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Q- The rise of religious extremism and militancy has become a major challenge to Pakistan's internal stability and promotion of democracy. Elaborate.

Introduction

The rise of religious extremism and militancy has emerged as one of Pakistan's most persistent internal challenges, undermining both security and democratic development.

"Pakistan's existential crisis stems not from its enemies but from the intolerance corroding its foundations."

Maleeha Lodhi (2011)

The threat today is ideological as much as physical.

Historical Roots of Religious Radicalization

Religious extremism in Pakistan traces back to the Islamization drive of the late 1970s, when General Zia-ul-Haq blended politics with faith to consolidate power. His policies institutionalized sectarian divisions and promoted madrasa expansion, which, by the 1980s, served as recruitment grounds for jihad in Afghanistan.

Post-9/11 Transformation

After 9/11, Pakistan's alignment with the U.S.-led War on Terror produced domestic backlash. Formerly state-sponsored

militant outfits turned inward,
accusing Islamabad of betrayal.
The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
(TTP) emerged in 2007,
launching suicide attacks across
cities, including the Army
Public School Tragedy (2014)
that killed 149 people.

• Ideological Polarization and Intolerance •

Extremism thrives in a climate
of sectarian hatred and social
exclusion. The Pakistan Institute
for Peace Studies (PIPS, 2023)
reported a 50% rise in religiously
motivated attacks. Groups exploit
identity fault lines - Sunni vs.
Shia, Deobandi vs. Barelvi - eroding
pluralism. As Ejmal Ahmad once
warned, "An intolerant society,
cannot nurture democracy."

Zia's Islamization

1977-88

State-led ideological
Shift

Afghan Jihad
Ex Sectarian

Funding

1980-90s. Armed

Proxy Networks

Post-9/11 Blowback

TIP Insurgency

2007- Domestic

turn against State

State Response

NAP 2014 Ex

NAP 2.0 2021

Military-led

Counter Strategy

Contemporary Phase

2023-2024

Cyber Radicalization
and

Ideological Polarization

• Madrasa Expansion and Ideological Capture •

Over 30,000 madrasas operate in Pakistan, many unregulated, propagating narrow interpretations of Islam.

Despite NAP's madrasa reforms, implementation remains incomplete.

A 2022 NACTA audit found only 13% registered institutions.

The absence of curriculum modernization perpetuates radical worldviews that marginalize rational and civic education.

• Militant Networks and Political Penetration. •

Militant-linked religious parties have gradually entered mainstream politics. Groups like Tehreek-e-

Lebbait Pakistan (TLP) mobilize mass protests under blasphemy narratives, coercing state policy. Their ability to paralyze Islamabad in 2017 and 2021 exposed weak governance. Such politicization undermines state authority and destabilizes parliamentary decision-making.

Economic Cost of Religious Militancy

According to the Ministry of Finance (2023), terrorism and extremism caused an estimated \$126 billion loss to Pakistan's economy since 2001. Foreign investment declined by 30% between 2018 and 2023, while tourism and exports suffered heavily. Extremism diverts national resources from development to defence.

deepening economic insecurity.

∴ Impact on Democracy and Civil Rights ∴

Religious intolerance curtails freedom of expression and minority rights, eroding democratic culture. Journalists, activists, and reformers face threats for advocating pluralism. The Human rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP, 2023) documented over 70 blasphemy accusations last year, showing how fear silences dissent and weakens civic participation.

∴ Civil - Military Imbalance and Governance Failure ∴

The military's historical reliance on

religious sentiment for legitimacy
has constrained democratic
consolidation.

Religion became a tool
of statecraft rather
than moral guidance

Farzana Shaikh (2009)

Weak civilian control over
security and education allow
extremist ideologies to infiltrate
governance structures unchecked.

