

## **Strengthening Local Governance as a Preventive Framework Against Violent Extremism: Institutional Approaches in Conflict-Affected Regions of Pakistan**

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### **Abstract:**

Violent extremism remains one of the most persistent threats to democratic governance and social cohesion in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan's conflict-affected regions. While state responses have largely centered on kinetic strategies and national level counterterrorism frameworks, the role of local governance structures in addressing the root causes of extremism has received limited scholarly and policy attention. This paper critically explores how localized, participatory, and institutionally grounded governance mechanisms can serve as sustainable and preventive frameworks against violent extremism, with a specific focus on the regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (especially merged districts), Balochistan, and South Punjab. Drawing on qualitative field data, semi-structured interviews with local administrators, and content analysis of policy documents and provincial governance frameworks, this study interrogates the interplay between local institutional capacity and community resilience. It situates its analysis within the broader theoretical lens of preventive governance and decentralization, arguing that administrative inclusion, equitable service delivery, and civic engagement serve as effective deterrents to extremist narratives. Key findings reveal that weak institutional presence, lack of inclusive local representation, and insufficient delivery of public goods in conflict-prone areas create vacuums that are often exploited by violent non-state actors. Conversely, regions where local governance structures were empowered through budgetary autonomy, participatory decision making, and integration of local dispute resolution bodies witnessed relatively greater community resistance to extremist influence. Notably, the integration of traditional jirga structures within the formal governance architecture, when regulated and made inclusive, enhanced legitimacy and trust in state institutions. The paper recommends a multi pronged approach to institutional reform. First, the devolution of fiscal and administrative authority must be complemented with targeted capacity-building programs for local officials, particularly in conflict-sensitive governance. Second, localized peace committees with representation from women, youth, and religious minorities should be institutionalized under district-level governance bodies to serve as early warning systems and community engagement platforms. Third, policy frameworks must prioritize the creation of accessible service delivery mechanisms in education, healthcare, and civil documentation as a means of reinforcing state legitimacy and civic identity. These recommendations are grounded in existing policy mandates such as Pakistan's National Internal Security Policy (NISP) and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act (amended 2019), but require recalibration to prioritize preventive governance and conflict sensitivity. This paper contributes to the emerging discourse on indigenized public administration in South Asia by demonstrating that sustainable peace and governance resilience can be achieved not solely through central directives but through robust, inclusive, and contextually embedded local institutions. The findings offer practical pathways for both provincial governments and development partners to design interventions that are not only politically feasible but socially legitimate and operationally effective in regions vulnerable to violent extremism.

**Keywords:**

Local governance, violent extremism, decentralization, conflict prevention, institutional resilience, Pakistan

**Introduction:**

Violent extremism remains one of the most devastating factors affecting peace, state authority and legitimacy in Pakistan, particularly its marginal states of conflict. Throughout the last 20 years, the country has a history of violence followed by terrorism, which in addition to affecting national security, has also destroyed social solidarity, institutional confidence, democratic consolidation. It has been estimated that over 80,000 people lost their lives and Pakistan incurred billions of dollars' worth in economic damage since 2001. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have disproportionately suffered loss in Pakistan (Orakzai, 2019). The military campaigns, known as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have effectively destroyed the militant hideouts; however, the ongoing strongholds of radicalization and the influence of extreme elements show that the force driven, security based strategies alone cannot fix the issue. (Makki & Akash, 2020). (*Drivers of Violent Extremism in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan: Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Vol 13, No 3 - Get Access*, n.d.) There is growing discussion among academic practitioners as scholars contend that the issue of violent extremism in Pakistan cannot be treated as just being a lack of ideological brainwash; it is a resultant imminent deficiency in governance. The declining of institutional integrity, divergences in service delivery to people, marginalization of political actors, and a deprivation of legitimate inclusive local space to make voices, in particular, creates the conditions conducive to extremism. (*Drivers of Violent Extremism in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan: Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict: Vol 13, No 3 - Get Access*, n.d.). This identification has gradually shifted the discourse beyond its emphasis on counterterrorism to include that of countering and preventing violent extremism (CVE and PVE), but in the newly emerging paradigm, the preventive aspect of the local governance is under inspected. The main focus of national strategies, such as the 2014 National Action Plan (NAP). (290.Pdf, n.d.) and the 2018 National Internal Security Policy (NISP). (*National-Internal-Security-Policy-2014.Pdf*, n.d.) placed greater emphasis on surveillance, the control of madrassas, and coordinated intelligence activities, thus offering very little space to localized or community-based preventive efforts. (Khan, 2021). However, based on empirical data of fragile situations worldwide, it has been identified that resiliency against extremist violence is longer lasting when governance is localized, participative, and responsive to the demands of citizens and thus reduces gaps in governance exploited by extremist organizations. (Mirahmadi, 2016). Within the Pakistani context, the ongoing conflict between a very centralized security apparatus on one hand and the marginalized provincial and district institutions on the other has denied conflict prone communities any substantive representation and equitable provision of services. Therefore, such disjuncture creates gaps of legitimacy and authority, into which the violent non state actors often slip under their pretense to offer alternative systems of justice, welfare, and identity. (Yousaf & FurrukhZad, 2020). The dynamics is best illustrated by the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. During decades, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were ruled by the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) that deprived those living there of formal courts, representation, and modern administrative systems. Effectively, the issue of dispute resolution was pushed to tribal jirgas that were under the control of political agents, which was strongly criticized due to low levels of transparency and accountability. (Yousaf & FurrukhZad, 2020). Even though in 2018, the incorporation of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas

