The Contribution of Pakistan in Countering Islamophobia and Extremism

*** Dr. M. Aminuddin, **Dr. Abida Iqbal**

*** Assistant professor, department of Islamic studies Bahria university Islamabad*
**** National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad*

Counter-terrorism,
National Action Plan,
OIC,
United Nations
Extremism,
Islamophobia,
Pakistan,

Pakistan, as a leading Muslim-majority nation, has emerged as a significant actor in the global discourse on countering Islamophobia and extremism. This article critically examines Pakistan's multifaceted contributions, both internationally and domestically, in addressing these intertwined challenges. At the international level, Pakistan has demonstrated notable diplomatic leadership, particularly through its advocacy within the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Notably, Pakistan spearheaded the UN resolution designating March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, a landmark initiative that underscores the country's commitment to fostering global solidarity and action against anti-Muslim hate. The article explores the strategic, legal, and policy measures Pakistan has championed to criminalize hate speech, promote interfaith dialogue, and advocate for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Islamophobia. Domestically, Pakistan's efforts are anchored in its comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP), which integrates military operations, legal reforms, and social initiatives to counter extremism and terrorism. The NAP's key components—such as the regulation of religious seminaries, counter-narratives, and de-radicalization programs—are analyzed for their effectiveness and implementation challenges. The article also highlights Pakistan's educational and community-based initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance, critical thinking, and social cohesion among its diverse population. Despite these robust efforts, Pakistan continues to face significant obstacles, including political instability, resource constraints, and persistent threats from militant groups. The article critically assesses the limitations and criticisms of Pakistan's approach, particularly regarding human rights concerns and the over-reliance on military solutions. Through comparative analysis and case studies, the article identifies lessons learned and best practices for other nations grappling with similar challenges. Ultimately, Pakistan's contributions set a valuable precedent for international cooperation and policy innovation in the fight against Islamophobia and extremism.

K E Y W O R D S   **A B S T R A C T**

Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape, the rise of Islamophobia and extremism poses profound challenges to social cohesion, international security, and the protection of human rights. Islamophobia—the irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred directed against Islam and Muslims—has manifested in various forms, from discriminatory policies and hate speech to violent attacks targeting Muslim communities worldwide (Runnymede Trust, 1997). Simultaneously, extremism, particularly in its violent manifestations, threatens the stability of nations and undermines the values of pluralism and tolerance. These phenomena are not isolated; they often intersect, with extremist narratives fueling anti-Muslim sentiment and, conversely, Islamophobia contributing to the radicalization of vulnerable individuals.

Pakistan, as one of the largest Muslim-majority countries and a key player in the Muslim world, has found itself at the intersection of these challenges. Historically,

Authors: *Dr. M. Aminuddin, Dr. Abida Iqbal*

Pakistan has faced its own struggles with extremism, shaped by geopolitical dynamics, regional conflicts, and internal socio-political factors. However, in recent years, Pakistan has also emerged as a proactive advocate for the rights of Muslims globally, leveraging its diplomatic influence to combat Islamophobia and promote interfaith harmony.

At the international level, Pakistan has played a leading role in multilateral forums such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The country's efforts culminated in the adoption of a landmark UN resolution in 2022, designating March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia (ISSI, 2023). This initiative reflects Pakistan's commitment to fostering global unity and collective action against anti-Muslim hate. Domestically, Pakistan has implemented a comprehensive counter-extremism strategy through its National Action Plan (NAP), which integrates military, legal, and social measures to address the root causes of extremism and terrorism (Khan, 2020).

This article seeks to critically analyze Pakistan's contributions to countering Islamophobia and extremism, both internationally and domestically. It examines the country's diplomatic initiatives, legal reforms, and policy measures, while also addressing the challenges and criticisms associated with these efforts. By exploring Pakistan's unique position and strategies, the article aims to provide insights into effective approaches for combating hate and violence in diverse contexts. The findings have significant implications for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners engaged in the global fight against Islamophobia and extremism.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The phenomena of Islamophobia and extremism have been extensively studied across disciplines, including political science, sociology, and international relations. Scholars have sought to define, analyze, and address these issues through various theoretical lenses.

