

MORAL POSTURING AND POLICY DRIFT: THE IMPACT OF SYMBOLIC RESOLUTIONS ON PAKISTAN'S CVE LANDSCAPE

Muhammad Kashif Irshad

Addl. Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar

kashifkhankhail@hotmail.com

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17034541>

Keywords

Pakistan, countering violent extremism, symbolic politics, religious resolutions, policy drift, moral posturing

Article History

Received on 30 May 2025

Accepted on 11 August 2025

Published on 30 August 2025

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Muhammad Kashif Irshad

Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of moral posturing through symbolic religious resolutions in Pakistan's legislative assemblies and their counterproductive impact on countering violent extremism (CVE) efforts. A mixed-methods examination of 127 religiously-motivated resolutions passed between 2008-2023, this study demonstrates how political elites utilize the symbolism of religion to achieve electoral advantage and simultaneously has the effect of legitimizing extremist ideologies and eroding actual policy action. The study introduces the concept of "policy drift" - the divergence between symbolic legislative posturing and practical CVE outcomes - and demonstrates how religious instrumentalization by mainstream political actors creates cognitive dissonance in Pakistan's counter-extremism landscape. Drawing on stakeholder interviews, content analysis of legislative proceedings, and comparative case studies, this research develops the Integrated Symbolic-Substantive Framework (ISSF) for Pakistan's CVE strategy. The ISSF focuses on genuine religious work, community-based intervention, governance changes, and evidence-based policymaking in efforts to close the divide between symbolic politics and effective extremism prevention. The framework fills in important gaps in the current CVE literature with a culturally contextualized, empirically based approach that is specifically relevant to the religio-political specifics of Pakistan. The results add to the global P/CVE literature in the sense that it shows how symbolic politics unintentionally supports extremist recruitment and suggests novel solutions that can rebrand the religious discourse as a source of vulnerability to radicalization.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's struggle with violent extremism has been marked by a paradoxical relationship between symbolic religious politics and substantive policy outcomes. After 2008, the Provincial and the National Assemblies of the country have adopted more than 127 resolutions under the banner of religious slogans and posturing as a show of Islamic credentials and political mileage. This has however come with an unintended outcome of policy drift

that is hampering the process of real countering violent extremism (CVE) processes whilst unwittingly justifying the extremist arguments.

The policy drift idea, however, that has been utilized in the paper means the systematic disparity between rhetorical actions in legislation and their actual outcomes in the CVE area. Such drift is evident when political elites start focusing on religious symbolism as a means to win elections in the short

term and fail to focus on the substantive policy changes required to succeed in extremism prevention. What follows is the creation of a disjointed CVE environment in which symbolic actions take the place of evidence-based interventions, which causes cognitive dissonance between proclaimed religious values and the actual security results.

The case of Pakistan is of particular importance to worldwide scholarship of P/CVE since it can be viewed as the context in which religion can be used as both a source of extremist mobilization and a potential root of counter-narratives. The history of religious instrumentalization of mainstream political actors in the country provides crucial understanding of how symbolic politics may be unwittingly used to further processes of radicalization despite seemingly working against them. This paradox has not been much exploited in current CVE literature, which is generally split between security-based interventions or community engagement interventions without exploring the multifaceted interaction between symbolic politics and extremism prevention.

This study has a wider international impact since it is not only in Pakistan but also almost all the countries with the highest populations of Muslims that are grappling with the same dilemma of how to ensure that religious symbolism does not hinder effective CVE policies. The lessons of the experience of the territory of Pakistan can be applied to CVE policies in both Indonesia and Malaysia as well as in France and the United Kingdom, where issues of religious accommodation and counter-extremist overlap in ways that are difficult to describe.

This paper fills a major gap in the current CVE paradigms, which have not shown much relevance in religiously heterogeneous, politically disintegrated settings such as Pakistan. Past studies have mainly relied on Western-centric theories or general theories without paying close attention to the dynamics of symbolic politics in Muslim-majority societies. The existing literature does not provide region-specific evidence-based frameworks that can strike the fine line between being sensitive to religious sentiments and implying effective measures to prevent extremism.

Research Question: What is the effect of symbolic resolutions of religious nature in Pakistani legislature

on CVE effectiveness and what construct can be used to ensure there is a bridge between moral posture and actual policy implementation?

This research has three key goals: first, to systematically, investigate the pattern and effect of religiously-motivated resolutions in the Pakistani legislature; second, to evaluate how such symbolic actions can be applied to broader CVE outcomes, using the mechanism of policy drift; and third, to develop a novel, culturally-sensitive framework that can turn symbolic politics into an asset.

Current work has seven sections after the introduction. The literature review is comprised of critical synthesis of the available literature on CVE frameworks, symbolic politics, and instrumentalization of religion. Methodology section here explains the utility of mixed-methods approach in current work, including content analysis, stakeholder interviews, and comparative case studies. The analysis part discusses the empirical testing of policy drift in CVE landscape of Pakistan, while the discussion section contextualizes the outcome in the existing theory. The newly developed Integrated Symbolic-Substantive Framework (ISSF) is subsequently coined as a unique solution, ending with conclusions being made as for scholarship and practice.

Literature Review

The academic literature on countering violent extremism has indeed changed a great deal in the last twenty years, but still there are enormous gaps in comprehending how symbolic politics collide with CVE efficacy, especially in religiously diverse settings. This review of literature draws on the main theoretical and empirical findings, and outlines the major gaps that the present study will fill.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of CVE

Modern CVE research has focused on three major theoretical perspectives, some of which are security-centric, others community-centric, and some offer a hybrid approach that incorporates both aspects. Security-centered models, such as the one of Hoffman (2006) on terrorism studies focus on law enforcement, intelligence collection, and military actions as the main means of extremism prevention. Although such methods have been proven to be

tactically very successful in clogging terrorist networks, they have proved to be less effective in terms of tackling the cause of radicalization and they can consequently lead to the formation of grievances (Kundnani, 2012).

Community-based models, in their turn, focus on the importance of the participation of local communities, religious authorities, and civil society organizations in radicalization prevention (Romaniuk, 2015). These strategies rely on the theory of social movements and community psychology to show that sustainable CVE involves finding solutions to the real problems of social, economic, and political complaints in which individuals are vulnerable to extremist recruitment. Nevertheless, the community-based models also tend to be less detailed when it comes to implementing the mechanism and face the difficulty of balancing the community independence with the state demands of security.

Combined methods, including those suggested by Bjorgo and Horgan (2009) seek to harmonize aspects of security and community in holistic CVE strategies. These models acknowledge that successful extremism prevention must include short-term suppressing of threats and long-term organizational changes. Nevertheless, known integrated strategies have been viewed as western-focused and insufficiently applicable to non-western situations where religious, cultural, and political dynamics are not aligned with European or North American backgrounds.

2.2 Symbolic Politics and Religious Instrumentalization

The sources on symbolic politics present essential information concerning the ways in which the political elite employs the religious discourse in a strategic way. The pioneering study of Edelman (1964) on symbolic uses of politics provided the theoretical framework on how symbolic behaviors may be used as a means of electoral politics with little substantive influence. Later more recent scholarship by Norris and Inglehart (2004) has applied this analysis to the religious contexts, showing that political actors use religious symbolism to solicit support bases and justify their policy positions. Within the narrower context of Muslim-majority societies, researchers have traced the pattern of

religious instrumentalization that follows the same trend as the case with Pakistan.

Nasr (2001) has written about the way political elites in different Muslim nations invoke Islamic symbolism to outdo each other in terms of legitimacy, which can easily result in a race to the bottom in religious posturing that may have the unintended effect of reinforcing extremist discourse. Likewise, the analysis of Islamist movements conducted by Wickham (2013), illustrates how the common political use of religion discursively based on mainstream politics can erase the distinction between a legitimate and an extremist rhetoric.

Nonetheless, the literature on symbolic politics has not sufficiently considered how the particular mechanisms of symbolic religious activities influence CVE effectiveness. This gap is addressed by the concept of policy drift, formulated in this paper, which helps understand how symbolic politics may systematically weaken the substantive executions of policies in the CVE arena.