(FATA) in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa officially provided constitutional rights and the formation of state institutions in the territories, the actual process has been marked by a very long and uneven process, which has left a significant gap in administrative role and service delivery. Settlements that were traditionally characterized by neglect continue to face limited access to education, medical care services, civil registration processes, and economic opportunities, thus giving extremist groups a chance to take advantage of such shortcomings to increase their reach and justify their existence.(M. Ali et al., 2020).

The political dynamics of Balochistan vary, but are no less consequential years of marginalization in political life, rivalry of control of natural resources, and systematic under investment in basic services have led to the formation and maintenance of insurgency movements, thus creating conditions favorable to the spread of violent extremism ideologies. (H. Ali et al., 2021). In both cases of FATA and Balochistan, the failure of state institutions to provide inclusive governance and equitable development has contributed to a cycle in which grievances reinforce radicalization. A growing body of Pakistan related literature suggests that the level of local governance directly corresponds to institutional legitimacy and resilience to maintain community against extremism. Research has proven that appropriate management of local councils and administrative systems through the allocation of resources, authority and participative mechanisms build trust among citizens and serve as cushions against extremist narratives ((Jabeen & Iqbal, 2020) (Jameel et al., 2019). ). On the other hand, in a situation where local institutions are weak, elite dominated or excluded, they are unable to mediate grievances, which leads to the continued attractiveness of violent actors who promise to provide justice, welfare, and protection (Rafique et al., 2023). Notably, preventive governance in Pakistan is also effective insofar as it incorporates the traditional systems into the formal system like jirgas or shuras. Although they do not become culturally embedded and socially accessible, the preventative benefit of such forums is compromised when they marginalize women, youth and the minorities or they do not operate in a controlled manner. Experience indicates that institutionalization of traditional mechanisms in an inclusive and transparent way facilitates legitimacy of the state institution since it supplements formal governance with practices that resonate with culture (Yousaf & FurrukhZad, 2020). Another important aspect of preventive governance is service delivery. Education, healthcare, water, and civil registration services are not only satisfying material needs, but also symbolize the existence of a state and give rise to civic identity (Husain, 2012). ). In war torn areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa specifically FATA and Balochistan, unequal allocation or low quality provision of services is a common source of resentment that is more acute than the lack of services, as unequal provision of services strengthens the impression of exclusion and discrimination (Naz et al., 2023) ). As an illustration, the access to schools or healthcare in urban and rural regions has been mentioned as factors of alienation that extremist recruiting agencies take advantage of (Ahmed & Jafri, 2020) ). Devolution of local governments to promote equity and accessibility in service delivery is not only a preventive measure against terrorism but also part and parcel of overall developmental direction. The changes implemented in the governance structure in Pakistan give micro ambition evaluation in this context. In 2001, General Musharraf introduced elected local governments providing unprecedented power and financial decentralization to them, but it was a one-time event, as local governments remained only during his rule and thus became politically manipulated and unstable. (Aslam, 2019) More recent legislation, such as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act.(*Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of the Local Government Act 2019 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*) The initiative was aimed at empowering institutions at the district level, and

