



# PIPS Policy Brief Counter-Violent Extremism

Working Group 6

Pak Institute For Peace Studies (PIPS) ● www.pakpips.com ● pips@pakpips.com

May 2017

## Youth Engagement Program

### Summary

- This policy brief summarizes the findings of the sixth working group's meeting on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE). The meeting, which was part of a PIPS-led exercise to strategize response options to CVE in Pakistan, explored how youth can be engaged beforehand so that they are not radicalized in the future.
- Group members underscored that youth radicalization be understood as a social phenomenon which cuts across different divides. However, multi-dimensional accounts of different sets of youth should be considered in the processes of understanding and preventing radicalization in youths.
- Young people are called to dream big and nurture idealistic notions, but because there is no voice in the mainstream to translate those notions into reality, many of them become prone to fall for radical groups, like the Islamic State (IS) group, who too make promises for an ideal/fantasy land.
- The influx of radical or extremist thought in the minds of the youth went parallel to a gradual outflow of inclusive spaces for them, mainly in terms of sociocultural, and physical activities. Not only those spaces should be revived, but youth representation at all levels should also be ensured.
- Enhanced interaction and communication with youngsters at homes is imperative to prevent any wayward activity among them.
- The group called for exploring and supporting youth-centric content on news channels and engaging local-level opinion makers.
- Government's initiatives for youth are few and not disseminated widely. Their scope shall be increased.
- Education reform is pivotal to curb youth from falling for radicalized thoughts easily.
- Young people of the marginalized areas like FATA, Balochistan, and southern Punjab, shall be uplifted physically and politically.

### Group members (arranged alphabetically by last name)

- **Mubashir Akram**  
Development professional
- **Shaukat Aziz**  
President, FATA Youth Organization
- **Ali Baba**  
Poet, writer
- **Farman Baig**  
Journalist
- **Farzana Bari**  
Director, Gender Studies, Quaid-e-Azam University
- **Romana Bashir**  
Director, Peace and Development Foundation
- **Rashad Bukhari**  
Peace-building worker
- **Abdullah Dayo**  
Frederich Ebert Stiftung (FES)
- **Saeeda Deip**  
Chairperson, Institute for Peace and Secular Studies
- **Ravi Dewani**  
All Pak Hindu Council
- **Muhammad Ismail Khan**  
Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
- **Pandit Chana Laal**  
Hindu Community
- **Krishan Laal**  
Hindu Community
- **Tasawur Majeed**  
City College, Multan
- **Khurshid Nadeem**  
Religious scholar/ Columnist

(Continued on next page)

## Background

On April 18, 2017, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) convened meeting of the sixth working group on Counter-Violent Extremism (CVE), exploring the way youth are being radicalized in the country, and what can be done in the first place that they don't fall for extremist provocations.

This was the sixth in a series of 10 planned meetings on CVE; below are summaries of the previous five sessions:

- The first working group, which met on March 20, 2017, deliberated about the mechanism for shaping a religion-based narrative that counters those of extremists.
- The second group, which met on March 27, 2017, discussed the mechanism for reintegrating militants willing to shun violence and denounce *takfeer* (the practice of declaring fellow Muslims out of creed of Islam).
- The third group, meeting on April 3, 2017, pondered upon the need for a national dialogue to address critical politico-philosophical issues in the country, especially those producing extremism, and whether a revised social contract could provide answers.
- The fourth group, which met on April 10, 2017, discussed the implementing mechanism of National Action Plan, the country's counter-terror plan announced in January 2015.
- The fifth working group, meeting on April 17, 2017, brainstormed as to how extremism revolves around lack of equal status and physical services to all citizens. The group observed that on the one hand, areas excluded from the mainstream provide space to violent extremists, on the other hand, they often target religious minorities, an excluded group.

The themes of these working-group meetings are largely derived from the CVE model PIPS proposed in 2016. A group of scholars, experts, and practitioners had, in a series of meetings, brainstormed over different components of a Pakistan-specific CVE model, one of them being engaging the youth.

