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## **Mental Health and Somatic Symptoms of Residents in Relation to Landfill Site Proximity**

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The Jakuševac landfill is the main landfill for Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. Its proximity to residential areas has sparked protests from residents demanding better waste disposal solutions. Although its closure was planned years ago, it continues to operate due to a lack of alternatives. Over time, it has become a major environmental problem, mainly due to pollution and unpleasant odors. Despite public concern, no study has yet examined the mental health and somatic symptoms of residents living at different distances from the landfill. For this reason, the current study set out to examine this issue. A total of 823 residents of Zagreb (84.4% women) between the ages of 18 and 85 took part in the online study. Participants indicated their place of residence, reported on their mental health based on measures of depression, anxiety, stress and life satisfaction, and on the frequency of somatic symptoms. Participants indicated their place of residence and provided information on the frequency of somatic symptoms, as well as on their mental health using scales assessing life satisfaction, stress, anxiety, and depression. The results of a series of hierarchical regression analyses showed that living near the landfill was associated with reduced life satisfaction and a higher frequency of somatic complaints. These findings underscore the urgent need for the City of Zagreb to develop alternative waste management strategies that prioritize both environmental sustainability and the health and well-being of local residents.

**Keywords:** landfill, mental health, somatic symptoms, pollution, proximity

The sustainability of land filling systems has become a global concern due to increasing environmental and public health challenges (Rafiq et al., 2015). In this context, the Prudinec/Jakuševac landfill (hereinafter, Jakuševac landfill) serves as a major disposal site for municipal, non-hazardous, and industrial waste from Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, and its surrounding areas. Covering approximately 80 hectares, it is one of the largest regulated landfills in the country and is located in western Zagreb, about 5 km from the city center and roughly 400 meters from the nearest residences in the Jakuševac district (Barčić & Ivančić, 2010). Its proximity to residential areas highlights the potential for environmental exposure and related health risks, making it a relevant case for studies on the public health impacts of landfills.

Waste disposal at this location began in 1965, and by 1995, around 4.5 million cubic meters of waste had been deposited (Barčić & Ivančić, 2010). By 2000, this number grew to 8 million cubic meters (Barčić & Ivančić, 2010). Due to years of neglect, the site has developed into the largest unmanaged landfill in south-eastern Europe (Nakić et al., 2007). Uncontrolled waste disposal caused significant environmental issues, which necessitated extensive remediation completed in late 2003, transforming the site into a regulated sanitary landfill (Barčić & Ivančić, 2010).

Despite its remediation in 2003, the Jakuševac landfill still has a significant environmental impact, particularly on groundwater and air quality. Investigations of the groundwater and aquifer systems in the vicinity of this landfill in 2004 revealed negative effects on groundwater quality and a gradual spread of pollution towards the east (Nakić et al., 2007). Nakić et al. (2007) state that the pumping system, which was put into operation after the landfill was remediated

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in 2003, is not and cannot be a long-term solution. With this remediation approach, the contamination remains trapped under the landfill body. The heavily contaminated soil and groundwater layers directly beneath the landfill were not removed during the remediation process and continue to be an active source of groundwater pollution.

In addition, a considerable impairment of the air quality in the surrounding neighbourhoods was observed. Due to emissions from landfill gas, substances such as hydrogen sulfide, mercaptans, and gaseous fluorides are released, often exposing nearby residents to unpleasant odors and airborne particles. These volatile compound concentrations have been shown to be significantly higher in summer than in winter (Vadić, 2006).

The announcement of the closure of the Jakuševac landfill was made years ago and has since caused resentment among local residents, especially those living in the immediate vicinity of the landfill (Opačak & Wang, 2019). The landfill administration, which is operated by the municipal company ZGOS Ltd., proposed December 31, 2018 as the date for the end of waste disposal (Opačak & Wang, 2019). Despite the intention to close the landfill, it continues to operate due to inadequate regional waste treatment facilities. A solution for the landfill has not yet been found by 2025.

Residents remain frustrated and frequently voice their protests in the media (e.g., Index.hr, 2022; Kronike Velike Gorice, 2022; Jutarnji, 2025), arguing that the landfill harms their health and overall well-being and decreases the value of their property. Despite ongoing public concern, there are still no studies that explore whether living near the landfill is related to the physical or psychological well-being of the local residents.

### Review of literature

Prior studies (e.g. Abiola et al., 2021; Heaney et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2020) indicate that residing in the vicinity of landfills is associated with elevated health risks. In their systematic review, Vinti et al. (2021) reported elevated rates of mortality, respiratory illness, and adverse mental health outcomes among residents living in close proximity to landfills. In addition, the research indicated differential exposure to landfill types and showed that residents living near open landfills had far more severe health problems than those living near regulated sanitary landfills (Peprah et al., 2024). For example, Peprah et al. (2024) investigated differences in physical and mental symptoms in residents living next to three landfill sites in Ghana's Ashanti region. The majority of people suffered from health complaints such as insomnia, breathing difficulties, skin rashes and irritations, persistent fatigue, low mood, reduced appetite, stress, anxiety and depression. People living near open landfills show a significantly higher propensity for a range of health symptoms, including reduced appetite, severe fatigue, depression, increased anxiety, mental disorders, decreased mood and cognitive impairment, than people residing in the vicinity of an engineered landfill.

The negative health effects associated with landfills are largely due to the environmental conditions in their vicinity, in particular the constant exposure to toxic fumes and dust (Njoku et al., 2019). As exposure generally decreases with increasing distance from the pollution source (Mataloni et al., 2016), comparisons between residents living near landfills and those living further away provide important insights into how proximity is related to health outcomes.

Although relatively few studies have investigated these differences, those that do exist have generally found significant differences in physical health. As an illustration, Njoku et al., (2019) compared residents living 100–500 m versus 1–2 km from a landfill in South Africa's Limpopo province and reported higher rates of respiratory symptoms and diseases in those living closer to the site. Phan et al. (2021) reported that individuals residing up to 2 km from a waste facility were much more likely to report dermatological complaints and gastrointestinal problems than people living further away.

In addition to physical health, both studies also investigated the effects of proximity to landfill sites on psychological health and overall quality of life, although the results differed. Njoku et al. (2019) have shown that the life satisfaction of people living near landfills is lower than that of people living further away from such sites. Conversely, Phan et al. (2021) pointed out that the psychological health and quality of life score remains relatively low regardless of proximity to waste disposal facilities.

### Purpose of the study

Systematic reviews of studies addressing the impact of solid waste management practices on health (e.g., Porta et al., 2009; Vinti et al., 2021) have provided sufficient evidence that living near landfills can negatively affect human health. However, the results of international studies cannot be directly applied to the Jakuševac landfill, as the landfills differ significantly in terms of construction, waste composition, management practises and proximity to residential areas. This highlights the importance of analysing the Jakuševac landfill in its specific local context. Such an analysis

is particularly urgent considering that local residents have repeatedly expressed their concerns about the potential harmful effects of the landfill (e.g., Index.hr, 2022; Kronike Velike Gorice, 2022; Jutarnji list, 2025) and that no comprehensive health studies have been conducted in Croatia to date.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address two key questions. The questions are as follows: (a) Does residential distance from the Jakuševac landfill predict the frequency of somatic symptoms? and (b) Does residential distance from the Jakuševac landfill predict mental health problems manifested as lower life satisfaction and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms?

Unlike the majority of previous studies (e.g., Njoku et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2021), the distance to the landfill was treated as a continuous variable in the present study. Prior work (e.g., Njoku et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2021) typically classifies distance into broad categories (e.g., "near" versus "far"), potentially neglecting more nuanced variations in the effects of landfill residence.

In this study, mental health is assessed on the basis of self-reported stress levels, life satisfaction and the frequency of depressive and anxiety symptoms. We chose to examine the relationship between living distance from the landfill and stress levels, as pollution is considered one of the most important human stressors. As part of the broader stress theory, Environmental Stress Theory explains how environmental factors such as pollution, noise, and overcrowding can cause stress in individuals (Evans, 1984). In this context, environmental stressors are specific challenges that individuals must appraise and respond to. If individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their coping abilities, stress occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Lazarus and Cohen (1977), pollution falls into the category of stressor with daily difficulties. Even if such stressors do not have immediate or dramatic effects, their persistent nature can significantly affect morale, social functioning, and overall health. For this reason, we also used life satisfaction as an indicator to recognise how sensitive it is to long-term environmental stress. In addition, we examined symptoms of depression and anxiety based on three key points emphasised by Lazarus and Cohen (1977). First, stress-related emotions - such as anxiety and depressive sadness - have a direct effect on personal satisfaction and morale. Second, these emotions affect a wide range of adaptive functions, including problem-solving ability, social competence, and physical health, and third, their presence reflects a fundamental interaction between the individual and his or her environment.

Another strength of this study is the inclusion of age and socioeconomic status as a control variables when analysing the relationship between proximity to the landfill and somatic symptoms and mental health outcomes. Specifically, we considered respondents' income level and their subjective perception of their standard of living. This approach aligns with prior evidence indicating that socioeconomic status is an important determinant of both mental (e.g., Lei et al., 2024) and somatic health outcomes (e.g., San Sebastian et al., 2015), and allows for a more accurate and nuanced interpretation of the studied relationships.

In addition to all these methodological aspects, this study is characterised by the fact that it is the first study in Croatia to address these issues and thus makes an important contribution to the investigation of the possible effects of the Jakuševac landfill on the health of local residents in Croatia.

## Method

### Participants

The study sample consisted of 823 individuals (84.4% women) aged 18 to 85 years. In terms of education, 35.6% had completed a master's degree, and 31.6% had finished secondary school. A further 16.3% held a bachelor's degree, 8% had obtained a doctorate, and 7.2% had only an elementary education or less. With respect to marital status, the sample comprised 54.9% married, 33.5% single, 8.1% divorced, and 3.4% widowed individuals. Participants lived in households of an average size of  $M = 3.24$  persons ( $SD = 1.53$ ). Approximately two-thirds of participants (67.9%) were employed.

### Measures

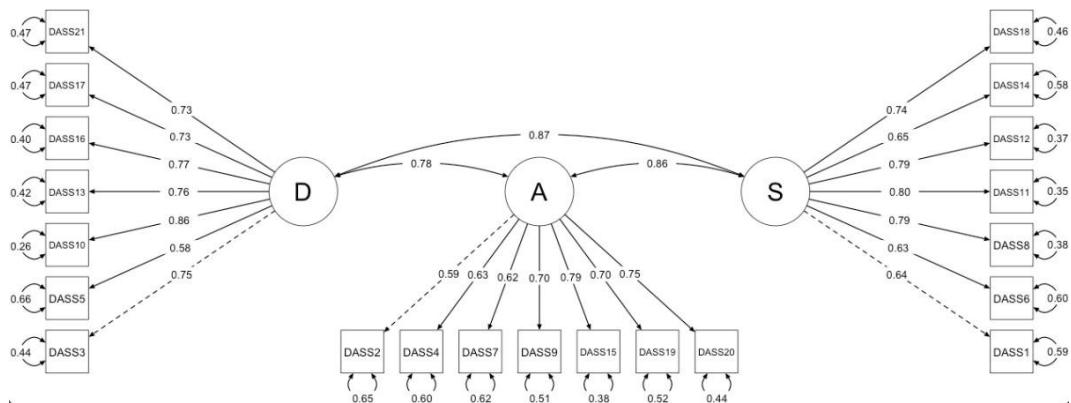
#### Depression, anxiety, and stress

The DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) is the 21-item abbreviated version of the original 42-item scale, consisting of three subscales (7 items each): depression (e.g., "I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all"), anxiety (e.g., "I felt scared without any good reason"), and stress (e.g., "I found it difficult to relax"). Participants assessed the degree to which each item reflected their experience in the past week on a 4-point scale (0 = not at all, 1 =

sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = almost always). Higher scores reflect more severe symptoms, with a theoretical range of 0 to 21 per subscale. To investigate the construct validity of the DASS latent constructs, a first-order, three-factor CFA (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) model was specified for the 21 items of the DASS-21 scale (Supplementary material 1). The model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2(186) = 1042.62, p < .05$ ; CFI = .913; TLI = .902; RMSEA = .075; SRMR = .048). No additional modifications were made, as the initial model was theoretically consistent and provided a satisfactory fit across all indices. Internal consistency indicators in this study for depression ( $\alpha = .89$ ), anxiety ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and stress ( $\alpha = .88$ ) subscales were excellent, consistent with previous findings (Henry & Crawford, 2005).

### Supplementary Material 1

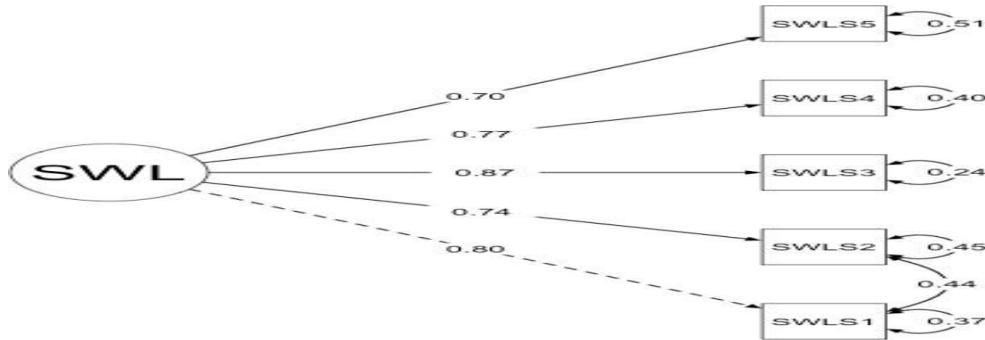
Parameter Estimates for the first-order three-factor CFA model of the DASS scale



*Note.* Standardized coefficients are presented. Maximum likelihood estimation with bootstrap standard errors was used. D - Depression, A - Anxiety, S - Stress

### Satisfaction with life

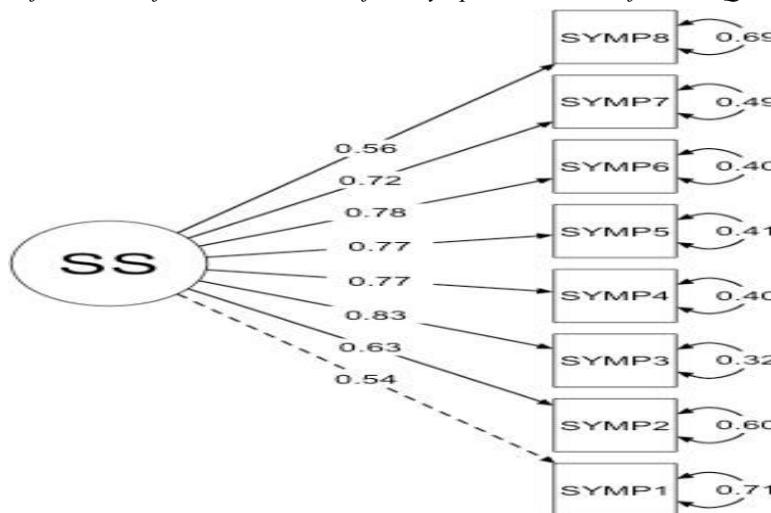
The SWLS (Diener et al., 1985; Croatian adaptation by Komšo & Burić, 2016) measures global life satisfaction through 5 items (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”). Responses were given on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Possible total scores span from 5 to 35, where higher values indicate higher levels of life satisfaction. A five-item, one-factor CFA model was specified to assess the construct validity of life satisfaction (Supplementary material 2). The initial model demonstrated relatively good fit ( $\chi^2(5) = 114.05, p < .05$ ; CFI = .954; TLI = .908; RMSEA = .163; SRMR = .038), although the RMSEA exceeded the recommended threshold. An examination of the modification indices suggested that adding the residual covariance between item 1 (“In most ways my life is close to my ideal”) and item 2 (“The conditions of my life are excellent”) would substantially improve model fit, likely due to their conceptual overlap (“close to ideal” vs. “excellent conditions”). After allowing this covariance, the model fit improved considerably ( $\chi^2(4) = 49.01, p < .05$ ; CFI = .990; TLI = .970; RMSEA = .100; SRMR = .020). All standardized factor loadings were high, supporting strong relationships between each indicator and the latent life satisfaction construct. Cronbach’s alpha indicated good internal consistency in this sample ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Supplementary Material 2***Parameter Estimates for the one-factor CFA model of the SWLS scale*

*Note.* Standardized coefficients are presented. Maximum likelihood estimation with bootstrap standard errors was used. SWL - satisfaction with life

***Somatic symptoms***

The Symptom subscale of the Air Quality Perception Scale (Deguen et al., 2012) assesses the frequency of eight perceived physical symptoms associated with air pollution (e.g., “Did you experience nasal irritation?”). Items were rated on a 4-point scale (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = often, 3 = always). The possible score range is 0–24, where higher scores correspond to a greater perceived frequency of symptoms. To assess the construct validity of the Symptom Subscale, an eight-item, one-factor CFA model was specified (Supplementary material 3). The model demonstrated good overall fit ( $\chi^2(20) = 152.52, p < .01$ ; CFI = .956; TLI = .938; RMSEA = .090; SRMR = .032). No additional modifications were applied, as the model showed satisfactory fit and aligned with the theoretical structure of the subscale. Although the RMSEA slightly exceeded the commonly suggested cut-off value of .08 for acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), it is worth noting that elevated RMSEA values can occur in simpler models with small degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2015), and the strong CFI and SRMR values indicated acceptable overall model fit. The internal consistency was  $\alpha = .88$  (original study  $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Supplementary Material 3***Parameter Estimates for the one-factor CFA model of the Symptom subscale of the Air Quality Perception Scale*

*Note.* Standardized coefficients are presented. Maximum likelihood estimation with bootstrap standard errors was used. SS - somatic symptoms.

***Socioeconomic status***

Socioeconomic status was assessed using two indicators. The first was self-reported monthly household income, measured on an 8-point scale (1 = up to €600, 2 = €601–860, 3 = €861–1,130, 4 = €1,131–1,660, 5 = €1,661–2,190, 6 = €2,191–2,720, 7 = €2,721–3,250, 8 = over €3,250). The second indicator measured the standard of living

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perceived by the participants, which was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = well below average, 2 = below average, 3 = average, 4 = above average, 5 = well above average).