scholars observe that fiscal transfers and administrative capability are insufficient to enable real autonomy. (Khaliq & Yasin, n.d.) Decentralization empirical literature shows that decentralization can only enhance preventive resilience when a systemic capacity-building of local officials, formal accountability mechanisms and genuine fiscal authority are in place. (Saud & Khan, 2016) ,(Khan, 2021b).Devolution would otherwise represent a cosmetic form of reform, which will hardly help to curb structural grievance that the extremist actors can use to their advantage.

### **Literature Review:**

The role of local governance in policy-making has increasingly taken center stage; and has gained momentum in the academic field in that it tackles the collateral problem of violent extremism. Existing anti-terrorism models have mainly focused on security-oriented interventions, but accumulating evidence shows that failure to govern effectively; that is, institutional instability, biased services delivery and discriminatory and isolating politics serve to allow extremist groups to gain substantially earned legitimacy and consolidated power. (Brinkerhoff, 2011). This literature review represents a highly organized synthesis of theoretical constructs, as well as of empirical evidence regarding the understanding of decentralization, the effectiveness of service delivery, participatory forms of governance, community relations, and proactive resilience. The analytical paradigm places those phenomena in the wider context of prevailing global discourses plus mentioning the subtle regional case studies of South Asia. The fact that the whole world is moving away of a counter-terrorism (CT) paradigm towards the focus on preventing violent extremism (PVE) is a sign that the use of coercive pressure is not enough to combat the complexity of modern day security issues. (Schmid, 2013) and (Romaniuk, 2015) emphasize that effective PVE frameworks must integrate development, inclusion, and governance. (Brinkerhoff, 2011) a fact that is further enhanced by the fact that the status of fragile states is often characterized by governance vacuity whereby extremist groups come up with parallel system of governance or justice to fill such voids. As a result, the reinforcement of local government is interpreted in terms of prevention that helps to reduce grievances and enhance state legitimacy. Decentralization reforms in South Asia have both positive and negative results. (Crook & Manor, 1998) indicate that decentralization is capable of promoting participation and accountability provided it is well resourced and has institutional protections in place. .(Bardhan, 2002) states that the effective local government requires fiscal autonomy and administrative ability as the preconditions. In the absence of strong structures,(Smoke, 2015b) argues that decentralization tends to recreate disparities, empowering the elite to take over and corrupt the prevention goals. All these studies bring out the point that decentralization is a component of PVE but its effectiveness depends on design and implementation, but not rhetoric. Service delivery is widely regarded as central to the legitimacy of the state in fragile and conflict affected settings. (Rotberg, 2024) conceptualizes governance as the ability to provide political goods, including health, education, justice, and security. When states fail to provide such goods, non-state actors often step in. Cammett and MacLean ((PDF) *The Politics of Non-State Social Welfare*, n.d.) document how groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas derived political legitimacy by providing welfare services.(Giustozzi, 2019) similarly shows how the Taliban's delivery of parallel justice systems in Afghanistan increased their influence.

Service provision is also political.(Hickey et al., 2014) demonstrate that patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the distribution of social goods shape perceptions of fairness and

