pakistan spread the message of peace through painting homes in the color white.
- **We are the Answer:** Youth interested in arts, literature, or poetry were invited to participate in various three- or five-day workshops in Quetta, Loralai, and Sibi. Participants were asked to write and reflect on social issues (i.e., extremism, violence, gender, human rights) and then propose solutions (i.e., tolerance, acceptance, harmony). Their reflections were shared on social media. Participating youth were then encouraged to return to their schools and colleges and inspire deeper reflection. Thus, peace became a topic to discuss and debate in local schools.

National Level: YPBs not only worked locally within indigenous societies, but also worked to create national forums to include young voices in decision making. Some notable capacity building, training, and exposure initiatives are as follows:

- **Emerging Policy Institute:** A youth-led think tank devoted to providing policy inputs to decision makers through research and analysis.
- **The Dayspring:** Pakistan’s first youth-centric Audit Bureau of Circulation-certified newspaper, The Dayspring highlights youth achievements and their problems, while instilling pluralism, tolerance, and optimism. The paper is published every two weeks from Islamabad. The Dayspring also builds capacity for other young journalists, writers, and change makers.
- **Bolo Jawan:** Pakistan’s first students-led citizens’ news portal launched by Pakistan Youth Change Advocates, Bolo Jawan is a platform on which young people from across the country can share information with a larger national and international audience. It serves as a citizen-led watchdog for mainstream media.
- **Salamti Fellowship:** The Shoor Foundation offers a fully funded tech-free residential fellowship program for peace seekers and peacebuilders from all around Pakistan. Over the course of a week, peacebuilding specialists and gurus train selected participants through exercises, interactive sessions, and workshops.
- **Peace Club:** Youth learn and reflect on peace while networking and collaborating with other people, groups, and cultures. Peace Club helps connect and organize youth communities interested in peace and turn commitment and peace ideas into action.

Regional Level: YPBs also mobilize at the regional level. Some notable capacity building, training, and exposure initiatives are as follows:

- **Pak Afghan Youth Forum:** The Pak Afghan Youth Forum is an initiative to address the issues of public diplomacy, lobbying, cultural exchanges, education, health, and Afghan refugees. The forum consists of individuals and organizations from both Afghanistan and Pakistan.



- **Markhor by Youth Impact:** Pakistan's premium wilderness youth leadership conference aims to develop social leadership skills. Markhor hosts renowned international speakers and trainers, along with delegates from South Asia, Turkey, Malaysia, and Pakistan. In the last seven years, 622 delegates graduated as young social leaders from twenty-five countries and six religions.
- **MAPS Young Professional Fellowship:** This fully-funded fellowship enables candidates to develop global friendships and cultural exchange relationships. The cultural exchange program not only provides a new learning environment but also a chance to discover the beauty and cultures of other societies.

Impact of Youth-led PVE initiatives in Brief

In the past, individuals who experienced the worst effects of radical and political student societies would disapprove of any non-academic youth activity. YPBs work to break stereotypes by facilitating conducive environments for other young people to engage civically.

Small-scale capacity building programs create safe spaces, avenues of active participation, and train more young people to work on PVE. This trend has increased the sense of responsibility and level of acceptance to talk and work on issues like gender-based violence and human rights. These programs have also helped increase levels of tolerance and harmony in society.

PVE initiatives also create awareness of youth participation and representation. This, in turn, is noticed by institutions and decision makers. Although there have yet to be big interventions at the policy level, youth have been recognized and their experiences have been acknowledged as important perspectives. A few national-level programs were initiated for youth representation, like "National Youth Council," and also for youth participation, including "Paigam Pakistan" (all youth) and "Dukhtran-e-Pakistan" (specifically for women). "Prime Minister Tiger Force" is another example of youth inclusion programs in local governance system initiated during Covid-19.

Primary Enablers

CSOs' varied approaches, from philanthropy to service-delivery, create multiple avenues through which awareness of peacebuilding opportunities is created. More young people can organize their work on social issues at the community level. Despite restrictions, CSO activities include more community-based organizations and youth groups to come together campaigning for certain issues.

National and international scholarships and cultural exchange program also help young people to interact, understand different cultures, and develop leadership skills for civic engagement. These networking opportunities help youth recognize commonalities among different societies and cultivate the ability, confidence, and motivation to make a difference in their own communities.

Social media has played an important role in creating awareness, quickly relaying news and information, as well as engaging more youth through online campaigns. Social media also provides YPBs with multiple platforms to connect and collaborate with likeminded youth working for similar causes.