2.3 CVE in Pakistan: Existing Research and Limitations

Academic interest in the CVE experience in Pakistan has grown significantly after Pakistan became more significantly involved in counter-terrorism activities after 2001. Yet, a lot of this literature has centered on military operations, madrassah reforms, and bilateral collaboration with foreign partners, but it has been little concerning the domestic political processes that determine the CVE implementation.

The detailed examination of the counter-terrorism strategy in Pakistan, developed by Bukhari and Huda (2020), can serve as a great source of information on how the country has approached the extremism issue through the years, as it has increasingly favored a more integrated approach including development, governance, and counter-narrative elements. Nevertheless, they fail to provide a sufficient discussion of the role of domestic political factors, especially the employment of religious symbolism by mainstream parties in influencing the effectiveness of CVE.

The recent article by Khan (2022) on the radicalization process in Pakistan can provide valuable empirical data on the social and psychological factors that influence the manner in

which people engage in the extreme activity. His study shows the importance of grievance formation, social networks, and ideological appeals, in the process of recruitment. Nevertheless, the analysis of Khan does not study how symbolic political actions can positively or negatively impact the processes of radicalization.

Boutellier et al. (2019) work on CVE strategies applied in communities in a number of international settings is an excellent source of comparative information, but their discussion of Pakistan is very superficial. Their model focuses on supporting the significance of local ownership, cultural sensitivity, and multi-stakeholder collaboration - those that are very applicable to the situation in Pakistan but would have to be drastically adjusted to consider the religious and political specificities of the country.

2.4 Gaps in Existing Literature

This literature review presents several critical gaps. To begin with, the current CVE models are shown to be less relevant to those situations in which religious symbolism is a major component of political contestation. Most frameworks assume either secular political contexts or contexts where religious and political spheres remain relatively distinct assumptions that do not hold in Pakistan's case.

Second, there is a gap in the literature in terms of systematically analyzing the effects of symbolic political acts on CVE outcomes. Although the application of religious symbolism in political contesting has been documented by scholars, not many have actually analyzed the process by which political symbolism can be used in preventing extremism.

Third, the paradox of the nature of religious discourse in CVE settings has not been sufficiently considered in the existing research as the same religious references can have both extremist and counter-extremist purposes in different contexts and framing. This is especially acute in Pakistan, where major political parties have a tendency to resort to religious discourse that borders on extremist discourses.

Lastly, the literature does not provide frameworks in the region, which can maneuver the complicated intersection of religious authenticity, political legitimacy, and security effectiveness. The available

frameworks are either too general to meet the needs of individual cultural settings or too specific to the particular elements of the CVE challenge.

2.5 Theoretical Framework for This Study

Based on the above literature gaps, the theoretical framework used in this research takes into consideration the findings of symbolic politics theory, social identity theory, and literature on policy implementation. The framework has that symbolic political acts generate meaning-making procedures that affect how communities perceive both state intentions and extremist tales. When symbolic acts are not followed substantively - the state we call "policy drift" - they may unwittingly give credibility to extremist assertions regarding the hypocrisy and insincerity of a state.

This theoretical methodology allows a methodological examination of the processes in which symbolic politics influences CVE effectiveness and forms the basis of designing more culturally contextualized intervention strategies. The focus on the processes of meaning-making of the framework recognizes the dominant role of interpretation and discourse in the process of radicalization and prevention programs, whereas the attention to the dynamics of policy implementation offers concrete information on enhancing the effectiveness of CVE.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is a mixed method whereby the researchers will integrate quantitative content analysis, qualitative interviews with stakeholders, and a comparative analysis of cases to understand the relationship between symbolic political behaviors and CVE effectiveness in Pakistan. The methodological design aims to capture not only the systematic patterns of policy drift, but also the finer processes in which symbolic politics affects the extent of extremism prevention endeavors.

3.1 Research Design and Rationale

The mixed-methods design is due to the multi-dimensional character of the research issue, which demands both the systematic measurement of trends and profound insights into causal processes. Quantitative methods help to determine the trends in the legislative practice and policy outcomes,

whereas qualitative methods give the idea of the stakeholder perceptions, the implementation problems, and the contextual factors that affect CVE effectiveness.

The study design will be an exploratory sequential design that will involve analysis of quantitative content to determine the baseline patterns and later qualitative data collection to illuminate and put in perspective the quantitative results. This chain allows the qualitative part to be informed by the early quantitative findings without compromising methodological rigor in each part.

3.2 Data Sources and Sampling

3.2.1 Legislative Resolution Database

The quantitative component centers on a comprehensive database of religious-themed resolutions passed by Pakistan's National Assembly, Senate, and four Provincial Assemblies between 2008 and 2023. The 15-year timeframe captures the period following Pakistan's constitutional reforms that strengthened provincial autonomy while encompassing multiple electoral cycles and changes in federal and provincial governments.

Information gathering was done through a method of systematic search of official parliamentary documents, such as session transcripts, committee reports, and resolutions. The database finally comprised 127 resolutions which passed the inclusion criteria: clear religious content, symbolic and not substantive legislative nature, and obvious political motive behind religious positioning.

The coded resolutions were based on various dimensions such as party sponsoring, religious references, policy areas covered, objectives of the resolutions, and the mechanisms of implementation used. Other variables reflected contextual or situational influences, including election timing, simultaneous security events, and degree of media coverage.

3.2.2 Stakeholder Interview Sample

The qualitative segment entailed 47 semi-structured interviews with the key stakeholders belonging to various categories. The purposive sample consisted of:

- 12 current and former legislators from major political parties who sponsored or voted on religious resolutions
- 8 CVE practitioners from government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations
- 10 religious leaders of mainstream and minority sectarian views.
- 9 community leaders from areas with high extremism risk, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Southern Punjab
- 8 academic experts in terrorism studies, political science, and Islamic studies

The selection of stakeholders was based on the principle of representativeness in terms of party affiliation, sectarianism, geography, and the level of professional experience. Snowball sampling methods used in interview recruitment, with institutional contacts to guarantee sufficient diversity, and prevent selection bias towards specific perspectives.

3.2.3 Comparative Case Studies

Three detailed case studies are used to study definite examples of how the symbolic resolutions came into conflict with CVE implementation issues. Cases were selected to represent different types of policy drift:

- **The Blasphemy Protection Resolution (2020):** Commentary on a resolution of the National Assembly condemning any international blasphemy acts and its effects on efforts to promote religious tolerance in the country.
- **The Madrassah Integration Resolution (2018):** Examination of Punjab Assembly resolution on madrassah modernization and subsequent implementation failures.
- **The Jihad Clarification Resolution (2019):** Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly resolution on "true" jihad and its effects on counter-narrative campaigns.

All the case studies involved document analysis, interviews with stakeholders that were specific to the case, and policy outcome analysis based on some indicators that were available (e.g. funding allocations, program implementation, and security statistics).

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1 Content Analysis

The collection of legislative texts was conducted through a systematic searching of official parliamentary websites with additional searches through parliamentary libraries and research services. To maintain the correct interpretation of the content, documents were received in both native languages (Urdu and English).

Content coding used a structured codebook created based on the pilot testing of a subset of resolutions. Two independent coders were used to determine inter-rater reliability on 25% of the dataset, and the Cohen kappa scores were above 0.80 on all the primary coding categories.

3.3.2 Interview Procedures

The interviews took place between January and September 2023, with the majority of the sessions taking 45-90 minutes. Due to security measures and COVID-19 limitations, two-thirds of the interviews were held online, and the rest held face-to-face in major cities such as Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar.

Each interview was conducted according to a semi-structured protocol that included standard core questions but also offered flexibility in exploring the emerging themes. Questions covered how stakeholders viewed the purpose and effects of religious resolutions, the connections between symbolic and substantive policies, implementation issues, and suggestions about enhancing the effectiveness of CVE.

Interviews were transcribed word-to-word and translated into English when needed. The privacy of participants was maintained by pseudonymizing and eliminating identifying information in transcripts.

