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De-radicalizing Pakistani society: The receptivity of youth to a liberal religious worldview

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Abstract

The reported rise in radicalism among youth in Pakistan since 9/11/2001 has been attributed to religious education in *madrasas* and schools. However, education in Pakistan is only part of the historical and contemporary forces that contribute to the prevailing exclusivist religio-political discourse. Although most policy papers have recommended a secularization of public education, such efforts by the Pakistani government have been counterproductive. These efforts by the Pakistani government to reshape education, with massive funding from international donors, have faced strong opposition and there are signs of psychological reactance as evidenced by even greater levels of religious radicalism among Pakistani youth. The current study suggests a viable alternative for reshaping education in Pakistan. A nationwide survey of educated urban youth (N = 386) conducted by the first author, revealed that when considering radical religious, Western secular and liberal religious ideas, Pakistani youth were overwhelmingly supportive of a liberal religious approach to education that highlights an inclusive Islam emphasizing freedom and compassion. Findings have implications for government reforms, peace education initiatives, and long-term conflict transformation in Pakistan.

Keywords: religion, radicalism, education, youth, peace, peace building, Pakistan

De-radicalizing Pakistani society: The receptivity of youth to a liberal religious worldview

Education reform in Pakistan has been a key concern for US security policy since 9/11. In order to counter the spread of radical ideas that fuel militancy, the US government, USAID and other donor agencies have invested millions of dollars to reform and secularize Pakistan's education system (Hathaway, 2005). But despite substantial investment, subsequent research has indicated growth in the popularity of radical ideas amongst educated Pakistani youth (Siddiqa, 2010; Yusuf, 2008). . The current study is based on the premise that educated Pakistani youth tend to adopt radical ideas primarily because these ideas are conflated with religion. International donor agencies' recommendations to secularize education do little to mitigate this perception of youth. Furthermore, the current research will offer evidence for the proposition that religion-based radical ideas can be effectively countered by introducing religion-based liberal ideas in education. It tests the hypothesis that given a choice, Pakistani youth will prefer liberal religious ideas in education over Western secular and radical religious ideas. Accordingly, we argue that liberal religious ideas should be used to reform education in Pakistan in order to mitigate the effect of confrontational radical ideas.

The article begins with a historical overview of the persisting debate in Pakistan on the role of religion in education. It then elaborates how radicalism has been defined by various authors especially in Pakistani context. The study then proceeds to advance the argument in favour of religion-based liberal ideas as a means of countering religion-based radicalism in Pakistan and building peace.

Historical Context: Religion and Education in Pakistan

Movement toward the creation of Pakistan originated in the late 19th century, a time when

a vigorous debate was taking place among Muslim scholars seeking to explain the decline of Muslim power in and outside India. Muslim reformers like Syed Ahmed, Shibli Nomani, Mahmud al-Hasan and Iqbal argued for the need to restore Muslim dignity. Most scholars felt the need to rethink, revive and restructure their religious ideas, practice and identity (Rahman, 1982; Zaman, 2012; Mc Cloud, Hibbard, & Saud, 2013).

An important element of the debate was the role of education in religious revival and reform. The establishment of institutions like Darul Uloom Deoband, Nadwatul Ulama and Aligarh University demonstrated a strong recognition among Muslims of the key role education could play in the restoration of their faith in changing times. At its birth, Pakistan inherited this debate; thus, the role of religion in education has remained a central question in the country. The First Education Conference in Pakistan was held in November 1947, right after independence while the country was struggling to deal with the aftermath of a violent partition. But other than passing resolutions favouring an Islamic orientation in education and emphasizing the need to inculcate moral ideals through education, this conference did not achieve much in terms of subsequent action (Rahman, 1982, pp. 110-112). Rahman (1982) contends that while it is clear that the leaders of Pakistan at the time of its inception 'wanted to inform their educational system with an Islamic orientation, this Islamic orientation, in their eyes, was not

only tolerant but positively liberal' (p. 111).Yet after almost seven decades of independence, the resolve of the First Education Conference, to have an educational system, inspired by a liberal Islamic ideology (as cited by Nayyar & Salim, 2003) remains an unfulfilled agenda.