At the individual level, personal experience with violence and trauma motivates individuals to work towards a more peaceful, inclusive society. Many YPBs wish to support others who have suffered similar experiences so that they are not repeated in their communities.

Political stability and peaceful democratic transition in the last two decades have finally provided youth with the opportunity to participate in democratic activities. Youth play a significant role in democracy, comprising a significant percentage of voter turnouts in both the 2013 and 2018 Pakistan general elections. These elections, in turn, have created avenues for democratic activities in which youth may participate, connect, and relay their concerns and interests.

Primary Barriers

Skills Deficits: YPBs often do not have the skills or capacity to supply others with tools, support, and encouragement. These limit the work, scope, and impact of YPBs. Most YPBs are self-motivated or inspired by some work done by others. They may have skill deficits in literacy, language, and/or public speaking, that may limit their work.

Lack of Trust and Community Support: Young people are often portrayed as vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment in Pakistan. A past of youth radicalization and extremism has led to these common concerns and misconceptions. Youth are considered to be directionless and/or a societal problem. Young people's opinions and abilities are often considered subordinate to that of adults, which becomes a barrier for them to work and creates community resistance. In urban areas, these preconceptions and misconceptions are weaker, but the majority still do not believe youth are able to lead or represent society. In addition, communities are often resistant towards foreign-funded development work, as it has been portrayed as a threat to national security or different ideological beliefs. Society notably creates barriers for the involvement of young women in youth led activities.

Lack of Financial Resources: Insufficient resources are another major barrier to youth peacebuilding. Cultural and societal norms dictate a young person's lifestyle is dependent on their family until their late twenties. During this time period, energetic youth who are motivated to work depend on social and financial support. YPBs require funds from their families, communities, or outside organizations. Even so, many are often impermanent sources of funding, so the sustainability of initiatives remains insecure.

Restrictions and Laws: New systems of registering NGOs to qualify for foreign funding are not just difficult but also time and resource consuming. As a result of strict government policies, it is very difficult for YPBs, youth groups, and local organizations to register for and receive international funds. This has forced many organizations to scale down significantly.





Policy Recommendations

VE threatens the security and fundamental rights of peaceful living. Youth are essential actors in contributing to PVE and peacebuilding work. Youth are not only highly affected by VE, but they also play an important role as positive change agents. The way youth resilience manifests is very much dependent on social, political, and economic factors. The following recommendations for the government of Pakistan would, if implemented, facilitate the increased engagement and impact of youth in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism in Pakistan:

- Local government represents and acts in the interest of civil society's needs. As such, it is imperative that governments listen to young voices and utilize their energies in serving and advancing their local communities. Local government systems should create space for youth participation. "Prime Minister Tiger Force" is an example of this kind of youth inclusion in local governance. Proper policy planning is needed to make such initiatives more useful and effective.
- The government of Pakistan, at all levels, should consider youth as an important stakeholder in all social policy development processes and take necessary steps to ensure youth are represented in decision making processes. "National Youth Council" is a great first step.
- Government should strengthen the National Youth Assembly and take steps to make it a more effective platform for the inclusion of youth in policy making processes.
- Government should promote the spirit of volunteerism among youth and encourage public trust and confidence in youth through the development of local youth volunteering and community services schemes, such as the Paint to Peace project described in this document.
- Government has the ability to mobilize youth at a national level with a special focus on youth-led PVE work. There is a need to scale up and create more youth representation and participation programs like "Paigam Pakistan."
- Government should introduce more flexible policies, laws, and regulation process for peacebuilding work.
- Government should mobilize media for program and policy visibility. Government support can be very helpful in creating awareness, especially on issues related religious misinterpretation and manipulation.
- Government should develop ways to channelize international funds and provide CSOs and youth organizations with easier and steadier access to national and international funds.
- Government should develop protocols for the collaboration between NGOs – particularly those concerned with gender and youth – the UN, governments, and YPBs for a systematic inclusion in the design and delivery of PVE programming.



Government should expand educational programming beyond schools to reach children and youth outside of educational institutions who may have suffered trauma or are coping with the impacts of violence.



Government should support research on factors, including indigenous PVE initiatives, that foster resilience, pluralism, diversity and acceptance.



Government should make curricula reforms with a special focus on PVE, conflict resolution skills, societal diversity, and interfaith harmony. Writers should take care to avoid promoting gender stereotypes in curriculum.

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AMPLIFYING THE LEADERSHIP OF LOCAL YOUTH (ALLY) IN PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN SOUTH ASIA