## Group members (continued)

- **Usman Pirzada**  
Chairman, Muzzafarbad Youth Council
- **Younis Qasmi**  
IRD, International Islamic University Islamabad
- **Mujtaba Rathore**  
Peace and Education Foundation
- **Zia Ur Rehman**  
Karachi-based journalist
- **Maimoona Saeed**  
Multant-based journalist
- **Aoun Sahi**  
Bureau Chief, Channel 24
- **Hina Saleem**  
Peace worker, Bahawalpur
- **Kulbeer Singh**  
Sikh Community, Lahore
- **Sabookh Syed**  
Editor, IBCUrdu.com
- **Asmat Wazir**  
Anchor, Khyber TV
- **Samreen Wazir**  
Vice President, FATA Youth Organization
- **Muhammad Zeeshan Zafar**  
Bargad Organization for Youth Development



With more than 60% of population below the age of 30, Pakistan is a young country. At the same time, extremists are able to resonate with a wide section of the youth, which is brought into believing into the extremist notions. Steering youth away from radicalization will greatly diminish the space for radicalization in general.

### Key considerations

- Members of the group noted that youth radicalization in Pakistan is a cross-cutting phenomenon. "Extremists have attracted young people from rural areas and urban centers, madrassas and even universities, poor and well-off backgrounds, not only men but women too", noted the day-long deliberations.

This universal radicalization is evident in the diverse way in which the Islamic State (IS) has been trying to recruit from Pakistan. The group has attracted former Pakistani Taliban militants from the underdeveloped FATA, where internet penetration is nearly zero, as well as motivated well-off individuals including women from urban areas like Karachi in Sindh, and Lahore, Sialkot, and Faisalabad etc., in Punjab.

Working on social behaviors across the country, is therefore one way the trend of radicalization can be addressed, the group noted.

- At the same time, the group noted to better diagnose solutions for different youth groups, better to take into account the multi-dimensional realities of the radicalization, too. True, a university graduate in a university in Karachi is exposed to radicalized thoughts as a poor young man from southern Punjab is, but the means and causes could be entirely different. One may be susceptible through unchecked use of social media, another falling prey through personal interaction with some of the already radicalized lot. In Karachi's conflict, the group was told, there are social, economic, and political causes of young people being radicalized. Thus, the processes of counter-radicalization – preventing

youth from getting radicalized – and de-radicalization – bringing back the radicalized youth – require consistent work at multiple fronts.

- The group debated if one particular set of radicalized youth should be preferred over another. No matter what the level of internet penetration in Pakistan, millions of people especially young people have access to internet. Some members called for focusing more on rural areas, where youth fall for radical ideologies because they lack opportunities.
- The group also touched upon the education background of the radical individuals. It was shared that around 64 of the arrested radicals in the last one year from Sindh were Masters or above, while 70 were graduates. Another participant shared that many of the complainants in the blasphemy cases in southern Punjab were completely illiterate. These people too should be kept in mind.
- It was earlier assumed that young men and women fall easily for the simplistic notions of right and wrong. The group debated why so?

Member shared youth of the country has been brought up in a worldview that does not diverge much from the extremists'. They have studied textbooks and watch dramas, which thrive on creating stereotypes of non-Muslims. Before Pakistan got stuck in the war in Afghanistan, youth of Punjab was largely radicalized by the civilizational ways in which the animosity with India was propagated.

Members noted youth are denied spaces and opportunities where they can translate their ideas and dreams into reality. Young people are called to dream big and nurture idealistic notions, but because there is no voice in the mainstream to translate those notions into reality, they become vulnerable to fall for radical groups, who too offer promises of a fantasyland. The caliphate of IS in Syria is to many a dream come true, a dream on which students have been brought up their entire life. A student in the group pleaded, "Don't show us dreams which are shattered in our adult lives; show us real life!"

- The influx of radical thought in the minds of the youth went parallel with the outflow of the inclusive spaces for them. Gone are the days when people would sit, walk, eat, or drink with each other, least concerned with the faith of each

other. There were public spaces like parks and playgrounds, which have diminished, thanks also to the way urban architectures are planned.

In colleges and universities too, forums meant for students to express their thoughts to each other have, dissipated. Not many campuses have regular magazines where students would compete to get published.

Members called for providing “enabling environment” where people engage with diverse opinions of the society.