Some Pakistani governments tried to address the issue of religion and education. In 1960s, the Ayub Khan regime made efforts to upgrade *madrasas*, the traditional institutes for

religious learning. He founded an *ulama* academy to expose madrasa educators to modern ideas and wider social issues. An Islamic university was set up in Bahawalpur and most importantly an Islamic Research Institute was formed to study and interpret religion for modern times. The Institute was built with the twin mission of bridging the gap between traditional madrasas and modern scientific scholarship, and reorienting the Westernized mind-set of modern educated Muslims towards their religious tradition (Rahman, 1982). However, the Institute became a victim of reactionary Islamist forces that failed to comprehend its scholarly work, doubted its intentions, viewed it as inspired by a Western liberal agenda and rendered the institute ineffective through protests and demonstrations that effectively mobilized the opposition. And here a theme is set for the future of Pakistani education.

The breakup of Pakistan in 1971 was a turning point in country's history when it had to reinvent its national identity from scratch (Kumar, 2001).Religion again played a key role in identity formation. The New Education Policy introduced in 1972 by the Bhutto regime was informed by a religio-ideological discourse (Datoo, 2014; Nayyar & Salim, 2003), but according to Rahman (1982), religion was again used as an empty slogan rather than a genuine guideline for education. Owing to a trust deficit between modernist ruling elite and traditionalist *ulama,* no sincere effort was made to clarify the role of religion in education or to advance religious scholarship in Pakistan (p. 114).

Growing radicalism

The ideological discourse in Pakistan remained dominated by debates among liberal modernists, traditional Islamists and radical Islamists until the 1980s, when new regional and domestic developments strengthened the influence of the radical Islamist position. The radical discourse emphasized a professed ideological confrontation between Islam and other systems of

the 20th century, namely, Communism and Capitalism. The policy discourse identifies radicalism as: …youth perceptions/responses on religiosity, their exclusionary thinking, religious intolerance, a level of sympathy for – or at least lack of active opposition to – Islamist violence among pockets, an 'us versus them' conception of the world, and frustration with the conditions in the country … (Yusuf, 2014; p. 9).

Some key regional and domestic developments in and around Pakistan since the1980s contributed to the growth of radical ideas in the country. The 1979 Iranian revolution escalated the sectarian divide as Sunni-Shia rift in the Middle East shifted to Pakistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and resulting US funding for Islamist jihad in Afghanistan fuelled Islamist militancy, and a military regime seeking legitimacy through 'Islamization from above' resulted in politicizing the religious sentiment of the common man. A climate was thus created in which religious radicalism, militancy and sectarianism thrived (Haider, 2011; Hussain, 2009). In addition, the military regime began to promote an exclusivist religious discourse in education for political gain (Hussain, Salim, & Naveed, 2011, p. 15; Nayyar & Salim, 2003), an endeavour that had a profound impact on subsequent generations.

The trend continued to grow the radical Islamist position during 1990s, escalated by a number of events: internal political instability, an economic recession, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, new US sanctions on Pakistan over nuclear issue, the continuation of civil war in Afghanistan, rise of the Taliban, insurgency in Kashmir, the US led war in the Gulf, the post-cold war rhetoric of 'New World Order' and promotion of 'Clash of Civilizations' narrative. As the Saudi-Iranian rivalry persisted, Pakistan experienced an expansion of Saudi funded Salafi madrasas which greatly contributed to the spread of radical worldviews especially among the urban, educated affluent class (Ahmad, 2009; Haider, 2011; Waseem, 2011).