Conceptualizing Islamophobia

Islamophobia is commonly defined as the unfounded fear, prejudice, or hostility towards Islam and Muslims, often resulting in discrimination, exclusion, and violence (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The concept has evolved from a focus on individual prejudice to include structural and systemic forms of discrimination, such as policies that disproportionately target Muslim communities (Allen, 2010). Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon; its roots can be traced to historical Orientalist discourses, colonial legacies, and contemporary geopolitical conflicts (Sayyid, 2014). The persistence of Islamophobia in the post-9/11 era has been particularly notable, with Muslim communities in Western and non-Western societies facing heightened scrutiny, surveillance, and stigmatization (Cesari, 2013).

Understanding Extremism and Radicalization

Extremism refers to the advocacy of radical political, religious, or social ideologies that reject or undermine democratic values, pluralism, and human rights (Kundnani, 2012). In the context of this article, extremism is understood as the use of violence or the threat of violence to achieve ideological goals, particularly those rooted in religious or sectarian beliefs. The process of radicalization—whereby individuals or groups adopt extremist views and are mobilized towards violent action—has been the subject of extensive research (Borum, 2011). Scholars have identified a range of factors contributing to radicalization,

including socio-economic marginalization, political grievances, identity crises, and the influence of extremist propaganda (Horgan, 2008).

The Role of States in Countering Islamophobia and Extremism

States play a crucial role in both perpetuating and countering Islamophobia and extremism. On one hand, state policies and rhetoric can reinforce negative stereotypes and exclusionary practices (Mondon & Winter, 2020). On the other hand, states have the capacity to implement legal, educational, and social measures to promote tolerance, protect minority rights, and address the root causes of extremism (Khan, 2020). International cooperation is also essential, as Islamophobia and extremism are transnational challenges that require collective action (OIC, 2021).

Pakistan's Position in the Literature

While much of the literature on Islamophobia and extremism focuses on Western contexts, there is growing recognition of the need to examine these issues in Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan (Basit, 2015). Pakistan's experience is unique due to its geopolitical position, historical struggles with extremism, and active role in international advocacy for Muslim rights (ISSI, 2023). Existing studies highlight Pakistan's efforts to counter extremism through military operations, legal reforms, and community engagement, as well as its diplomatic initiatives to combat Islamophobia at the global level (Sargana et al., 2024).

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theoretical frameworks inform the analysis of Pakistan's approach:

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979): Explains how group identities and intergroup relations shape perceptions of threat and exclusion.

Securitization Theory (Buzan et al., 1998): Analyzes how issues such as Islam and extremism are framed as existential threats, justifying extraordinary measures.

Constructivism (Wendt, 1999): Emphasizes the role of norms, identities, and discourses in shaping state behavior and international relations.

These theories provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics of Islamophobia and extremism, as well as the strategies employed by states like Pakistan to address these challenges.

Pakistan's Role in Combating Islamophobia

Pakistan has distinguished itself as a leading advocate in the global effort to counter Islamophobia, leveraging its diplomatic influence and moral authority within the Muslim world. At the heart of these efforts is Pakistan's active engagement in international forums, most notably the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Recognizing the growing threat posed by anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crimes, Pakistan has consistently raised the issue of Islamophobia on the world stage, calling for collective action to address this pressing challenge.

One of Pakistan's most significant contributions to the international discourse on Islamophobia was its leadership in securing the adoption of a landmark UN resolution in March 2022. This resolution, co-sponsored by the OIC and supported by a broad coalition of member states, designated March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia (ISSI, 2023). The initiative, championed by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Munir Akram, underscored the need for global solidarity against anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. The annual observance of this day serves as a reminder of the

importance of fostering interfaith harmony and protecting the rights of Muslim communities worldwide.

Beyond its diplomatic initiatives, Pakistan has also played a pivotal role in shaping legal and policy frameworks aimed at countering Islamophobia. At the OIC, Pakistan has advocated for the criminalization of hate speech and the desecration of religious symbols, emphasizing the need for robust legal mechanisms to deter acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims. The country has called for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Islamophobia, a proposal that reflects Pakistan's commitment to institutionalizing efforts to combat anti-Muslim prejudice at the highest levels of international governance (Dawn, 2025).

Pakistan's approach to combating Islamophobia is not limited to the international arena. Domestically, the government has sought to promote interfaith dialogue and social cohesion through public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and community engagement programs. These efforts aim to challenge stereotypes, dispel misconceptions about Islam, and foster a culture of tolerance and mutual respect. By addressing both the global and local dimensions of Islamophobia, Pakistan has positioned itself as a bridge between the Muslim world and the international community, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable global order.