Foreign Influence

and
Regional dynamics

External funding from Gulf
states and Iran sustains
sectarian organizations. Cross-border
sanctuaries in Afghanistan provide
refuge to TTP factions. The

UN Security Council (2023) warned of increased regional connectivity among extremist groups, illustrating how Pakistan's domestic militancy links to broader geopolitical rivalries.

∴ Counter-Terrorism and Ideological Responses ∴

Pakistan launched Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Raed-ul-Fasaad (2017) to neutralize militant strongholds. The National Action Plan (2014) and NAP 2.0 (2021) expanded to cyber extremism, hate speech, and madrasa regulation. However, NACIA's limited autonomy and poor inter-agency coordination hinder lasting success.

Religious Radicalization

Sectarian + Violence
Social + Fear

Erosion of Civil Liberties
+
Minority Rights ~~Suppression~~
Suppression

Policy Paralysis
+
Populist Religious Politics

Weak Democracy
+
Internal Instability

∴ Deradicalization and Social Reform

Initiatives like Sabaoon in Swat and Paigham-e-Pakistan (2018) fatwa represent important ideological countermeasures. Yet, their reach remains limited. Education reform, youth employment, and inclusive religious dialogue must complement kinetic action to erode extremism's social base. Reform without empathy breeds resentment, not, not reintegration.

∴ Towards a Democratic Counter-Narrative

Pakistan's democracy can survive only through inclusive pluralism and constitutionalism. Maleeha Lodhi rightly asserts, "Political consensus and civic education

are the real ~~antidotes~~ ^{antidotes} to
"extremism". Democratic institutions must
champion tolerance, ensure equitable
justice, and integrate marginalised
regions to restore public faith
in the constitutional order.

Conclusion

Religious extremism and militancy
are existential threats to
Pakistan's internal stability and
democratic evolution. The fusion
of ideology and politics
corrodes governance, divides society,
and empowers authoritarian tendencies.
Sustainable democracy demands not
only defeating militancy but
also nurturing a culture of
coexistence, dialogue, and constitutional
faith.

←————→

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Q- Highlight the Role of National Action Plan (NAP) in Stabilization of Internal security of Pakistan.
Critically analyze its outcomes?

Introduction

The National Action Plan (NAP), adopted in December 2014 after the Army Public School (APS) Peshawar massacre, marked Pakistan's most comprehensive effort to counter terrorism and extremism.

"Pakistan's struggle against terrorism is not only military - it is political, ideological, and social."

Maleeha Lodhi (2011)

Background and Context

By 2014, Pakistan faced unprecedented

violence - terror incidents peaked
at 1,823 attacks (PIPS, 2014).

Public outrage after the
APS tragedy united civil
and military leadership,
producing the 20-point NAP,
aimed at eliminating militancy,
regulating madrasahs, countering
hate speech, and empowering
NACIA for policy coordination.

APS Peshawar Attack

Dec 16, 2024

National Tragedy.



National ~~Congress~~ Consensus
Conference

All parties & Military
Leadership

Urgent Dialogue



20-Point National Action
Plan

Announced. Holistic Military,
Legal, Social Strategy.



Major Military Operations
launched

Zarb-e-Azb & Radd-ul-

Fasad. Kinetic Enforcement



Policy Evolution: NAP 2.0

2021 Update

Focus on Cyber &
Ideological Threats.

Core Objectives of NAP.

NAP's objectives centered on dismantling terror networks, prohibiting armed militias, reforming madrassas, and countering hate material. It also called for criminal justice reform, FATA integration, and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The plan represented a shift toward a whole-of-state response beyond kinetic operations.

Institutional framework and Implementation

NAP assigned operational roles to NACTA, the Interior Ministry, provincial police, and the military's intelligence apparatus.

Military Courts were temporarily established to expedite terrorism cases.

'Without civilian ownership, counter-terrorism remains a tactical success, not a strategic transformation.'