And then came 9/11/2001, demanding from Pakistan, an immediate reversal of the radicalization process which was active since 1980s. The 9/11 Commission Report highlighted the link between international terrorist networks and Pakistan's religious seminaries - *madrasas*. The dismal state of Pakistan's public education sector was also identified as a root cause of militancy and a potential threat for US security (Hathaway, 2005; Winthrop and Graff, 2010). Faced with international pressure to de-radicalize Pakistan, President Musharraf introduced yet another slogan of 'enlightened moderation.' Much was done in a hasty manner under this new slogan: militant organizations were banned, foreign militants were captured, madrasas were raided and aided to meet the Western demand for madrasa reform, and school curricula were examined for revision. But all these efforts were inconsequential and did not change much on the ground (Haider, 2011, p. 125). Instead, hostile reactions were elicited from various groups in Pakistan that perceived these efforts as a Western conspiracy against Islam (Kronstadt, 2004, p. 6). In effect, the top down approach to bring 'enlightened moderation' to Pakistan proved counterproductive. Radicalization continued to multiply especially among the young, now fed by the local and global 'war on terror' discourse.

The result was a radicalized generation, raised during the war on terror years, fiercely attached to religious beliefs which are at the core of their identity, and suspicious of the 'other,' be it another sect, religion, or 'the West' (Basit & Rathore, 2010; Fair & Shapiro, 2010; Khan, 2013; Sial & Anjum, 2010; Siddiqa, 2010; Waseem, 2011).

What we mean by radicalization

Radicalism remains a contested term in academic literature. A number of academic and policy papers have conceptualized radicalism in different ways. Yusuf (2014) has made an effort to synthesize multiple meanings of radicalism in a single definition quoted earlier in the text.

Radicalization, according to Schmid (2013), is not only a social psychological scientific concept but also a political construct, introduced and popularized in recent years by academic debates on national security. Schmid (2013, p. 18) defines radicalization as follows:

> An individual or collective (group) process whereby, usually in a situation of political polarization, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational tactics of conflict-waging…

Siddiqa (2010) sets apart radicalism from religiosity, conservatism and militancy. She defines radicalism as 'the tendency to be exclusive instead of inclusive vis-à-vis other communities on the basis of religious belief' (p. 25). Such radicalism may not be manifest in behaviour, but can lead to militancy in its extreme form; Siddiqa describes this attitude as 'latent' or 'passive' radicalism. Generally, radicalism exists as a worldview or an attitude in which the individual develops a bias against 'the religious other.' Drawing on the ideas of Yusuf, Schmid and Siddiqa, the current study defines radicalism as: a tendency to endorse rigid, exclusivist and confrontational ideas especially against the perceived threats to religious identity. In the current article, the term extremism is used interchangeably to convey a similar meaning.

Radicalism, especially religion-based radicalism among the youth, has been on the rise in Pakistan especially since 9/11 (Basit & Rathore, 2010; Haque, 2014; Khan, 2013; Noor, 2009; Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2009; Saigol, 2010; Sial & Anjum, 2010; Siddiqa, 2010; Yusuf, 2008). Schmid (2014) and Khan (2013) explain how narratives are constructed by extremist organizations to win public support for their cause. Radical narratives draw upon deeply embedded cultural narratives to appeal to emotions and values of the target audience. In the case of Pakistan the extremists' propaganda has been particularly effective as they have successfully exploited the 'narratives related to political, social and historical conditions of Pakistan's birth'

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(Khan 2013, p. 2). They generate emotional resonance because they are aligned with people's fears, desires and hopes.

Widespread radicalism provides an enabling environment for ideologically motivated terrorism and prevents consensus building against acts of terror (Calfas, 2014; Khan, 2013; Haque, 2014; "Religio-Political Discourse in Pakistan Too Narrow and Dissonant to Curb Radicalization in Pakistan," 2012). General John Allen, former commander of US-NATO forces in Afghanistan describes this phenomenon in the following words, 'The growth of extremism, terrorism and insurgency in Pakistan is one of the most alarming developments in the past 10 years in that particular region. It could possibly be the most alarming development globally' (Calfas, 2014, p. 1).

