

SOFT POWER TO ADDRESS YOUTH EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN

Chaudhry Saeed Ullah*

Abstract

This article delves into the potential of utilizing Soft Power as a tool to address extremism within the youth population of Pakistan. It explores how leveraging Soft Power can help diminish the allure of ideologies by influencing attitudes, values, and behaviors through cultural, educational, and informational initiatives. The study shows cases how effective soft power can be in encouraging inclusivity, tolerance, and civic participation among Pakistanis. Furthermore, it discusses the roles that various stakeholders—such as allies, civil society groups, and governmental bodies—can play in utilizing power to tackle the underlying factors contributing to extremism. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of implementing a power strategy in nurturing peace, stability, and resilience among Pakistani youth.

Keywords: *Extremism, Radicalisation, Soft Power, PVE*

Introduction

The problem of radicalization has recently expanded beyond national boundaries, posing a complicated and diverse issue that impacts society, countries, and continents. Governments, academic institutions, and international organisations have all taken notice of the surge in extremist ideologies, which are frequently disseminated by manipulating complaints and weaknesses. It has become especially clear how vulnerable young populations are to radicalization within this complex web of influences. Pakistan is at a turning point in its continuous fight against extremism because of its distinct position among the countries facing this challenge. Pakistan is known for its rich cultural legacy, dynamic customs, and historical significance. Because of its advantageous location, heterogeneous populace, and long history of social and political advancement, Pakistan is both susceptible to the spread of extremist ideologies and well-prepared to counter them.

* Chaudhry Saeed Ullah is a PhD Scholar of International Relations at National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: csu67a@gmail.com

Violent extremism has been able to establish a foothold and marginalise the moderate voice with the help of numerous Islamist groups within Pakistan, including the murder of Salman Taseer, former Governor of Punjab, the attack on Malala Yousafzai, a promoter of girls' education, and targeted killing of Maulana Hassan Jan and Mufti Naeem who represented moderate Islam.¹ This thought process has been strengthened by the poor governance, social injustice, madrasas and public education system.² Simultaneously, the growing global incidence of terror strikes perpetrated by many terrorist groups with the assistance of their foreign fighters, has given the impression that global efforts against WoT are not going in the right direction and are yielding no significant results. Is the question about the direction of effort against WoT a new argument? These opponents have long argued for a more all-encompassing and balanced approach, one that will rely more heavily on "soft" or "smart" tactics as vital parts of the counterterrorism toolkit and incorporate more of them.³ Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy combines both kinetic and non-kinetic tactics expertly. Pakistan has seen a drop in terrorism, yet extremism still exists there, albeit with some new traits. It is imperative that non-kinetic Counter Terrorism (CT) measures be maintained through institutionalised systems in order to address these difficulties.⁴

Since the mid-2000s, the world has witnessed the introduction of many diverse prevention strategies, especially by ME and European countries, to counter violent terrorism/extremism, while the UN and EU efforts are focused on creating harmony and providing support to its member states.⁵ Despite all these initiative and political concerns, a very little effort has been made to conduct research in the area of PVE on various preventive initiatives, methods, especially on their effectiveness.⁶

¹ "Pakistan and the Threat of Extremism: Turning Point," Economist, October 20, 2012, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2012/10/20/turning-point>

² Manzar Zaidi, "Pakistan's Security Dilemma: On Doctrines, Perceptions and Institutional Interests," SISA Report Number 6, Centre for International and Strategic Analysis, June 2013.

³ Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-radicalization Programs*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2-3.

⁴ Dr. Khurram Iqbal, "Pakistan's Non-Kinetic Responses to Violent Extremism," *Strategic Thought* 3 (December 2021):147-61. <https://strategicthought.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/31>.

⁵ David Lowe, "Prevent Strategies: The Problems Associated in Defining Extremism: The Case of the United Kingdom," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:11, (2017):918.

⁶ C Mastroe, and S Szmania, *Surveying CVE Metrics in Prevention, Disengagement and Deradicalization Programs*, Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, Department of Homeland Security (START: College Park, MD, Mar. 2016):14.