While Pakistan's leadership in combating Islamophobia has been widely recognized, the country also faces challenges in advancing its agenda. Resistance from some Western countries, concerns about freedom of expression, and the politicization of the issue have occasionally hindered progress. Nevertheless, Pakistan remains steadfast in its commitment to advocating for the rights of Muslims and promoting a world free from religious intolerance and discrimination.

Pakistan's Efforts Against Extremism

In addition to its international advocacy against Islamophobia, Pakistan has undertaken comprehensive domestic measures to address the persistent threat of extremism within its own borders. The country's approach is shaped by its historical experience with terrorism and violent extremism, which has not only threatened national security but also undermined social cohesion and economic development. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of extremism, Pakistan has developed a multi-pronged strategy that integrates military, legal, social, and educational interventions.

At the core of Pakistan's counter-extremism policy is the National Action Plan (NAP), a comprehensive framework launched in 2014 following a devastating terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar. The NAP outlines twenty key points aimed at dismantling terrorist networks, curbing extremist ideologies, and restoring public confidence in the state's ability to ensure security (Khan, 2020). Among its most notable components are large-scale military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, which have targeted militant strongholds in the country's tribal regions and urban centers. These operations have significantly disrupted terrorist networks and reduced the incidence of violent attacks, although challenges remain in ensuring long-term stability and preventing the resurgence of extremist groups.

Legal and administrative reforms have also played a crucial role in Pakistan's efforts to counter extremism. The government has enacted and strengthened anti-terrorism laws, established special courts for terrorism cases, and enhanced the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute extremist activities.

The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) has been tasked with coordinating these efforts, facilitating intelligence sharing, and monitoring the implementation of counter-extremism policies. Additionally, Pakistan has taken steps to regulate religious seminaries, ensuring that they adhere to standardized curricula and do not propagate extremist ideologies.

Beyond military and legal measures, Pakistan has invested in social and educational initiatives designed to address the root causes of extremism. Public awareness campaigns, interfaith dialogues, and community engagement programs have sought to promote tolerance, critical thinking, and social cohesion. Educational reforms have introduced curricula that emphasize peace, pluralism, and respect for diversity, while teacher training programs aim to equip educators with the skills to counter extremist narratives in the classroom. De-radicalization and rehabilitation programs have also been established to reintegrate former militants into society, offering vocational training, psychological support, and opportunities for social reintegration.

Despite these robust efforts, Pakistan continues to face significant challenges in its fight against extremism. Political instability, resource constraints, and the persistence of militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and sectarian outfits pose ongoing threats. Critics have also raised concerns about the over-reliance on military solutions and the potential for human rights violations in counter-terrorism operations. Nevertheless, Pakistan's comprehensive approach to countering extremism demonstrates its commitment to building a more secure, tolerant, and inclusive society.

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite Pakistan's proactive and multifaceted approach to countering Islamophobia and extremism, the country faces a range of persistent challenges that complicate its efforts. One of the most significant obstacles is the gap between policy formulation and effective implementation. While frameworks such as the National Action Plan (NAP) provide a comprehensive roadmap for addressing extremism, their execution has often been hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited resources, and political instability. These issues have slowed progress in key areas, such as the regulation of religious seminaries and the enforcement of counter-extremism laws, leaving certain vulnerabilities unaddressed.

Another critical challenge is the ongoing threat posed by militant and extremist groups. Despite sustained military operations and counter-terrorism initiatives, organizations such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and various sectarian outfits continue to operate, carrying out periodic attacks and undermining public confidence in the state's ability to ensure security. The resilience of these groups is partly attributed to their ability to adapt, exploit local grievances, and leverage cross-border support, making it difficult for authorities to achieve lasting success through conventional means.

Critics have also raised concerns about the human rights implications of Pakistan's counter-extremism strategies. The heavy reliance on military solutions has, at times, resulted in collateral damage, including displacement of civilians and allegations of extrajudicial actions. Such practices have drawn criticism from domestic and international human rights organizations, which argue that a militarized approach can alienate local populations and inadvertently fuel further radicalization. There is a growing recognition that sustainable solutions require a greater emphasis on addressing the root causes of extremism, such as socio-economic

Authors: *Dr. M. Aminuddin, Dr. Abida Iqbal*

marginalization, lack of education, and political exclusion.