Radicalism in Pakistan has been linked to religion (Haider, 2011; Mufti, 2012; Saigol, 2010), religious education (9/11 Commission Report, 2004; Coulson, 2004; Haqqani, 2002; Rahman, 2004; Singer, 2002) and public education in the country (Bajoria, 2010; Fair & Shapiro, 2009; Hathaway, 2005; Hussain, Salim, & Naveed, 2011; Kronstadt, 2004; Nayya r& Salim, 2003; Winthrop & Graff, 2010). Madrasas, Pakistan's traditional religious seminaries became the immediate cause of concern for policy makers and academics after 9/11. Termed 'incubators for violent extremism' (9/11 Commission Report 2004, p. 367), 'Islam's Medieval Outposts' (Haqqani, 2002), 'factories of jihad' (Sareen, 2005), 'weapons of mass instruction' (Coulson, 2004), Pakistani madrasas remained at the centre of academic and policy debate post 9/11. Later the fear of madrasas was viewed as largely exaggerated and instead, the need to focus on Pakistan's public education was highlighted (Andrabi, Das, & Khawaja, 2009; Bergen &Panday, 2006; Fair, 2008; Kronstadt, 2004; Winthrop & Graff, 2010). Attention was drawn to the alarming state of the structure (Khan & Yusuf, 2011; Winthrop & Graff, 2010) and content of

public education (Haider, 2011; Hathaway, 2005; Hussain, Salim, & Naveed, 2009), which demanded immediate attention. The absence of good public education and good civic education was identified as a major factor that contributes to the growth of radicalism in Pakistan.

Policy recommendations to resolve the problem of radicalism in Pakistan post 9/11 included financial assistance to reform religious and public education in Pakistan. It was suggested that madrasas be monitored by the government, and modern, secular disciplines should be introduced in madrasa curricula (Singer, 2002, p. 7; Kean and Hamilton, 2004). Musharraf regime's efforts to curb extremism and introduce a policy of 'enlightened moderation,' which paid special attention to education sector reform, was highly encouraged and generously supported (9/11 Commission Report 2004, p. 369). During this time, the education sector in Pakistan received a substantial amount of funding from the US government (i.e., a five year $100 million US Pakistan agreement was signed in Aug 2002). About $300 million of additional funds for education were allocated to USAID from 2005-09 (Report for Congress on Education Reform in Pakistan, 2005, p. 123). The 'mainstreaming of madrasa' (i.e. inclusion of secular subjects in their curriculum) and 'a critical review of the entire education curriculum from grade one through ten' were the top most goals of reform plan (Report for Congress on Education Reform in Pakistan, 2005, p. 134). But despite heavy funding the impact of this reform effort remained limited. Little progress was made on the ground. In fact these efforts turned out to be counterproductive as they met strong opposition from madrasas and the general public (Kronstadt, 2004).

Religion remains an important force in Pakistan and it provides power to the radical narratives (Basit & Rathore, 2010; Haider, 2011; Fair & Shapiro, 2010; Sial & Anjum, 2010; Siddiqa, 2010). Fair and Shapiro (2010) present the results of polling data obtained in 2009

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showing nearly 70% Pakistanis wanted *sharia* to play a larger role in Pakistan's law. Importantly, most people equated *sharia* with good governance. Sial and Anjum (2010) report that most people in Pakistan do not like religious extremism and militancy. But their religious ideas are greatly influenced by the state led ideological discourse and the assertions of religious clerics. Therefore, they look to these same sources of authority namely the state and the religious clergy to transform their disliking for extremism into an open rejection of it. It is also reported that one of the main reasons for Pakistanis' resistance to post 9/11 madrasa and public education reform is the perception of foreign intervention in their religious teaching and their extreme sensitivity to this matter (Kronstadt, 2004, p. 6).