This conceptual uncertainty, absence of programme assessment and evidence-based research, and the complex nature of its underlying causes deter the prospects of PVE.⁷

Some of the recent studies highlight the prevalent nature of the threat of extremism in Pakistani society including the susceptibility of Pakistani youth to it. The definitional challenges and the lack of systematic understanding complicates the policy interventions. There is a clear vulnerability of university youth to radical influences.⁸ The dynamics at play are many including hate speech, availability of extremist material, and recruitment practices. There is a need for counter radicalization strategies targeted at the youth.⁹

In the context of addressing youth extremism in Pakistan, this article adopts soft power as its theoretical framework. It focuses on the potential of culture, values, and diplomacy to counter radicalization. Using a qualitative research methodology, the paper explores how soft power can be strategically harnessed in Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE). The analysis begins with a discussion of the promising potential of soft as a compelling alternative to hard power, particularly in situations where ideological and social factors fuel extremism. The paper identifies key sources of soft power—such as education, media, civil society, and international partnerships—and evaluates their potential for influencing youth narratives and fostering resilience against extremist ideologies. It examines how resisting the pull of radical ideologies can be accomplished through fostering basic values, utilising cultural variety, and pursuing a proactive foreign policy. Additionally, it highlights the challenges in implementing these soft power strategies, including political resistance, institutional inertia, and measuring the effectiveness of soft power over the years in the complexities of shaping youth perceptions in a globalized media environment. The investigation of soft power's potential becomes more than just an academic exercise as Pakistan looks to protect its youth and future. It is a call to action that celebrates the nation's rich cultural heritage and imagines a future in which radicalization is never tolerated.

⁷ M Ranstorp, "The Root Causes Of Violent Extremism," *Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Issue Paper*, January 4, 2016.

⁸ Dr Khuram Iqbal, Dr Zahid Mehmood "Emerging Trends of On-Campus Radicalization in Pakistan," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism Volume 16, Issue 2, (2021): 141-156.*

⁹ Dr Zahid Shahab, and Qamar Abbas Jafri, "Drivers of Violent Extremism in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 13 (3): 230-44, (2020) doi:10.1080/17467586.2020.1821068.

Why Soft Power for Preventing Radicalisation?

Pakistan's counter-extremism efforts, such as the National Action Plan (NAP), madrassa reforms, and rehabilitation centers, have achieved only partial success in curbing extremism.¹⁰ These initiatives have primarily focused on security measures and deradicalization efforts but have often failed to address the root causes of extremism, including socio-economic disparities, ideological indoctrination, and identity crises among youth.¹¹ Despite progress in dismantling terrorist networks and limiting the influence of radical clerics, the lack of a holistic approach has hindered long-term effectiveness. Recent analyses suggest that to build lasting resilience, Pakistan needs to foster a sense of pride and identity among its youth, leveraging soft power tools such as education, media, cultural engagement, and civic participation to counter extremist ideologies. This shift requires a broader, more nuanced strategy that goes beyond enforcement to influence the minds and values of younger generations, making them less susceptible to extremist narratives.¹²

It is hard to describe power. "Power is like the weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it."¹³ According to a dictionary, it's the capacity to achieve desired results, Nye, on the other hand, believes that it can affect other people's behaviour to achieve those goals. Forcing someone to do something they would not normally do is another way to define power.¹⁴ Collective power is the capacity to shape other people's actions to bring about desired outcomes. This skill, according to Nye, is also known as "indirect or co-optive power behaviour" and while applying such indirect power, a nation may succeed in achieving its desired results if other nations agree to the same system or wish to emulate it.¹⁵ Joseph Nye's original definition was complemented by Elizabeth Economy by stating that, "people often conflate soft power with investment and economic development, but I define it as culture, education, and diplomacy."¹⁶

Soft and Hard power are generally treated separately by most scholars. Hard power is usually associated with economic and military

¹⁰ Dr. Khurram Iqbal, "Pakistan's Non-Kinetic Responses to Violent Extremism,"

¹¹ Ayesha Siddiqi, "Pakistan's Counter-terrorism Strategy: Separating Myth from Reality," *The Washington Quarterly* 34:1 (2021):149-162.

¹² Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier*, updated ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021)

¹³ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 136, 1

¹⁴ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," 1-10.

¹⁵ Nye, Joseph S. *Bound to Lead: the Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books, 1990, 31.

¹⁶ Chen Jia and Ding Qingfen, "Overseas Officials Head To Chinese Classrooms," *China Daily*, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/dsjbjhy/t722151.htm>

strength, while defining soft power is considered more challenging. However, these two are aimed to affect others' behaviour.¹⁷ In the wake of these discussions, Leonardo Ramos and Geraldo Zahran established the fundamental distinction between these two types of power, arguing that while command power represents the skill to transform what other people do, the ability to affect what other people want involves co-optive power.¹⁸ Soft power persuades and seduces while hard power intimidates and dissuades,¹⁹ in short, hard and soft power can be differentiated as push and pull forces respectively.²⁰

Robert Nisbet in his book *Twilight of Authority* talked about "the softening of power"²¹ and in his opinion, to change an individual's behaviour, soft power can be more effective and superior in comparison to hard power. As per Sun Tzu, the pinnacle of competence is to defeat the enemy without engaging in combat,²² but last century saw Hard Power being priority one option to deal with most of the disputes, countering menace of terrorism included. All political theorists have asserted that large powers alter not just an entity's behaviour but also the mentality that underlies it. Power, in whatever subtle form it may take, invades both the soul and the mind.²³ A foolish ruler may bind his subjects with physical shackles, but a great politician ties them even more tightly with the shackles of their personal beliefs, notes Author Michel Antoine Servan; conversely, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view, the ultimate power is one which reaches a person's core and is equally concerned with their deeds and their will.²⁴ Since radicalization has both behavioural and cognitive origins, it is more important to stop it from happening to the mind than to eliminate it.