3.4 Analytical Methods

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The legislative database was statistically analyzed using descriptive statistics, trend analysis, and correlational analyses to determine patterns in resolution sponsorship, content, and timing. Resolution frequency, religious intensity scores and implementation outcome measures were key dependent variables.

Trends in religious resolution activity were analyzed using time series analysis in comparison with electoral cycles, security incidents, and government transitions. Correlation analysis examined connections between symbolic political activity and multiple CVE outcome measures, such as counter-narrative program funding, community engagement levels, and public opinion measures.

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Transcripts of interviews were analyzed thematically through deductive and inductive methods. Deductive coding employed theoretically-derived themes related to symbolic politics, policy implementation, and CVE effectiveness. Emergent themes were determined by inductive analysis based on systematic reading and pattern identification across transcripts.

The analysis used constant comparative methods, and recurring themes were compared both between and within the categories of stakeholders to determine convergent and divergent views. Theoretical saturation was measured by comparing themes produced in early and subsequent interviews, and information collection was continued until no new rich themes were produced.

Case study analysis involved within-case narrative analysis and cross-case comparison to determine causal mechanisms and contextual influences that determined outcomes. Both case studies traced the policy process since its resolution adoption until implementation attempts and outcomes, paying close attention to areas where the symbolic and the substantive aspects diverged.

3.5 Methodological Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

A number of methodological constraints deserve consideration. First, the sensitivity of the study on extremism posed limitations on the availability of data and the willingness of the stakeholders to engage freely. This limitation was addressed by ensuring that the anonymity of the participants was carefully considered, that research was approved by the institutional review board and that the trust was fostered by academic and professional networks.

Second, the retrospective design prevents the establishment of clear causal connections between

symbolic actions and CVE outcomes. Although the mixed-methods approach allows developing triangulation among several data sources, the study cannot exclude other possible explanations of observed patterns. Future studies using longitudinal or experimental study designs may enhance causal inferences.

Third, the emphasis on formal legislative measures can undermine the significance of informal political messages and symbolic gestures that occur outside of the parliamentary reality. This weakness is partially met in the research by considering the stakeholder interviews, which elicited wider views of political behavior, although systematic study of informal symbolism is an area of future research.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Extremism studies present a lot of ethical concerns, especially in matters of participant protection, information privacy, and the abuse of research results. The institutional review board approved this study and had a number of safeguards:

- Informed consent was given by all participants who clearly stated the purpose of the research and possible risks.
- Encrypted systems with restricted access were used to store interview data anonymously.
- No analysis was done on sensitive information that may compromise the safety of participants or the security of a nation.

- Presentation of findings does not include information that can be used to support extremist recruitment or operational planning.
- Collaborations with local institutions provided cultural sensitivity and community goodwill.
- Reflexivity was also considered in the research design in terms of the positionality of the researcher and potential bias; the researcher regularly consulted with local colleagues and members of his advisory board to confirm the right interpretation of cultural and political nuances.

Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Patterns of Symbolic Religious Resolutions (2008-2023)

The quantitative analysis of 127 religious-themed resolutions reveals systematic patterns that illuminate the relationship between electoral politics and symbolic religious positioning in Pakistan's legislative assemblies. The time-based distribution reveals a clear concentration around election years, where the frequency of resolutions grows by 67 percent in the 12 months before general elections than during mid-term periods. This trend implies that religious symbolic posturing is more electoral than policy-oriented.

Table 1: Religious Resolution distribution by the Assembly and by Time (2008-2023)

Assembly	2008-2013	2013-2018	2018-2023	Total	Percentage
National Assembly	8	12	15	35	27.6%
Senate	6	9	11	26	20.5%
Punjab Assembly	7	11	14	32	25.2%
Sindh Assembly	4	6	8	18	14.2%
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly	3	5	8	16	12.6%
Total	28	43	56	127	100%

Note: Electoral periods refer to the general election cycle. The 2018-2023 electoral period has seen the highest number of religious resolutions, which aligns with the increased security challenges and political competition.

Table 2: Distribution of Religious Resolutions based on their Themes (N=127)

Theme-based Category	No.	%age	Electoral Timing
Condemnations related to Blasphemy	39	30.7%	Pre-election time
To express Islamic solidarity	36	28.3%	Post an international incident
Religious/Madrassah education	28	22.0%	Budget cycle on Education
Islamic financial system	8	6.3%	Economic and Fiscal Policy debate
Halal certifications	6	4.7%	Commerce/Trade-agreement period
Protection of the religious minorities	5	3.9%	Post-communal incidents
Counter-extremism/Direct PCVE	5	3.9%	Post terrorist incidents
Total	127	100%	

Table 3: Distribution of the Resolution Sponsorship on Party Basis

Name of the Political Party	No. of Resolutions Sponsored	%age	General Party Ideology
Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N)	34	26.8%	Conservative, Center-right,
Pakistan People's Party (PPP)	29	22.8%	Secular, Center-left
Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI)	27	21.3%	Reform-oriented, Populist,
Jamiat e Ulema e Islam (JUI-F)	23	18.1%	Traditionalist, Religious
Awami National Party (ANP)	8	6.3%	Pashtun Nationalist, Secular
Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM)	4	3.1%	Secular, Urban
Others	2	1.6%	Various
Total	127	100%	

Note: Data on Sponsorship comprises both the primary sponsor and co-sponsor. Multi-party resolution is counted for each sponsoring party.

The content analysis reveals three dominant thematic categories: blasphemy-related condemnations (31% of resolutions), Islamic solidarity expressions (28%), and madrassah or religious education pronouncements (22%). The

remaining 19 percent include miscellaneous religious issues such as Islamic financial systems, halal certification, and protection of religious minorities. Interestingly, resolutions directly dealing with violent extremism are in the sample only 8% of the sample, indicating that symbolic politics in religion are

mainly oriented towards proving religious qualifications and not responding to security issues. Partisan analysis indicates that religious symbolism transcends conventional ideological lines, as allegedly secular parties such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) sponsoring 23 percent of religious resolutions, almost as many as Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 27 percent. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which stressed reform in governance, sponsored 21 percent of resolutions, whereas overtly religious parties such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) had a share of only 18. This distribution indicates that symbolic religious competition has become normalized across Pakistan's political spectrum.

4.2 The Mechanism of Policy Drift

The qualitative analysis exposes policy drift as a systematic process that has four different phases: symbolic initiation, rhetorical amplification, implementation neglect, and outcome divergence. All these phases create a widening disconnect between symbolic political activities and the substantive policy deliverables of the CVE space.

4.2.1 Symbolic Initiation

According to interview data, the origin of religious resolutions is more of an electoral positioning requirement and less of a policy interest. It was necessary to demonstrate our Islamic credentials prior to the elections as one of the former members of the National Assembly observed: "We knew that nothing on the ground would change because of the resolution, but we had to demonstrate our Islamic credentials. They were on the attack because they doubted our dedication to Islamic values." This trend signifies what the parties involved called defensive symbolism - the need to use religious resolutions to forestall political critique at the expense of meaningful agendas.

The mythical initiation step entails tactical planning regarding religious communications that would appeal to the right voter segments without being scandalous among religious conservatives or the security agencies. Such balancing act can lead to cloudy, idealistic language that can seem to possess substance but no concrete implementation mechanisms.

4.2.2 Rhetorical Amplification

After the resolution is passed, political actors practice rhetorical amplification by making statements through media, social media, and communication with their constituency that overstate the meaning of the symbolic action. This intensification has two purposes: to maximize the electoral credit of positioning religious matters, and to generate expectations among the public that the symbolic act will generate concrete outcomes.

It must be noted that the promises that are made in the process of rhetorical amplification are far more than the scope of the resolution itself. Indicatively, sponsors of madrassah reform resolutions regularly asserted such token measures would modernize religious education and prevent extremist interpretations, even though the resolutions had no funding provisions, implementation schedules, or accountability provisions.

4.2.3 Implementation Neglect

The systematic dislocation between symbolic politics and policy implementation is unveiled in the implementation phase. Among the 127 resolutions that were examined, just 23 percent included any action that could be followed up, and just 11 percent led to any change in policy. The rest were merely token gestures that were not translated into administrative action.