legitimacy.(McLoughlin, 2015) adds that service delivery strengthens legitimacy only when it is equitable, consistent, and accessible. Conversely, when services are absent or delivered unevenly, citizens may view the state as predatory or indifferent conditions extremist groups often exploit. This framing situates service delivery not merely as a technical exercise but as a preventive governance strategy. Participation in governance provides peaceful channels for grievance expression, reducing the attractiveness of violent alternatives.(Fung & Wright, 2003).argue that participatory governance deepens democracy by embedding accountability within local institutions.(Dryzek, 2002) highlights deliberative democracy as a process where inclusive dialogue transforms conflict into cooperation. Evidence from fragile contexts supports these arguments. (Casey et al., 2012) find that village forums in Sierra Leone increased citizen satisfaction and reduced reliance on informal actors. (Barron et al., 2011) show that participatory projects in Indonesia enhanced peacebuilding by engaging marginalized groups. In South Asia,(Blair, 2000) demonstrates that democratic local governance improves accountability and participation in Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines, while (Heller, 2001) highlights Kerala's success in embedding participatory politics into local governance Yet participation can be tokenistic. (Cornwall, 2008) contends that unless power is redistributed, participatory forums risk reinforcing existing hierarchies. Thus, preventive governance requires not just representation but meaningful inclusion of marginalized voices in decision-making processes. Community-level institutions such as councils, traditional assemblies, and peace committees can function as culturally legitimate forums for dispute resolution. (Mac Ginty, 2010) argues that hybrid peace emerges when local institutions complement state frameworks, enhancing trust and responsiveness. (Allen & Macdonald, 2014) document how reconciliation rituals in Uganda aided post-conflict reintegration, demonstrating the potential of culturally embedded practices. Still, limitations exist. (Richmond, 2012) cautions that community peace infrastructures may be undermined if they exclude women, youth, or minorities, while (Pouligny, 2006) shows that peacebuilding often fails when it neglects local legitimacy. Sustainable preventive governance, therefore, requires integrating culturally resonant practices into formal frameworks while ensuring inclusivity and transparency. Decentralization is often promoted as a mechanism to strengthen accountability and legitimacy by bringing governance closer to citizens. (Manor, 1999) finds that devolution enhances responsiveness when accompanied by resources and oversight. (Faguet, 2014) cautions, however, that elite capture at the local level can entrench inequality and fuel conflict.(Smoke,2015) stresses that decentralization must involve genuine fiscal and administrative authority to achieve developmental or preventive goals. . (Clunan, 2009) applies this principle to conflict settings, contending that resilience emerges when diverse actors collaborate to meet citizen needs. This suggests that preventive resilience requires both structural devolution and mechanisms for transparency, accountability, and multi-actor collaboration. The concept of preventive governance intersects with broader debates on state legitimacy, resilience, and peacebuilding. Resilience theory emphasizes adaptive capacity and transformation in the face of shocks (Joseph, 2013). In this view, preventive governance entails strengthening institutional legitimacy through equitable services, inclusive participation, and accountable local institutions. Critics warn of potential misuse. (Chandler, 2014) argues that resilience discourse risks shifting responsibility from states to communities, obscuring structural inequalities. .(Duffield, 2007) similarly critiques the securitization of development, noting that preventive frameworks can be co-opted by security agendas. Nevertheless, (Ungar, 2011) suggests that resilience, when framed as shared responsibility between state and society, can provide a sustainable alternative to militarized approaches. Taken together, these debates highlight that preventive governance must balance state obligations with community

empowerment. By situating service delivery, participation, and decentralization within frameworks of accountability and legitimacy, preventive governance can foster resilience against violent extremism.

### **Methodology:**

In this study, a qualitative research design with an interpretivist paradigm is used to question the mitigating role of local governance structures in dealing with violent extremism in the conflict-ridden regions in Pakistan. The primary empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews with local administrators, the representatives of the civil society, traditional leaders, and policy practitioners in the selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including merged regions) and Balochistan. Purposive approach of sampling was used to select the respondents and interviews were done in Urdu, Pashto or either English, depending on the choice of the respondents. To protect confidentiality, all participants were anonymized. A literature review through content analysis of significant policy documents was also used as a secondary source; the research documents reviewed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Local Government Act, National Energy Policy (NISP), and the National Action Plan (NAP). Thematic analysis of interview transcripts was done as per the six-step model of Braun and Clarke, where five salient themes could be identified, which are; institutional capacity, administrative inclusion, service delivery, community engagement and governance reforms. Interview data was triangulated with the policy documents under analysis by adding to the reliability provided to the study.

Ethical principles were observed in the study through the informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality during the study.