In this sense, Nye made it clear that soft power is in play if I am convinced to support your objectives in the absence of any overt threat or

¹⁷ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,"7.

¹⁸ G. E. D. Zahran, and Leonardo Ramos, "From Hegemony To Soft Power: Implications Of A Conceptual Change," (2010):17.

¹⁹ Matthew Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 10.

²⁰ Nye, Joseph S., "Hard, Soft, and Smart Power," in Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Aug. 2013) 565.

²¹ Robert Nisbet, "Twilight of Authority," (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1975), 223.

²² Quoted in Mark Kilbane, "Military Psychological as Public Diplomacy," in *Routledge handbook of Public Diplomacy*, eds. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York N.Y.: Routledge, 2009), 187.

²³ Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority*, 226-227.

²⁴ Quoted in Ohnesorge, Hendrik, "Soft Power: The Force of Attraction in International Relations," *Chinese Political Science Review* 7(1), June 2021, DOI :10.1007/978-3-030-29922-4, 51.

exchange—or, to put it another way, if an obvious but subtle attraction drives my actions. Therefore, attractive power is what soft power is in terms of behaviour.²⁵ Although Nye classified "soft power" as a different type of power, he made no indication of its effectiveness.²⁶ Similarly, despite having agreed with Nye's notion concerning soft power, Hall yet contends that although it is helpful in policy debates, it is inappropriate for utilisation as a means of analysis. Additionally, he thinks that the Nye mechanism has flaws with regard to soft power's objectives and sources, and he suggests using an alternative process to break down the concept into three separate categories of soft power: "institutional power, representational power, and reputational power."²⁷

Narratives or ideas may appeal to people more in changing their view point and in the longer run could be even more effective and more lasting. As in such events, change occurs with the consent of the target. Xenophon discusses the same idea, saying that although a conqueror who uses force may think he can keep doing so, conquests only hold true when people voluntarily submit to superiors and generosity is really the only way to triumph over a country.²⁸ Basing on above arguments, it can be well established that soft power- by bringing the change from within and with consent by ways of attraction-can be much more effective and can bear more fruit than what hard power could ever achieve.

Sources of Soft Power and their Application in PVE

Scholars have two different opinions regarding soft power sources. As per Nye, "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" is Soft Power. Nye goes on by saying that to achieve what one wants; one must utilize "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies."²⁹ If we see the sources mentioned by Nye, it does not include employment of economic resources of a state to achieve what it wants. On the other hand, Joshua Kurlantzick has included economic power elements into soft power, combining both under soft power. As per Nye's point of view, economic power should not be incorporated into soft power as it offers itself in the form of a "carrot" or "stick."³⁰ To do something, economic power, instead of attracting, induces another country. Although it is a shortcut for policymakers to define

²⁵ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics,"6-7.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Todd Hall, "An Unclear Attraction: A Critical Examination of Soft Power as an Analytical Category," 190-191.

²⁸ Quoted in Ohnesorge, Hendrik, "Soft Power: The Force of Attraction in International Relations."

²⁹ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," x.

³⁰ Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Charm: Implication of Chinese Soft Power," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 47 (June 2006): 1.

power in relation to resources,³¹ it is essential to discuss Soft Power's sources and how they create impact.

Culture as an Enabler

Culture has frequently been regarded by Scholars and policymakers as among soft power's main components. Concurrently, though, it is also believed that culture is not one that lends itself to definitive analytical conclusions; issues pertaining to definition, provenance, dissemination, acceptance, and lasting impacts continue to be ambiguous or malleable.³² Culture, just like Power, is conceivably a concept which is much debated in international relations.³³ Culture is a multidimensional phenomena that is difficult to define, according to John Holden, who made this claim in a 2013 study.³⁴ Thus, Kieron Culligan did quite well when he said that culture is an umbrella term that can imply many distinct notions to various individuals.³⁵ Accordingly, different societies or civilizations have different understanding of the concept of culture.³⁶ Because of this, the term "culture" has multiple meanings,³⁷ which demands further explanation.

Though 'Culture' was conceptualized by Ancient Greeks, the word however has its roots in the Latin word 'cultura', which meant "farming, agriculture, or tilling," but subsequently, "the nurture of minds" was later on added to broaden the term.³⁸ Ideas and practices being a synthesis of culture give a society its meaning, and it can take many different forms.³⁹

³¹ Joseph S. Nye, "Hard, Soft, and Smart Power," in Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Aug. 2013), 560.