Several causes of implementation neglect exist. First, the absence of particular implementation mechanisms in the resolution language generates the uncertainty of responsible bodies and actions to be taken. Second, any lack of funding allocations entails that resolutions marshal unsuccessfully against budget-supported programs in terms of bureaucratic attention. Third, the symbolic and not substantive motive of most resolutions decreases the incentives of sponsors to seek implementation, especially once the electoral benefits have been achieved.

One of the senior civil servants in the Ministry of Interior added: "These resolutions are presented in our desk with much trumpet-tongue, but there is no budget, no time, no concrete idea, what we are supposed to do. The politicians receive their press attention, and then they all turn to the next problem."

4.2.4 Outcome Divergence

The last stage is a period of increasing disjunction between proclaimed symbolic aims and policy reality. This divergence manifests in three primary forms: resource diversion, narrative confusion, and credibility erosion.

Resource diversion happens when symbolic political moves eat administrative time and focus that could be utilized in evidence-based CVE programming. Several CVE practitioners indicated that they wasted a lot of time answering legislative queries, briefing, and consultations on symbolic resolutions as fundamental prevention initiatives suffered resource shortages.

Narrative confusion arises when symbolic religious positioning through mainstream political parties is overlapped or accidentally reinforced by extremist messages. As an example, resolutions denouncing acts of international blasphemy usually use almost the same rhetoric that extremist organizations do, which leaves it unclear what is considered a legitimate or illegitimate form of religious expression. The erosion of credibility is a consequence of the fact that the general awareness of the discrepancy between the promises made in symbols and the realities of the policy became more apparent. Interviews with community leaders indicated frequently expressed doubt regarding the genuineness of the government in its approach to extremism and several leaders specifically related this doubt to the trend of promises of resolutions not being fulfilled.

4.3 Impact on CVE Effectiveness

The phenomenon of policy drift has proven to have adverse effects on the CVE effectiveness in Pakistan in various aspects. The analysis finds out five main impact mechanisms; legitimacy undermining, misallocation of resources, message dilution, coalition fragmentation, and opportunity cost multiplication.

4.3.1 Legitimacy Undermining

Probably the most notable influence is the loss of state credibility in CVE messaging. By doing symbolic religious posturing yet failing to follow through with real actions, government actors become unwittingly complicit in extremist accounts of

government hypocrisy and insincerity. This is especially a problem in counter-narrative work, where credibility of the state is critical in delivering the message.

Interview data indicates that community-level CVE practitioners find it difficult to retain credibility when their programs are linked to government actors who are viewed as manipulating religion to accumulate political benefits. One of the religious leaders, who participated in the efforts to counter-radicalization, stated: "How can we explain to the youth that the government is actually interested in spreading real Islam, when all are aware these resolutions are merely an act of political showmanship? The extremists turn our empty promises made by our own politicians against us."

4.3.2 Resource Misallocation

Policy drift contributes to systematic misallocation of scarce CVE resources. Opportunity costs to evidence-based programming are administrative time, political focus, and bureaucratic energy spent on symbolic resolutions. The analysis estimates that symbolic resolution processing uses about 15-20 percentage of senior official time in concerned ministries, time that can be used in program design, program implementation control, or stakeholder coordination.

But more to the point, the publicity that goes into symbolic acts frequently eclipses other more productive activities. A number of CVE practitioners cited that their programs were given less political support due to the lack of a symbolic appeal of the kind of religious resolutions, even though they showed better results in actual extremism prevention.

4.3.3 Message Dilution

The proliferation of symbolic religious messaging creates a "signal-to-noise" problem in Pakistan's information environment. Once religious rhetoric is used regularly by the mainstream political players to appeal to voters, it is hard to see any real counter-narratives and easy to read between the personal politics and the political stance. This watering down effect diminishes the effects of authentic actions at undermining extremist versions of Islamic values.

The situation is worsened by the fact that symbolic resolutions tend to use religious language that intersects with extremist messages to a great extent. The analysis of content shows that 43 percent of resolutions concerning blasphemy include rhetoric that might be construed as endorsing vigilante justice or religious intolerance, which weakens concurrent government attempts to encourage religious moderation.

4.3.4 Coalition Fragmentation

Policy drift contributes to fragmentation within Pakistan's counter-extremism coalition by creating cynicism among key stakeholder groups. Civil society organizations, religious leaders, and community-based CVE practitioners indicated a decline in their willingness to work with government agencies because they distrusted government dedication to substantive reform.

Such fragmentation is especially harmful since successful CVE implies long-term collaboration between various stakeholder groups. The collaborative relationships that are necessary to sustain the community-based prevention are even harder to sustain when symbolic politics erodes the trust among the actors of government and civil society.

4.3.5 Opportunity Cost Multiplication

Perhaps most importantly, policy drift generates a multiplier effect on opportunity costs by disincentivizing innovations and evidence based response to CVE. Where political actors choose to reward symbolic instead of substantive behavior, it lowers the incentive of bureaucratic and civil society actors to create and implement creative, effective interventions that might not be politically rewarding in the immediate.

The review revealed many examples of potentially strong CVE programs that were not supported properly because they did not offer any symbolic political value. On the other hand, inefficient programs were still being funded on the basis that they were fitting the symbolic political agendas even though their performance indicators were not good.

4.4 Case Study Analysis: Mechanisms in Action

The three comprehensive case studies help to shed light on the exact processes of policy drift and its effects on CVE effectiveness. Both cases prove different facets of the phenomenon and uncover similar underlying patterns.

4.4.1 The Blasphemy Protection Resolution (2020): Legitimacy Undermining in Action.

The resolution by the National Assembly denouncing the reaction of French political authorities to the acts of blasphemy serves as a clear illustration of the ways in which symbolic religious framing can sabotage the legitimacy of CVE narratives. Enacted by a unanimous vote under pressure at home, the resolution denounced the Islamophobic policies and urged international measures to safeguard religious sentiments.

Although this was a shallowly veiled call to religious tolerance, the wording of the resolution strongly resembled the anti-Western extremist messages of anti-Islamic conspiracies. Analysis of content shows 78 percent overlap in the language used to make resolution and statements by the banned extremist groups on the same incidences. This overlap posed serious challenges to CVE practitioners who tried to counter extremist messages on religious persecution.

According to interview data, more activity in terms of extreme recruitment occurred after the resolution was passed, with some individuals reportedly using the fact that their grievances were ultimately validated by the government as the reason they joined the radical groups. According to a counter-narrative expert: "We took months to make young people believe that the extremists were mistaken regarding government policy and the National Assembly adopted a resolution that sounded like an extremist prophecy. It killed our reputation in a single night."

The case also illustrates the effects of resource diversion, where diplomatic staff had to devote much time to responding to the fallout internationally regarding the resolution as opposed to working on bilateral counter-terrorism cooperation. The opportunity cost was measured in reduced international support for Pakistan's CVE programs and increased scrutiny of the government's commitment to moderation.

4.4.2 The Madrassah Integration Resolution (2018): Implementation Neglect and Outcome Divergence

The resolution of the Punjab Assembly, which requests the modernization and inclusion of madrassahs in mainstream education systems, is an example of the policy drift implementation dimension. Even though the resolution passed unanimously and was widely publicized, it led to no tangible modifications in the policy or programming of madrassahs.

The language of the resolution assured a total reformation of religious education to eradicate influences of extremism whilst maintaining Islamic values. Nonetheless, there were no concrete policy mechanisms, financing plans, or implementation schedules in the text. Follow-up analysis revealed that there were no clear guidelines to the government departments on how to implement the resolutions and there was no budgetary allocation towards the promised reforms.

Worse still, the symbolic promise of reform in madrasah set unrealistic expectations among the people affected by extremism but offered no tangible solutions in terms of quality education and counter-radicalization. Some of the parents interviewed in the case study noted that they were initially optimistic about the attempts by the government to reform, but they became disheartened when they did not see any changes.

Narrative confusion effects are also demonstrated in the case. The commitment of the resolution to wipe out extremist forces and at the same time maintain Islamic values came with words that were ambiguous enough to please both the reformist lobby and the conservative constituencies. But this vagueness rendered implementation unfeasible, given the conflicting interpretations of the commitment by various stakeholders.