### Distance from the landfill

The distance between the participants' homes and the Jakuševac landfill was measured in kilometers using Google Maps. The airline distance from the landfill to individual neighborhoods in Zagreb and Zagreb County was recorded.

### Procedure

Prior to data collection, the study protocol underwent review and received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Croatia. The data was collected in May 2024 using an online questionnaire created with LimeSurvey. The survey link was shared through social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. Participants provided informed consent and were notified about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants could withdraw at any time. The questionnaire took about 10 minutes to complete.

### Data Analysis

To assess the construct validity of the measures used, confirmatory factor analyses were performed with the *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), *semPlot* (Epskamp, 2015) and *semtools* (Cheung & Lai, 2025) packages in R (R Core Team, 2023). As the chi-square statistic tends to over reject models in large samples (Kline, 2015), model adequacy was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indices (CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR) using the thresholds recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999). To investigate the predictive contribution of landfill proximity beyond age and two indicators of socioeconomic status (SES) on mental health and somatic symptoms, five hierarchical regression analyses were performed using SPSS (version 23). Age and SES were entered at Step 1 as covariates, and distance to landfill was added in step 2. Outcomes included mental health (depression, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction) and somatic symptoms.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations

Descriptive statistics and Pearson intercorrelations for all study variables are shown in Table 1. Participants reported an average income of  $M = 5.48$  ( $SD = 1.97$ ) on an 8-point scale and an average standard of living of 3.02 ( $SD = 0.70$ ) on a 5-point scale, both of which are values around the centre of the scale. The distance to the landfill ( $M = 6.12$  km,  $SD = 3.59$ ) showed considerable variability (range = 1.08–20.18 km).

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	41.22	13.03									
2. Income	5.48	1.97	-.15**								
3. Life standard	3.02	0.70	-.15**	.47**							
4. Symptoms	6.50	4.70	.08*	-.16**	-.21**						
5. Depression	4.44	3.98	.03	-.19**	-.21**	.36**					
6. Anxiety	3.50	3.75	-.03	-.17**	-.21**	.50**	.69**				
7. Stress	6.14	3.98	-.05	-.12**	-.16**	.38**	.79**	.74**			
8. Satisfaction	22.28	6.45	-.21**	.28**	.44**	-.32**	-.52**	-.38**	-.41**		
9. Distance	6.12	3.59	-.10**	.02	.00	-.17**	-.02	-.06	-.03	.12**	

**Note.**  $N = 823$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . Distance - distance from landfill in km, Satisfaction - Life satisfaction, Symptoms - Somatic symptoms

The average depression ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 3.98$ ), anxiety ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 3.75$ ), and stress ( $M = 6.14$ ,  $SD = 3.98$ ) scores were all below the theoretical scale midpoint (10.5), indicating generally low levels of reported psychological distress. Life satisfaction ( $M = 22.28$ ,  $SD = 6.45$ ) was slightly above the scale midpoint, reflecting moderately high satisfaction. Somatic symptom scores ( $M = 6.50$ ,  $SD = 4.70$ ) fell below the theoretical midpoint of the scale, suggesting low to moderate levels of reported somatic complaints.

Income and subjective life standard were strongly positively correlated ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that individuals with higher household incomes also tended to perceive their standard of living as higher. Both income and

life standard were negatively correlated with all mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, stress) and somatic symptoms, with correlations ranging from negligible to small in size (income:  $r = -.12$  to  $-.19$ ; life standard:  $r = -.16$  to  $-.21$ , all  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that participants with lower SES reported more psychological distress and somatic complaints. Distance from the landfill was weakly but significantly positively correlated with life satisfaction ( $r = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negatively with somatic symptoms ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results suggest that individuals living further from the landfill tended to report slightly higher life satisfaction and fewer somatic complaints. Intercorrelations between mental health outcomes were strong and positive ( $r = .69$  to  $.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that these distress indicators tended to co-occur. Life satisfaction was moderately negatively related to depression, anxiety, and stress ( $r = -.32$  to  $-.52$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and moderately positively related to income and life standard ( $r = .28$  to  $.44$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Somatic symptoms correlated moderately with depression, anxiety, and stress ( $r = .36$  to  $.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and weakly negatively with life satisfaction ( $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ), confirming that greater somatic complaints were associated with poorer psychological well-being and lower life satisfaction.

### Hierarchical regression analyses

Five hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the predictive contribution of distance to the landfill beyond age and socioeconomic status in explaining mental health and somatic symptoms (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Mental Health and Somatic Symptoms*

Outcome	Predictor	Step 1 b	Step 1 $\beta$	Step 2 b	Step 2 $\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	Final $R^2$
SS	Age	.02 [-.01, .04]	.04	.01 [-.02, .03]	.02		
	Income	-.17 [-.36, .01]	-.07	-.17 [-.35, .01]	-.07		
	Standard	-.12 [-1.63, -.60]	-.17***	-.14 [-1.64, -.63]	-.17***	.027***	.076
	Distance			-.22 [-.31, -.13]	-.17***		
Depression	Age	-.01 [-.03, .02]	-.02	-.01 [-.03, .02]	-.02		
	Income	-.24 [-.39, -.08]	-.12**	-.24 [-.39, -.08]	-.12**		
	Standard	-.90 [-1.33, -.47]	-.16***	-.90 [-1.34, -.47]	-.16***	.00	.055
	Distance			-.02 [-.10, .05]	-.02		
Anxiety	Age	-.02 [-.04, -.001]	-.07*	-.02 [-.04, -.003]	-.08*		
	Income	-.20 [-.35, -.06]	-.11**	-.20 [-.34, -.06]	-.11**		
	Standard	-.90 [-1.31, -.49]	-.17***	-.90 [-1.31, -.50]	-.17***	.004	.059
	Distance			-.07 [-.14, .002]	-.07		
Stress	Age	-.02 [-.05, -.003]	-.08*	-.03 [-.05, -.004]	-.08*		
	Income	-.13 [-.29, .03]	-.06	-.13 [-.28, .03]	-.06		
	Standard	-.82 [-1.26, -.38]	-.14**	-.83 [-1.27, -.39]	-.15**	.001	.036
	Distance			-.04 [-.11, .04]	-.03		
LS	Age	-.07 [-.10, -.04]	-.14***	-.06 [-.10, -.03]	-.13***		
	Income	.27 [.05, .50]	.08*	.27 [.04, .49]	.08*		
	Standard	3.51 [2.87, 4.15]	.38***	3.53 [2.89, 4.16]	.38***	.011**	.231
	Distance			.19 [.08, .30]	.11**		

Note.  $N = 823$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ . Distance - distance from landfill in km, Standard - life standard, SS - somatic symptoms, LS - life satisfaction. 95% CI of b coefficients are presented in squared brackets

For somatic symptoms, the first model was significant,  $F(3, 819) = 13.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 4.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = .049$ ). Lower standard of living was a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t = -4.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of increased somatic symptoms, in contrast to both age ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $t = 1.16$ ,  $p = .245$ ) and income level ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t = -1.88$ ,  $p = .061$ ). Adding distance to the landfill significantly improved the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .027$ ,  $F(1, 818) = 24.34$ ,  $p < .001$ . Distance was found to be a significant negative predictor ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t = -4.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with participants who lived near the landfill reporting more somatic symptoms. This is the positive answer to the first research question of the study.

For depression, the first model, which included the age, income and standard of living variables, was significant,  $F(3, 819) = 15.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , and explained 5.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .055$ ). Lower income ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = -3.04$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and lower life standard ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $t = -4.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ) predicted greater depression, while age had no predictive contribution in explaining depression. Adding distance to the landfill in step 2 did not significantly improve the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $F(1, 818) = 0.30$ ,  $p = .549$ . Distance was not a significant predictor of depression ( $\beta = -.02$ ,  $t = -0.60$ ,  $p = .549$ ).

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For anxiety, the first model was significant,  $F(3, 819) = 15.75, p < .001$ , and explained 5.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .055$ ). Lower age ( $\beta = -.07, t = -2.05, p = .041$ ), as well as lower income ( $\beta = -.11, t = -2.72, p = .007$ ) and lower standard of living ( $\beta = -.17, t = -4.31, p < .001$ ) predicted greater anxiety. Adding distance to the landfill explained an additional 0.4% of the anxiety variance, and didn't improve the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .004, F(1, 818) = 3.66, p = .056$ . Distance was not a significant predictor of anxiety ( $\beta = -.07, t = -1.91, p = .056$ ).

For stress, the initial model was significant,  $F(3, 819) = 9.87, p < .001$ , and explained 3.5% of the variance ( $R^2 = .035$ ). Lower age ( $\beta = -.08, t = -2.29, p = .022$ ), as well as lower standard of living ( $\beta = -.14, t = -3.68, p < .01$ ) predicted higher stress, whereas income did not ( $\beta = -.06, t = -1.64, p = .101$ ). Adding distance to the landfill did not significantly improve the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .001, F(1, 818) = 0.88, p = .349$ . Distance was not a significant predictor of stress ( $\beta = -.03, t = -0.94, p = .349$ ).

For life satisfaction, the first model was highly significant,  $F(3, 819) = 76.77, p < .001$ , and explained 21.9% of the variance ( $R^2 = .219$ ). Lower age ( $\beta = -.14, t = -4.46, p < .001$ , as well as higher income ( $\beta = .08, t = 2.36, p = .019$ ) and higher standard of living ( $\beta = .38, t = 10.78, p < .001$ ) predicted greater life satisfaction. Adding distance from the landfill significantly improved the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .011, F(1, 818) = 11.73, p = .001$ . Distance was a significant positive predictor ( $\beta = .11, t = 3.43, p = .001$ ) for life satisfaction, suggesting that participants who lived further away from the landfill reported higher life satisfaction, and conversely, those who lived near the landfill reported lower life satisfaction. These results indicate a partially positive answer to the second research question of the study.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the proximity of the residential area to the Jakuševac landfill is related to the frequency of somatic symptoms, even after controlling for age, income and the participants' assessment of their standard of living. In particular, the data showed that individuals residing nearer to the landfill tended to report more somatic symptoms. These findings align with studies carried out in other countries, e.g. in Bangladesh (Shammi et al., 2023), India (De & Debnath, 2016), Ghana (Peprah et al., 2024), Mexico (Al-Delaimy et al., 2014), South Africa (Njoku et al., 2019), and Pakistan (Akmal & Jamil, 2021). They provide strong empirical evidence that living near landfills is associated with symptoms such as sleep disturbance, fatigue, respiratory problems, loss of appetite and eye irritation. These symptoms have been shown to be related to exposure to environmental stressors — such as unpleasant odours and particulate matter. In one study, Heaney et al. (2011) had participants record odour intensity, changes in daily activities, mood, and somatic symptoms across 14 days, with hydrogen sulphide concentrations in the air being measured every 15 minutes. The results showed a strong correlation between hydrogen sulphide concentration, perceived odour intensity and the presence of somatic symptoms, including nasal irritation, coughing and sneezing.

As far as mental health is concerned, the results of this study showed that distance from the Jakuševac landfill is related to the life satisfaction, even after controlling for age, income and participants' assessment of their standard of living. In particular, the data showed that people living closer to the landfill had lower levels of life satisfaction. The aforementioned study by Njoku et al. (2019) also showed that people living nearby (100–500 m) were more likely to report lower life satisfaction than residents living far (1–2 km) from the landfill. Proximity to landfills may be associated with lower life satisfaction due to a combination of environmental, esthetic and psychosocial stressors. Those living near landfills are not only exposed to unpleasant odors and visual pollution, but also worry about potential health risks. These factors can contribute to a lingering sense of unease, lower levels of housing satisfaction and perceived neglect by local authorities, all of which can have a negative impact on an individual's overall life satisfaction.

This study is not without limitations. The use of a cross-sectional design is a notable limitation, as it restricts the extent to which causal relationships can be inferred. In addition, unmeasured variables — such as the participants' previous health status or psychological characteristics — could have influenced the results and possibly distorted the observed associations. To address these limitations, conducting a longitudinal study would be extremely valuable, as it would make it possible to track changes in residents' mental and physical health over time while measuring air quality. This approach would provide a deeper insight into the effects of prolonged exposure to pollution on health and could help to identify specific points in time or phases when health problems occur or intensify. Future work should also test a partially mediated SEM model in which distance to the landfill predicts life satisfaction indirectly via somatic symptoms and stress, while retaining a direct path from distance to life satisfaction and controlling for age, income, and perceived standard of living. Such a model would estimate the direct path from distance to life satisfaction alongside indirect paths via somatic symptoms and stress, allowing a comparison of how much of the association is mediated

versus direct. Moreover, this study is affected by a frequently noted limitation of Internet-based research, whereby male participants generally have lower participation rates than their female counterparts (Porter & Umbach, 2006). Future research should employ sampling methodologies that better reflect the sex distribution in the country, such as quota sampling. Additionally, a potential limitation of the study is that people who were more concerned about the landfill may have been more likely to participate. This self-selection bias could have influenced the results by overrepresenting individuals with a higher reported frequency of symptoms.

However, despite its limitations, this study has several advantages. For example, this study treated distance to landfill as a continuous variable rather than a categorical variable, which is a methodological advance over most previous studies. This approach allowed for a better understanding of how small differences in proximity can be associated with health indicators and avoids arbitrary dichotomisation that could obscure nuanced patterns in the data. In addition to the methodological aspects, a major strength of this study lies in its novelty. It is the first study in Croatia to specifically examine the relationship between distance to the Jakuševac landfill and the mental health and somatic symptoms of the capital's residents. It fills a significant gap in the national scientific literature and provides an essential basis for future evidence-based policy decisions. The study provides empirical evidence of the potential health risks associated with inappropriate waste management practices and emphasises the need for a different approach to landfill siting and operation.

### Conclusion

The results of this study showed that residents of the Jakuševac landfill reported more somatic symptoms, even after controlling for age, income and standard of living. In particular, they reported more frequent headaches, fatigue, eye irritation, breathing difficulties, loss of appetite and sleep problems. In addition, residents living near the landfill reported lower levels of life satisfaction.

These results highlight the importance of understanding and addressing residents' perceptions and health concerns related to the landfill. Municipal authorities should consider measures to improve waste management practices and environmental monitoring to support community well-being.

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## A Comparative Analysis of Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Indonesian Deradicalization Program, Approaches and Best Practices

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Deradicalization has emerged as a pivotal soft-power strategy in response to the global proliferation of violence perpetrated by non-state actors, extremist ideologies, and terrorist networks. Designed to counter radical thought and enable the reintegration of affected individuals into society, deradicalization initiatives have been implemented in diverse forms across countries such as Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. This study adopts qualitative methodologies and comparative analysis to critically examine the national programs, such as violent extremist measures (CVE) with efforts to gain public support through the “hearts and minds” approach which were mainly framed within the context of religious radicalization, explicitly focusing on tackling the rise of Islamic extremism through what was called a “battle of ideas” with particular focus on deradicalization efforts in Yemen, Indonesia, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and identifies best practices, essential components, and inherent limitations.. The findings demonstrate that no universal model of deradicalization exists; rather, each program is firmly embedded within its distinct cultural, political, and social milieu. Nonetheless, certain commonalities emerge across cases, including the use of psychological counseling, vocational training, and constructive engagement by state authorities. These shared elements highlight core principles that can inform the design of tailored, context-sensitive deradicalization frameworks .

**Keywords:** deradicalization, radicalization, reintegration, extremism, correctional facilities

In recent decades, the phenomena of radicalization, deradicalization, and reintegration (RDR) have become crucial areas of scholarly research (Grip & Kotajoki, 2019). The post-9/11 surge in violent extremism and terrorism has introduced new challenges and threats to global peace and security (Afzal et al., 2012; Gunaratna, 2005; Mahsud, 2024). In response, significant efforts have been made to address the rising violence and emerging threats. The effort led by the United States, which is considered a major strategic shift, moving from primarily targeting terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda leadership to a broad-based approach. This new strategy combines countering violent extremist measures (CVE) with efforts to gain public support through winning the “hearts and minds” approach (Glasser, 2005). These policies were mainly framed within the context of religious radicalization, explicitly focusing on tackling the rise of Islamic extremism through what was called a “battle of ideas” (Payne, 2009; Perry, 2018). Consequently, this strategic shift in countering violent extremism (CVE) has stimulated scholarly interest in diverse correctional models, with particular attention to their approaches and methodologies in addressing radicalization and implementing countermeasures such as deradicalization.

In the aftermath of 9/11, efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism mostly relied on kinetic operations (Shah et al., 2024), which led to the voluntary surrender or mass arrest. This, in turn, raised a critical question regarding the long-term management and rehabilitation of detained radicals. Equally pressing is the concern whether genuine reformation and rehabilitation is achievable within deradicalization facilities (Ali et al., 2024).

Over time, such questions have spurred extensive scholarly inquiry, shaping contemporary understandings of deradicalization and motivating a range of global initiatives. Consequently, many countries have adopted policies that employ tailored soft approaches through specialized correctional facilities. Each model has offered unique insights into the processes of radicalization and counter-radicalization, contributing both notable successes and identifiable limitations.

Upal (2015) states that the development of diverse deradicalization programs reflects the need to combat radicalization and has prompted numerous government efforts.

This research aims to analyze, in a comparative fashion, the main deradicalization initiatives implemented by various countries, focusing on approaches, shared components, contextual differences, lessons learned, and evaluating their effectiveness and success. For this purpose, this study explored deradicalization efforts in Yemen, Indonesia, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). While literature and secondary data informed the analysis of all three contexts, the KSA case holds particular significance due to an in-person visit to the Rehabilitation Center. This direct engagement offered a deeper, firsthand understanding of the program's operational framework, thereby enabling a more nuanced comparison with other cases. The following section outlines the conceptual foundations of radicalization, deradicalization and disengagement as analytical frameworks, extensively examined in existing literature.

### **Radicalization and Deradicalization: A Conceptual Framework**

Scholars from various academic fields with an interdisciplinary lens have analyzed the phenomenon and process of radicalization. A common explanation describes it as a growing social and psychological dedication to extremist beliefs, along with the formation of attitudes or behaviors that endorse violence (Horgan, 2009; Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). Likewise, Allen (2007) characterizes it as "*the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence as a method to effect societal change*" (p. 4). Rabasa et al., (2010) and Mahsud (2018; 2019) describe radicalization as a process that promotes extremist beliefs and worldviews, including the willingness to employ, support, or deploy violence to bring about societal change. Dar (2023) offers a detailed definition, describing radicalization as: "*A state of mind wherein an individual lacks the sense of acceptability for the peaceful coexistence of people with diverse political, ideological, religious, and socio-cultural beliefs and seeks to impose their views on others through coercive means*" (p.27). Therefore, radicalization is the first step in which individuals adopt extremist behavior or engage in violent activity.