³² Michael Ermarth, "Between Blight and Blessing: The Influence of American Popular culture on the Federal Republic," in *The United State and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990: A Handbook, Volume II: 1968-1990*, ed. Detlef Junker, Associated editors Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 335.

³³ Frederik Engelstad, "Culture and Power," in *The SAGE Handbook of Power*, eds. Stewart R. Clegg and Mark Haugaard (London: SAGE Publications, 2009), 210.

³⁴ Quoted in Ohnesorge, Hendrik.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Frank Trommler, "Culture as an Arena of Transatlantic Conflict," in *The United State and Germany in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1990: A Handbook Vol II: 1968-1990*, ed. Detlef Junker, associated editors Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach, and David B. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 270.

³⁷ Norman John Griville Pounds, *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1.

³⁸ Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Culture Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005), xvii.

³⁹ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," 11.

Many contemporary academics view culture as an organic phenomenon that is created and sustained by humans, always changing, and best understood as an action word as opposed to a noun.⁴⁰ Culture is defined by Ralph Linton, an American anthropologist as “configuration of well-educated behaviors and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society.”⁴¹

In the complex network of strategies designed to prevent Pakistani young from becoming radicalised, culture emerges as a potent force for change. Pakistan's diverse cultural landscape, with its assortment of languages, traditions, and artistic expressions, has the power to resonate profoundly with naive minds. Despite their differences, young people are reminded that they are part of a global community through universally understandable stories, music, and artwork that encapsulate Pakistani culture. Realising our common humanity can help overcome the divisive rhetoric employed by extremist groups to establish a “us versus them” narrative.

The nation promotes self-acceptance among its youth by means of cultural events, workshops, and historical preservation programmes. Pakistan's culture has endured over the millennia, demonstrating its resilience in the face of adversity. Youth around the country are inspired with hope and determination by the nation's emphasis on the resilience stories woven into cultural traditions. This sense of cultural ownership and belonging reduces the appeal of radical narratives that feed off feelings associated with marginalisation since it boosts confidence and self-worth. Culture serves as a bridge to link people from disparate origins. Young people can transcend prejudices and preconceived beliefs when they participate in programmes that encourage interaction among diverse ethnic groupings. Intercultural dialogue promotes empathy, comprehension, and the realisation that people desire to live in peace and prosperity regardless of cultural differences.

Values as Beacon

Starting from ancient Greek history, values have always been a more influential aspect of negotiations to persuade the target to submit to the laid down conditions; however, the aspect of values has got more

⁴⁰ R.S Zaharna, “The Culture Awakening in Public Diplomacy, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy,” paper 4, 2012 (Los Angeles, Cal.: Figueroa Press, 2012), 31; Brian V. Street, “Culture is a Verb: Anthropological Aspect of Language and Cultural Process,” in *Language and Culture: British Studies in Applied Linguistics*, eds. David Graddol, Linda Thompson, and Mike Bryam, Volume 7 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1993), 23-43.

⁴¹ Ralph Linton, *The Culture Background of Personalities* (New York, N.Y.: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1945), 32.

prominence in the domain of public diplomacy after 9/11.⁴² Regardless of Joseph Nye's view, who consider culture being the focal point of discussion on soft power works, "[o]f course, soft power is more than just cultural power."⁴³ Consequently, 'values' advocated or supported by an actor is regarded as another vital resource of soft power. In explaining the importance of values, Russell A. Berman pointed out that it is logical to suppose that views of their value systems influence assessments of other nations. While competing values may result in bad judgements, common values may encourage favourable assessments.⁴⁴ The same point has also been made by Joseph Nye, who states that a government's behaviour at home, in global organisations, as well as foreign policy all have a significant impact on other people's preferences.⁴⁵

While highlighting the impact of values at different spheres of interaction, Thus, Nye divided values into three categories: values upheld in one's home country, values promoted in collaboration between nations, and values upheld in their foreign policy.⁴⁶ A country's political system and fundamental principles, such as gender equality, admiration of human rights, and provision of justice for all, can be a good indicator of its national soft power.⁴⁷ Because soft power is based on appeal predicated on common beliefs as well as equity and responsibility to contribute towards policies being in accordance to underlying principles, multilateral consultations seem considerably likely to produce soft power compared to simple unilateral value assertions.⁴⁸ Multilateral approach in contrast with unilateral on can be considered as more effective depiction of nation's values. According to Su Changhe, a nation's reputation and social capital within the global community increase with its level of compliance with international laws and conventions and its approach to multilateralism.⁴⁹

Cultivating core values becomes a vital thread in the complex tapestry of preventing radicalization among Pakistani youth, one that can show the way towards understanding, empathy, and resilience. The values-based approach places a strong focus on diversity acceptance and tolerance. Pakistan may create an atmosphere that hinders the growth of extremism by teaching young people that variations in backgrounds, ideas,

⁴² Zaharna, "The Culture Awakening in Public Diplomacy," 37.