The failure of post 9/11 education reform effort in Pakistan demands a re-examination of the underlying assumptions. In particular, the assumption that Pakistani youth may be de-radicalized by introducing liberal secular ideas in education has proven erroneous. Pakistanis seem unwilling to accept such changes in their school and madrasa curriculums especially when they are demanded from outside. In fact such efforts tend to be taken as confirmation of the prevailing conspiracy theories generating fears of being controlled by others.

Potential glimmers of hope

Based on close observations of Pakistani students' political views in classrooms during post 9/11 years, [1] it is our contention that the imposition of a foreign secular tradition can result in 'reactive radicalism' by which we mean the tendency of individuals and collectives to adopt a stronger radical identity when there is the perception that powerful but subtle forces are attempting to influence the nature of their Islamic identity. The sources of these subtle forces

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[1] The lead author has been teaching 'Social Studies', 'Political Science' and 'International Relations' courses in Pakistani schools and universities for more than a decade.

could be efforts by members of another religion, a different sect, country, culture or civilization

(e.g. the notion of 'the West' and 'the Western civilization'). *Reactive radicalism* may even

occur in response to someone from one's own faith that is perceived as an 'agent of the other,' as

in the case of Malala Yusufzai[2] in Pakistan.

A number of studies suggest alternatives to secularization in the interest of de-

radicalization. In keeping with the enduring influence of religion in Pakistan and the centrality of

religion to Pakistani identity, it has been suggested that religious ideas may be used for de-

radicalization in Pakistan (Ahmad, 2011; Candland, 2005; Khan, 2013; Siddiqa, 2010). In

particular, many scholars have argued for the construction of an alternative religious discourse,

closer to the liberal, enlightened Islamic vision of the founders of Pakistan, to counter the

prevailing radical discourse (Ahmad, 2011; Candland, 2005; Huda, 2010). The current study

builds on the arguments advanced by earlier studies and examines whether educated Pakistani

youth are likely to be receptive to such an approach. The findings have implications for the kind

of educational approach and national narrative that could counter radicalism.

The assumption that radicalism is caused by a lack of education, socio economic factors,

poor governance and corruption (Noor, 2009; Winthrop & Graff, 2010; Yusuf, 2008) has been

roundly criticized by Siddiqa (2010, pp. 6-12) who finds traces of radicalism even among youth

from financially secure backgrounds studying in elite universities of Pakistan. Radicalism among

this group, apparently is not affected by the grievances of the marginalized and instead, has been

attributed to the growing influence of religious based organizations working in urban areas of

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[2] Malala Yousafzai is a young Pakistani activist for female education, who was shot by radical religious militants in 2012, when she was on her way to school. She however recovered from the injury, continued her campaign for female education and managed to receive worldwide recognition for her work including Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. Inside Pakistan, however, the popular opinion about Malala remains divided and many consider her a 'Western ploy'.

Pakistan since 1990s and the 'growing consciousness' of being 'targeted' and 'ostracized' by the West since 9/11 (pp. 81-82).

Our expectation is that given a choice between radical religious, Western secular and liberal religious ideas, youth in Pakistan will prefer liberal religious ideas. The reason for this expectation is twofold: First, as we have suggested, Pakistani youth exhibit psychological reactance when presented with a secular curriculum, a condition in which they more fervently turn toward more radicalized ideas. Second, research suggests that Pakistani youth favour education based on religion but reject militant views of religion (Sial & Anjum, 2010; Siddiqa, 2010).

Method

Since the study is linked to Pakistan's education system, especially the religious content of the national curriculum, it seeks the opinion of educated, middle class, urban youth of Pakistan, as this particular class is the main recipient of public education. The study examines the responses of youth to three sets of ideas. The first set, labelled 'radical religious ideas,' represents a confrontational worldview; it includes ideas frequently projected in the extremist discourse. The second set, labelled 'Western secular ideas,' emphasizes tolerance for diverse religions; it includes ideas frequently presented in the Western academic and policy discourse as recommendations to counter radicalism in Pakistan. The third set, labelled 'liberal religious ideas,' is consistent with the views of Islamic scholars and most people who identify themselves as Muslims. In this third set, the notions of justice and equality are emphasized and many of the ideas are clearly recognized as coming from the two main religious sources in Islam: Quran and Hadith, the latter of which refers to the sayings or practice of the Prophet. For example, items

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such as 'no compulsion in religion' and 'female education' are direct quotes from the Quran and Hadith text.