- Interactions at homes themselves enabled members kept checks on any wayward activity. In the good old days, parents would know what their children are up to. Now, children are glued to gadgets, even at homes, with parents having little idea of whom their children are interacting with. When parents of a militant are told about what their child were up, they get into denial. Clearly, parents can be approached in assuring their children do not go the harm’s way.
- Other influencers include teachers, who can judge if a student is being “transformed”; a student’s sudden change in behavior, like the content of question, attendance are good indicators, and can be worked upon. Some members, however, lamented that teachers themselves end up radicalizing the students. Even if curriculum is neutral on some subjects, the interpretation by a teacher can misguide a student. Hence, there is double need for engaging teachers.
- For sure, media is a powerful tool influencing thoughts of students. A lot of the discussion in this regards, participants noted, is on TV shows on the current-affairs channels. These shows, which occupy major slot in prime time, come under repeated criticism for glorifying militant messages. Members called for exploring how youth-centric content can be aired during those times; such content should not be detrimental to the business of the young people, who constitute majority of the population.

But more than focusing on news channels, there is a need to review the content broadcasted in the name of entertainment. Dramas often depict non-Muslims in stereotypical fashion.

Local opinion makers shape thought of the young people too. These opinion makers write in regional papers and are often ignored in any sensitization activity.

- The group critiqued government's lack of action to cater to the growing "youth bulge".

Members were told of the several government initiatives offering incentives such as internship programs to distributing laptops. The group, after appreciating these efforts, suggested these initiatives be advertised wisely, besides increasing their scope, such as engaging more young people especially from far-flung areas.

- Members were told while Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have announced their youth policies, Sindh and Balochistan have yet to do so. Members recommended that policies for administration units like Gilgit-Baltistan, FATA, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir be shaped too, and these policies should be coordinated with each other.
- Members noted that "proper education" is pivotal, too, to ensure young people are not swayed too easily. A significant population cannot afford to read and write, and therefore, one way or the other, become vulnerable to militant messages. Meanwhile, those who can read and write, their quality of education is unable to contest the narrative of the extremists; instead, their worldview is not dissimilar to that of the extremists'.

Even the curriculum structure is flawed. But making Islamiyat (Islamic studies) compulsory, minorities are left with no choice; similarly, while Muslim students are given additional marks for memorizing their holy book, non-Muslims students are not given such marks.

Different entry points with regards to education were discussed; teachers were one of them. As much as a radicalized teacher can radicalize student, a sensitized teacher can help de-radicalize a student. Teachers in the campuses shall be sensitized on how to counter any creeping radicalizing discourse or questions in the classroom.

Another education-related entry point, pointed out was curriculum. The group called for revisiting subjects sowing apartheid, introducing courses on citizenship; of all, literature can help instill tolerant human values.

- The working group shared that young people of the marginalized areas shall be uplifted. Besides providing political rights in these areas, universities and colleges be established in areas like Balochistan and FATA. The strength of functional institutions in these areas are far and few.

### Recommendations

- The mission of any youth engagement program should be to empower them politically, socially, and economically.
- To counter online radicalization, the cyber wing of FIA should be engaged:
  - Online campaign against intolerance and discrimination be launched.
  - Online communities moderating diverse opinions be established.
- Government's initiatives for youth be disseminated widely.
  - The scope of government initiatives with youth, be increased, in both numbers and backgrounds.
- Youth be taught about their constitutional rights.
- Engage opinion-makers at grass-root level.
- Engage community influencers including parents.
- Bridge communication gap with youth.
  - Regular interaction be made with them.
  - Career counseling be provided to students; counseling department be encouraged at school level.
  - Youth-adult partnership be undertaken.
- Education reform is pivotal.
  - To preempt against radicalization, teachers can be sensitized.

- Curriculum shall be reformed, by reviewing subjects on history and Pakistan Studies, and adding content on literature and citizenship.
  - Sectarian-minded teachers and courses in madrassas be checked.
- Enabling environment be provided for youth to engage with diversity and/or diverse opinions, by reviving dialogues, student unions, parks, playgrounds, public places, youth clubs, online communities, campus magazines.
- All provinces should come with youth policies.
  - Coordinated youth policy be achieved.
- Parliament-youth interactions be increased and explored.
- Educational institutions be established in marginalized areas like FATA, Balochistan.
- Time slots for youth-centric content be explored in electronic media.

### Observers

1. Zarghouna Alam, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
2. Sajjad Azhar, Associate Editor, *Tajziat*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
3. Anam Fatima, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
4. Lema Jan, German Embassy, Pakistan
5. Shagufta Hayat, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)

### Rapporteurs

1. Atif Hashmi, Contributor/columnist, *Tajziat*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
2. Muhammad Ismail Khan, Associate Editor, *Conflict & Peace Studies*, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)