⁴³ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Limits of American Power," *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 4 (Winter 2002/03), 554.

⁴⁴ Russell A. Berman, "Anti Americanism in Europe: A Culture Problem," (Stanford, Cal.: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), 30.

⁴⁵ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," 14.

⁴⁶ Ohnesorge Hendrik (2019).

⁴⁷ Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁹ SU Changhe, 'Soft Power,' in Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Aug. 2013), 551-552.

and viewpoints are normal and beneficial. The acquisition of inflexible, polarising ideas is discouraged when youth are taught to embrace diversity of viewpoints.

In a world full of strife and war, compassion and empathy become priceless qualities. Pakistan's kids are given the capacity to see past superficial distinctions and comprehend the experiences of others by fostering these abilities. Extremist narratives that take advantage of complaints for personal gain become less appealing when people show empathy for others who may be marginalised or persecuted. It is essential to promote values that prioritise religious harmony and cohabitation. Pakistan should combat extremist narratives that take advantage of religious differences by educating young people to respect all faiths and recognise the moral precepts that all religions share.

Youth who are encouraged to think critically are better equipped to evaluate information critically and distinguish between reliable sources and misinformation. Young people are less vulnerable to the oversimplified narratives advanced by extremist organisations when they are prepared to critically think critically about and assess information. The cornerstone of a just society is the observance of basic human rights. By emphasising the value of justice, equality, and individual freedoms, Pakistan encourages its youth to reject beliefs that encourage prejudice and violence.

Values are frequently fostered in the setting of the family and community. Pakistan might offer a counterradicalization support system by building community and family relationships. Resilience against extremist influences is fostered in an atmosphere created by families and communities that promote principles of respect, empathy, and unity. The country fights radicalization and equips youngsters to become advocates for peace, social harmony, and constructive change by fostering tolerance, empathy, and critical thinking.

Policy Making: Laying the Foundation Stone

Given classic realists, states relationships depend on philosophies of reputation and honour and purpose of foreign policy is to provide the impression that one's own country has more power than it does or that it feels it has more power than other countries wish to believe.⁵⁰ When a country has enough soft power accumulated, it can take on a manipulative position that prevents other countries from expressing their preferences because it makes them appear too unrealistic. If a state's foreign policies are viewed as ethical and trustworthy, they can strengthen its soft power.⁵¹ Political values of a government and its foreign policies both are considered soft power sources. It could be anticipated that states will

⁵⁰ Morgenthau *Politics Among Nations: The Struggles for Power and Peace*, 70.

⁵¹ Nye, Jr., "Soft Power and The Means to Success in World Politics," 7.

adopt a policy that looks after its national interest, though the way its interest is defined is based on change.⁵² A strong foreign policy should put human rights first, facilitate the transfer of public property, maintain public and cultural diplomacy, and collaborate with others in return.⁵³ In this manner, policy centered on broad values will likely give way to invite cooperation.

Propagation of Soft power is only possible once foreign policies and political values are aligned with universal dogmas. Foreign or domestic policies that are hypocritical, snobbish, insensitive to the opinions of others, or narrowly focused on national interests can undermine soft power. Despite considering diplomacy to be an immeasurable and unspecified element, Morgenthau continues to view it as the fundamental quality of global dominance and the intellect of a nation, with morale serving as its spirit. On the other hand, in the event that a nation possesses significant capabilities but its diplomacy is unable to effectively communicate them, it might have to concede to a rival whose diplomacy is skilled at using all sources of power, making up for its deficiencies in other areas with superiority in diplomacy.⁵⁴ In a similar vein, Morgenthau believed that nations have to depend on the quality of their diplomacy to ignite the other components of their power.⁵⁵ In his explanation of the importance of aligning policies with one's beliefs, Nye says that a state is less likely to need to adapt if it can create international norms that align with its culture. It may be able to avoid the expensive use of force or hard power if it can assist organisations that persuade other governments to impose limits or to steer their operations in ways that benefit the dominant state.⁵⁶

Foreign Policy as a Promoter

- Pakistan's foreign policy decisions, whether made on regional or international stages, could present the country in a way that is consistent with the values of engagement, stability, and responsible citizenship. Pakistan is viewed worldwide via the prism of its diplomatic engagements and foreign policy choices. In contrast to the narrative pushed by extremist organisations,

⁵² Nibid., 60.

⁵³ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 255-270. Accessed November 27, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345>. 225-270.