### **Analytical finding and analysis:**

Through thematic Analysis, the interview data revealed five dominant themes that illustrate how local governance institutions in Pakistan's conflict affected regions function as a preventive framework against violent extremism. These themes institutional capacity, administrative inclusion, service delivery, community engagement, and governance reform consistently recurred across diverse respondents including administrators, civil society representatives, traditional leaders, and policy practitioners.

#### **Institutional Capacity and Gaps in Addressing Root Causes:**

Respondents emphasized that local governance institutions are generally capable of managing short term security and administrative issues but lack the capacity to address the structural drivers of violent extremism. Factors such as unemployment, weak education systems, and perceptions of injustice remain insufficiently addressed. A recurring concern was the absence of inter departmental coordination, which leads to fragmented responses and limits preventive effectiveness. Several respondents stressed the need for capacity-building, decentralization, and enhanced resource allocation to transform local institutions into proactive agents of prevention.

“Local institutions can handle day to day security issues fairly well... but when it comes to the deeper reasons for extremism like unemployment, poor education, or feelings of injustice, they are not very effective.” (Responder 1)

“In the context of KP, there is a lack of institutions to address the root causes of violent extremism.. even our Centre of Excellence is working in isolation.” (Responder 2)

“Pakistan’s governance and security framework does not empower local institutions to play a role in curbing extremism.” (Responder 3)

#### Administrative Inclusion and Participatory Governance:

While institutional frameworks for consultation exist such as council meetings, jirgas, and peace committees respondents widely observed that participation is often symbolic rather than substantive. Decision making power remains concentrated among elites, leaving women, youth, and minority groups with limited voice. This exclusion undermines trust and weakens the preventive potential of governance systems. Respondents stressed the importance of moving beyond tokenistic inclusion towards institutionalized, meaningful participation that embeds accountability and ensures all segments of society are represented.

“The final decisions are still taken by a small elite group. Women, minorities, and poorer areas rarely get a real voice.” (Responder 1)

“Youth groups are included occasionally, mostly during emergencies. Regular and structured involvement would allow us to contribute more meaningfully.” (Responder 10)

“Inclusion of women and youth is still inconsistent. Participation sometimes feels symbolic, but when our voices are heard, outcomes are better received.” (Responder 11)

#### Equitable Service Delivery and Community Trust:

Service delivery emerged as the most consistent determinant of community trust in governance. Respondents highlighted that where schools, healthcare centres, and registration offices function reliably, citizens are more likely to support and engage with the state. Conversely, when services are absent, irregular, or unequal across regions, resentment deepens and extremist actors exploit these gaps. Several participants noted that inequity between communities with some receiving consistent services while others are neglected generates more anger than the complete absence of services. Trust in governance was therefore seen as directly tied to the fairness, equity, and continuity of service provision.

“If schools are open and teachers attend regularly, people trust the system. If not, extremist groups may exploit the frustration.” (Responder 1)

“These are basic rights... when a government fails to provide them, people start losing trust in institutions.” (Responder 2)

“Nothing builds or breaks trust like service delivery. A functioning school can change the atmosphere of an entire community.” (Responder 7)

“Unequal service delivery is a recurring problem. Some villages have functioning schools or clinics, while others are left behind.” (Responder 10)

**Community Engagement Platforms as Preventive Mechanisms:**

Local forums such as peace committees, jirgas, and community councils were repeatedly identified as effective platforms for resolving disputes, building social cohesion, and countering extremist narratives. Their strength lies in their cultural legitimacy and accessibility, which enable them to respond quickly to community grievances. However, respondents also noted their limitations: elite dominance and the exclusion of women and youth reduce their preventive potential. To maximize their effectiveness, such forums must be inclusive, transparent, and institutionally linked to formal governance structures.

“Jirgas and peace committees have played an important role in giving communities a platform to address their grievances quickly and collectively.” (Responder 2)

“Alternative dispute resolution forums have been demonized... terrorists have also targeted tribal elders, creating a vacuum.” (Responder 3)

“If we merge the credibility of jirgas with state institutions, we can create a preventive ecosystem against violent extremism.” (Responder 4)

“Community forums are stronger when elders and youth work together. If youth are excluded, they feel alienated.” (Responder 13)

**Governance Reforms for Preventive Resilience:**

Respondents across sectors strongly advocated for systemic reforms to strengthen local governance against extremism. Key recommendations included decentralization of authority, flexible community level funding, accountability mechanisms, and regular training for officials in conflict sensitive governance. Several participants emphasized the need to reframe governance from being perceived as control-oriented to being seen as service oriented, thereby strengthening institutional legitimacy and reducing the appeal of extremist alternatives.