The politicization of counter-extremism and anti-Islamophobia initiatives has further complicated Pakistan's efforts. On the international stage, resistance from some Western countries to measures aimed at combating Islamophobia—often framed as concerns over freedom of expression—has hindered the advancement of Pakistan's agenda. Domestically, the issue of extremism has sometimes been exploited for political gain, with different actors using it to consolidate power or discredit opponents. This politicization can undermine public trust and weaken the legitimacy of state-led initiatives.

Finally, Pakistan's efforts are constrained by limited resources and capacity, particularly in the areas of education, social services, and community engagement. While the government has launched numerous programs to promote tolerance and critical thinking, their impact is often limited by inadequate funding, weak institutional support, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders. Overcoming these challenges will require sustained political will, greater investment in social development, and enhanced international cooperation.

Case Studies

To provide a deeper understanding of Pakistan's contributions and challenges in countering Islamophobia and extremism, it is instructive to examine specific initiatives and operations that have shaped the country's approach. These case studies highlight both the successes and the limitations of Pakistan's strategies, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners.

One of the most notable examples of Pakistan's international leadership is its role in establishing the International Day to Combat Islamophobia at the United Nations. In March 2022, Pakistan, along with other member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), successfully championed a resolution that designated March 15 as a day to raise global awareness about anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination. This initiative, led by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Munir Akram, marked a significant milestone in the global fight against Islamophobia. The resolution not only underscored the need for collective action but also provided a platform for Muslim-majority countries to share their experiences and advocate for stronger legal and policy measures. The annual observance of this day has since become a focal point for international dialogue on religious tolerance and the protection of minority rights (ISSI, 2023).

On the domestic front, Operation Zarb-e-Azb stands out as a defining moment in Pakistan's counter-extremism efforts. Launched in 2014 in response to a surge in terrorist attacks, this large-scale military operation targeted militant strongholds in the country's northwestern tribal regions. The operation resulted in the dismantling of numerous terrorist networks, the recovery of vast caches of weapons, and the restoration of state authority in areas that had long been controlled by extremist groups. While Zarb-e-Azb achieved significant tactical successes, it also highlighted the complexities of countering extremism through military means. The displacement of civilians, allegations of human rights abuses, and the challenge of ensuring long-term stability in affected regions underscored the need for complementary social and economic interventions (Khan, 2020).

Another important case study is Pakistan's community-based counter-violent extremism (CVE) programs. These initiatives, implemented in collaboration with

local partners and international organizations, focus on de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and the reintegration of former militants into society. Programs such as the Sabaoon Rehabilitation Center and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Center of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism have provided vocational training, psychological counseling, and educational opportunities to individuals disengaged from extremist groups. While these efforts have shown promise in reducing recidivism and fostering social cohesion, their impact is often limited by resource constraints and the need for broader systemic reforms (Sargana et al., 2024).

Taken together, these case studies illustrate the breadth and complexity of Pakistan's efforts to counter Islamophobia and extremism. They highlight the importance of combining international advocacy with robust domestic action, while also underscoring the ongoing challenges that must be addressed to achieve lasting success.

Conclusion

Pakistan's contributions to countering Islamophobia and extremism are both significant and multifaceted, reflecting the country's unique position as a leading Muslim-majority state and its historical experience with terrorism and religious intolerance. Through its proactive engagement at international forums such as the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Pakistan has emerged as a vocal advocate for the rights of Muslims worldwide. The country's leadership in establishing the International Day to Combat Islamophobia stands as a testament to its commitment to fostering global solidarity and collective action against anti-Muslim hatred.

Domestically, Pakistan has demonstrated a comprehensive approach to countering extremism, integrating military operations, legal reforms, and social initiatives into a cohesive strategy. The National Action Plan and community-based counter-violent extremism programs highlight the government's recognition of the need to address both the symptoms and root causes of extremism. While these efforts have yielded notable successes, such as the dismantling of terrorist networks and the rehabilitation of former militants, they have also revealed persistent challenges, including implementation gaps, human rights concerns, and the resilience of extremist groups.