⁵⁴ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Politics among Nations: The Struggles for Power and Peace," 6th ed., rev. Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 159.

⁵⁵ Morgenthau, "Politics among Nations: The Struggles for Power and Peace," 140.

⁵⁶ Nye, "Soft Power," 80.

Pakistan can present itself as an advocate of peaceful resolutions to disputes by coordinating its foreign policy with ideals like peace, stability, and cooperation. Pakistan's dedication to tackling global issues through collective action is demonstrated by its active involvement in international forums. Participating in talks about matters like climate change, humanitarian emergencies, and counterterrorism initiatives presents Pakistan as a responsible nation open to working together to find solutions.

- At the heart of this strategy is cultural diplomacy, a powerful tool that transcends frontiers and appeals directly to people's emotions. With the help of initiatives like international festivals, cultural exchanges, and collaborations between artists and craftspeople, Pakistan may showcase the diversity of its cultural heritage to a global audience. By providing foreign viewers with an intimate glimpse of Pakistan's customs, the country may be able to dispel preconceptions and foster a stronger sense of national identity.
- Stability in the region can be enhanced by pursuing positive ties with nearby nations and regional organisations. Pakistan actively collaborates on matters of shared interest, including development, trade, and security, creating a climate that challenges extremist narratives rooted in alleged regional grievances.
- Working together with foreign allies to combat terrorism fortifies Pakistan's opposition to extremism. The country contributes to global security and shows its will to fight radicalization by exchanging intelligence, resources, and best practises.
- Encouraging educational interactions with foreign countries exposes young people in Pakistan to a variety of viewpoints and cultural practises. This increases their horizons and promotes comprehension, which lessens their vulnerability to extreme narratives that profit from isolation and ignorance.

Finally, a state's foreign policy must also reflect her domestic values to make it more credible, which demands "consistency of practice with values."⁵⁷ Moreover, as Nye has discussed, simply suggesting democratic and human rights values is not good enough, rather these values should be enforced and promoted through foreign policies of states to make them more credible and attractive.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Joseph S. Nye, Jr. "Hard, Soft, and Smart Power," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 568.

⁵⁸ Nye, "Soft Power," 55.

Domestic Policies

Youth Empowerment and Engagement

The approach of youth empowerment and involvement comes to light as a crucial factor in the complex effort to avoid radicalization among Pakistani youth, with the potential to change attitudes, aspirations, and behaviours. Pakistan may divert young people off the road of extremism and direct them towards a future characterised by constructive involvement, self-efficacy, and good transformation by giving them the resources, chances, and platforms to actively contribute to their communities and society.

Giving young people a top-notch education that prioritises problem-solving, critical thinking, and modern-day skills enables them to successfully traverse life's obstacles. Education provides the groundwork for making well-informed decisions, empowering youth to assess misinformation and radicalised stories critically. By providing skill development programmes that meet market expectations, employers may better employ young people and promote economic growth. When youth are equipped with skills, they are less likely to fall for the violent extremist groups that provide financial stability.

By creating mentorship programmes, young people are connected to seasoned adults who can offer advice, support, and constructive role modelling. By promoting self-assurance, personal development, and a sense of community, mentoring combats the alienation that radical organisations prey on. Young people who are encouraged to be entrepreneurs and innovators not only contribute to economic prosperity but also develop a feeling of purpose and ownership. Social entrepreneurs and startups founded by young people provide opportunities for constructive involvement, which counteracts the influence of radical ideas.

Starting leadership programmes gives young people the tools they need to lead good change by teaching them conflict resolution, leadership, and communication skills. Opportunities for leadership provide a sense of accountability and direction that fills the vacuum left by radical organisations. Giving young people opportunities to actively engage in community development and civic affairs fosters a sense of ownership over their society. Local concerns handled by youth-led initiatives foster a sense of agency and responsibility in participants, which lessens their vulnerability to extreme narratives that take advantage of frustrations.

Creating secure and welcoming environments just for young people encourages peer connections, free speech, and artistic expression. These areas give young people a platform to express their ideas, worries, and goals, which helps them feel like they belong and have an identity. Pakistan has the potential to establish digital platforms that facilitate positive self-expression among adolescents by using the power of technology. Videos, blogs, and social media campaigns can concentrate

their efforts on fostering tolerance, understanding, and peace in order to counterbalance the influence of extremist propaganda on the internet.

Media as a Productive Force

In the complex process of keeping Pakistani youth from becoming radicalised, media strategy becomes a potent tool for changing attitudes, stories, and perceptions. The primary problem with counter-narratives is that they make it difficult to portray radicalism and its narratives as an imminent risk because the state has contributed to their development and normalisation.⁵⁹ Acknowledging the ability of media to impact, instruct, and motivate, Pakistan can utilise this medium to refute extremist stories, cultivate comprehension, and advance constructive transformation. The media is a powerful tool for telling stories of hope, resiliency, and cross-cultural collaboration. Pakistan has the potential to provide a counterweight to extremist ideology through the dissemination of tales that accentuate unity, celebrate diversity, and underscore common values.