In contrast, deradicalization by some analysts is often viewed as the antithesis of radicalization. According to Dechesne (2011), it aims "*to prevent further escalation of violence*" and "*create the conditions conducive to dialogue*" (p. 287). El-Said (2015) elaborates on this concept, defining deradicalization as: "*a package of policies and measures designed and implemented by authorities to normalize and convince groups and individuals who have already become radicalized or violent extremists to repent and disengage from violence*" (p. 10). Similarly, Rabasa et al., (2010) characterize it as a process in which extremists not only reject their previous worldviews but also renounce violence as a means of achieving social change. Likewise, Horgan and Braddock (2010) define deradicalization as a "socio-psychological process" intended to diminish an individual's commitment to and involvement in violent radical activities. Thus, deradicalization fundamentally entails the renunciation of radical beliefs.

Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of definitions, Porges (2011) concludes that no universal model of deradicalization exists; rather, processes and approaches vary according to context, region, and the specific ideologies under consideration. In their exploration of deradicalization programs, Porta and LaFree (2012) categorize the process into two components: the first focuses on "*the deradicalization of attitudes and beliefs*," while the second involves "*disengagement from violent behavior and the process of leaving violent groups to reintegrate into other social groups*" (p. 7).

Synthesising the various understandings of scholars mentioned above, this research primarily relies on Horgan's distinct ideas on deradicalization and disengagement. As Horgan (2009) argued that individuals may disengage operationally from terrorism, terminating their active involvement in violent acts, without necessarily abandoning the ideological frameworks that initially motivated their behavior. Disengagement, therefore, should be viewed as a behavioral shift that may or may not be accompanied by a cognitive or ideological change. This distinction is crucial, as deradicalization involves a more profound transformation, whereas disengagement may be a temporary or strategic withdrawal from violence. Individuals in the disengagement phase are in critical transition mode, where they may either progress toward full deradicalization or conversely, relapse into violent extremism. According to Horgan (2014), the motivations for disengagement are not uniform; instead, they exhibit significant variation across individuals, reflecting idiosyncratic trajectories, personal experiences, and situational contexts. This conceptual difference is crucial, as research shows that behavioral change is often more achievable, measurable, and sustainable in the short to medium term than deep-rooted belief change (Horgan & Braddock, 2010; El-Said, 2015). Therefore, within the broader framework of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), disengagement and deradicalization function as complementary processes.

## DERADICALIZATION PROGRAM

At present, there is no consensus on the criteria for determining success in reforming individuals associated with terrorism, nor is there clarity regarding what “reform” entails in this context. Moreover, evaluating the implications and outcomes of programs that claim to deradicalize terrorists remains a significant challenge (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). To date, no program has successfully established valid and reliable indicators of effective deradicalization or disengagement, whether framed in cultural, psychological, or alternative terms. Consequently, efforts to assess the efficacy of such initiatives are confronted with numerous challenges that are both conceptual and practical in nature.

Given that this research seeks a comparative examination of the approaches and models adopted by Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. It highlights their approaches, shared components, contextual differences, lessons learned, and evaluating their effectiveness and success critically.

### Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a comparative orientation to examine diverse international approaches to deradicalization programs. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Primary data collection included a field visit to the Rehabilitation Center in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on May 14, 2025. During this visit, the first author conducted semi-structured interviews, engaged in informal discussions, and carried out participant observation. Ethical considerations were considered, and verbal consent was obtained from respondents. In-depth sessions were held with Center administrators and faculty members responsible for psycho-social support, religious instruction, health care, and sports activities. This primary fieldwork offers a grounded perspective that enriches the comparative analysis of international approaches to deradicalization.

During the fieldwork, interviewees were asked about the functioning of the correctional facility, with particular focus on how it implements deradicalization, the factors contributing to its effectiveness, and its distinctive contributions to the field. Drawing on more than 25 years of law enforcement experience in Pakistan and abroad—including substantial familiarity with the Pakistani prison system and its deradicalization initiatives through repeated visits and participant observation—the first author was well positioned to grasp the dynamics of rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia. This background proved invaluable in comprehending the nuances of the Kingdom’s deradicalization environment. The second author, an academic from a conflict zone, provided firsthand contextual understanding and scholarly expertise as the reflexivity in the study that significantly enhanced the study. While the third author, an early-career researcher, contributed analytical rigor and research skills that significantly enhanced the study. Data obtained from primary sources were triangulated with secondary materials and co-authors to ensure credibility. Interviews were discontinued once response saturation was achieved.

Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and published evaluations of deradicalization initiatives implemented across diverse national contexts. Programs were selected for analysis based on their prominence in academic literature and their value as representative cases reflecting different cultural, religious, and socio-political settings. The comparative analysis seeks to identify approaches, shared components, contextual differences, lessons learned, and evaluate their effectiveness and success across these programs, thereby generating insights to inform future policy and practice.

#### ***Rationale for Case Selection: Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia:***

This research employs a ‘most different systems design’ in undertaking the comparative study of Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Yemen for a host of reasons.

- These countries have diverse political and governance structures. Yemen is an authoritarian state where authority is fiercely contested between various factions like the Houthis, the internationally recognized government, and the Southern Transitional Council. Indonesia is a democratic republic with multi-party elections and a decentralized governance system. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is a monarchy which has emerged a key state in the region.
- On the socio-economic front, these countries present stark contrasts: Yemen is a conflict-ridden, war-torn economy struggling due to infighting and chronic issues of weak institutions. Indonesia, the largest Islamic country by population, is a middle-income emerging economy. In contrast, Saudi Arabia is a high-income, oil-rich nation that is undergoing rapid development under its Vision 2030.
- Regarding the religio-cultural domain, there are pronounced dissimilarities. Yemen has a large Zaidi Shia population, leading to a sharp divide between Shia and Sunni communities. Indonesia is a predominantly Sunni Muslim country following the Shafi school of thought; and it also recognizes five other religions. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia is a staunch follower of a Wahhabi/Salafi interpretation of Sunni Islam.

- Similarly, the cases show varying Human Development Insights, with Yemen having the lowest HDI of less than 0.47. Indonesia has HDI of 0.72. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has the highest HDI among them, reaching 0.9 (UNDP, 2025).
- Militarily, they have different capabilities. The Global FirePower (2025) Index, which uses over 60 factors to determine a country's firepower, ranks Yemen at 74<sup>th</sup> globally in 2025, Indonesia at 13th, and Saudi Arabia at 24<sup>th</sup>.
- Considering the systemic differences in terms of political, economic, and cultural domains, these countries have suffered from religiously motivated terrorism and continue to face challenges of radicalization. For instance, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was the leading terrorist organization wreaking havoc in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen; in fact, it was formed through the merger of Al-Qaeda in Yemen and Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia. In the case of Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) emerged as an Al-Qaeda-inspired and affiliated network, with many of its senior leaders having fought alongside Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and later receiving training and financial support from it.

Initially, each of these countries adopted a stringent hard-power approach to combat terrorism, but eventually realized that the use of force alone was insufficient to counter violent extremism effectively and adopted unique deradicalization programs.

### **Deradicalization Programs as a Soft Approach to CVE**

The emergence of a 'soft approach' within the framework of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) reflects a growing recognition that kinetic measures alone are insufficient to address terrorism. This realization underscored the urgent need for well-designed and systematically developed non-kinetic strategies to complement military and security efforts. Consequently, numerous countries initiated deradicalization programs with the primary aim of rehabilitation and reintegration, thereby seeking to counter violent extremism through transformative, rather than purely coercive means. (Aly, Balbi, & Jacques, 2015). Moreover, the soft approach to terrorism takes an integrative measure to address the root causes of violent extremism and dissuade extremists from embracing violent extremist ideologies (Gunaratna, 2011, p. 67). The non-Kinetic approach is primarily based on the premise that violence cannot be effectively addressed by counter-violence alone; instead, violence must be transformed by addressing its underlying causes and adopting rehabilitative measures (Agastia et al., 2020).

### **Approaches and Models**

#### **Yemen's Deradicalization Program**

##### **Context:**

Yemen is considered the first country to launch a deradicalization program, followed by several other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Singapore, Jordan, Libya, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Tajikistan, and the Netherlands (Ashour, 2009). Likewise, Koehler and Horgan (2016) echoed that Yemen's prison-based program is perceived to be the oldest one in the Middle East, established in 2002.

The history of terrorism in Yemen is long and complicated. The rise of Al Qaida (AQ) in the 1990s resulted in a significant threat to Yemen as well as American interests in Yemen in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the 1992 hotel bombings in Aden targeting US Marines to the attack on USS Cole, AQ emerged as a potent threat to Yemen and the broader region. In the post 9/11 period, the Yemeni government launched a massive crackdown against the terrorists and arrested hundreds of them. As the pressure from their families grew stronger, the government decided to release the individuals who had not committed serious crimes after reforming their ideology through a religious dialogue (Dar, 2023).

##### **Program Structure:**

The deradicalization program was grounded in a religious dialogue that aimed to correct the detainees' distorted beliefs; it was primarily run by Judge Hamoud Al-Hitar, the key architect of the program and his three fellow clerics (Dar, 2023). The program, popularly known as the Al-Hitar rehabilitation program, is structured around three key components: psychological, religious, and social rehabilitation (Aslam, 2020). The psychological component was aimed at addressing the mental and emotional challenges of the detainees, which had contributed to their radicalization process. During the regular interaction with detainees, psychologists provided counseling sessions to manage stress, anger, and other emotional issues (Aslam, 2020). Alongside that, these sessions also allowed psychologists to explore and monitor the detainees' thought processes, identifying patterns of aggression or susceptibility to extremist ideologies.

The religious component was the mainstay of the program, which mainly focused on a moderate understanding of Islam. Judge Hamoud Abdulhameed Al-Hitar explained in an interactive session with ICPVTR that their dialogue had

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never been confrontational and that they would give the detainees time to reflect on these ideas (*International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, 2010*). He further explained that the Committee engaged with the detainees on critical issues like whether Yemen is an Islamic state and whether the Yemeni system follows Islamic Shariah. The positive and engaging response of detainees paved the way for a structured dialogue to follow. Apart from the religious aspects, the model also addressed the social component of reintegrating detainees into society after their release. This component was designed to improve detainees' social competencies, thereby reducing the risk of recidivism.

Nevertheless, like all other deradicalization programs, the Hitar program faced criticism and resistance from different segments of society, including security forces. This fact was acknowledged by Judge Hitar, who also faced assassination attempts (ICPVTR, 2010).

### **Successes:**

According to the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (2010), the program received positive attention from the international community for its pioneering efforts, making the country the first in the region to undertake deradicalization efforts in its prisons. While revising and refining an existing model is comparatively easier, conceiving, planning, and implementing a new one is far more challenging. In this regard, the Yemeni model deserves recognition for launching a pioneering initiative in the soft-power domain. The government claimed that the program remained largely successful as after effective dialogue it released 364 detainees against a certificate signed by them pledging that they had renounced their previous ideology (Birk, 2009). The Government further justified granting amnesty to those who had renounced their previous ideology and had also undertaken not to revert to terrorism (Rabasa et al., 2010)

### **Limitations**

As the program's primary focus was on the religious dialogue, it offered only limited assistance for post-release sustenance and livelihood jobs (Dar, 2023). This approach also drew criticism, with the Yemeni model widely regarded as a failure due to a high recidivism rate among participants (El-Said, 2012). Moreover, scholars also pointed out some fundamental errors, like focusing on religious dialogue alone while disregarding the individual's psycho-social therapy and psychoanalysis before reintegration. Likewise, the program lacked strong financial support and a sound rehabilitation plan to keep the detainees away from potential extremist activities (Dar, 2023). Additionally, the program provided only limited assistance for jobs and monitoring of beneficiaries for at least one year. Despite the limitations, it was observed that the dialogue approach run by the Committee for Dialogue, if effectively undertaken, could serve as a significant source of deradicalization and facilitate those who are willing to renounce their radical beliefs.

It is pertinent to mention that Yemen's deradicalization initiatives have largely evolved within the context of prolonged political instability, conflict, and weak institutional capacity. Early efforts were led by religious scholars who sought to engage imprisoned militants through dialogue, emphasizing reinterpretations of religious texts to counter extremist narratives. However, the absence of strong state structures, limited resources, and recurring waves of violence severely constrained the sustainability of these programs. While they demonstrated some promise in fostering ideological disengagement, the lack of systematic follow-up and reintegration support meant that long-term effectiveness remained limited. Yemen's experience underscores how fragile political environments and ongoing conflict can undermine the success of deradicalization initiatives.

## **Indonesia's Prison-based Deradicalization Program**

### **Context**

Indonesia has experienced severe terrorist attacks from various extremist organizations, including Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), established in 1993, as well as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and other militant factions. These groups have carried out a series of attacks and fueled radicalization, highlighting the growing security threats faced by the country. Furthermore, between 1999 and 2009, a total of 208 bombings were reported, highlighting the intensity of terrorism the country endured (Ellie & Laiq, 2010). In response, the Indonesian government has undertaken significant measures to counter terrorism, including the implementation of a comprehensive deradicalization program. For instance, when the GWOT was in full swing, Indonesia enacted Anti-Terrorism Law No. 15/2003 to effectively combat terrorism, which led to the establishment of Denus 88, an elite counter-terrorism force. This force quickly sprang into action and produced tangible results. Indonesia suffered a series of deadly terrorist attacks in 2004-05, including an attack on the Australian Embassy (2004), the Marriott Hotel (2004), and the bombing in Bali (2005). However, despite efforts to counter terrorism, the second attack on the Marriott Hotel in 2009 showed that efforts in countering terrorism were inadequate (Wathan & Barthos, 2021).

## Program Structure

In 2010, a key development was made by establishing the National Counter-Terrorism Agency, also known as Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terrorisme (BNPT), under the Presidential Regulation No. 46/ 2010. The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) was designated to lead and coordinate Indonesia's counterterrorism efforts in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Following an initial assessment of the threat landscape, BNPT issued a National Blueprint on Counterterrorism, which articulated the overarching framework of Indonesia's strategy. For the first time, the Blueprint explicitly distinguished between *deradicalization*—targeted interventions with detained extremists—and *counter-radicalization*—preventive efforts directed toward the broader public.

1. **Identification:** Collecting and gleaning information to develop the terrorist's profile to determine whether to proceed with the next phase.
2. **Rehabilitation:** This phase seeks to 'develop moderate understandings and attitudes to gradually facilitate 'inclusive, peaceful, and tolerant behavior and mindset. Along with personality development, training and nurturing with skill learning was also a main aspect of rehabilitation.
3. **Re-education:** This phase builds on the existing work and aims to transform the inmates 'thoughts, understanding, and attitudes.
4. **Resocialization:** This phase is the culmination of the program, which seeks to reintegrate the inmate back into society effectively.
5. **Monitoring:** Participants are closely monitored after release to track their behavior and ensure reintegration.

Indonesia's deradicalization program is prison-based and was carried out with collaboration of police primarily, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, correctional institutions, the Coordinating Ministry for People's Welfare (Kemenko Kesra), civil society organizations and other institutions (Ulyana & Riyansyah, 2021). Moreover, instead of concentrating only on religious re-education to alter ideological beliefs and religious legitimacy, the program focused more on the disengagement from violence (Rabasa et al., 2010). One salient feature of the program was the utilization of the services of ex terrorists to engage the detainees (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Despite being aware of the risks involved, the authorities went on to utilize the services of former extremists on the presumption that they were still considered part of the 'inner group' and they still commanded respect from militants (Osman, 2014, p. 223). One such key ex-militant was Nasir Bin Abbas, who played a tremendously important role in the disengagement of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members, besides efforts to counter radicalization (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). While explaining his methodology to re-educate detained terrorists, Bin Abbas explained that he used to tell the inmates how they had misunderstood the Islamic struggle and the meaning of Jihad and urged them to return to the right path of Islamic teaching. He further observed that the inmates felt more comfortable talking to him and preferred him over the police (Cave, 2006). On the other hand, it was also reported that he actively assisted Indonesian police in locating and apprehending former militants.

## Limitations

Horgan and Braddock (2010) observed the Indonesian program as 'a loosely knit array of different soft-line approaches.' Several flaws in the BNPT program were highlighted after critical evaluation by independent bodies. It was noticed that there was a lack of coordination between the BNPT and other relevant stakeholders, like the police, prisons, relevant ministries, and regional governments. Also, the prison system had profound operational and structural difficulties while running a deradicalization program in prisons (Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 2016). Hwang (2018) also discussed the issue of structural difficulties faced by BNPT and reported a few instances; for example, BNPT intended to use a facility as a 'de-radicalization showcase', whereas conversely, the Directorate-General of Corrections preferred to use the facility to isolate hardened extremists. Abuza (2008) also describes the program as 'underfinanced, understaffed, and not institutionalized.'

Like other deradicalization initiatives, the Indonesian model has faced persistent questions regarding its effectiveness, particularly in light of instances of recidivism. A prominent example is Abdullah Sunata, once hailed as the 'poster child' of Indonesia's deradicalization efforts; who despite rehabilitation, returned to militancy and emerged as one of the country's most-wanted terrorists. Such relapse, especially by a high-profile participant, raises serious concerns about the program's efficacy. Moreover, a host of infrastructural problems also adversely affected the performance of this program; for instance, Horgan and Braddock (2010) mentioned that the infrastructural issues in prisons limited the scale of these innovative efforts, which had tremendous potential to transform into a vibrant program. However, Rabasa et al., (2010), despite admitting and criticizing the shortcomings, contended that the Indonesian program achieved a certain degree of success.

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Admittedly, these deradicalization efforts cannot be assessed in isolation; they must be situated within Indonesia's broader governance and security ecosystem. While the state sought to rehabilitate and reintegrate extremists, terror networks were simultaneously expanding, exploiting social grievances; thereby undermining the overall effectiveness of deradicalization initiatives. The official sources confirmed that 2,000 militants had received military training in Afghanistan and the Philippines (Riyanta et al., 2021). Additionally, there were reports that around 3,000 members of Al-Qaeda and many ISIS supporters and sympathizers had settled in Indonesia. (Kfir, 2018). Ironically, radical narratives were so strong that even police officers could not escape, exemplified by Brigadier Syahputra of Batanghari Resort Police, who joined ISIS in Syria in 2015 (CNN Indonesia, 2015).