A comparative analysis with other countries underscores the importance of context-specific strategies and the value of international cooperation. Pakistan's experience offers valuable lessons for other nations grappling with similar issues, particularly in terms of balancing security imperatives with respect for human rights and social inclusion. The country's dual focus on domestic action and international advocacy sets a precedent for addressing the complex and interconnected challenges of Islamophobia and extremism.

Looking ahead, Pakistan's continued progress will depend on sustained political will, greater investment in social development, and enhanced collaboration with both regional and global partners. By building on its achievements and addressing its limitations, Pakistan can further strengthen its role as a leader in the global fight against hate and violence. Ultimately, the country's efforts serve as a reminder of the importance of unity, tolerance, and shared responsibility in creating a more just and secure world.

Recommendations

Building on the analysis of Pakistan's efforts and the challenges it faces, several

recommendations emerge to strengthen the country's approach to countering Islamophobia and extremism. First, there is a need for greater investment in the implementation of existing policies, particularly the National Action Plan. This includes ensuring adequate funding, improving inter-agency coordination, and addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies that hinder progress. Strengthening the capacity of institutions such as the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and local law enforcement agencies will be crucial for the effective execution of counter-extremism initiatives.

Second, Pakistan should continue to prioritize social and educational interventions that address the root causes of extremism. Expanding community-based programs, promoting interfaith dialogue, and investing in education reform can help foster a culture of tolerance and critical thinking. Special attention should be given to marginalized communities, where socio-economic deprivation and lack of access to quality education often create fertile ground for radicalization. Empowering local leaders and civil society organizations to play a more active role in these efforts can further enhance their impact.

Third, it is essential to uphold human rights and due process in all counter-extremism operations. While security measures are necessary, they must be balanced with respect for civil liberties and the rule of law. Addressing allegations of human rights abuses and ensuring accountability will help build public trust and prevent the alienation of communities that are most vulnerable to extremist narratives.

Fourth, Pakistan should sustain its leadership in international advocacy against Islamophobia. This includes continuing to push for stronger legal frameworks at the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, as well as fostering partnerships with other countries and international organizations. Sharing best practices and lessons learned from its own experience can contribute to a more coordinated and effective global response to these challenges.

Finally, there is a need for ongoing research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of counter-extremism and anti-Islamophobia initiatives. Investing in data collection, impact assessments, and independent monitoring will enable policymakers to make evidence-based decisions and adapt strategies as needed. By adopting a holistic, rights-based, and evidence-driven approach, Pakistan can further consolidate its role as a leader in the global fight against Islamophobia and extremism.

References

Allen, C. (2010). *Islamophobia.* Ashgate.

Basit, A. (2015). *Countering violent extremism: Evaluating Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategies.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Borum, R. (2011). Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories. *Journal of Strategic Security, 4*(4), 7–36. https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.4.4.1

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis.* Lynne Rienner.

Cesari, J. (2013). *Why the West fears Islam: An exploration of Muslims in liberal democracies.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Horgan, J. (2008). *The psychology of terrorism.* Routledge.

Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. (2023). *Pakistan's role in combating Islamophobia* (Issue Brief). https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/IB_Mahrukh_Apr_21_2023.pdf

Khan, A. (2020). Accomplishments and challenges of Pakistan's fight against violent religious extremism: A critical analysis. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review, 6*(2), 119–132. https://pssr.org.pk/issues/v6/2/accomplishments-and-challenges-of-pakistan-s-fight-against-violent-religious-extremism-a-critical-analysis.pdf

Kundnani, A. (2012). *The Muslims are coming! Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic War on Terror.* Verso.

Mondon, A., & Winter, A. (2020). *Reactionary democracy: How racism and the populist far right became mainstream.* Pluto Press.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. (2021). *The OIC Observatory: Islamophobia turns into government policies.* https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=33882&lan=en

Runnymede Trust. (1997). *Islamophobia: A challenge for us all.* https://assets.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/617bfd6cf1456219c2c4bc5c_islamophobia.pdf

Sargana, T. H., Hussain, M., & Sipra, G. H. A. (2024). Counter violent extremism (CVE): An analysis of Pakistan's policy calculus. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom, 3*(2), 119–132. https://pjlaw.com.pk/index.php/Journal/article/view/v3i2-119-132

Sayyid, S. (2014). *Recalling the caliphate: Decolonization and world order.* Hurst.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics.* Cambridge University Press.