4.4.3 The Jihad Clarification Resolution (2019): Message Dilution and Coalition Fragmentation

The resolution on true jihad by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly illustrates how the symbolic use of religion can unintentionally reinforce extremist messages and divide counter-extremism coalitions. The resolution denounced the distortions

of jihad and affirmed that the true jihad is beneficial to both Islam and the national interests of Pakistan.

Although the purpose of the theological statements of the resolution was to counter extremist interpretations, they created major issues among CVE programming. Through religious interpretation, the actors in the government placed themselves in the place of theological authority a role that most religious leaders believed was unsuitable to political institutions. This stance led to a fracturing of the coalition because traditional religious authorities parted ways with government counter-narrative campaigns.

The resolution demonstrates message dilution effects as well. Its theological terminology was complicated and disputed enough that various groups had different interpretations of it. Extremist groups cherry-picked parts of the resolution that seemed to legitimize their causes, with moderately religious leaders condemning other parts as theologically unsound.

The post-resolution analysis showed a lack of effectiveness in government counter-narrative programming, and some community-based programs noted a decline in the involvement of religious leaders because of the fear of political appropriation of religious speech. This case shows that the symbolic religious positioning by government actors can even diminish the effectiveness of genuine religious counter-messaging instead of increasing it.

4.5 Comparative and International Context

The experience of policy drift in CVE settings in Pakistan is representative of overall trends visible in various Muslim-majority states, albeit with unique features due to the specifics of the political and religious processes in the country. The comparative analysis shows both universal obstacles and context-specific factors that determine the role of symbolic politics in extremism prevention activities.

The same patterns of symbolic religious rivalry and the resultant failure in implementation could be found in countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, and Egypt. The situation in Pakistan is however marked by the specific intensity of the inter-party religious rivalry and the heritage of the state-sponsored religious mobilization in the Cold War

era and the continued instability in the border areas following the conflicts.

The discussion indicates that policy drift is a systematic problem, not an idiosyncratic one, of CVE efficacy in a situation where religion is a key element in political legitimation. The implications of this result to international CVE aid are extensive, since it indicates that technical aid based on program design and implementation cannot be adequate without consideration of the underlying political processes, which impact the symbolic and substantial emphasis of policy priorities.

Proposed Framework: The Integrated Symbolic - Substantive Framework (ISSF)

5.1 Framework Overview and Theoretical Foundation

The Integrated Symbolic-Substantive Framework (ISSF) is a novel approach to CVE that converts the symbolic politics of religion into an asset of extremism prevention. Rather than attempting to eliminate symbolic politics - an unrealistic goal in Pakistan's context - the ISSF provides mechanisms for aligning symbolic actions with substantive policy outcomes while maintaining the electoral benefits that drive political engagement with religious issues.

The framework rests on four theoretical pillars derived from the empirical analysis of policy drift mechanisms. First, symbolic authenticity acknowledges the fact that religious messaging demands substantive theological interaction and not shallow political expediency. Second, implementation accountability provides systematic processes of converting symbolic commitments into quantifiable policy actions. Third, stakeholder integration develops inclusive procedures that cut across government, religious, and civil society actors in symbolic and substantive CVE activities. Fourth, adaptive assessment offers feedback loops that allow correction of the course when the symbolic and substantive components are out of line.

Unlike other current CVE frameworks, the ISSF recognizes and integrates the reality of symbolic politics instead of seeing it as a barrier to surmount. This strategy acknowledges that symbolic activity has valid roles in democratic regimes - especially in situations where religious identity has become a major source of political legitimation - but does offer

means to assure that symbolic payoffs are consistent with, not inconsistent to, substantive prevention goals.

5.2 Core Components of the ISSF

5.2.1 Authentic Religious Engagement Mechanism

The first component addresses the authenticity deficit identified in the policy drift analysis. Instead of leaving the ad hoc pronouncement of religion to the political actors, the ISSF creates a systematic approach to real theological involvement that incorporates credible religious authority into both symbolic and substantive CVE policy.

The Authentic Religious Engagement Mechanism is an engine that works under three interrelated components:

Theological Advisory Councils: Multi-sectarian organizations of trusted religious authorities give theological advice to government CVE initiatives, so that overarching religious communication does not interfere with but complements counter-narrative work. These councils consist of not only major sectarian traditions (Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahle-Hadith, Shia) but also regional religious leadership as a way of being culturally and linguistically relevant.

Religious Validation Processes: Any religiously-themed resolutions or policies are subject to systematic theological scrutiny prior to adoption in order to determine how these resolutions or policies may conflict with current CVE programming and suggest any modifications that enhance prevention outcomes instead of harming them. Such a process will incorporate impact evaluation of societal perceptions, likelihood of extremist response, and compatibility with current counter-narrative measures.

Integrated Messaging Coordination: A coordinated system coordinates government messages, legislative resolutions, and CVE counter-narratives by taking joint planning steps that guarantee consistency in all symbolic and substantive domains. This coordination avoids the message dilution effects that were found in the analysis of the case study and it maximizes the potential of reinforcement between

the government positions and the community-based prevention activities.

5.2.2 Community-Based Implementation

Architecture

The second element deals with implementation oversights by establishing systematic processes to convert symbolic commitments into action at the community level. Based on lessons gained through successful community developmental project, this architecture guarantees that symbolic religious placement creates concrete advantages of extremism prevention at the grassroots.

Community Ownership Mechanisms: Local communities at risk of extremism are directly engaged in the definition of how symbolic government commitments are converted into practical interventions. This engagement is done with participatory processes in planning in order to determine community priorities, resources, and culturally relevant implementation strategies. Community ownership lowers the legitimacy issues related to top-down symbolic politics, and makes sure that prevention activities meet locally-recognized needs.

Multi-Stakeholder Implementation Committees:

Multi-jurisdictional bodies comprising governmental officials, religious figures, civil society groups, and residents establish in order to translate symbolic commitments into particular programs and actions. These committees possess budgetary authority, supervisory duties in implementation, and performance assessment obligations which establish accountability systems to ensure that symbolic commitments do not end up as mere rhetoric.

Graduated Implementation Pathways: The framework does not anticipate instant comprehensive implementation of symbolic commitments, but offers graduated pathways which commence with pilot programs in a few chosen communities, and increase in scale as demonstrated effectiveness. This method saves on the burden of implementation and allows learning and adaptation on early experience.

5.2.3 Evidence-Based Adaptation Processes

The third element deals with the assessment and learning shortfalls that lead to drift in policy by creating systematic procedures of quantifying both symbolic and substantive results and allowing the process of framework refinement by using the evidence offered by the empirical data.

Dual-Track Monitoring Systems: Parallel monitoring systems monitor both symbolic outcomes (media coverage, public perception, political satisfaction) and substantive outcomes (behavior change, program participation, security indicators) to detect agreement or divergence between symbolic and substantive tracks. This two-track strategy allows the prompt detection of the emergent drift in the policy and offers evidence on how the course can be corrected.

Community Feedback Integration: Regular community feedback mechanisms capture grassroots perceptions of government sincerity, program effectiveness, and religious authenticity of CVE efforts. Such feedback guides both the symbolic message modifications and substantive changes to programs, which provide responsive governance processes that sustain community participation over time.

Cross-Regional Learning Networks: Structured information exchange among populations, provinces, and similar international settings can facilitate the fast spread of successful practices and prevent the reuse of previous strategies that have failed. These networks consist of government and civil society actors, and they promote innovation that cuts across institutional lines.

5.3 Governance Structure and Institutional Design

5.3.1 National Coordination Architecture

To have proper coordination between symbolic and substantive CVE factors, the ISSF demands institutional innovations at various levels of governance. At the national level, the framework creates a National CVE Coordination Council headed by the Prime Minister and constituted by the representation of the major ministries, provincial governments, religious leadership, civil experts, and society organizations.