### *Successes*

Despite these challenges, the Indonesian program is well known for utilizing the services of former terrorists in a befitting way to the extent that they became champions of deradicalization efforts. Abuza (2008) endorsed this view for two reasons: firstly, because of the tremendous level of insight into JI provided by the ex-militants; and secondly, because the credibility and respect these individuals commanded played a crucial role in encouraging and facilitating the disengagement of detainees. Horgan & Braddock (2010) also considered this program unique for its utilization of former terrorists for disengaging militants. The credibility of the interlocutors for engaging the incarcerated terrorists has been of paramount importance (Casptack, 2015). This was true for both the clerics involved and the former militants employed by deradicalization authorities. Another important factor that paved the way for a smooth disengagement process – at least in the first phase – is the humane treatment meted out by Detachment 88, which contributed to winning over the inmates' trust in government authorities (Hwang, 2018). Additionally, the logistic and financial support for prisoners, including travel, accommodation, and educational expenses, also played an important role in cooperation (International Crisis Group, 2007). The Indonesian deradicalization program began around 2000 and has taken time to mature. Its soft approach focuses on religiously motivated radicals both in prisons and outside, offering preventative and rehabilitative deradicalization efforts. A notable feature of this program was the use of former radicals as beneficiaries who then helped in deradicalizing other inmates. The program employed a dialogue approach, allowing family members of detainees to interact with them and providing incentives to the families. The use of interlocutors and trust-building through dialogue proved effective in contributing to successful cases. However, despite these efforts, the program faced challenges such as poor prison conditions, a lack of an inter-agency approach and legal framework for deradicalization, insufficiently trained staff, and limited inmate participation. As a result, many detainees returned to radical groups after release.

### **Saudi Arabia's Rehabilitation & Deradicalization Program**

#### *Context*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has experienced serious security threats for many years and has taken appropriate measures to counter them. However, in May 2003, a series of attacks on residential buildings in Riyadh shook the whole nation, exposing the limitations of the Saudi counter terrorism strategy (Casptack, 2015; Al Jazeera, 2003). This attack drastically changed the counter-terrorism scenario for the state, and the focus shifted to the home-grown enemy (Mumtaz, 2004). This led the Saudi Government to review its counter terrorism policy and augment it with a new 'soft approach', thus focusing on the deradicalization (Boucek, 2008).

#### *Program Structure*

Saudi Arabia's deradicalization program was primarily conceived, designed, and implemented by Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz al-Saud, Minister of the Interior (Porges & Stern 2010). The program was well-financed and employed a combination of strategies to ensure thriving results (Gendron, 2010). Keeping in view the local context, this program was a combination of education, vocational training, religious dialogue, and post-release programs that help detainees reintegrate into society (Porges & Stern, 2010). The program focused on changing the behavior as well as changing the belief system or ideological rehabilitation of the detainees.

To ensure the effective implementation of the program, Saudi authorities enlisted a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including prominent clerics, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists and researchers. Psychologists working within the program were tasked with eliciting critical information from participants in order to assess their mental and emotional states, provide diagnoses, and monitor shifts in behavior and cognition (Boucek, 2008). Clerics, by contrast, engaged participants in personalized, one-on-one dialogue designed to probe their worldviews and religious interpretations (El-Said, 2012). Conducted in a friendly and informal manner, these interactions sought to build rapport and facilitate reconciliation. Importantly, such dialogues—centered on religious re-education and the contestation of extremist ideologies—formed the cornerstone of the program (Faculty Member, personal communication, May 14, 2025). The fact that the religious clerics whom the Center employed were highly qualified and well respected for their religious

knowledge, juristic acumen and independent opinion had a far-reaching impact on the beneficiaries; as most of them found themselves outwitted by the logic and reasoning (Faculty Member, personal communication, May 14, 2025).

To successfully graduate from the program, the participants must pass an exam demonstrating they have renounced extremist views and no longer pose a security threat (Casptack, 2015). Upon passing the exam, they enter the next phase, which spans about 8-12 weeks in a rehabilitation center, a boarding facility where participants live together, cook food, and continue their rehabilitation journey (Boucek, 2008). During this phase, efforts are made to effectively groom participants through various specialized courses to reintegrate them into society.

The Rehabilitation Center is housed in an expansive, state-of-the-art training complex. Where strenuous efforts are made to train and groom the individuals through several tailored courses so that they can successfully reintegrate into their societies. During the process, they undergo art therapy and various other vocational courses to help them acquire a livelihood after reintegration into society (Head of the Saudi Rehabilitation Center, personal communication, May 14, 2025).

Furthermore, the academic infrastructure includes well-designed syndicate rooms tailored for both group discussions and one-on-one mentorship sessions. The library is well equipped with an extensive collection of the latest books, journals, and audio-visual resources to support in-depth research and learning. The hostel not only offers comfortable living suites but also includes a dedicated family section, allowing beneficiaries to spend the night with visiting spouses in a private environment. The purpose was to involve the families in the process for emotional support during the rehabilitation phase and for support during the reintegration process (Faculty Member, personal communication, May 14, 2025).

### **Limitations**

Despite its ambitious framework, the program's success rates remain contested. While Saudi authorities initially claimed a 100 percent reintegration rate, they later acknowledged in 2009 that between 10 and 20 percent of former detainees had re-engaged in violent activities following release (Porges, 2010; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). Official sources suggest that 80–90 percent of participants were successfully rehabilitated, with failures attributed either to participants who voluntarily withdrew from the program or were screened out for insincerity (Boucek, 2008). Other scholars argue that the harsh treatment many participants endured in Guantanamo Bay contributed significantly to recidivism, accounting for the higher relapse rate of approximately 20 percent among this subgroup, compared to the program's overall average of 9.5 percent (Porges & Stern, 2010; Coleman, 2013). While the Saudi program is highly cherished in the world, some scholars argue that it involves huge money and therefore seems less practical for other countries to emulate due to the paucity of resources (Dar, 2023). It is also argued that the program is based on Saudi Arabia's long history and culture of rehabilitation; therefore, this program is a "Saudi solution to a Saudi problem," and this program is not replicable elsewhere (Boucek, 2008).

### **Success**

While analyzing the factors that led to the success of the Saudi initiative, some scholars argue that developing a strong relationship between prisoners and program officials was a critical factor, as it developed a bond and increased the chances of successful reintegration into society (Porges & Stern, 2010). A key feature of the Saudi program is providing successful detainees with funding and life skills for seamless reintegration, leading to high success rates. (Rabasa et al., 2010). Moreover, Saudi Arabia, as the custodian of Islam's two holiest sites with numerous scholars, is best suited to re-educate convicted extremists (Casptack, 2015). This facilitated meaningful dialogue that challenged participants' ideological beliefs. Counselling, especially its socio-psychological aspect with Western-educated experts analyzing behavior and conducting therapy, was also key. (Boucek, 2008).

As highlighted by Capstack (2015), the Saudi program extended counselling and support well beyond the initial rehabilitation stage, ensuring continuity after participants' reintegration into society. Following an 'individual approach,' each participant's social and financial circumstances were assessed, and personalized plans were developed to facilitate their adjustment. Support was not limited to economic assistance but also extended to personal life arrangements, such as facilitating marriages when deemed necessary. The post-reintegration phase further aimed to actively involve participants' families to promote social stability and smooth reintegration, offering sustained social and financial support (Faculty Member, personal communication, May 14, 2025). For this reason, the Saudi program is widely recognized for providing extensive financial and material assistance not only to beneficiaries but also to their families (Johnston, 2009).

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The Saudi program is generally considered a success, with researchers citing different and diverse reasons. Kruglanski (2019) regarded it as one of the most robust and extensive approaches, and it is considered to have shown great success.

The KSA followed an individual approach focused on the personal development of detainees. It stands out contextually for its strong state sponsorship, religious legitimacy, and extensive financial investment. The deradicalization model was highly funded, and social and economic needs for each inmate were addressed to the extent that, in some cases, marriages were facilitated. Qualified religious scholars, expert psychologists and vocational training played a significant role in rehabilitation. Notably, the KSA model was highly tailored to meet its unique sociocultural and religious needs; therefore, it is difficult to replicate in other parts of the world. Moreover, many detainees declined to participate in the program and later showed recidivism.

Drawing on global best practices, the following key lessons emerge, forming the basis of the comparative analysis.

### Comparative Analysis

#### *No One-Size-Fits-All Formula – Local Context and Drivers of Radicalization*

Radicalization is a complex and multidimensional process, deeply shaped by local political, cultural, regional, and economic contexts. Consequently, a program designed for one setting may not be transferable to another. The development of effective deradicalization initiatives therefore requires a careful examination of local dynamics, conflict drivers, and prevailing socio-economic conditions to ensure their integration into program design. Central to this effort is an understanding of the specific factors that propel individuals toward radicalization. The literature widely identifies these drivers as including socio-economic marginalization, political grievances, religious misinterpretation or manipulation, personal trauma or desires for revenge, peer pressure, and ideological grooming within vulnerable environments. Meaningful rehabilitation can only occur when programs are informed by these underlying causes; otherwise, interventions risk addressing symptoms superficially rather than resolving the structural and psychological roots of radicalization.

#### *Common Components and Contextual Variations*

A comparative analysis of different programs shows that there are a number of similarities among them. One salient feature of these programs is the ideological foundation that attempts to de-legitimize “the use of violence against the state, the society and the ‘other’” (Rabasa et al., 2010). Another common feature Neumann (2010) highlights are the psychological component, which includes psychological counseling, religious debate, and dialogue through a select group of clerics. Likewise, post-release monitoring and support were also reported to be in all programs, albeit with varying degrees (Rabasa et al., 2010).

Moreover, it has been observed that major deradicalization programs often include not only socio-economic support but also ensure vocational and entrepreneurial support for effective reintegration into society (Gunaratna & Hussin, 2018). While comparing different programs, Koehler (2015) points out that, in contrast, Western de-radicalization programs were focused on economic assistance and counseling and placed little emphasis on ideological concerns linked to deradicalization; the Middle East programs “heavily rely on a theological component”. Similarly, while analyzing the similarities between Western and Middle Eastern programs, Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013, p. 100) notes that one main similarity was that “go-betweens” usually included “religious scholars, repentant terrorists, or family members” to influence the participant’s moral grounds and facilitate reintegration.

It is also interesting to note that in the past two decades, alongside numerous government-run programs, a host of civil-society-run programs have also sprung up. Highlighting the limitations of the government-run programs, some scholars argue that government agencies might not be the right partners for deradicalization, as their interests could be perceived as a bid to procure intelligence (Koehler, 2015). While acknowledging that there is no one-size-fits-all formula, Rabasa et al., (2010) emphasize that the most effective programs are those that leverage local culture and values to achieve their objectives, and that such strategies must be developed in alignment with the cultural context of each country.

Similarly, Dar (2023) notes a significant distinction between Western and non-Western models: in the former, civil society—including NGOs and the private sector—plays an active role, whereas in the latter, civil society remains

relatively marginal due to the dominant presence of state institutions. To enhance the development of such programs and foster public trust, rigorous evaluation is essential to assess their actual effectiveness (Horgan & Altier, 2012). As Horgan and Braddock (2010) argue, the credibility of these initiatives ultimately depends on their transparency of objectives, clarity of evaluation criteria, and reliance on evidence-based claims of success. Therefore, for designing and implementing a successful deradicalization and rehabilitation program, it is crucially important to adopt a holistic approach that is not confined to punitive measures and strategies; instead, it makes strenuous efforts for reforming them from the inside and altering their behavior.

Aslam (2017) found parallel patterns that align closely with this study. The following table shows a comparison of deradicalization models across various national contexts.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of deradicalization models of Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia*

Country	Ideological/ Religious	Psychological	Finance	Educational	Family engagement	Society
Yemen	✓	✓				✓
Indonesia		✓	✓		✓	
Saudi Arabia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### ***Ideological Rehabilitation, Vocational Support, and Post-Release Incentives***

Understanding extremist narratives represents one of the most complex yet essential dimensions of deradicalization programs. Credible religious scholars, equipped with deep knowledge of theological principles, play a pivotal role in engaging individuals, challenging flawed interpretations, and correcting distorted religious worldviews through sustained dialogue. Such ideological transformation is central in the broader contest of ideas, ensuring that individuals not only renounce violent behaviour but also abandon the underlying violent worldview.

At the same time, the socioeconomic marginalization of many recruits—often originating from impoverished or disadvantaged backgrounds—underscores the need to complement ideological engagement with material support. Effective reintegration, therefore, requires equipping individuals with marketable skills, vocational training, or formal education, alongside mechanisms for generating sustainable livelihoods. Financial assistance, whether through stipends, employment opportunities, or small-scale entrepreneurial support, reduces the risk of recidivism by diminishing the appeal of militant networks. Continuous monitoring, counselling, and structured incentives reinforce peaceful reintegration, signalling the state's commitment to rehabilitation while discouraging re-engagement with extremist groups.

### ***Assessing Effectiveness and Measuring Success***

The effectiveness of the deradicalization programs has been under constant scrutiny since the very beginning from different perspectives. Some criticize these programs for cases of recidivism; while others point out the lack of standardized benchmarks for determining the success of these programs. Several deradicalization efforts faced intense criticism, with individuals committing terrorist acts, raising security concerns.

One such case is that of Said al-Shihri, who, after release from Guantanamo Bay in 2007, underwent and qualified the Saudi program, but after the release re-joined al-Qaeda in Yemen and was said to have played an important role in bombing the American embassy in Sana'a in 2008. Many policymakers and academics cite such cases to argue that these programs have failed to fully deradicalize these beneficiaries.

One important aspect of deradicalization is how to define and measure 'success'. Since these programs aim to deradicalize deeply ingrained views – and the radical thoughts often remain hidden – it's difficult to determine whether the individual has got rid of these. Horgan and Braddock (2010) too observe that measuring attitudinal and psychological change is difficult; and this makes the measurement a difficult task.

Amidst ongoing uncertainty and the absence of scholarly consensus, low recidivism rates are often cited as the most widely accepted indicator of the effectiveness of deradicalization programs. Recidivism is defined as 'a tendency to relapse into a previous condition or mode of behavior, especially relapse into criminal behavior' (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). However, evaluating the success of such programs remains highly complex. Most initiatives operate under considerable

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secrecy, and the scarcity of publicly available data significantly constrains opportunities for systematic and scientific evaluation (Johnston, 2009). On one level, this lack of data poses a substantial barrier to rigorous analysis; and on another, it raises questions about the reliability of recidivism as a metric for program assessment. Indeed, scholars continue to debate whether recidivism rates, though convenient, are the most appropriate measure of program success (Porges & Stern, 2010; Johnston, 2009). Boucek (2008) similarly argues that recidivism, by itself, does not adequately capture the broader and more nuanced dimensions of rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes.

Despite challenges, deradicalization programs still symbolize a truly creative and reformatory approach to counterterrorism efforts as these 'offer benefits far beyond those originally envisaged' (Horgan & Altier, 2012). Many countries have officially devised and developed ambitious deradicalization programs, resulting in varying degrees of success and failure (Rabasa et al., 2010).

### Discussion

As discussed above, the key elements of nearly all programs include ideological reorientation, psychological counselling, and successful reintegration into society. Ideological dialogue is crucial for challenging and correcting extremist worldviews. Psychological rehabilitation is equally important for two reasons: first, to address trauma, frustration, and aggression; and second, to determine the level of radicalization, thus facilitating the reintegration decision. Additionally, for effective reintegration, it is imperative to include vocational training, education, and employment opportunities to facilitate the post-reintegration life.

On the other hand, while designing the program, it is crucial to consider the indigenous drivers of the conflict (socio-cultural, political, or ideological) that caused radicalization. The design must be sensitive to context, and the program should be tailored to meet the local setting. Moreover, it is equally important that the program is backed up with strong political will and a whole-of-government approach. Deradicalization is a long-term commitment, not merely a course of 6-8 months, and it is quite resource intensive. Therefore, when designing a program, this must be taken into account. Likewise, interlocutors—whether they are religious scholars, former militants, or psychologists—must be credible and experienced to engage with them skilfully.

In a similar vein, Aslam (2018) identified the following components for effective deradicalization, which were also present to some extent in the cases of Yemen, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia.



### Conclusion

A comparative analysis of these programs highlights that there is no single criterion for a successful model that fits in all contexts. Each country has tailored its CVE approach to local conditions, available resources, and the nature of the threat. The main approaches followed in these case studies include ideological and religious re-education, psychological counseling, vocational training, family and community support, and post-reintegration monitoring. However, the extent and quality of implementation vary from country to country.

In all three countries, ideological and psychological components emerge as the most common and essential features of the deradicalization process; though implementation varies considerably. However, each country has clear contextual differences in how it designed and implemented its programs. The Saudi model emphasizes post-reintegration welfare, providing financial and employment support to help participants rebuild their lives—something that was relatively weaker in Yemen's program. The Indonesian model, on the other hand, made effective use of former militants who became peace advocates and worked closely with the government—an approach not fully replicated elsewhere. Additionally, the scale of funding and institutional support provided by the Saudi government was far greater than in the other two countries.

Therefore, a successful deradicalization program requires a whole-of-government approach, where all state institutions collaborate toward this shared goal. Yemen's pioneering initiative ultimately failed to sustain itself because of internal political divisions and a lack of unified support within the government. Despite challenges, deradicalization programs are gaining traction, and more countries are adopting them. Clearly, soft power is making imprints by offering an alternative that changes minds, focusing on reintegration rather than elimination.