Participants

A total of 386 (70% male) participants completed the survey from across 7 regions of Pakistan. Of those who reported a religion, all were Muslim (5 did not select any religion). The ages ranged from 16 to 30 years old, with the majority being within traditional college ages: 45% were 16 to 20 years old, 41% were 21 to 25 years old, and 14% were 26 to 30 years old.

Measures

Radical religious ideas. Eight items were used to assess the degree to which young people in Pakistan support radical ideas which tend to be dualistic and confrontational. This set of ideas was collected from popular radical discourse. It represents inclinations toward a rigid and confrontational worldview perceived to be linked to religion owing to its association with a fixed religious identity. Possible responses were on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items included the 'United States is the root cause of all the troubles in Pakistan' and 'I want Pakistan to become an Islamic Superpower that dominates the world.' Higher scores indicated more support for religious radical ideas. The internal consistency of this scale was acceptable ($\alpha = .73$).

Western secular ideas. The degree to which participants endorsed Western, secular ideas around education was assessed with an 8-item scale. This set of ideas was collected from recommendations that appeared in the Western policy papers to reshape education for de-radicalization of the youth in Pakistan. It represents inclination toward a Western secular position which advocates religious neutrality and/or equal space for all religions. The scale included items such as 'In addition to Islamic Studies, Pakistani school curriculums should also include other

faiths such as Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism etc.' and 'Pakistani schools should teach respect for religions other than Islam.' Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale the degree to which they 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). As with the previous scale, higher scores indicated greater support, in this case for Western secular ideas; the internal consistency for this scale was $\alpha = .63$.

Liberal religious ideas. The third construct, support for liberal religious ideas, was assessed using 13 items. This set of ideas was collected from authentic Islamic religious text and tradition. It represents an inclination toward an tolerant and inclusive worldview based in religion. Participants could respond on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to the extent they supported items such as 'Protection, respect and equal treatment to minorities is closest to the Islamic spirit' and 'Female education is ordered by the Quran.' This scale had acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$) and higher scores signified greater support for liberal religious ideas.

Results

All means, standard deviations, ranges and bivariate correlations are reported in Table 1. Gender did not relate to any of the constructs of interest. Age, however, was negatively correlated with support for radical religious ideas ($r = -.13$, $p < .05$); that is, older youth were less likely to support radical ideas compared to younger participants. At the same time, overall support for radical religious($r = .18$, $p < .01$) and Western secular ideas ($r = .35$, $p < .01$) were both significantly and positively related to liberal religious ideas.

To test our hypothesis that youth in Pakistan are more receptive to liberal religious ideas as compared to radical religious or Western secular ideas, a series of paired t-tests were conducted in SPSS 21. Paired t-tests were selected because of the dependent nature of the data;

that is, all participants responded to all scales (Figure 1). The use of this approach allowed for the direct comparison of endorsement between the three types of ideas that might inform education policy in Pakistan. However, a condition of the paired t-test is that all measures must be on the same scale. Therefore, prior to the running the comparisons, each of the measures were transformed by dividing the total by the number of items, giving each a range from 1 to 5 with comparable means.

Analyses for the first pair of variables, radical religious and Western secular, revealed there is more support for radical religious ideas, compared to Western secular ideas (t = 6.44, $p<.001$). That is, the mean differences between the two scales (radical religious: M = 3.87, SD = .72 vs. Western secular: M = 3.53, SD = .70) suggests there was slightly *more* support for radical religious ideas within this sample.