Such a coordination council is distinct to the current inter-ministerial committees in that it incorporates both non-governmental stakeholders in full as opposed to consultative capacity, thereby sharing ownership of both symbolic and substantive CVE strategies. The council's mandate includes review of proposed religious resolutions for CVE impact, coordination of government religious messaging with counter-narrative programs, and oversight of implementation accountability mechanisms.

Parliamentary Engagement Protocols: The protocol sets up new protocols around parliamentary review of religiously-themed resolutions, such as compulsory CVE impact evaluations, consultation with theological advisory councils, and specification of implementation modalities and funding sources. These protocols make the resolution process not only symbolic positioning but structured policy creation, yet they retain the electoral advantages that drive the political process of interaction.

5.3.2 Provincial and Local Implementation Structures

The provincial-level implementation utilizes the available CVE frameworks but includes additional coordination and accountability tools that are specifically created to reconcile symbolic and substantive CVE components. The Government established statutory organizations at the provincial level i.e. the Provincial Centers of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism, provincial CVE Implementation Committees both in the shape of their BoGs and other committees and councils notified under the Acts have representation of the relevant departments of the government, councils of religious leaders, and civil society networks and the chairmanship is rotated to balance the stakeholder influence.

District-Level Integration Teams: At the district level, integrated teams comprising government officials, religious leaders, educators, and community representatives manage real-world implementation of both symbolic commitments and substantive programs. These teams are endowed with the power to adjust national and provincial models to guarantee compliance with the general ISSF goals.

5.3.3 Resource Mobilization and Allocation Mechanisms

The framework deals with resource limitations by introducing creative financing schemes that integrate government financing, international support, and community input. The ISSF does not rely only on government budgets, which is a major limitation considering the fiscal struggles experienced by Pakistan - the ISSF establishes various sources of resources according to various framework elements.

Symbolic-Substantive Funding Interconnections:

Government symbolic pledges with resolutions and statements of position automatically result in specific budgetary allocations towards the substantive programs involved, establishing financial responsibility as a means of political positioning. This mechanism prevents symbolic politics from occurring without resource backing while ensuring that electoral benefits from religious positioning translate into community benefits.

Community Investment Matching: Local communities put resources or in-kind donations (such as volunteer time, facilities, and local expertise) that are matched by government funding, resulting in common investment in prevention outcomes. This method builds community ownership and stretches scarce government funds.

International Partnership Integration: The framework offers mechanisms of international CVE support to assist in capacity building and program implementation without infringing upon Pakistan sovereignty and cultural authenticity. The engagement between international partners follows the governance structures formed, and not parallel implementation systems to ascertain that it is in line with the national priorities.

5.4 Strategy and Sequencing of Implementation

5.4.1 Pilot Phase Development

The implementation of ISSF adheres to a well-planned process that starts with pilot programs in the first few districts that reflect a range of regional, sectarian, and conflict dynamics. Its pilot phase is aimed at three districts: one district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa facing cross-border extremism, one in

Southern Punjab with a history of sectarian tension, and one in Sindh with the challenges of urban radicalization.

The entire ISSF framework is applied on a smaller scale in every pilot district, allowing it to learn and practice before expanding nationwide. Pilot implementation involves setting up all governance entities, authentic religious engagement mechanisms, community-based implementation architecture, and running evidence-based adaptation processes.

Selection Criteria and Baseline Development: Pilot districts are chosen based on the level of extremism risk, capacity of government, strength of civil society, quality leadership of religious figures, and willingness of a community to do it. Comprehensive baseline studies in each district establish pre-implementation conditions for symbolic politics patterns, CVE program effectiveness, community attitudes, and relevant outcome indicators.

5.4.2 Provincial Scaling Strategy

After pilot demonstration, the framework expands to full provincial implementation starting with the provinces that exhibit the most robust government commitment and civil society ability. Provincial scaling implies the reproduction of pilot structures with adjustments to a greater geographic range and more sophisticated governance needs.

Inter-Provincial Learning Systems: Provinces that adopt the framework engage in systematic learning discourses that facilitate quick adaptation of effective practices without duplicating the implementation challenges. Such learning systems involve frequent conferences, staff exchange, and common training that foster implementation capacity across provinces.

5.4.3 National Integration Timeline

The entire national implementation spans a period of five years with a set of milestones on the framework establishment, institutional development, program rollout, and evaluation completion. This schedule harmonizes the urgency of CVE requirements with the realistic demands of institution change and capacity development.

Political Transition Resilience: The framework incorporates mechanisms of continuity through electoral cycles and between different governments, noting that the longevity of CVE performance necessitates longer-term commitment than is typical of common political planning horizons. Such mechanisms involve multi-party framework endorsement, civil society continuity roles, and institutional embedding that crosses specific government administrations.

5.5 Expected Outcomes and Impact Measurement

5.5.1 Symbolic Track Outcomes

The ISSF expects to positively affect the validity and efficacy of government religious messaging to combat CVE. Projected outcomes of the symbolic tracks are a heightened sense of government honesty on religious matters, a decrease in the use of religious positioning by extremists, and the improving integration of official messages with community counter-narrative initiatives.

Credibility Indicators: Public opinion surveys, media analysis, and stakeholder feedback systems offer periodic assessment of government credibility in religious messaging. These indicators monitor shifts in societal attitudes toward the trustworthiness of the government, the religious purity of official messages, and discrepancies between the proclaimed values and the actual practices.

5.5.2 Substantive Track Outcomes

Substantive track outcomes involve quantifiable increases in the effectiveness of prevention programs against extremism, such as lower rates of radicalization, higher-resilience of communities to extremist recruitment, better inter-community relationships, and greater local prevention programming capabilities.

Prevention Effectiveness Metrics: The framework uses various measures such as survey-based attitude tracking, behavioral results of community participation, participation in prevention programs, and security results where appropriate and ethically feasible.

5.5.3 Integration Impact Assessment

The final success of the framework is assessed using indicators that reflect the synergistic outcomes of harmonized symbolic and substantive components. Integration impact assessment focuses on whether collectively applied symbolic-substantive strategies yield better results than either of the two mechanisms working alone.

Synergy Measurement: Comparative analysis between communities with integrated ISSF implementation and communities with traditional CVE programming or only symbolic government engagement can give evidence of framework added value. This measure also incorporates cost-effectiveness analysis to indicate the efficiency of the approach in resources relative to other strategies.

Framework Implementation: Addressing Practical Challenges

6.1 Political Economy Constraints

The ISSF implementation has tough political economy limitations that are based on the Pakistani competitive electoral system and the incentive systems that modernly encourage symbolic, not substantive, religious positioning. These limitations will need to be handled with caution to avoid compromising the viability of the framework without losing the transformative potential.

Electoral Incentive Alignment: The framework responds to electoral limits by showing that genuine religious participation can offer better political advantages than mere symbolic location. Implementers of the ISSF can plausibly argue both religious authenticity (as theologically approved by theological advisory council) and practical effectiveness (as measured by actual community results), establishing competitive benefits over conventional symbolic strategies.

Inter-Party Competition Management: The multi-party aspect of Pakistani politics poses a challenge in terms of the framework implementation over multiple electoral cycles. The ISSF tackles this issue with institutional embedding that builds interest vested in continued structures across party lines and

offers ways in which each party will be given the ability to take credit in effective CVE results.

6.2 Capacity Development Requirements

Effective implementation of ISSF demands extensive capacity building among various types of stakeholders, including government officials and religious leaders, civil society organizations, and representatives of the community. The capacity development strategy of the framework covers the technical skills and collaborative competencies needed to achieve successful symbolic-substantive incorporation.

Government Capacity Building: Political leaders and civil servants need to be trained on religious sensitivity, community involvement, participatory planning, and evidence-based policy creation. This capacity building is achieved through collaboration with academic institutions, international development agencies and effective CVE programs in similar settings.

Religious Development Leadership: The religious leaders who take part in the framework are trained on conflict resolution, community development, the process of social policy, and interfaith dialogue. This capacity building achieves respect of religious autonomy and greater competence by leaders towards effective contribution to CVE goals.

Civil Society Strengthening: Community groups and civil societies are assisted with organizational development, program management, advocacy capacity, and coordination with government and religious bodies. This fortification acknowledges the significant role that the civil society plays in mediating between the government and the community view with preserving independence and accountability functions.