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## Women's Studies in Turkish Academia: Exploring Knowledge Production through Doctoral Dissertations

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In this study, 33 dissertations conducted in women's studies doctoral programs in Turkey between 2018 and 2024, spanning from the earliest completed dissertation to the most recent with finalized data analysis, were thematically analyzed to systematically identify the prevailing trends, themes, and social issues addressed in the generation of feminist knowledge. Theoretically, the study is based on Haraway's concept of situated knowledge and feminist critique of knowledge. Methodologically, a qualitative research design based on document analysis was used, and the data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis, which was supported by MAXQDA software. The findings identified the following six main themes: "Feminist Activism and Empowerment," "Migration, Identity and Gender," "The Body, Health and Life Cycle Experiences," "Gender Roles and Masculinity," "Cultural, Familial and Ecological Representations," and "Everyday Life and Gender." These themes elucidate how feminist knowledge contributes to social transformation and its connection to contemporary debates regarding digitalization, care work, ecofeminism, and everyday life. The findings, which underscore the practical relevance of doctoral research and its academic contributions, emphasize the importance of women's studies doctoral programs in developing policies based on gender equality and provide a guiding framework for future research.

**Keywords:** Feminist activism, gender roles, gender studies, thematic analysis, women's studies

Women's studies have gained a noticeable presence within academic discourse in recent years as a multidisciplinary research field that seeks to understand the historical, structural, and cultural underpinnings of gender inequalities. This area of academic inquiry, which has emerged as a significant source of theoretical and empirical knowledge, challenges established patriarchal epistemologies by transforming women's experiential knowledge into academically recognized forms (Anderlini-D'Onofrio, 2004; Collins, 2011; Mozeley, 2019). The rise of women's studies in Turkey coincided with the feminist movement of the 1980s, which led to increased academic engagement, as

evidenced by the founding of the Istanbul University Women's Issues Research and Application Center in 1989 (Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2019). The impact of these developments on educational programs was evident with the establishment of the first master's program in women's studies at Istanbul University in 1990 and the doctoral program at Ankara University in 2011 (Sancar, 2003; Soyer, 2013). While the institutionalization of the field has navigated complex sociopolitical climates and changing higher education policies, these programs have successfully embedded academic practices that interrogate women's experiences and patriarchal knowledge production. These practices have become increasingly embedded within university institutions, shaping the academic landscape.

Doctoral dissertations are essential to academic research, as they reflect the primary dynamics and direction of a particular academic field by focusing on the most current research topics (Delamont et al., 2000; Park, 2007). By identifying gaps, controversies, current trends, and emerging research areas in the existing literature, doctoral dissertations contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge (Grover, 2007; Trafford & Leshem, 2008). Despite the significant number of doctoral dissertations in the field of women's studies in Turkey since 2018, it has been observed that there is a lack of research focusing directly on these dissertations. While extant literature on the subject (Balçı, 2016; Çubukçu, 2022; Kandiyoti, 2010; Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2019) has focused more on the quantitative development or institutional issues of women's research centers, the core directions, associations with social issues, and the diversity of doctoral dissertations have been largely overlooked. This knowledge gap signifies a substantial deficiency in comprehending the field's scholarly aspect and its potential for societal impact.

A focus on doctoral dissertations in women's studies enables an analysis of the field's most profound, theoretical, and interdisciplinary contributions to knowledge production. Indeed, doctoral dissertations in this field aggregate extant literature, introduce novel concepts, engage in authentic field research, and contribute to feminist epistemologies. Furthermore, as the doctoral level signifies the pinnacle of knowledge production in academic domains, the thematic shifts observed in these dissertations serve as key indicators of the overarching direction of the field and its prospective future research trends. However, a comprehensive thematic analysis of doctoral dissertations in the field of women's studies in Turkey is conspicuously lacking. In this particular context, the principal issue of this research lies in the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the thematic boundaries of doctoral dissertations within the domain of women's studies programs in Turkey.

This study aims to identify the contextual trends of the field by thematically analyzing doctoral dissertations conducted in women's studies programs in Turkey. Specifically, it addresses the following research question: What are the dominant themes and patterns of knowledge production within the doctoral dissertations in this field? As an inductive, thesis-based inquiry, the study focuses on the internal intellectual landscape revealed by these documents rather than evaluating them against the external sociopolitical backdrop of the period. Theoretically, this study is based on Haraway's "situated knowledge" conception and feminist critique of knowledge. According to this conception, knowledge is not merely neutral or universal but a historically, spatially, and socially situated construction (Haraway, 1988). In doctoral dissertations conducted in Turkey, this perspective is manifested in field-based, participatory, and critical studies grounded in women's experiences. At this juncture, it can be posited that doctoral dissertations in this domain should be regarded not solely as academic knowledge production but also as a praxis of political response and resistance. In this context, this research aims to provide substantial contributions on both academic and practical levels.

While a content analysis of doctoral dissertations in the field of women's studies provides insight into the current theoretical state of the field, in practice, it offers strategically relevant information regarding educational policies and gender equality studies.

Consequently, this study focuses on a comprehensive thematic analysis of doctoral dissertations conducted in the field of women's studies in Turkey to reveal the trends and potential areas of transformation in knowledge production. Doctoral dissertations in this field serve a dual role, functioning as both an academic artifact and a historical memory of feminist knowledge production. Thematic mapping of this memory offers a comprehensive overview of the past and guidance for future research. In other words, the exploration of the relationship between feminist knowledge production and academic institutionalization processes, the identification of subjects that have been prioritized, and the examination of issues that remain invisible provide a highly significant basis for researchers in the field.

### **Method**

This study was structured on a basic qualitative research design, which serves as one of the qualitative research approaches. Basic qualitative research offers a paradigm for an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and the meanings associated with these experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this context, this research endeavors to unveil the thematic patterns, academic directions, and knowledge production processes within the content of these studies by thoroughly analyzing doctoral dissertations conducted in the domain of women's studies in Turkey. This method was selected because its flexibility and interpretative depth align with the feminist goal of rendering visible the nuanced and situated meanings within women's experiences. By allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories, the method supports an inductive approach consistent with feminist critiques of positivist rigidity.

The document analysis method has been the preferred approach in the data collection process. This method systematically evaluates written documents containing information on a specific phenomenon (Bowen, 2009; Güler et al., 2025; Kıral, 2020). The sample was determined using criterion sampling, which is a purposive sampling technique. As a criterion, the sample consisted of doctoral dissertations conducted in women's studies programs, which were open to access. Following these established criteria, the analysis was conducted on a sample of 33 doctoral dissertations. The documents under analysis in this study consist of doctoral dissertations conducted in women's studies programs of universities in Turkey between 2018 and 2024. The year 2018 was selected as the starting point to capture the emergence of the first cohort of graduates from dedicated women's studies doctoral programs established in the preceding decade. These documents are accessible in the National Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). As the data consists of publicly published scientific documents, author names and university affiliations were not anonymized. This decision aligns with the feminist ethical principle of citation justice, ensuring that the intellectual labor of women scholars is visibly acknowledged rather than obscured.

The study employed the six-stage Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019), which posits researcher subjectivity as an analytic resource rather than a bias. This methodological choice operationalizes Haraway's (1988) "situated knowledges" by acknowledging that the generated themes are not passive discoveries but interpretative constructions shaped by the researcher's engagement with the data. The analysis moved iteratively through six phases: familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting. In the initial

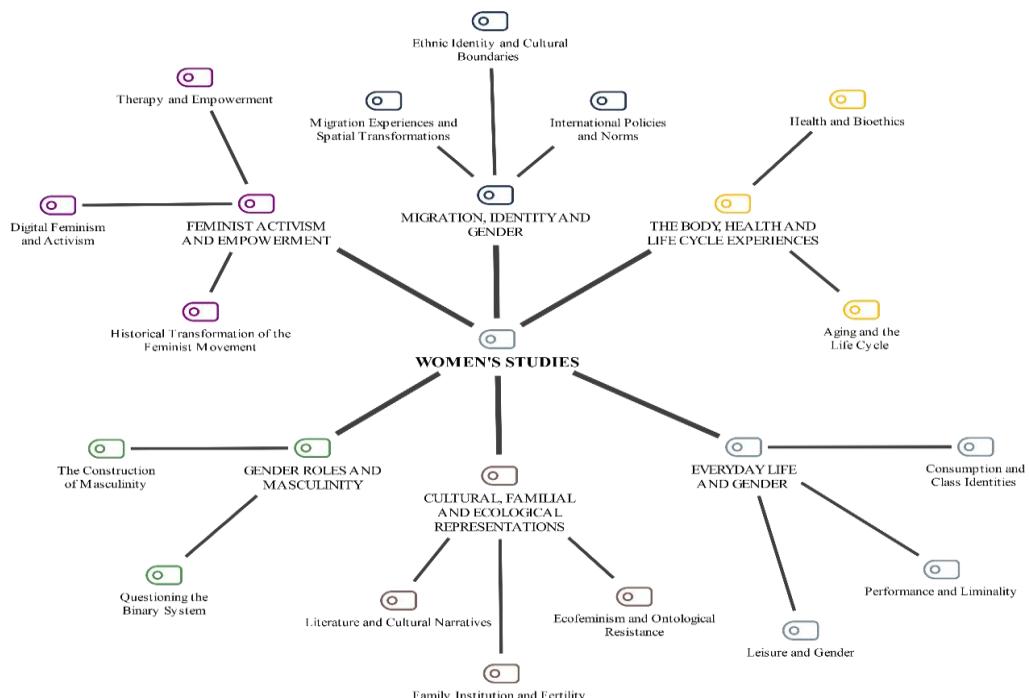
phase, the researcher cultivated comprehensive familiarity with the data by meticulously reviewing the abstracts of 33 doctoral dissertations. At this stage, preliminary coding was executed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2024 software. Beyond this initial phase, the software facilitated the systematic management of the dataset and supported theme construction through the hierarchical grouping and iterative refinement of codes. Additionally, it was employed to visualize the conceptual relationships between categories, ensuring the coherence of the final thematic map. In the subsequent stage, analogous phrases were classified by these codings to form categories for potential themes. In the third stage, these categories underwent a comparative analysis with the broader dataset comprising the study to ensure contextual dependability. In the fourth and fifth stages, the conceptual associations between the categories were established, and the final themes were identified based on these associations. In the sixth stage, each finding was supported by categories and reported. This process yielded the identification of 16 categories and 6 main themes.

## Results and Discussion

The themes and categories that have emerged following the systematic and inductive analysis of doctoral dissertations in women's studies programs in Turkey to reveal the contextual trends of the field are presented below. Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical relationship between the sixteen identified categories and the six overarching themes, mapping the conceptual landscape of the analyzed dissertations.

**Figure 1.**

*Themes and Categories of Doctoral Dissertations*



### Feminist Activism and Empowerment

Contemporary feminist activism has emerged on digital platforms, presenting novel strategies and opportunities that differ from those available through conventional forms of activism. Tuna Dur's (2024) examination of the methods employed by women-focused civil society organizations in utilizing social media as a medium for cyberfeminist activism revealed that these platforms function as a pivotal instrument in the pursuit of gender equality, primarily by augmenting the visibility of women within the digital domain. Similarly, Kama Öznelkan (2024) analyzed

the reflections of the #MeToo movement in Turkey and explored the continuum relations between online and offline feminist activism in the case of the Susma Bitsin Platform (Speak Up to End Platform). The extant research demonstrates that digital feminist activism does not merely function as a conduit for raising awareness; it also engenders substantive contributions in domains such as women's solidarity and organization, economic empowerment, and policy-making.

A comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of the feminist movement in Turkey necessitates an examination of generational differences and the diversification of political approaches. Morsünbül's (2019) examination of the transformation of the movement revealed that the feminist movement is characterized by fragmentation and diversification, as indicated by the personal experience narratives of feminist women. This finding challenges the prevailing notion of a unified feminist movement, suggesting a more complex and heterogeneous social landscape. Aygunes's (2022) study explored feminist struggle practices in relation to affect theory, positing that participants cultivated emotional volunteering practices within the feminist movement by oscillating between affect contradiction, affect solidarity, and affect belonging, thereby enhancing the resilience of their activism. These findings imply that generational distinctions and the metropolitan-provincial dichotomy have influenced the feminist movement. Moreover, it suggests that the movement has undergone a multifaceted transformation.

Empowerment and therapy have become key strategies in addressing gender inequality. Bozkur's (2022) investigation examined the impact of a feminist therapy-based group program on women's perceptions of empowerment, reporting a decline in internalized sexism levels among the participants, concurrent with an increase in their psychological power. In a recent curriculum development study for the gender equality education course, Şanlı (2022) examined the effects of the intervention on pre-service teachers' awareness of gender equality and their subsequent acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to gender equality education. The study's results demonstrated that the intervention increased the pre-service teachers' awareness of gender equality and their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to gender equality education.

This theme encompasses contemporary transformations of the feminist movement and processes of women's empowerment. Cyber feminist practices on digital platforms engender horizontal communication networks that transform traditional hierarchies following Castells' (2015) concept of a "network society." Digital activism is also being integrated with local resistance practices, becoming a space of communication and political activism for feminist organizations (Baer, 2016). Affective solidarity practices establish a continuum between online and offline activism, thereby rendering the feminist struggle more flexible and widespread (Chen, 2025; Crossley, 2015). Conversely, feminist therapy-based practices aim to address internalized sexism by empowering women, while educational programs promote this transformation at the institutional level (Brown, 2018; Lamptey et al., 2015). The studies under this theme illuminate the innovative potential of digital technologies in fostering feminist activism, the methods through which practices of affect and solidarity contribute to the sustainability of activism, and the pivotal role of educational and therapeutic programs in empowering women to combat internalized sexism.

### **Migration, Identity and Gender**

Moving from the collective mobilization of activism to individual trajectories of displacement, the second theme addresses the intersection of mobility and identity. Studies of migrant women's experiences reveal how gender and migration intersect. Güdekli's (2024) examination of crime fear experiences among women immigrating to Antalya

in the context of international migration revealed a correlation between the migrants' disadvantaged status and crime fear, particularly in cases involving male perpetrators and sexual crimes. The study also identified factors contributing to this fear, including language barriers, cultural differences, and inadequate social support. Hatipoğlu (2020) examined refugee women's experiences in a small city by studying the everyday lives of Somali women in Kütahya. This study revealed that Kütahya is not only a satellite city but also a place that affects these women's lives. Kemik (2020) revealed that migrant women construct remote motherhood strategies for their children within the framework of transnational motherhood by focusing on the motherhood experiences of Filipino care workers in Hong Kong.

Ethnic identity and cultural boundaries emerged as important factors that shape women's experiences. Atalar (2024) examined the transformation of the Circassian family structure, revealing that it is organized to ensure community cohesion and collective solidarity within the framework of khabze norms. However, this structure shows diversification in rituals and interactions due to urbanization. Harnuboğlu (2022) discussed intercultural marriages between Arab Alevi women and Turkish/Arab Sunni men, exploring how they crossed ethnic boundaries to create a space for themselves in Sunni society. On the other hand, Boztaş (2020) examined 19th-century American missionary women and revealed that the interactions of women of different classes, races, ethnicities, and religious beliefs within the context of missionary work differed from Western Orientalist discourse.

Substantial findings are provided by international norm production processes and their impact on gender policies. Doğan's (2021) postcolonial critique of the UN gender regime reveals a discernible hierarchy between global and domestic norms. This hierarchy is maintained by abjectification, whereby global norms are elevated above domestic norms. Additionally, Akgül's (2019) examination of conflict and gender equality approaches in UN documents analyzes the evolution of gender equality approaches within the UN, shaped by the global women's movement, over time.

This theme encompasses an exhaustive exploration of the experiences of migrant women, the transformation of ethnic identities, and the intricacies of international policy-making processes. The experiences of migrant women are influenced by transnational labor and care networks and spatial dynamics (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Kofman et al., 2000). The processes of reconstructing ethnic identities in everyday life create a space of tension between social norms and individual strategies (Anthias, 2020). The discordance between international norms and local contexts indicates Mohanty's (2003) critique, which asserts that the conceptualization of "woman" as promoted by Western-centered feminism obscures the significance of locality. This theme explores how the intersections between migration processes, intercultural interactions, and global-local political dynamics shape women's experiences.

### **The Body, Health and Life Cycle Experiences**

A critical examination of women's experiences and bioethical issues in the health field from a feminist perspective has yielded significant findings. Demirhan (2024) examined the experiences of living organ donor women in the context of feminist bioethics, demonstrating that the donor experience has wide-ranging effects on women's lives. The analysis revealed that the donor experience can be examined through autonomy, family relations, motherhood, and the body. Özsavaş (2023) evaluated the concept of informed consent in cesarean-section practices and revealed that there are difficulties in obtaining informed consent promptly before cesarean-section practices in Turkey and that women lack autonomy in their choice of mode of delivery. Türkmenoğlu's (2024) examination of the gender role stress levels of

healthcare professionals revealed that these professionals predominantly experienced stress due to gender dynamics, including gendered stereotypes and expectations. Their conflicting emotions influenced role stress, subsequently leading to professional dilemmas and emotional tensions.

A comprehensive examination of the role of age in gender experiences across the life cycle has been conducted, encompassing diverse dimensions. Kılıç's (2023) examination of age discrimination against women revealed that ageism is not limited to the elderly but also affects younger demographics. This phenomenon has been observed to manifest in various aspects of life, including intimate relationships, reproduction, biological processes, academic pursuits, and identity construction. Elmas (2024) examined the remarriage experiences of men in later life in the context of masculinity and found that remarriage plays an important role in the process of reconstruction and negotiation of gender identities for men. The study also found that remarriage leads to a tendency to re-establish heteronormative family relations in case of weakening of hegemonic masculinity values with aging.

Focusing on this theme, the investigation delves into the gender dynamics of health experiences across the life cycle. Within a social structure shaped by power relations, which prioritize patriarchal standards of health, the female body becomes the subject of male-dominated surveillance (Demez & Tunca, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Karahan & Adak, 2019). The limitation of the autonomy of the female body by medical norms is related to Foucault's (1973) concept of biopolitics, while the intersection of age discrimination with gender is supported by the gendered nature of aging (Leontowitsch, 2022; Thompson, 2019). Conrad's (2007) conceptualization of the "medicalization of society" offers a compelling explanation for transforming health experiences into mechanisms of social control. Research conducted under this theme has yielded insights regarding the limitations imposed on female autonomy due to prevailing medical and social norms, the manifestation of age discrimination at the intersection of gender, and how gender inequalities in healthcare exert a significant impact on both professional and personal domains.