The second analysis compared support for radical religious ideas vs. liberal religious ideas among Pakistani youth. It revealed that there was significantly more support for liberal religious compared to radical religious ideas (t = -15.01, $p<.001$). That is, the mean differences between the two scales (radical religious: M = 3.87, SD = .72 vs. liberal religious: M = 4.47, SD = .47) were significantly different. Examining the third pair of variables indicated there was significantly more support (t = -26.50, $p<.001$) for liberal religious (M = 4.47, SD = .47) compared to Western secular ideas (M = 3.53, SD = .70). It should be noted that the mean for liberal religious ideas was quite high, indicating that on average youth strongly agreed with this approach to education.

Discussion

The results support the hypothesis that given a choice between radical religious, Western secular and liberal religious ideas, Pakistani youth prefer liberal religious ideas. This finding

implies that unlike prior claims, youth in Pakistan are not most attracted to radical ideas. In fact, youth are willing to embrace liberal ideas if they are embedded in religion. For example, although radical religious views were favoured over Western secular views, given a third option, Pakistani youth in this sample clearly preferred a set of liberal religious ideas more than the other two views.

Sial and Anjum's (2010) analysis points towards a possible explanation of our findings. They claim that most people in Pakistan do not like religious extremism but their religious ideas are shaped by the state led ideological discourse and assertions of the clerics. Moreover, they look towards these same sources of authority to reject extremism but such a counter-narrative by state and religious clergy is not forthcoming.

Although the prevailing discourse and narrative in Pakistan conflates religion with radical ideas, the current study suggests that it is religion which is important for Pakistanis and not radical extremism. In addition, the results of the current study are consistent with the proposition that efforts to push a secular agenda on Pakistanis may result in 'psychological reactance' or a condition in which a more radicalized identity is adopted. Coulson (2004), for example, states that the central goal of USAID's education operations in Pakistan was to improve public schools 'to draw children away from madrasas' (p. 19). As a result, large amounts of funding were made available for Pakistan's 'Education Sector Reforms.' The report notes, however, that the 'only significant result' of this policy was to motivate previously factionalized madrasas 'to unite under a single umbrella organization' (p. 5). Such interventions were clearly counterproductive. In the present study, radical religious and Western secular ideas were negatively correlated; future research is necessary to try to tease apart the relation between these two approaches to education.

The results of the current study are also consistent with findings of Siddiqa's (2010) survey research that queried the attitudes of educated Pakistani youth towards religion. Most youth identified themselves as believers, considered religion their primary identity, considered religion very important in their lives and think it is right to have Islam as the basis of a system of governance. Most youth also consider Al Qaida a terrorist outfit and want government to ban all *jihadi* outfits.

These findings comport with the current study's thesis that educated Pakistani youth are attached to religion but not radical extremism. But, it appears youth, for a variety of reasons, conflate being religious with being radical. As noted in previous studies (Khan, 2013; Nayyar & Salim, 2003; Sial & Anjum, 2010; Siddiqa, 2010), the religious ideas of the young in Pakistan are largely shaped by prevailing radical discourse and exclusivist ideas in education, be it madrasa or public education, and strengthened by War on Terror experience.

Only a few previous studies recognize the importance of de-radicalization through religion in Pakistan. Strategically such an approach would not only be readily accepted by Pakistani youth, as indicated by the current study, it would also counter radical elements in society that are opposed to de-radicalization efforts, as has happened in the past.

Although many earlier studies rightly suggest investment in education (Hathaway, 2005; Winthrop & Graff, 2010; Yusuf, 2011) and revision of curricula (Hussain, Salim, & Naveed, 2011; Haider, 2011), this alone might not be sufficient to de-radicalize Pakistani youth. Instead, an effective de-radicalization strategy should aim to connect to the religious sentiment in Pakistan and disconnect religion from radical ideology propagated by militant groups.