6.3 Resource Mobilization Strategy

The resource needs of ISSF are higher than the present levels of fund commitment by the CVEs in Pakistan, which require the adoption of new methods of mobilizing resources that integrate both local and foreign resources to ensure sustainability of the programs and national ownership.

Domestic Resource Innovation: This framework examines new domestic sources of financing including the use of zakat funds, corporate social responsibility alliances, and community contribution systems that are consistent with Islamic values as well as facilitating CVE goals. These processes remove the dependency on external financing and generate internal ownership.

International Partnership Development: International partners are involved in the governance structures of the framework as opposed to parallel systems and are therefore able to align with national priorities and access technical expertise and financial assistance. Partnership contracts have explicit capacity transfer and development of local ownership.

Sustainability Planning: Long-term sustainability involves institutionalizing and local resource production potential that facilitates the continuity of frameworks without perpetual external financing. Sustainability planning is initiated at pilot implementation and maintained in scaling.

6.4 Risk Management and Mitigation

6.4.1 Political Risks

ISSF is encroached by a number of political risks such as the disruption during government transitions, exploitation through inter-party competition and possible backlash of the stakeholders who are interested in the current trends of symbolic politics. Each category has risk mitigation strategies outlined in the framework.

Government Transition Continuity: Institutional entrenchment at various levels of governance and among various categories of stakeholders makes transitions in government resilient. Framework structures involve representation of the opposition parties and civil society organizations allowing diverse ownership than single party efforts.

Elite Resistance Management: It is also possible that some political elites will be reluctant to implement the framework, as this will decrease their capacity to enjoy the electoral gains associated with the mere symbolic religious positioning. The framework

tackles this opposition by proving other avenues to religious plausibility that offer better political values and fulfill authentic CVE agendas.

6.4.2 Security Risks

CVE programming in Pakistan occurs in contexts of ongoing security challenges that create risks for framework participants and implementation activities. The balance between program effectiveness and participant safety must be carefully taken in security risk management.

Participant Protection: Framework implementation will involve security checks and safeguards against vulnerable participants, especially religious leaders and community activists that might be targeted by extremists due to their CVE engagement. Protection mechanisms are established after consultation with security authorities and without interfering with programs.

Information Security: Sensitive data regarding program participants, weak areas in the community, and implementation strategies demand secure management to avoid extremist use. The security measures are set based on the advice of cyber-security experts and governmental agencies.

6.4.3 Social Risks

The focus of the framework on religious involvement poses possible social hazards such as aggravation of sectarian tension, division of the community, and inadvertent justification of exclusionary religious interpretations. Risk mitigation should be addressed with attention to inclusive involvement and equal representation.

Sectarian Balance Maintenance: Every element of the framework contains a clear statement on multi-sectarian participation and representation, ensuring that a single religious interpretation does not take over CVE messaging or programming. This is because sectarian balance mechanisms consist of rotating leadership, proportional representation, and consensus decision making processes.

Minority Protection: The framework provides certain safeguards to religious minority groups that may be negatively impacted as a result of enhanced focus on Islamic discussion in CVE settings. Such

safeguards encompass minority representation in the governance system and certain programming aimed at maximizing minority security instead of endangering it.

International Implications and Comparative Insights

7.1 Theoretical Contributions to Global CVE Literature

The ISSF's development contributes several theoretical innovations to global CVE scholarship that extend beyond Pakistan's specific context. Importantly, the framework presents the principle of the so-called symbolic-substantive integration as a systematic practice of dealing with the intersection between political symbolism and policy efficacy in CVE setting.

Policy Drift Theory: Theory of development of policy drift in this study offers an analytical model of how symbolic political acts may work against policy performance across various arenas, not just CVE. Four-stage drift model (symbolic initiation, rhetorical amplification, implementation neglect, outcome divergence) provides analytical instruments that can be used in policy analysis in varied settings where symbolic politics interact with technical considerations of implementation.

Authentic Engagement Paradigm: The paradigm is marked by the focus on authentic and not superficial religious engagement, which helps establish a growing scholarly awareness that successful CVE in religious settings must be based on genuine theological competency rather than purely secular technical means. The paradigm opposes Western-centric CVE models that view religion as only instrumental and emphasize the possibility of religious discourse to perform prevention instead of radicalization roles.

7.2 Comparative Applications and Adaptations

Although it has been created with a specific focus on the context of Pakistan, the main principles and mechanisms of the ISSF provide insights that can be applied to CVE problems in other contexts where religion and political legitimization interact with

extremism prevention. The comparative analysis demonstrates universal factors and contextual adoptions needed to apply the framework in other settings.

Southeast Asian Uses: Indonesia and Malaysia are countries with comparable issues of trying to reconcile Islamic political symbolism with successful CVE. The mechanism of the ISSF theological advisory council could be scaled down to these settings, albeit with some alterations to suit various sectarian environments and relationships between states and religions. Indonesia has the experience of moderate Islamic movements such as Nahdlatul Ulama that can offer possible examples of authentic religious involvement that may improve the performance of ISSF.

Middle Eastern Contexts: There are multiple Arab nations that use religious symbolisms in politics whilst grappling with CVE effectiveness. The elements of participatory governance presented by the ISSF would, however, need serious adjustment in the situation when there is a lack of democratic competition and the freedom of the civil society. The multi-stakeholder aspect of the framework could be more effective in transitional such as Tunisia than in authoritarian contexts.

European Applications: The symbolic-substantive integration focus in the framework provides ideas to guide European nations which are balancing between religious accommodation and security issues. Although the concrete structures would have to be scaled to a secular system of governance, the idea to match symbolic policies with substantive outcomes might guide the response to such challenges, as the regulation of mosques, Islamic education, and community involvement in CVE programming.

7.3 International Assistance Implications

The evolution of the ISSF has some important consequences on global CVE support strategies, especially the trade-off between universal best practices and local adaptation. The framework implies that successful global assistance assumes more involvement with local political and religious

processes than it is typical of technical assistance programming.

Partnership Paradigm Shifts: International partners might fund capacity-building of locally-conceived structures such as the ISSF instead of offering standardized CVE programming. The strategy involves a longer-term commitment and enhanced cultural competency of international organizations and may yield more sustainable and effective results.

Religious Engagement Capacity: International CVE support is typically oriented toward secular technical strategies with little attention to religious aspects of extremism prevention. The ISSF's success in Pakistan could encourage international partners to develop religious engagement competencies and support religious leadership development as core CVE strategies rather than peripheral activities.

7.4 Regional Security Integration

Pakistan's implementation of the ISSF has potential spillover effects for regional security cooperation, particularly regarding cross-border extremism challenges with Afghanistan and India. The authentic religious engagement focus of the framework can be used to serve regional counter-narrative coordination and the implementation architecture of the framework based on communities may help facilitate cross-boundary cooperation efforts.

Afghanistan Incorporation: The ISSF theological advisory council vehicle would potentially offer a platform of religious interaction across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border with extremist outfits using religious discourses to legitimize cross-border activities. Security cooperation might be supplemented by coordinated religious messages and community-based programming to resolve the ideological aspects of cross-border extremism.

Regional Learning Networks: An effective implementation of ISSF can help make Pakistan a regional hub of excellence in Islamic-contextualized CVE programming, which will help in knowledge sharing and capacity building efforts across South

and Central Asian settings that struggle with similar issues.

Conclusion

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study has identified and analyzed a previously under-examined phenomenon in Pakistan's CVE landscape: the systematic policy drift that occurs when symbolic religious positioning by political elites undermines rather than supports substantive extremism prevention efforts. The study, based on an in-depth examination of 127 religiously-themed legislative resolutions, 47 individual interviews with stakeholders, and three detailed case studies, confirms how this disconnect between symbolic politics and policy implementation opens several avenues through which government actions unwillingly reinforce extremist discourses and undermine counter-radicalization programming. The idea of policy drift, which is operationalized in four phases (symbolic initiation, rhetorical amplification, implementation neglect, and outcome divergence) offers a new methodology in the analysis of how symbolic political acts can systematically cripple policy effectiveness. This frame is not specific to the CVE scenario but attempts to provide insights on policy implementation issues in any area where symbolic politics collide with technical implementation needs.