### **Gender Roles and Masculinity**

The construction and transformation of masculinity represents a significant domain within the broader field of contemporary gender studies. Ok (2023) examined the processes through which white-collar men construct masculinity in the context of domestic kitchens and found that their participation in kitchen activities merely creates a suitable environment for hybrid masculinity maneuvers without producing multidimensional egalitarian behaviors that affect all activities requiring unpaid domestic labor. Akgün (2018) examined the behavior of male senior executives in terms of working with women and found an increase in competitive gendered attitudes of professional men, especially regarding career women. Yetiş (2019) examined men's perceptions and experiences of violence, and explored the relationship between the dominant culture of masculinity and violence in Turkey by analyzing the fragility of masculinity through the sense of shame.

The experiences of gender identities excluded from the traditional gender order present findings with significant evidence regarding their transformative impact on societal norms. İpekçi (2024) revealed the insidious effects of systemic cisgender normative violence on the life experiences of queer individuals and showcased how these communities resist the systematic oppression and marginalization they face. Sarıtaş's (2018) historical analysis of heteronormativity and sexual modernity argued that unstable and inconsistent subjectivities and discourses emerged during the late Ottoman and Republican periods. This analysis posited that these instabilities were a consequence of

heteronormativity's incapability to function without giving rise to its own instabilities.

This theme encompasses the construction and transformation of masculine identities and the experiences of gender identities that deviate from the binary order. Masculine identities are shaped by both hegemonic norms and alternative forms of masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The selective engagement in domestic practices fosters the emergence of forms of "hybrid masculinity" rather than promoting equality by perpetuating the patriarchal order (Prattes, 2022). Individuals who are situated outside the binary gender system become the object of both violence and social exclusion, where they have to develop alternative strategies against these pressures (Massaquoi, 2020; Munt, 2007). The studies under this theme illustrate how hegemonic values of masculinity are reproduced and transformed simultaneously, the instabilities within the binary gender system, and the ways in which alternative gender identities challenge this system.

### **Cultural, Familial and Ecological Representations**

Gender representations in literature and cultural artifacts provide significant insights regarding their role in social transformation. Çakmak (2024) analyzed gothic and grotesque body representations in contemporary women's literature and revealed that abject and grotesque female body representations aim to overthrow the patriarchal system by opposing it and that the metamorphosed female body can be handled through an ecogothic lens. Engin (2024) examined the theme of the child in Republican-era poetry with literary sociology, demonstrating that the themes of children and childhood in the poems of the 1950-1980 period have evolved in tandem with modernization, positioning the child as the most valuable member of society. Conversely, Özkan's (2018) study examined the impact of popular culture icons on social transformation, highlighting the pivotal role of queer popular culture icons in this process. The study demonstrated that performative acts, spanning from the individual to the social level, significantly influence social transformation.

Several dimensions of family institutions and social transformations are discussed regarding fertility and motivation to have children. Duran's (2024) study examined the motivations of families in Hakkari to have children, finding that the participants predominantly desired to have children and ascribed significance to family, foundation, future, joy, and love concepts to the child. The analysis revealed that personal factors, societal culture, social environment, religious teachings, and physical and economic problems significantly influence the motivation to have children.

The relationship between the ecological crisis and feminist philosophy constitutes one of the fields of contemporary feminist theory. Toprak (2022) explores the intersection of quantum philosophy and new materialist feminism, highlighting the parallels between the principles of quantum philosophy (operationality, indeterminacy, and entanglement) and queer theory through the lens of Deleuzian existential philosophy. This study indicates a significant interconnection between the foundations of New Materialist feminist ontology and quantum physics, suggesting a shared underlying theoretical basis. Kurtuluş (2020), on the other hand, provided an ecofeminist critique of the concept of human rights, emphasizing that human rights and ecology are not opposing concepts and that ecofeminism opposes not only the domination of women and nature but all forms of domination.

This theme explores gender representation in literature and cultural productions, the transformation of the family institution, and the convergence of feminist philosophy with ecology. The presence of grotesque body representations in contemporary women's literature indicates Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, which posits that the female body is a medium of resistance against the patriarchal system (Katrak, 2006). The restructuring processes of the family institution indicate that preferences regarding fertility are shaped by individual and social dynamics (Atalay, 2019; Gillespie, 2003). The domination of women is seen as a product of patriarchal and instrumentalist approach in line with the domination of nature, and for this reason, ecofeminists argue that human-nature relations should be rebuilt on a healthy basis in order to end these forms of domination (Şimşek & Nalbant, 2025). The intersection of ecofeminist ontology and quantum philosophy evokes Barad's (2007) "entanglement" theory, while the transcendence of nature-culture dualism is integrated with Plumwood's (1993) ecofeminist critique. An examination of studies within this theme reveals how literature and art function as agents of challenge to patriarchal norms, how the institution of the family experiences transformation in the process of modernization, and how the convergence of feminist theory with the natural sciences gives rise to novel ontological possibilities.

### **Everyday Life and Gender**

The interplay between leisure and gender can be examined through travel experiences. Elnur's (2022) analysis of solo travel experiences among both women and men, within the context of gender, revealed that gender-based spatiotemporal constraints experienced in everyday life substantially influence the processes associated with solo travel. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the concept of the "geography of fear," a phenomenon perpetually reproduced by the patriarchal control system, exerts a significant influence on women's mobility during travel, predominantly through the medium of security concerns.

The consumption practices and the processes of constructing a class identity that have been observed can be discussed in the context of conservative identity. An examination of the consumption practices of upper-middle-class conservative women in Gaziantep was conducted by Çöçel (2019), with findings indicating that these subjects' evolving relationships with consumption offer significant insights into their lives, social and familial positions, as well as the growing factions associated with conservatism among the upper and middle classes since the 2000s.

The performativity dimensions of everyday life and liminal identity experiences offer valuable findings in transcending normative categories. Barutçu (2019) examined the liminal experiences of köçeks within the framework of performance and the body, positing that they establish a domain that disrupts conventional oppositional frameworks and surpasses conventional categories. The study shows that this domain signifies liminality and is distinguished by its distinctive attributes. It has been posited that köçeks' artistic praxis challenges established normative categories while concurrently engendering a novel non-normative identity representation through their dance performances at the liminal threshold. It has been argued that the construction of this novel identity representation through performance offers insights into the social construction of diverse identities.

This theme explores how gender relations influence everyday life practices. The present study contributes to Massey's (1994) theoretical framework by analyzing gender constraints in leisure experiences, such as traveling, and their relationship to gendered control of space. The consumption practices of individuals have been identified as a critical factor in the production of both material forms and symbolic gender identities (Kehily & Nayak, 2018; Zayer et al.,

2012). Performance-based experiences of liminality demonstrate that gender is not a stable identity but a socially constructed process (Butler, 1990). According to the aforementioned theme, studies have been conducted that have revealed how a patriarchal social order influences quotidian practices. These studies have also revealed the strategies women develop to cope with these processes, as well as how alternative identity performances are constructed. Collectively, this theme highlights how the mundane and quotidian spheres function as critical sites where patriarchal norms are both enforced and subtly subverted.

The six identified themes collectively delineate a dynamic intellectual topography, wherein patriarchal norms are not only critiqued but also actively deconstructed through various sites of resistance. These themes are not isolated entities; instead, they are profoundly interrelated, with the macro-political struggles of digital activism and migration policies reverberating through the micro-political domains of bodily autonomy and quotidian interaction. This synthesis reveals a disciplinary shift in the field from descriptive accounts of victimization to a more nuanced engagement with agency, intersectionality, and the "situated knowledge's" that challenge hegemonic epistemologies. For the field of women's studies in Turkey, these findings underscore the necessity of methodological pluralism in capturing the complexity of gendered experience. In terms of policy, the research suggests that effective interventions for gender equality cannot be purely legislative. Nevertheless, it must also address the deep-seated cultural, spatial, and embodied mechanisms of exclusion identified within these dissertations, thereby bridging the gap between academic knowledge production and social transformation.

### Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of 33 doctoral dissertations reveals a diverse array of themes, with a particular focus on feminist activism, gender roles, health, migration, ethnic identities, cultural representations, and everyday life. This analysis delves into the forms of inequality experienced by women within these themes and approaches to knowledge production. The meticulous examination addresses these inequalities and the strategies employed to address them. Digital activism and affect-based forms of solidarity reveal the evolving nature of contemporary feminist movements. At the same time, the effects of gender-based roles on health, labor, and family structures are evaluated in different contexts. The spatial experiences of migrant women and their relations with cultural identities serve as indicators of broader structural inequalities. These thematic areas indicate that knowledge production in the field of women's studies in Turkey is developing at the theoretical level and in a field-based manner that contributes to social transformation. By centering women's experiences, these dissertations exemplify Haraway's (1988) "situated knowledges," rejecting universalist patriarchal narratives in favor of localized, embodied, and partial perspectives that are critical for genuine epistemic objectivity. A limitation of this study is its reliance solely on doctoral dissertations within the YÖK database; future research could expand this scope to include master's theses or comparative analyses with international programs.

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## **Construct the Exemplary Chinese Police Image: Public Perceptions and Generational Differences**

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In an era when online discourse and mediated scrutiny increasingly shape public attitudes, understanding how citizens construct the image of “exemplary police” has practical importance for legitimacy and governance. This qualitative study asks: How do citizens conceptualize an exemplary police image, how do these conceptions vary across generations, what obstacles hinder image construction, and what strategic pathways might address those obstacles? Using an online Jungian free-association task ( $n = 200$ ; 1,740 descriptors) and follow-up semi-structured interviews ( $n = 30$ ; >80,000 words), we applied inductive thematic analysis in NVivo 12 to generate empirically grounded findings across four birth cohorts. Results identify three core image dimensions—moral integrity, professional competence, and civic embeddedness—and reveal clear generational priorities—Baby Boomers: ethics; Gen X/early Millennials: relational trust; late Millennials/Gen Z: integrated expertise and digital responsiveness. We also identify three major gaps that hinder image construction: fragmented frameworks, conflicting enforcement-service standards, and uneven individual image awareness. To address these gaps we propose a three-part roadmap: institutionalize leadership (value alignment and accountability metrics); build organizational ecosystems (role modelling, incentives, and disciplinary clarity); and cultivate individual agency (co-created goals, peer reflection, and recognition). The study concludes that coordinated top-down, mid-level, and bottom-up strategies are necessary to co-construct a trusted, adaptable police image. Future research should test the model’s generalizability in underrepresented regions, develop quantitative validation instruments, and evaluate targeted interventions.

**Keywords:** exemplary police image; generational differences; qualitative study; image positioning

Since the early 21st century, the rapid expansion of the internet and media channels has made image a crucial dimension of daily life, placing the image of the police at the center of long-term public attention. Social evolution and shifting public expectations have made it possible for adverse events or media hype to rapidly erode trust, and public perception directly influences support and cooperation with the police. High-profile incidents — such as the Guizhou “June 28” police cover-up, the wrongful-conviction cases of She Xianglin, Zhao Zuohai and Xie Yalong, the beating death of Lei Yang, the June 10, 2022 Tangshan assault, and the Hu Xinyu case (Feb 2, 2023) — have attracted

widespread attention and severely damaged public trust. A positive police image not only enhances public credibility, authority, and law enforcement effectiveness but also serves as an intangible governance resource to strengthen social stability. Conversely, improper image management can undermine trust and exacerbate police-civilian tensions.

Examining the characteristics, positioning, and construction of exemplary police images from a public psychology perspective holds significant theoretical and practical significance. On the one hand, this helps to uncover the psychological mechanisms that shape public attitudes, expectations, and trust, thereby enabling the development of more precise strategies for enhancing police images. Such strategies are particularly crucial when they fully account for the varying expectations of different generations, driven by their life experiences, media usage habits, and values. On the other hand, systematically examining how image attributes are generated, positioned, and cultivated can enhance the reputation of security organs, fostering a virtuous cycle of police-community interaction.

This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature: the lack of a comprehensive, psychologically informed analysis of the exemplary police image within the context of generational differences. The specific research questions are: How do citizens conceptualize "exemplary police officers"? How do these differ across generational groups? What factors hinder the construction of a positive image? How can contemporary Chinese policing utilize public positioning strategies to overcome these challenges and cultivate an exemplary image?

## **Literature Review**

Police image refers to the public's subjective impression of law enforcement, encompassing attitudes, evaluations, and expectations of police functions held by various sectors of society (Salmi et al., 2000). Traditional public relations research, both internationally and domestically, has focused on using police behavior and institutional publicity to establish an image of authority and demonstrate legitimacy (Reiner, 2010). Scholars generally categorize this into internal factors, such as personal integrity, professionalism, and behavioral consistency, and external factors, such as media presentation and community integration (Xu & Han, 2019; Liu, 2011). These dimensions collectively form the basic framework for the concept of police image.

However, maintaining a positive police image is often challenged by crises. Crises are exceptionally high-profile events that can dramatically shift public sentiment (Coombs, 2007). Research on image crises shows that police misconduct, excessive use of force, or corruption can quickly erode public trust, further fueling public suspicion (Mukhsinin, 2023; Stanford, 2015; Tyler, 2006). The development of social media has exacerbated this situation, as the rapid dissemination of negative news often constrains the timeframe for official responses (Meijer & Thaens, 2013). For example, the 2024 Zhuhai Sports Center "car accident" incident resulted in significant discrepancies between the government's news release and eyewitness accounts, leaving the public perplexed (Associated Press, Ewan, 2024).

Proactive image management has become crucial to this end (O'Connor, 2017). Empirical research confirms that a carefully crafted police image not only enhances public trust and satisfaction but also strengthens institutional legitimacy and operational effectiveness (Vaitkevičiūtė & Dobržinskienė, 2022; Vigoda-Gadot & Cohen, 2015). Key attributes such as transparency, accountability, and empathetic community engagement are strongly associated with higher rates of public cooperation in crime prevention (McCandless, 2018). Consequently, police agencies worldwide

are implementing measures such as ethics training, community policing initiatives, and targeted media campaigns to cultivate and maintain a positive public perception (Okhrimenko, 2020)

Despite concerted image-building efforts, police organizations often struggle to bridge the gap between top-down messaging and grassroots expectations (Dang, 2025). While official initiatives tout "modernized policing" and "service-oriented reforms," public surveys consistently show that citizens prioritize concrete actions, such as fair treatment and a welcoming police presence, over abstract policy rhetoric (Simmons, 2009; Nickel, 2018). This discrepancy highlights that image-building strategies should not rely solely on government-led directives but must be grounded in the public's genuine feelings about the community.

Mannheim's (1952) generational theory explains how shared historical and social experiences shape distinct generational identities, in turn influencing political values, trust in institutions, and worldviews. These generational differences are particularly pronounced in China, which has experienced distinct periods such as the Cultural Revolution, economic liberalization, and the rise of digital media. Older generations often perceive policing through on-the-ground police presence and community patrols (Stoudt et al., 2011), while younger generations primarily engage with the police through digital channels, ranging from official social media posts to widely circulated citizen-filmed videos (Luo, 2022). These divergent experiences exacerbate cognitive gaps, resulting in distinct impressions of law enforcement.

While extensive literature examines the definition of police image (Salmi et al., 2000; Ullah et al., 2016; Russell, 2021), crisis management, and general strategies for construct it (Hine & Bragias, 2021), few studies systematically consider demographic nuances or translate specific public expectations into targeted positioning frameworks. In particular, generational differences in perceptions of police image remain underexplored, and models integrating psychological knowledge with practical image-building strategies are lacking. This study aims to explore perceptions of the "exemplary police" across different generations in China. Compared to previous research, which has focused on structural drivers and willingness to cooperate (Wu et al., 2021), crisis communication and transparency strategies (Zheng, 2023), attitudes toward specific police roles or internal organizational mechanisms (Sun, et al., 2021), and national discourse or contextual/tactical analysis (Scoggins, 2022; Liu & Chen, 2023), this study contributes by qualitatively characterizing the psychological dimensions and generational differences in public perceptions of the police from a public psychology perspective. It examines how these perceptions inform the strategic positioning of this image and explores how psychological insights can guide the shaping of the police's image. Ultimately, these perceptions are translated into a targeted, multi-layered roadmap for improvement, complementing previous studies that have focused on institutional or organizational dimensions.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative approach to capture the depth and nuance of public perceptions concerning exemplary police image characteristics and strategic positioning. Data collection utilized two complementary methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews and a free-association task.

### ***Participants***

This study employed a two-stage, mixed recruitment strategy to capture both broad cultural associations with policing and in-depth, generationally informed perspectives. In the first stage, the free-association task was administered

via online recruitment, yielding responses from 200 participants who volunteered through community mailing lists, social media posts, and partner organization notices. Following completion of the free-association exercise, a stratified random sampling procedure was used to select a subsample of 30 participants for subsequent in-depth interviews. Stratification was performed by birth cohort to ensure generational representation: Baby Boomers (1946–1964, n = 7), Generation X (1965–1980, n = 6), early Millennials (1981–1996, n = 8), and late Millennials/Generation Z (1996–2010, n = 9). The target of 30 interviews was chosen because it falls within commonly accepted qualitative practice for achieving sufficient depth while remaining administratively manageable for intensive coding and case-by-case analysis (Boddy, 2016). In addition, the two-stage design — a large online free-association pool followed by a stratified set of in-depth interviews — provided methodological triangulation: the broad pool captured spontaneous cultural imagery, while the 30 interviews supplied balanced generational perspectives for detailed thematic analysis and allowed the team to pursue iterative coding until thematic saturation was observed. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of these 30 interviewees. This two-stage design allowed broad capture of spontaneous cultural imagery around policing while ensuring the interview sample provided balanced generational perspectives for detailed thematic analysis.

**Table 1***Basic information of respondents*

ID	Gender	Age	Occupation
1	Male	68	Retired(University Administrator)
2	Female	67	Retired(Police Officer)
3	Male	65	Retired(Factory Supervisor)
4	Male	64	Retired(Journalist)
5	Female	63	Retired(Nurse)
6	Male	61	Police Officer
7	Male	61	Police Officer
8	Female	56	Finance (MNC)
9	Female	55	Private Business
10	Male	55	Laborer
11	Female	49	Laborer
12	Female	48	Freelancer
13	Male	45	No job
14	Male	44	Government Staff
15	Male	43	No job
16	Female	42	Teacher
17	Male	37	Business Owner
18	Female	36	Private Enterprise
19	Male	36	Real Estate Sales
20	Female	35	Education & Training
21	Male	29	Maintenance Worker
22	Male	28	Farmer
23	Male	28	Administration

24	Male	26	Accountant
25	Female	25	Wedding Planner
26	Female	25	Software Developer
27	Female	23	Student
28	Female	23	Student
29	Female	22	Student
30	Female	22	Student

These cohort distinctions inform subsequent analysis of age-related variations in image attribute prioritization.