An additional implication of the current research is that the construction of 'the alternative national narrative' to counter religious extremism in the country, as suggested by

Pakistan's National Internal Security Policy (2014-18), should be based on liberal religious ideas rather than secular ideas. Competent religious scholars must be taken on board along with other stakeholders to negotiate a narrative based on mutual respect.

The study's findings have wider and deeper implications for peace building efforts outside Pakistan as well. In a world greatly shaped by Islam vs. the West narrative, and troubled by Islamist militancy in shape of Al Qaeda, Boko Haram and ISIS, the voices bringing attention to liberal, compassionate discourse within Islamic tradition become extremely important. Education in the Muslim world needs to highlight key religious ideas that promote universal human values and are intentionally ignored by radical religious narratives. Religious education in and outside Pakistan may benefit from the ideas of a multitude of contemporary Muslim scholars highlighting the liberal discourse within Islamic tradition. The following voices are only a few among them.

Fazlur Rahman considered the traditionalist educational system of the *ulama* as one of the most neglected areas of educational reform, owing to its resistance to change and adaptation to cultural and intellectual modernity. As a result religious leaders produced by this system are unable to fulfil socially relevant functions or provide guidance to the modern educated class (Rahman, 1999, pp. 6-7). Admiring the sophisticated intellectual tradition that *ulama* inherited, Fazlur Rahman laments that vital aspects of this tradition, namely 'critical thought' and 'innovation' have been abandoned by *ulama*. If traditional Islamic intellectual legacy is revived in its original spirit, it would inform social movements in the Muslim world that had an ethical and activist agenda (Rahman, 1999).

In an article published in Daily Express special edition on Iqbal Day (Nov, 9, 2014), Javed Iqbal, a noted intellectual and son of Pakistan's national poet Iqbal, wrote about the work

that Iqbal left incomplete. He mentions 'The origins and evolution of *Ijtehad* (independent reasoning in Islam)' and 'The Quranic Concept of a Welfare State' as two projects Iqbal had wanted to complete but could not during his lifetime. Javed Iqbal urged institutions built in Iqbal's name to undertake these incomplete projects and propagate Iqbal's liberal religious thought for the benefit of the masses.

At the heart of the radical Islamist narrative lays the idea of an Islamic state. An Naim (2009) presents a convincing religious argument to counter this idea based on the clear Quranic message that 'there is no compulsion in religion' (Quran, 2:256)*,* An Naim asserts that

> in order to be a Muslim by conviction and free choice, which is the only way one can be a Muslim, I need a.... state that does not claim or pretend to enforce *sharia* (the religious law of Islam)...simply because compliance of *sharia* cannot be coerced by fear of state institutions or faked to appease their officials (An Naim, 2009, p. 1).

An Naim argues that in order to let Muslims live by their own belief in Islam as a matter of religious obligation, the state should not attempt to enforce *sharia* because the coercive enforcement of *sharia* is against the basic principles of Islam, that is, 'there is no religious merit in forced compliance' (p. 290). At the same time An Naim points out the necessity of negotiating *sharia* among Muslims to make it more relevant to their lives. He contends that *sharia* for Muslims 'should be a source of liberation and self-realization, not a heavy burden of oppressive restriction and harsh punishments' (p. 290).

Although the current research was designed to focus on policy issues and underscored the value of liberal, compassionate Islam, future research could be aimed at the development of theory with particular attention to hypotheses that explore some of the reasons why Pakistani youth are receptive to various kinds of curricula. In addition, the current study raises a number of other questions, some of which include: What are the barriers to adopting a liberal religious

perspective in the popular discourse of Pakistan? What factors could promote the growth of intellectual liberal Islam in Pakistan? In what ways would the dominant Pakistani narrative be altered by the growth of liberal Islam? Who would be threatened by movement toward a liberal form of Islam? How could we test whether such an approach would promote a less violent society? In what ways would liberal Islam contribute to human well-being? We leave these questions for future research.

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Figure 1. Comparison of transformed means for the degree of support for radical religious, Western secular and liberal religious ideas among Pakistani youth (N=386).