“Provide small local funds for quick community needs like school repairs, streetlights, or youth activities.” (Responder 1)

“We need the local government to first formulate policies for PVE and implement them... if we work with basic things as such, we can move further towards bigger changes.” (Responder 2)

“Simply empower local government with elected representatives who oversee officials... accountable to the people.” (Responder 3)

“The reforms I would emphasize are institutional continuity, decentralization, and capacity-building.” (Responder 4)



“Decentralization is the way forward. The best reform is to empower the local government with resources, authority and accountability mechanisms” (Responder 5).

### **Discussion section:**

This part analyses the interpretation of these results to the context of modern governance debates and makes a contribution to theoretical and practical implications.

According to respondents, local organizations were well-positioned to support day-to-day business and alleviate dysfunction created by factors that enhanced structural extremism, including unemployment and inadequate education and grievances caused by injustice. These results align with literature which says that a lack of capacity accompanied by decentralization, amounts to downward burdens on administration and inhibits development. (Smoke, 2015) refers to these conditions as islands of weakness. These institutional weaknesses do not only diminish efficaciousness, but also provide space to other actors within the state to develop other regimes of power. As a result, capacity needs to be imagined technically and adaptively. (Andrews et al., 2017) The institutions in weak situations must go through a process of adaptation that is iterative, problem-based, and systematic experimentation must power the transformation, and systematic experimentation, constant learning and coalition-building should be used. The lack of interdepartmental coordination, as shown in this study, highlights the lack of adaptive capabilities in local governance in Pakistan. Improvements in preventive governance thus involves the redistribution of resources, professional training, and the institutionalization of coordination systems at the governmental levels. In excluding female, young, and minority leaders in the substantive decision-making process, there is some evidence that they still participate largely as symbolic. This finding aligns with general studies on participatory governance where the pursuit of participation tends to mask elite capture. (‘(PDF) Understanding Social Accountability’, 2025) (Gaynor, 2014) also demonstrates that participatory reforms in weak states often strengthen previous hierarchies and not redistribute power. This is a form of illegitimacy because citizens who view themselves as marginalized will tend to lose interest in the institutions of the state. (Fox, 2015) insists that accountability and trust are achieved when the voice of citizens are converted into the influence in a real action. These results point to the idea that when not supported by institutional reserves, i.e., quotas, the rotating leadership, and the extra-budgetary, local government will still have the weak point in terms of the dominant position of elites, which will undermine its preventive function against the extremist discourses. It was found that the most determinant issue toward defining trust was service delivery. The communities that enjoyed the stability of schools, clinics and registration offices were most likely to provide the state, and unfair or unstable supply of such services led to resentment. The findings coincide with the observations of (Cammatt & MacLean, 2014) that the accession to services is the foremost determinant of legitimacy as rated by citizens in fragile states but is unaffiliated with ideological commitments. Where services are absent or unequal, extremist actors often step in to provide alternatives, as documented in (Mampilly, 2012) Rebel governance, These dynamics depict how gaps in service delivery are directly translated into governance gaps.. (Grimm et al., 2014) Furthermore, it has been shown that under unstable situations, the equal distribution of services is not simply enough to satisfy material needs but serves as a marker of equity, which strengthens the resilience of society. As a result, transparency in terms of allocation and performance indices is crucial to allay the temptation of extremist players in governance loopholes. Respondents emphasized that forums within the community, including jirgas and