### ***Data collection***

#### *Semi-structured Interviews*

Follow-up interviews were conducted with the stratified subsample of 30 participants drawn from the online free-association pool. An interview guide—developed from the literature and pilot-tested for clarity and flow—framed open-ended questions about participants’ conceptions of an ideal police image, evaluations of current policing practice, and suggestions for image enhancement. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with informed consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim to support thematic analysis.

### ***Free-Association Task***

The free-association task, administered online to the initial sample of 200 respondents, asked participants to list spontaneously the words or short phrases that came to mind in response to the stimulus term “exemplary police.” This technique—adapted from Jungian associative methods for social research—was used to access implicit mental schemas and affective associations. Responses from the full online sample were compiled for frequency counts and co-occurrence pattern analysis to identify dominant descriptors and latent thematic structures. The associative responses contributed both as a population-level dataset ( $n = 200$ ) and as the basis for selecting interviewees who could elaborate on emergent themes.

### ***Research Procedure***

To ensure methodological transparency and rigor, the study followed a systematic workflow from recruitment through analysis. Initial recruitment for the free-association task used online channels; after collecting associative data from 200 participants, researchers implemented a stratified random draw by age cohort to obtain the 30 interview participants. Selected individuals were contacted by telephone or email to confirm eligibility, outline the study aims, restate confidentiality procedures, and schedule interviews. Prior to each interview, verbal informed consent was reconfirmed and demographic information verified. Interviews followed the semi-structured guide and were audio-recorded with participants’ permission; recordings were transcribed verbatim and redacted to remove personally identifiable information.

For qualitative analysis, NVivo 12 supported two complementary analytic streams. Associative responses from the full online sample were analyzed via frequency counts and co-occurrence mapping to reveal core image attributes and inter-term relationships, while interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis following established qualitative procedures. The primary analyst (Mao), who previously served as a community–police liaison and brings a normative orientation toward procedural justice, led coding. To reduce interpretive bias, a second coder unaffiliated with law

enforcement independently reviewed coding decisions, and member checks were conducted with three participants from each generational cohort to validate thematic interpretations. Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee under reference number UMREC\_2650.

## Results

### Coding Pipeline

We used NVivo 12 to organize and analyze both associative and interview data. First, in the open-coding phase, we reviewed raw transcripts and 1,740 free-association responses (collected online); after de-duplication these responses yielded 261 initial codes. Next, during axial coding, we consolidated and grouped those 261 initial codes into 76 nodes and subsequently organized them into 21 subcodes. Finally, in selective coding, we condensed the 21 subcodes into three core themes: Moral qualities, Professional competence, and Civic embeddedness. To ensure consistency, a second researcher independently coded 20% of the interviews and we calculated a Cohen's  $\kappa$  of 0.82, indicating strong agreement (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Coding Pipeline*

Phase	Units coded	Outcome (coding units)
Open coding	200 online free-association respondents (1,740 descriptors)	261 initial codes
Axial coding	261 initial codes	76 nodes → 21 subcodes
Selective coding	21 subcodes	3 core themes; $\kappa = 0.82$

### Thematic Findings

Our themes reflected a multidimensional view of the ideal police image. Moral Qualities included integrity, justice, responsibility, and respect for the law, and emerged as the most frequently cited category. professional competence covered areas such as legal knowledge, technical skill, physical fitness, and problem-solving ability. Civic Embeddedness captured qualities like approachability, empathy, patience, and clear communication. Together, these three themes provided a clear, empirical basis for examining generational differences and for developing targeted image-building strategies.(see table 3)

**Table 3**

*List of coding information of Exemplary police image characteristics in China*

Core code (reference points)	Associated coding (reference points)	The original vocabulary( extract)
	Justice (18)	Justice; fairness; proper handling of cases; hatred of evil;
	Clean (16)	Clean and honest; clean; do not take a needle from the thread;
	Patriotic (23)	Patriotism; love the motherland; serve the country; loyalty to the country;
	Courage (14)	brave; fearless of danger; courageous;

Moral qualities (162)	Love and dedication (10)	Love; work; dedication; on call; self-sacrifice;
	Responsibility (6)	Responsible; serious and responsible;
	Kindness (8)	Kind; friendly; smile;
	Love the Party (16)	Love the Party; be loyal to the Party; choose the Party firmly;
	Diligence (9)	Diligence; conscientious; hard-working; hardworking and capable;
	Loyalty (6)	Perduties faithfully; be a public servant; obey rules;
Values (5)	Values (5)	Correct values; atheism; three views; stay true to the original intention;
	Belief (2)	Have a sense of faith; firm faith sense ;
	Ideal (2)	Lofty ideals
	Political Consciousness (20)	High political consciousness; firm political direction;
	Unity (7)	assistance; unity; sense of cooperation;
Professional competence (50)	Mental health (4)	Good attitude; optimistic; mental health; positive and optimistic; not negative
	Solid knowledge (22)	Excellent professional knowledge; to be familiar with the law;
	Professional skills (24)	Excellent business skills; keen observation; insight; resilience;
Civic Embeddedness(49)	Service for the people (30)	Serve the people; the heart of the people;
	Public influence (6)	Be an example of the people; stand ahead of the people; be loved by them;
	Communication skills (13)	have strong communication and coordination skills;Can communicate

Analysis reveals that the public expects exemplary officers to demonstrate substantive legal expertise and technical proficiency in law enforcement operations. Respondents emphasized mastery of relevant statutes and procedural compliance, noting such knowledge is essential both for effective crime deterrence and robust protection of citizens' rights. Furthermore, participants highlighted the critical importance of situational acuity, rapid assessment capabilities, and adaptive decision-making in dynamic security environments.

### ***Positioning of the Exemplary Police Image***

Positioning—here defined as articulating distinctive traits that secure a unique place in the public psyche—is crucial for law enforcement to build citizen confidence and fulfill its mandate. Drawing on a free-association task (261 unique nodes) and over 80,000 words of interview transcripts, this study synthesizes public perceptions into a three-part framework. The most frequent associative terms—“integrity,” “justice,” and “service”—align with interviewees’

explicit expectations and coalesce into three interdependent dimensions: moral integrity, professional competence, and civic embeddedness. Together these dimensions form an integrated basis for strategic image-building in contemporary contexts.

### ***Moral Qualities***

Across age groups, respondents identified honesty, integrity and impartiality as the core of an exemplary police image. Citizens expect officers to apply the law consistently, explain decisions transparently, document actions, and admit errors—practices that institutionalize accountability rather than leaving ethics to individual discretion. Moral integrity also entails personal courage and composure in dangerous or chaotic situations; staying calm and decisive under pressure reassures the public and protects lives. Many interviewees described policing as a vocation: a self-motivated commitment to serve that sustains long hours and emotional strain. In short, moral integrity, bravery and a sense of professional mission together form the ethical foundation of public trust.

### ***Professional Competence***

Professional competence rests on legal mastery, investigative skill, situational awareness, and physical and psychological readiness. Participants emphasized the need to know statutes and procedures thoroughly so interventions—from obtaining warrants to courtroom evidence—are swift and defensible. Acute situational judgment allows officers to intervene early and prevent escalation; operational excellence also requires endurance and stress resilience for pursuits, crowd control, or other demanding duties. To cultivate these capabilities, respondents suggested routine physical training, regular assessments, and stress-management techniques (e.g., tactical breathing, tactical pauses). Lifelong learning and continuous skills upkeep were presented as essential to maintaining community confidence.

### ***Civic Embeddedness***

Respondents expect officers to be approachable community members who listen patiently, de-escalate disputes, and proactively address local needs. Practical examples included informal outreach (e.g., “Coffee with a Cop,” public office hours), community seminars, and participation in neighborhood events—activities that humanize police, elicit information that might not otherwise be shared, and prevent minor conflicts from escalating. Effective mediation skills and active listening were highlighted as tools that both defuse tensions and reveal critical reports. Embedding officers in grassroots contexts—walking patrols, safety committees, festival attendance—creates ongoing two-way communication, accelerates reporting, and strengthens mutual trust.

### ***Historical Evolution and Discussion of the Characteristics of Exemplary Police Image***

#### ***Baby Boomers' Emphasis on Moral Integrity***

In the early years of the People's Republic of China (the 1950s and 1960s), the legal system was underdeveloped and public literacy was low, making policing highly dependent on individual judgment and ethical self-discipline. This dual vulnerability of history and institutions made morality the primary safeguard against power and wrongful convictions. As one interviewee put it, "Police during the Republican era served class interests, and after 1949, morality was needed to compensate for the legal immaturity" (Interviewee 003). Before the establishment of external oversight mechanisms such as judicial review (such as the reforms around 1979), the public tended to evaluate the police based

on "responsibility, diligence, and integrity." This generation's priorities reflect a lingering institutional memory: when institutions were incomplete, personal virtue was expected to be the cornerstone of legitimacy and credibility, a path that continues to influence contemporary negotiations of legitimacy.

### ***Generation X and Early Millennials Emphasis on Civic Embeddedness***

From the end of the Cultural Revolution to the mid-1990s (roughly 1965–1996), with the expansion of legal education and the popularization of compulsory education, public legal awareness rose, and the criteria for evaluating police officers expanded from simple morality to include daily interactions and community engagement. Reflecting on the financial incentives and image damage of the early reform period, interviewees noted that early policing lacked standardized public service etiquette (Interviewee 013). With the stabilization of legal and social order, the public favored a "people-oriented" policing model—one that combines impartial law enforcement with respectful communication, empathy, and patience. As interviewees noted, responsibility is fundamental, and a friendly interpersonal attitude can earn additional trust in police officers (Interviewee 008). Therefore, this generation's ideal police officer is one who integrates ethics and community engagement.

### ***Late Millennials and Gen Z: The Integrated Competency Imperative***

Since the late 1990s, legal modernization, digital transformation, and widespread education have fueled public expectations for a comprehensive upgrade in police capabilities. This generation emphasizes ethical and interpersonal skills as necessary but insufficient—technical literacy, cross-disciplinary problem-solving, and visible performance are equally important. Institutional evaluations (such as the multidimensional assessments for "National Outstanding People's Police") incorporate political awareness, professional competence, social responsibility, and public support, reflecting institutional recognition of multifaceted professionalism. As interviewees noted, earlier generations of professionalism have limited effectiveness in the face of insufficient technical literacy (Interviewee 029); others emphasized that contemporary policing requires a "triad of technical operations, interpersonal mediation, and social engineering" (Interviewee 027). Overall, legitimacy in a digital society relies more heavily on visible performance and continuous learning. Excellent police officers are expected to dynamically integrate ethics, relationship building, and technical expertise.

### ***Limitations in construct the Exemplary Police Image***

While numerous initiatives have contributed to cultivating a positive police image, several constraints impede their overall effectiveness. These are systemic issues that impact public perception across generations. While each generation may prioritize different attributes, the core institutional flaws are common, so there's no need to distinguish between generations when addressing current issues.

### ***Lack of a Holistic Framework***

Current measures for image building—such as mentoring, pre-job and on-the-job training, and rotational positions at the grassroots level—primarily focus on improving individual competencies, but lack a unified management system, organizational structure, and standardized guidelines. Image-related requirements are scattered across various business regulations and job responsibilities, lacking specific policies and authoritative oversight. This fragmentation has hindered the development of replicable, standardized practices. As one interviewee explained, "When reporting a

crime, each police officer followed different procedures, and no one provided clear guidance. In the end, I didn't know who to turn to for help." (Interviewee 030) Overall, the immaturity of institutional design, legal safeguards, and regulatory policies has hindered the systematic advancement of image building.

### ***Insufficiently Comprehensive Standards***

Public expectations of police officers demand both strict law enforcement to maintain order and compassionate service to earn their trust. However, a multidimensional standard that balances these two approaches is currently lacking. Consequently, frontline officers often face uncertainty when handling such situations. They risk appearing too forceful and losing support, while also undermining their authority through excessive leniency. One interviewee vividly described this contradiction: "Traffic officers are sometimes serious about issuing tickets, and sometimes smiling and handing out leaflets. Without a clear demarcation between when to be 'tough' and when to be 'soft,' they can easily appear inconsistent or insincere." (Interviewee 005) Therefore, image building needs to shift from a single dimension to a cross-disciplinary and cross-functional standard system, clarifying when procedures should be prioritized and when communication should be prioritized, thereby achieving a coordinated and dynamic balance between law enforcement, professional competence, and interpersonal communication.

### ***Individual Officers' Lack of Image Awareness***

While the overall image of the police may be positive, the indifference or dereliction of duty by individual officers can significantly negatively impact public perception. Respondents repeatedly mentioned instances such as perfunctory reception, blunt language, and a negative work attitude; lack of follow-up after reporting a crime; reprimands; and on-duty phone use and a lack of urgency (Respondents 022, 017, and 009). These subtle behaviors often erode public trust more directly than systemic issues. Psychological factors such as burnout and a lack of self-monitoring can exacerbate this problem. However, without image awareness training and individual accountability mechanisms, individuals struggle to recognize the impact of their actions. Therefore, continuous feedback mechanisms, such as community satisfaction surveys and peer reviews, coupled with performance incentives and outstanding recognition, are necessary so that every officer can view image building as part of their professional identity and view daily interactions with the public as opportunities to rebuild public trust.

## **Discussion**

### ***Intergenerational Alignment and the Evolution of the Exemplary Police Image***

The exemplary police image is mutually supported by three dimensions: ethical integrity, professional competence, and community embeddedness. These three dimensions not only form the cornerstones of internal legitimacy (ethical training, socialization of values, and legal and tactical competence) but also generate feedback loops of trust or distrust through external public interaction (Tyler, 2003; Bradford et al., 2009). Qualitative data from this study demonstrates that a single dimension is insufficient to maintain an image: high ethics without skills can arouse suspicion (Putra, 2021); technical prowess without a moral foundation can also lack public trust (Turner, 2024). Therefore, constructing an exemplary police image requires not only cultivating personal virtues but also relying on institutional arrangements to transform these virtues into visible and evaluable community practices.

Generational differences reflect shifting priorities within a core of unchanging values. The "Baby Boomers," born between 1946 and 1964, respondents emphasise "absolute morality" — a binary ethic (right/wrong) rooted in formative

socialisation when legal oversight was limited, reputations and visible virtue were primary trust signals, and cultural norms stressed duty. For them, moral absolutes mean judging police by personal integrity and visible exemplary conduct rather than abstract procedural indicators. This suggests that image-repair for this cohort should foreground tangible moral exemplars while linking those symbolic gestures to institutional safeguards..

Generation X and early millennials, born between 1965 and 1996, grew up during a period of rapid social and institutional change. Marketization, urbanization, and community policing drove the increasing importance of daily interpersonal networks and the quality of grassroots services. Consequently, they place greater emphasis on relational trust—trust in police officers who demonstrate reliability, respectful communication, and active community engagement. This is because, in uncertain environments, these concrete interactions can better demonstrate the competence and predictability of police officers.

Late Millennials and Generation Z, who grew up after 1996, demand a balanced approach between ethics, interpersonal relationships, and technology in the context of digitalization and hybrid security threats. Generation Z demands this balanced approach because, as digital natives, they expect rapid, transparent, and verifiable accountability while facing a mix of online and offline security threats. Their frequent use of social media, coupled with numerous high-profile incidents, has spurred them to excel at verifying and disclosing information. Therefore, visible procedures and measurable performance are crucial. At the same time, hybrid threats like cyberthreats, misinformation, and cross-border crime demand technical expertise, while daily collaboration relies on interpersonal trust. These factors combine to foster a preference for a policing model that demonstrates ethical, relational, and technological proficiency.

The findings also point to a broader theoretical claim about the evolving basis of state legitimacy: across cohorts, the grounds of trust appear to be shifting from person-centred moral evaluations toward institution-centred assessments of procedural fairness and technical competence. In older cohorts trust is more readily anchored in perceived moral character and interpersonal integrity; in younger cohorts, by contrast, legitimacy increasingly depends on visible, systematized indicators of performance and accountability. This generational transition resonates with classic sociological distinctions between personalistic and legal-rational sources of authority (Weber, 1978), and it aligns with procedural justice perspectives that foreground fair procedures and transparency as key determinants of legitimacy (Tyler, 1990). Framing our empirical patterns in these terms clarifies that image work is not merely reputational management but reflects deeper structural shifts in how citizens judge authority — a shift with direct implications for what kinds of reforms will be perceived as legitimate by different cohorts.

Three major societal changes underpin this evolution. First, the shift from centralized to networked governance, which has made policing a partner in co-governance; second, the fragmentation of the media landscape, which has increased public expectations for transparency; and finally, the shift from a localized threat landscape to a diversified one, which underscores the necessity of professional expertise.

This suggests that image building should not be limited to discrete training or ad hoc activities, but should form performance guidelines that coordinate internal organizational development, such as codes of ethics and certifications, with external engagement, such as co-creation platforms and real-time feedback. This should permeate recruitment,

assessment, and leadership evaluation processes, thereby establishing a unified attribution framework between ethical, professional, and relational capabilities.

### ***New Path: Complementary Strategies for Building an Exemplary Police Image***

Establishing a sustainable image across generations and contemporary demands requires three interconnected paths: leveraging leadership as a cultural catalyst, fostering an institutionalized organizational ecosystem, and stimulating individual initiative.

Leaders must exemplify values and assume measurable accountability. Senior commanders should demonstrate integrity, professionalism, and community orientation in patrol and crisis response. Community trust audits and procedural fairness indicators must be embedded in performance and promotion evaluations (DiNapoli et al., 2019; Cockcroft, 2014) to transform exemplary behavior from a slogan into an institutional consideration.

Organizational ecosystems should embed ethics, competence, and community engagement into daily processes: first, establish recognition and mentoring mechanisms to strengthen role modelling; second, reshape performance management by incorporating indicators such as citizen satisfaction and procedural fairness into assessments to mitigate the bias of evaluations focused on arrest counts (Rosenbaum, 2025); third, incorporate victim-centred procedures and restitution pathways—responding to documented victim neglect—to ensure that front-line practice prioritises repair as well as enforcement, and provide targeted training and accessible support services for marginalised populations so reforms address differential harms and help rebuild legitimacy among vulnerable groups (Eze et al., 2020; Sherazi et al., 2023); fourth, incorporate core values into recruitment, training, and scenario-based exercises to ensure that leadership visions are translated into concrete actions; and finally, strengthen transparency and ongoing evaluation through regular community surveys and public dashboards (Minelli & Ruffini, 2018).