Including instructional exercises in media content improves understanding and critical thinking. Talk shows, instructional publications, and films can offer viewers a variety of viewpoints, demystify radical concepts, and make hard issues easier to understand. By doing this, the media becomes a force for good instead of just a communication instrument, contributing to the creation of a future where the voices of progress, tolerance, and unity will prevail over those of extremism. Campaigns for media literacy can enable young people to evaluate online content critically. Giving them the ability to differentiate between reliable sources and propaganda gives them the power to reject radical stories.

Youth may relate to and learn from the relatable examples of positive role models who exemplify ideals of tolerance, empathy, and social responsibility. Through showcasing the accomplishments of those who have had a positive influence, the media can encourage youth to follow positive career pathways. The nation's identity can be shaped by showcasing the diversity of Pakistani culture and heritage through documentaries, travelogues, and cultural events. In order to combat extremist narratives that take advantage of religious differences, holding interfaith dialogues and discussions on media platforms highlights the similarities that exist between many faiths.

Economic Opportunities and Development

In the intricate terrain of averting radicalism among Pakistani adolescents, the tactic of offering financial prospects and promoting advancement surfaces as a vital cornerstone. Given that youth are often

⁵⁹ S Nasir, *Extremism and Counter-Extremism Narratives in Pakistan: An Analysis of Narrative Building* (1st ed.) (Routledge: 2023) <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003386360>.

susceptible to extremist narratives due to socioeconomic problems, Pakistan has the opportunity to recast the narrative by providing opportunities for prosperity, stability, and a sense of direction. Building infrastructure in neglected areas raises living standards and generates job possibilities. Access to necessities like power, clean water, and transportation promotes inclusion and belonging. Pakistan addresses the socioeconomic core causes of radicalization and encourages its youth to have meaningful lives and contribute positively by investing in economic growth and opportunities. Economic empowerment gives young people a future full of dignity, hope, and the possibility of a better tomorrow, acting as a barrier against the recruitment of extremists.

When programmes for vocational training are offered that match market demands, youth are equipped with useful skills. By equipping individuals with the skills necessary to secure employment and promote economic growth, vocational training addresses the root causes of the issues that make people more vulnerable to radicalization. Youth are connected to mentors and employers through the planning of networking events, career counselling, and job fairs. These platforms help individuals expand their social networks and confidence in addition to exposing them to opportunities. Adopting laws that encourage young people to start their own businesses, create jobs, and improve their skills communicates to them that their future and well-being are important to the government.

Young people can have the chance to generate their own economic possibilities by fostering an entrepreneurial culture. Along with bringing in money, entrepreneurship fosters creativity, self-reliance, and a sense of ownership. Giving young people access to small loans and microloans allows them to launch their own companies and work towards financial independence. These programmes give people the power to escape the vicious cycle of poverty and reliance that extremist organisations would try to take advantage of. Pakistan may create opportunities for freelance work, internet enterprises, and remote work by utilising the potential of the digital economy. This lessens the attractiveness of radical alternatives by giving young people access to international markets and opportunities.

Challenges

Potential Resistance from Deep-Rooted Political and Religious Institutions

Soft power tactics to counter extremism may face resistance by political and religious organisations as they may see it challenging to their authority and ideological control. Pakistan's madrassas, frequently

associated with religious parties, have long resisted state-led reforms considering them as an infringement on their autonomy and customs.⁶⁰

Soft power techniques that engage with these institutions through inclusive discussion connect reforms with Islamic ideals, and leverage cultural narratives that resonate with both political and religious institutions should be used to minimise this resistance. Overcoming opposition might be aided, for instance, by articulating reforms in a way that is consistent with Islamic ideals or by working with moderate religious leaders who can act as go-betweens.⁶¹ Case studies from other nations with a majority of Muslims demonstrate that enlisting religious organisations as partners can increase support for agendas aimed at transformation.

The Government and Civil Society Cooperation

The successful deployment of soft power to combat extremism in Pakistan hinges on a high level of cooperation and efficiency between the government and civil society. However, the historical mistrust between the government and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Pakistan has often hindered collaborative efforts, with each side wary of the other's intentions and methods.⁶²

Bureaucratic inertia and a lack of accountability within the government compounded by the limited capacity of civil society organizations and a lack of institutional support.⁶³ makes this cooperation more challenging. Moreover, the varying agendas of different CSOs, influenced by regional, ethnic, and ideological differences, make it difficult to foster a unified approach to combating extremism.