peace committees, could be the force to build cohesion and arrive at resolutions on decisions. However, non-democratic influences like elite control over power and disenfranchisement of the youth and women have undermined these processes. (Harper, 2021) argue that customary institutions can support post-conflict stability only when they are inclusive and formally linked to state systems. (Haider, 2009) Equally, we find that community-based methods facilitate resilience, but they threaten fragmentation when unchecked by formal governance institutions. These findings support the idea that local forums are open to institutionalization processes, inclusivity and accountability concerning their preventive potential. The inclusion of these forums in institutionalized governing mechanisms could improve legitimacy and increase state-society connections in less powerful regions. The need to implement reforms of this nature in the form of decentralization, fiscal autonomy and improved accountability were underlined by the respondents who, at the same time, pointed to the challenges of institutionalizing the elite structure and political culture. This pattern is evidenced by (Levy, 2014) Shows that informal power networks influence the nature of governance reforms, along with formal rules. (Carothers & De Gramont, 2013) In the same way one can say that development strategies often fail when they do not take into account political realities. Integrating the results, a governance trap can be noticed: institutions are weak, which prevents participation, exclusion fosters a lack of legitimacy, inequitable service delivery breeds grievances, shallow involvement destroys accountability, and estimated reforms create fragility. This cycle needs to be disrupted in all five dimensions at once. The study is relevant to three research controversies. First, it widens the pool of knowledge related to preventive governance by clarifying the interaction between capacity and inclusion to shape resilience. Second, it further develops the idea of hybrid governance by showing how cultural legitimacy, on its own, cannot be complete without inclusiveness and institutional connections. Third, it supplements the body of adaptive governance literature by highlighting the need to reform political environments along gradual lines instead of wholesale systemic transformation. Being a semi-segmented interview study, the data collection approach is qualitative in its nature, thus limiting the generalizability of the study to all the conflict-affected regions. Secondly, the cross-sectional design does not capture the dynamics of evolution of governance over time. Future studies need to take longitudinal, comparative cross-district designs and mixed methods to evaluate reforms sustainability and whether non-state actors can step in to governance successfully.

### **Recommendations:**

This paper concludes by emphasizing that the need to have multidimensional reform to enhance preventive potential of local governance confront violent extremism in conflict prone regions of Pakistan. There must be increased institutional capacity; local governments must be strengthened with sufficient resources, training and interdepartmental synergies to address institutional aspects such as unemployment, deficit of educational opportunities and bad service delivery. Administrative inclusion must go beyond the tokenism of participation, in such a way that women, the youth and the marginalized groups have a significant role in the institutions of governance that builds credibility and trust. The most fundamental services like education, healthcare and civic registration should be provided fairly and uniformly to make a community more robust and less likely to be tempted by the extremist forces. The community involvement regimes and forums (jirgas, peace committees and other regimes of community-based practice) should be officially integrated in the other systems of governance and they

should be reinforced by systems that are inclusive, open and accountable. Finally, the system should be revamped with widespread governance changes to include system level preventive resilience. This is done by incorporating fiscal, political and administrative decentralization and checks and balances, participatory planning and performance measurement, reorienting local governance away towards a reactive, security-based approach towards a proactive, service based and inclusion centered approach.

### **Conclusion:**

The existing literature shows that the preventive role of local governance in Pakistan comprises five dimensions, which are linked: institutional capacity, administrative inclusiveness, service delivery, community engagement, and governance reforms. Local institutions are limited in their ability to respond to short-term administrative and security emergencies; nevertheless, their effectiveness is curtailed by resource implications, conventional restrictions and biased operations. As the evidence above shows, unfair service delivery, symbolic participation, as well as elite control contribute to the potential loss of trust of people and thus, susceptibility of a society to extremist ideologies. Local leadership, on the other hand, may serve as a strong defense mechanism against criminal extremists by means of inclusive governance structures, fair distribution of services and institutional publicity of community meetings. The discussion underlines the need to shift the paradigm of reactivity in security into the service-based and participative governance. Construction of resilience requires that equity, accountability and cultural legitimacy are integrated in the local systems that consider the underlying causes along with enhancing the bond between the state and civil society. Therefore, the work of the present study becomes part of the larger academic intuition that, when effectively designed and implemented, the issue of governance does not serve the ends of administration alone; rather, it is more of a preventive regime that, having the right measures and approaches, can mitigate its weak points, preclude complainants, and lay the grounds of long-term peace.

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