Zahid Hussain (2018)

• Security Gains
and
Counter-Terrorism Success •

NAP coincided with Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014-2017) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017 - ongoing), which dismantled militant sanctuaries in North Waziristan and Khyber. According to Global Terrorism Index (GTI 2023), Pakistan's terrorism ranking improved from 4th in 2014 to 10th in 2023, with incidents

declining by over 60% during the first five years.

Disruption of Militant Networks

Law enforcement targeted over 1,200 proscribed outfits and hate networks, while tens of thousands of terror suspects were arrested under NAP provisions. The Karachi Operation (2013-2018), aligned with NAP Goals, significantly reduced target killings by over 90% (Rangers Report, 2019), restoring partial urban stability.

Curbing Hate Speech and Extremist Propaganda

Thousands of hate literature

items and online pages were banned. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and FIA Cyber Wing blocked over 20,000 extremist digital platforms (2022).

However, ideological counter-narratives remained weak.

"Silencing Extremism without
deforming the mind is
only a pause, not
peace."

Farzana Shaikh (2009)

Judicial and Legislative Reforms

Special military courts executed 27 convicted terrorists between 2015-2019, instilling short-term deterrence.

The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was revitalized but remained underfunded. A

2023 audit revealed that NACIA received less than 30% of proposed funding, limiting its capacity for research, coordination, and de-radicalization.

• Limitations in Civilian Implementation. •

NAP's most serious flaw was its militarized execution. Civil agencies lacked capacity and political will to sustain reforms. Provinces failed to reform curricula, regulate madonnas, or prosecute hate crimes consistently. NACIA's coordination gaps created policy fragmentation between the Interior Ministry, ISPR, and provincial CTDs.

National Action
Plan
Security Mechanism

Military Operations
Terror Network Disruptions

Police Empowerment &
Legal Reforms,
Judicial Capacity &
Prosecution

Ideological control
& Media
Regulation
Counter-Narratives
& Hate
Speech Control

De-radicalization &
Social reintegration
Rehabilitation Programs

Sustainable Internal
Stability
Long-term Goal

Resurgence of Terrorism (2021-2023)

Recent TIP resurgence from Afghan sanctuaries, with over 650 attacks in 2023 (CCPS Report), reveals NAP's diminishing efficacy. While physical control was regained, ideological and logistical structures of militancy survived. The absence of a post-conflict integration framework allowed extremism to re-emerge under new labels.

Madrasa and Socioeconomic Reforms: A Missed opportunity.

NAP promised madrasa regulation and educational mainstreaming, yet progress remained symbolic. Out of over 30,000 madrasas, fewer than

5,000 were registered (NACIA, 2023).
Socioeconomic measures - youth employment
and local policing - were
neglected, leaving root causes
of radicalization unaddressed.

∴ Political Consensus and Federal - Provincial Tensions ∴

While NAP initially reflected
national unity, political discontinuity
eroded momentum. Post-2018
governments focused on economic
and political crises, sidelining
NAP's oversight committees. The
absence of a parliamentary
monitoring mechanism weakened
transparency and accountability in
counter-terrorism policy implementation.

Critical Analysis : Successes and Failures

NAP succeeded in short-term stabilization - terror attacks declined, urban security improved, and extremist networks fractured.

However, its long term vision faltered due to poor civilian follow-through, underfunded reforms, and lack of ideological de-radicalization. It achieved peace without permanence, security without societal transformation.

Way forward : Toward NAP 2.0

The revised NAP 2.0 (2021) emphasizes cyber extremism, hate speech, and socio-economic reintegration. To succeed, Pakistan must strengthen NACTA's autonomy,

enhance provincial CDS, and institutionalize civil-military coordination. Public education, digital monitoring, and community policing can consolidate security gains into sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The National Action Plan remains a cornerstone of Pakistan's internal security architecture. It restored immediate stability after a decade of terror but struggled to achieve durable transformation. As Zahid Hussain concludes, "Militancy is defeated not only on battlefields but in classrooms and minds."

The next phase of NAP must, therefore, be more civilian-led, ideologically informed, and institutionally sustainable.