The empirical analysis reveals five primary mechanisms through which policy drift impacts CVE effectiveness: legitimacy undermining, resource misallocation, message dilution, coalition fragmentation, and opportunity cost multiplication. These processes prove that symbolic religious positioning by mainstream political parties generates quantifiable adverse effects on the process of extremism prevention, as opposed to the declared objectives of such positioning.

8.2 Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

The study contributes to the CVE scholarship and practice in several important ways. It, in theory, brings about systemic drift as a policy phenomenon that needs analytical focus instead of an implementation anomaly. The four-stage drift model offers methodologies to examine symbolic-

substantive relations in various policy fields and political settings.

The research offers the empirical first systematic record of relevant religious symbolism in political contest influences of CVE in Pakistan. Quantitative analysis of legislative trends, coupled with qualitative views of stakeholders and the analysis of the case study, create a profound evidence base of the scope and mechanisms of this phenomenon.

Methodologically, the study illustrates the usefulness of mixed methods designs integrating content analysis, stakeholder interviews, and process tracing to study multifaceted policy phenomena. The methodological framework created on the basis of this study may be altered to analyze the symbolic-substantive relationships in other policies and countries.

8.3 The ISSF Innovation

The main practical implication of the study is the creation of the mentioned Integrated Symbolic-Substantive Framework (ISSF), turning symbolic religious politics into a CVE strength by systematic alignment mechanisms. Rather than attempting to eliminate symbolic politics - an unrealistic goal in Pakistan's electoral context - the ISSF provides institutional innovations that ensure symbolic actions reinforce rather than undermine substantive prevention objectives.

The ISSF's four core components (authentic religious engagement mechanisms, community-based implementation architecture, evidence-based adaptation processes, and integrated governance structures) address each identified source of policy drift while maintaining the legitimate functions that symbolic politics serve in democratic systems. This is a drastic change of current CVE models, which usually assume that symbolic politics is a challenge to be surmounted, but not a resource to be utilized.

A particular strength of the framework is the focus on genuine religious involvement compared to the Western-centric CVE strategies, which tend to instrumentally approach religion instead of addressing the theological aspects of the extremism prevention. The ISSF has resolved authenticity shortfalls that destroy government credibility in religious communication, by establishing institutionalized ways through which credible

religious leaders might be involved both in symbolic and substantive aspects of CVE.

8.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

To Pakistani policymakers, this study shows that present tendencies of symbolic religious positioning are counterproductive to CVE goals and propose practical options that should be able to preserve electoral advantages and improve the effectiveness of prevention at the same time. The ISSF offers a road to changing the way that Pakistan addresses religion in CVE contexts is not about positional politics but sincere effort to engage communities by strengthening the bond between them.

The study also presents important implications to global CVE assistance. Instead of standardized technical programming, the international collaborators might contribute to capacity-building of locally-designed frameworks such as the ISSF that take seriously the religious and political dynamics of particular situations. This method involves longer-term commitment and enhanced cultural competency yet may lead to more sustainable and effective results.

To CVE practitioners, the paper emphasizes the need to comprehend and work in relation to symbolic political processes instead of trying to act outside of them. The ISSF shows how practitioners can collaborate with but not oppose political incentives without compromising the program effectiveness and integrity.

8.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study's focus on Pakistan's federal and provincial legislative assemblies provides comprehensive coverage of formal symbolic political actions but may underestimate the importance of informal political communications and symbolic actions outside parliamentary contexts. Future studies might consider the use of political party communications, religious leader statements, and media discourse, to build a more thorough analysis of symbolic politics in CVEs.

The retrospective research design allows one to identify patterns systematically, but it restricts the possibility of drawing conclusive causal links between symbolic actions and CVE outcomes. Longitudinal research designs, which would trace symbolic-

substantive relationships over time, may enhance causal inference and offer clues about dynamic interactions of political incentives and policy implementation.

The approach used in the study could be modified to study symbolic-substantive relationships in other areas of policy other than CVE such as education reform, economic development, and governance improvement. Comparative analysis across policy domains could reveal whether policy drift represents a general challenge in contexts where symbolic politics are prominent or a phenomenon specific to CVE contexts.

Global comparative studies on how various political regimes and religious environments influence the formation of symbolic-substantive relationships in CVE programming might determine the scopes under which ISSF may be applicable and uncover alternative methods of the relationship. These studies may aid in the creation of more detailed, context-aware international CVE support strategies.

8.6 Final Reflections

The experience of symbolic religious politics in CVE settings is informative to the wider issue of how democratic societies may seek to find a balance between religious diversity, political competition, and security demands. The conflict between symbolic politics and substantive implementation of policy is a perennial dilemma of democratic governance in situations where identity-related appeals are prominent features of political competition.

The ISSF is one method of dealing with such tensions and its success will hinge on the political leaders, religious authorities, civil society organizations, and international partners commitment to embrace the application of the ISSF. The success of the framework demands a long-term collaboration between stakeholder groups with varying interests and motivations, which underscores the significance of the institutional design to bring diverse interests and motivations together to achieve common goals.

In a broader sense, this study indicates that successful CVE within religious settings needs to go beyond mere secular technical solutions and the shallow level of religious posturing to genuine exploration of the theological aspects of extremism

prevention. This involvement should be by way of credible religious leaders as opposed to government representatives without infringing on religious diversity and minority rights.

The question of symbolic-substantive integration is not exclusive to Pakistan nor to CVE, but rather to broader issues of democratic rule in various societies. With identity-based politics still playing a major role in democratic competition across the globe, the experience that Pakistan had with symbolic religious politics might show some insights that can be applied to such aspects as Hindu nationalism in India, the accommodation of Islam in Europe, and the religious freedom and public policy discussion in the United States.

In the end, the contribution of this research will be evaluated based on whether the ISSF or other frameworks can be implemented successfully to enhance the authenticity of symbolic religious politics, as well as the effectiveness of the substantive efforts to prevent extremism. It takes political leaders bold enough to support the effectiveness of long-term prevention over short-term electoral positioning, it takes religious leaders devoted to genuine involvement in security issues, and it takes the doggedness of civil society organizations devoted to mediating symbolic and substantive realms.

The stakes of this struggle go well beyond the realms of academic discussion to include the security and health of communities harmed by extremism, the validity and efficiency of democratic governance, and the potential of religious plurality to promote instead of jeopardize social cohesion. Pakistan's experience suggests both the difficulty and the potential of transforming symbolic politics into substantive prevention outcomes, offering hope that authentic engagement with religious dimensions of extremism prevention can contribute to more effective and sustainable approaches to one of the contemporary world's most pressing challenges.

REFERENCES

- Bjørge, T., & Horgan, J. (2009). *Leaving terrorism behind: Individual and collective disengagement*. Routledge.
- Boutellier, H., van Sluis, A., Verwers, C., & Prins, R. (2019). Transforming violent extremism: A peace psychology approach to understanding and addressing radicalization. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 25(4), 286-295.
- Bukhari, S. A. A., & Huda, S. M. (2020). Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy: Challenges and prospects. *Strategic Studies*, 40(3), 45-67.
- Edelman, M. (1964). *The symbolic uses of politics*. University of Illinois Press.
- Hoffman, B. (2006). *Inside terrorism*. Columbia University Press.
- Khan, M. A. (2022). Understanding radicalization processes in Pakistan: A social network analysis. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 15(2), 78-94.
- Kundnani, A. (2012). Radicalisation: The journey of a concept. *Race & Class*, 54(2), 3-25.
- Nasr, S. V. R. (2001). *Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the making of state power*. Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2004). *Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Romaniuk, P. (2015). Does CVE work? Lessons learned from the global effort to counter violent extremism. *Global Center on Cooperative Security*. Retrieved from <https://www.globalcenter.org/publications/does-cve-work-lessons-learned-from-the-global-effort-to-counter-violent-extremism/>
- Wickham, C. R. (2013). *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist movement*. Princeton University Press.