To address this, a phased approach to cooperation is essential. For instance, pilot projects in areas particularly vulnerable to extremist influence could serve as test cases for larger-scale interventions involving both the government and civil society working together in a more controlled environment, allowing for adjustments and learning before expanding the scope of cooperation.⁶⁴

Successful public-private partnerships (PPPs) have shown that when the private sector's resources and expertise are harnessed in

⁶⁰ C. Christine Fair, *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 45-46.

⁶¹ Tahir Abbas, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: The British Experience*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 120-122.

⁶² Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 238-240.

⁶³ Ayesha Siddiq, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 169-171.

⁶⁴ Moeed Yusuf, *Pakistan's Counterterrorism Challenge*, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 55-57.

collaboration with government and civil society, it is possible to achieve more effective and sustainable outcomes.⁶⁵

Measuring the Effectiveness of Soft Power Interventions

The complexity of soft power, which often involves subtle shifts in attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, necessitates a comprehensive approach to evaluation that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods. One effective way to evaluate soft power interventions is through **longitudinal studies**, which track changes over time, providing insights into the long-term effects of these strategies. Surveys conducted before, during, and after the implementation of a soft power campaign can measure shifts in public attitudes towards extremism, religious tolerance, and national identity.⁶⁶ In addition **quantitative metrics** can provide a more objective measure of impact. For instance, content analysis of media reports and social media platforms can help assess whether the narratives promoted by soft power initiatives are gaining traction and influencing public discourse.⁶⁷

Moreover, establishing a **baseline** before implementing soft power interventions is crucial for comparison purposes. A baseline study would gather data on key indicators related to extremism, such as public attitudes towards violence, the prevalence of extremist ideologies in educational institutions, and the level of support for extremist groups.⁶⁸ By comparing post-intervention data with the baseline, evaluators can identify the specific changes attributable to the soft power strategies.

Another important aspect of evaluation is the use of **adaptive management**. Given the dynamic nature of extremism and the socio-political context in Pakistan, soft power strategies must be flexible and responsive to new developments. Regular monitoring and evaluation allow for the adjustment of strategies in real-time, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and effective. For example, if an evaluation reveals that a particular narrative is not resonating with the target audience, the strategy can be adjusted to focus on a different angle or to engage different messengers.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ David Held and Kyle McNally, *Globalization and the Liberal International Order: Cultivating Resilience in a World of Uncertainty*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 132-134.

⁶⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 45-48.

⁶⁷ Philip Seib, *Real-Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 120-122.

⁶⁸ Matthew C. Waxman, *The Dynamics of Coercion: American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Military Might*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 102-105.

⁶⁹ David A. Baldwin, *Power and International Relations: A Conceptual Approach*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 78-80.

Considering the **multi-dimensional nature** of soft power, evaluations should also be multi-faceted, such as increased social cohesion, improved state-citizen relations, and the promotion of pluralistic values.

Conclusion

Considering how critical it is to keep Pakistani youth from becoming radicalised, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that leverages soft power—that is, culture, values, and policy—is needed. The global issue of radicalization demands a deep understanding of the underlying factors that contribute to its development, particularly in relation to young people. Through the lens of soft power, this study has shown the routes that can lead to a resilient society, where the allure of radical ideologies diminishes in the face of cultural diversity, shared values, and diplomatic ties.

Pakistan is about to undergo a radical change that will use its rich cultural and historical past to create a new story for its young people. A less receptive generation to radical beliefs can be raised in the nation by incorporating cultural components into community projects, media, and education. Furthermore, Pakistan can resist extremist narratives by fostering a feeling of belonging in society through the teaching of values like empathy, tolerance, and inclusivity in everything from community centres to classrooms. The encouragement of interfaith dialogue, social peace, and civic engagement further reinforces the belief that differences can promote growth and understanding rather than separation. Pakistan's foreign policy, which is distinguished by diplomatic contacts and global collaboration, has the capacity to strengthen these initiatives and make the world a safer, more connected place that fights extremism.

Lastly, the use of soft power to prevent Pakistani young from becoming radicalised calls for action that necessitates collaboration from policymakers, academics, religious leaders, civil society, and the international community. By using the inherent assets of culture, values, and corresponding policy making, Pakistan may create the conditions for a future in which the harmonious symphony of unity, tolerance, and growth overshadows the voices of extremism. This comprehensive strategy can be a light of hope for the country as it moves forward, showing the way to a society that is resilient, inclusive, and peaceful. The task at hand is undeniably exceedingly complex. Understanding the intricate web of interconnected factors that cause radicalization requires a deep understanding of the social, psychological, and economic forces at play. Through the lens of soft power, this essay has examined the intricacies of this intricacy and has identified workable solutions that could fortify Pakistani society against the allure of extremism.