At the individual level, a balance must be struck between empowerment and accountability: police officers should be involved in setting development goals and empowered to creatively solve problems. Monitoring and targeted coaching should also be implemented, along with peer review and reflection mechanisms such as after-action sessions to disseminate experience and foster self-awareness (Prenzler et al., 2013). Publicly recognizing small, tangible acts of kindness can closely link individual behavior with organizational credibility, encouraging every officer to consider building their image as a professional duty (Botha, 2023).

In summary, only by synergistically embedding leadership demonstration, institutionalized ecology, and individual initiative into policing practice can the image of exemplary police officers be continuously shaped and maintained under different generational expectations and changing social conditions.

### **Conclusion**

In answer to the four guiding questions, citizens depict “exemplary police officers” in three interrelated dimensions—moral integrity, professional competence, and civic embeddedness; these dimensions vary by cohort, with older generations privileging individual moral character, middle cohorts emphasising reliable relational service, and younger cohorts demanding visible, institution-level markers of procedural fairness, technical proficiency, and digital responsiveness. The main obstacles to a positive image are fragmented frameworks, conflicting enforcement-service

incentives, and uneven officer-level awareness—conditions that are magnified by high-profile adverse events and perceived opacity. To overcome these gaps, a coordinated, multilevel public-placement strategy is required: institutionalise leadership with clear accountability metrics; build organisational ecosystems that translate values into shared practices, common metrics, and visible role models; and cultivate individual agency through co-created goals, peer reflection, and recognition. Mapping solutions onto problems makes the pathway persuasive: organisational ecosystems directly remedy fragmented frameworks by creating routine, shared protocols; accountability metrics align incentives to resolve enforcement–service conflicts; and officer empowerment addresses uneven awareness by enabling public-facing competence. Embedding procedural fairness indicators into performance assessments creates the visible, quantifiable accountability younger cohorts expect. Together, these steps both revise theoretical understandings of shifting legitimacy—from person-centred morality to institution-centred procedure—and provide a cohort-sensitive, actionable roadmap for rebuilding police image and trust.

These three paths—top-down leadership culture, mid-level organizational design, and bottom-up individual police agency—reinforce each other. For example, the Baby Boomer generation's emphasis on ethical leadership can be achieved through clear ethical standards and accountability, while the younger generation's focus on procedural fairness and expertise can be addressed through ongoing training and community feedback loops. In short, building an exemplary police image requires both a stable, values-driven structure and empowered individuals. Leaders must foster a culture in which ethical behavior and skilled service become intrinsic to the force's operational culture.. This integrated approach, grounded in research findings and supported by policing studies, provides a sustainable roadmap for enhancing public trust and legitimacy.

This study has four key contributions. First, it develops a public psychology paradigm that transcends traditional public relations and legitimacy models and integrates the cognitive and affective mechanisms of image formation. Second, its dual-mode qualitative research method, combining structured interviews with Jungian free-association tasks, captures both explicit cognitions and implicit mental schemas, generating a rich local dataset. Third, we propose an anthropomorphic model that views the police organization as an organic whole: leadership (the "head"), systems and processes (the "body"), and individual officers (the "lifeblood") must develop in synergy. Fourth, by examining the standards and formation of excellent police images in China, we provide a Chinese perspective for international research on police image and offer a reference and comparison for developing police image across different countries. At the same time, we acknowledge several limitations: our purposive and snowball sampling methods favored participants with network connections in urban areas, potentially underrepresenting the perspectives of rural and ethnic minorities; the free-association task may have tended to elicit socially desirable descriptions; and the cross-sectional design can only capture static images and cannot track changes during periods of crisis or reform.

Looking ahead, we recommend four specific avenues for further research. First, generalizability studies should test our tripartite model in underrepresented contexts, such as rural provinces in western China and ethnic minority areas, to assess its robustness across diverse cultural and geographic settings. Researchers could collaborate with local institutions to conduct simultaneous qualitative and quantitative surveys to compare how the core dimensions manifest themselves in diverse social settings. Second, quantitative validation is needed: developing a standardized survey instrument to translate concepts such as the normative foundation, capacity framework, and civic inclusion into operational indicators, and then analyzing their predictive power on outcomes such as public trust, complaint rates, and

citizens' willingness to cooperate in crime prevention. Structural equation modeling can clarify the relative impact of each dimension on trust and legitimacy. Third, intervention evaluations should pilot and rigorously evaluate targeted image-building initiatives and measure their impact on crime statistics, community satisfaction indices, and intergenerational differences in trust. Randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs would enhance causal inferences. Fourth, the research could be expanded to encompass different countries and conduct cross-sectional comparisons to broaden the international perspective and longer-term significance of this topic. Through these future research directions, scholars and practitioners can refine our theoretical framework, validate its applicability, and identify the most effective strategies to jointly construct a dynamic and publicly trusted image of the police in China's changing social environment.

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## The Role of Clan Elders and Local Justice in Building Resilience against Extremist Ideologies in Pakistan

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Terrorism studies for the past two decades have been reliant on an insistent Euro centrism that consistently overlooks indigenous resilience capabilities and resilience opportunities in the Global South. This article examines the role of traditional governance and justice mechanisms (clan elders, jirga justice and community based processes) in Pakistan in relation to how they shape responses to extremist ideologies. It combines decolonial theory and primary data from North Waziristan, Dir Valley, Khyber District and urban students to demonstrate key features of localized mechanisms that allow for family and community resilience against extremist ideologies. The results indicate that traditional authority, alongside youth mobilization, religious authority and state-led P/CVE agendas can provide communities with significant capacity to enact Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). Resilience mechanisms are simultaneously mobilizing resources that create social cohesion and challenge extremists narratives to form a multi-layered resilience model. There are some limitations to resilience mechanisms such as the impacts of gendered biases, hierarchical abuses and elite capture that lessen inclusiveness and sustainability. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on state-led counterterrorism or Western theoretical models, this article introduces a *decolonial and community-centered framework* that foregrounds indigenous justice systems—such as jirgas and clan elders—as viable mechanisms of resilience against extremist ideologies in Pakistan. It fills a major gap in terrorism studies by systematically connecting decolonial theory with empirical insights from Pakistan's tribal and urban contexts.

**Keywords:** Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism, Community resilience, Resilience mechanisms, Global South

For decades, terrorism studies have been shaped by Western-centric epistemologies that privilege Euro-American security concerns. Emerging during the Cold War and consolidated after 9/11, this perspective has tended to emphasize state-centric, militarized, and surveillance-based solutions while overlooking the socio-historical and cultural dynamics of political violence in the Global South (Burnett & Whyte, 2005; Herman & O'Sullivan, 1989; Stampnitzky, 2014). In countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Nigeria, academic and policy discourses often portray local populations as passive victims or security risks, neglecting their agency and indigenous mechanisms of resilience (Oando, 2024; Achieng & Oando, 2023).

Decolonial scholarship challenges this imbalance by advocating for epistemic justice and the recognition of knowledge produced outside Western frameworks (Mignolo, 2009; Smith, 2012). To decolonize terrorism studies is to move beyond narratives that reduce counterterrorism to drone strikes and border securitization. Instead, it means recognizing indigenous traditions, local authority structures, and grassroots systems of justice as legitimate and vital sources of peacebuilding.

Despite growing interest in community-based approaches, few studies have systematically examined how indigenous governance structures interact with formal P/CVE strategies through a decolonial lens. This research makes a unique contribution by bridging decolonial theory and resilience frameworks to contextualize Pakistan's community-led resistance. It further provides a comparative analysis across tribal, rural, and urban settings, highlighting the diverse mechanisms through which communities sustain resilience. Additionally, the study introduces Ayaz Khan's Community Resilience Model as a localized conceptual framework that integrates cultural, social, and institutional dimensions. Collectively, these contributions underscore the article's novelty in reorienting counter-extremism discourse toward indigenous agency and epistemic justice.

### Historical Role of Traditional Systems

Pakistan's experience highlights the importance of such a reorientation. Since 2001, the state has been central to the global "War on Terror," oscillating between military operations and development initiatives. While these efforts weakened militant networks, they also displaced civilians, caused collateral damage, and fostered mistrust between communities and the state (Yusuf, 2012; ICG, 2015).

In the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), clan elders (maliks), jirgas (tribal councils), and hujras (communal gathering spaces) historically anchored social governance. These institutions, predating both colonial and postcolonial states, mediated disputes and preserved social order through consensus and restorative justice (Spain, 1962; Ahmed, 1980). Under British indirect rule, the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) institutionalized such practices, and Pakistan retained this arrangement until the 2018 FATA–KP merger (Caroe, 1958).

### Extremism, Erosion, and Resistance

The rise of militancy since the late 1970s, intensified by the Afghan jihad and post-9/11 conflicts, eroded these indigenous structures. Extremist groups such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan exploited state neglect and corruption within tribal leadership to gain credibility, offering their own swift but coercive "Sharia courts" as alternatives to jirgas (ICG, 2009). Militants assassinated clan elders and paralyzed local councils, deliberately weakening institutions that might mobilize resistance.

Yet communities were not passive in the face of this assault. Lashkars (tribal militias) and jirgas organized resistance, such as the Salarzai uprising in Bajaur Agency, demonstrating the resilience of indigenous governance when mobilized against extremist encroachment (Abbas, 2008). These examples reveal that, although weakened, traditional systems retain latent capacity for collective security and grassroots justice.

### Indigenous Resilience and Theoretical Significance

Resilience is increasingly defined as the capacity of communities to withstand shocks, adapt, and recover while maintaining cohesion (Ungar, 2011; Khan, 2021). In Pakistan, resilience draws from indigenous traditions: jirga deliberations, hujra hospitality, and the authority of clan elders offer culturally embedded mechanisms of solidarity and order. These practices challenge securitized views that depict communities merely as breeding grounds for extremism or passive recipients of state policy.

Practically, integrating such traditions into Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategies—like community policing or Paigham-e-Pakistan—can enhance legitimacy and sustainability. External models often fail due to mistrust, while indigenous systems already command cultural authority. The 2018 FATA–KP merger illustrates these tensions: abolishing the colonial FCR extended constitutional rights, but under-resourced courts and governance vacuums left communities uncertain, allowing extremists to exploit gaps by posing as alternative authorities. A hybrid governance model that blends constitutional safeguards with reformed jirga practices offers a way forward. Rather than discarding traditions, synchronizing them with formal institutions can strengthen resilience, uphold human rights, and limit militant exploitation.

### Theoretical Framework: Decolonising Terrorism Studies

A decolonial approach to terrorism studies (Mignolo, 2009; Smith, 2012) challenges the dominance of Western paradigms that universalise Euro-American experiences of violence and counterterrorism. Conventional studies emphasise militarisation and securitisation, often casting communities as threats rather than sources of resilience. By contrast, a decolonial framework values indigenous knowledge, local practices, and community-led responses as essential to countering violent extremism (CVE).

In Pakistan, this perspective is vital. The jirga system, though criticised for gender exclusion, provides a long-standing mechanism of justice and reconciliation that resonates with local communities more than external institutions. Recognising its role in CVE reflects a shift from viewing indigenous governance as an obstacle to treating it as an asset. Together, jirgas, lashkars, youth organisations, and religious leaders highlight how resilience is embedded in community networks and cultural heritage. Decolonial terrorism studies thus reframe CVE as empowerment rather than control, countering securitisation policies and unsettling the coloniality of knowledge that dominates global security discourse.

### Literature Review

Community-led interventions have gained increasing recognition in countering extremist ideologies in Pakistan, as state-centric approaches alone often fail to address the roots of radicalization. One example is the emergence of community-based youth organizations (CBYOs) in North Waziristan after years of insurgency and displacement. As Makki and Akash (2022) note, young people organized cultural activities, promoted education, and mobilized around the slogan “We want peace.” This declaration, rooted in local idioms, directly challenged militant narratives that normalized violence.

Despite growing interest in community-based approaches, few studies have systematically examined how indigenous governance structures interact with formal P/CVE strategies through a decolonial lens. Historical legacies of colonial administration continue to shape local governance and social organization in Pakistan’s tribal and rural areas. Malik and Ali (2020), for example, examine the bio-political strategies and medical missions implemented during the colonial period in NWFP, illustrating how colonial institutions influenced local governance structures and social hierarchies. Understanding these historical foundations provides a critical backdrop for analyzing contemporary indigenous governance and its interaction with formal P/CVE strategies. Several studies have also explored community-level responses to violent extremism and the mechanisms through which resilience is cultivated. For instance, Zaman and Munib (2020) conducted an exploratory study among survivors of the Bacha Khan University attack in Charsadda, Pakistan, highlighting how affected communities mobilized social support networks, local leadership, and coping strategies to overcome trauma. Building on these insights, the present research bridges decolonial theory and resilience frameworks to contextualize Pakistan’s community-led resistance and introduces Ayaz Khan’s Community Resilience Model as a localized conceptual framework integrating cultural, social, and institutional dimensions. Collectively, these contributions underscore the article’s novelty in reorienting counter-extremism discourse toward indigenous agency and epistemic justice.

Several studies have explored community-level responses to violent extremism and the mechanisms through which resilience is cultivated in affected populations. For instance, Zaman and Munib (2020) conducted an exploratory study among survivors of the Bacha Khan University attack in Charsadda, Pakistan, highlighting how affected communities mobilized social support networks, local leadership, and coping strategies to overcome trauma. Their findings underscore the role of indigenous social structures in fostering resilience, providing empirical grounding for examining how community-led approaches operate in both crisis and everyday governance contexts. Building on this foundation, the present research bridges decolonial theory and resilience frameworks to contextualize Pakistan’s community-led resistance and introduces Ayaz Khan’s Community Resilience Model as a localized conceptual framework integrating cultural, social, and institutional dimensions. Collectively, these contributions underscore the article’s novelty in reorienting counter-extremism discourse toward indigenous agency and epistemic justice.

Religious leaders have also been central to community resilience. In Dir Valley, clerics have used sermons and community gatherings to denounce militancy (Ahmed et al., 2021). Since extremist groups often seek religious legitimacy, such interventions erode their credibility.

Traditional authority has also been mobilized through tribal lashkars. The Mullagori tribe in Khyber District organized 3,000 volunteers to expel Taliban militants, reviving mechanisms of collective defense rooted in the Pashtunwali code of honor. While armed lashkars risk escalation and long-term militarization, they underscore communities’ willingness to reclaim security in the absence of the state.

Beyond armed resistance, socio-cultural resilience is a key protective factor. Survey research in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Peshawar shows that family bonds, cultural traditions, and peer networks shield youth from radicalization (Rehman & Behlol, 2022). Resilience theory underscores the importance of social capital in mitigating vulnerability. Yet vulnerabilities persist, Accountability Lab Pakistan (2025) reports that extremist groups exploit unemployment, school dropouts, and social isolation to recruit. Economic marginalization creates openings for extremist organizations to offer financial incentives and belonging. Families and elders, often the first line of defense, face structural barriers such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities.

Another important dimension is community policing. Bhatti (2025) finds that partnerships between police and communities can disrupt extremist networks if they prioritize trust, dialogue, and cooperation over enforcement alone. Such approaches encourage communities to share information and collaborate with authorities. Indigenous justice systems such as the jirga also play a complex role. Operating as councils for dispute resolution, jirgas derive legitimacy from collective participation and local traditions. In tribal areas, they remain trusted institutions that promote social cohesion by reducing grievances (Khan, 2020).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate the diverse ways communities contribute to countering violent extremism in Pakistan. CBYOs create youth-driven alternatives to militancy; clerics provide theological counterweights; lashkars assert traditional authority in security; cultural practices reinforce identity resilience; families and elders serve as early warning systems; community policing builds trust with state institutions; and jirgas mediate disputes to sustain cohesion. Though challenges remain—gender biases, risks of militarization, structural inequalities—these mechanisms affirm that resilience is not solely the domain of the state but is deeply embedded in local social structures and traditions. Importantly, these approaches embody the principle of local ownership, now recognized as crucial for sustainable peacebuilding. While international counterterrorism frameworks emphasize state-centric models, Pakistan's experience shows that effective resilience emerges from the interaction of grassroots agency and supportive state engagement. By integrating community-based mechanisms with broader socioeconomic reforms, Pakistan can build a holistic model of countering violent extremism that reflects local realities while challenging Western-centric security narratives.

### Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a comparative case-study design, as it provides the most suitable lens for examining the socially embedded and context-specific role of clan elders, traditional justice mechanisms, and community-led interventions in building resilience against extremist ideologies in Pakistan. A qualitative method allows for deeper engagement with lived experiences, institutional arrangements, and historical trajectories shaping community responses to violent extremism, particularly in areas where state authority is weak or contested. By situating the analysis within Pakistan's socio-cultural fabric, the study moves beyond conventional security paradigms and captures the nuanced interactions between traditional structures—such as jirgas and panchayats—and modern policy frameworks like the National Action Plan (NAP) and the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Act of 2017.

The primary foundation rests on peer-reviewed research published in reputable journals and edited volumes, ensuring scholarly rigor and empirically grounded findings. Works such as Makki and Akash (2022) and Ahmed et al., (2021) provide insights into the operational dynamics of clan elders, the evolution of traditional justice, and the challenges of integrating indigenous systems with state-led counter-extremism frameworks.

Data were collected through a triangulated qualitative approach that combined document analysis, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and field-based case comparisons. The document analysis encompassed key policy texts such as the National Action Plan (NAP) and the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Act of 2017, along with NGO and International Crisis Group (ICG) reports and scholarly publications produced between 2015 and 2025. In addition, twenty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with community elders, religious scholars, police officers, and youth organization leaders from North Waziristan, Dir Valley, Khyber District, and Islamabad. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded using NVivo software to identify recurring patterns of resilience, authority, and legitimacy across different contexts. A cross-case thematic analysis was employed to compare rural–tribal and urban–institutional dynamics, thereby ensuring analytical depth and contextual robustness. To enhance data validity, the study employed source triangulation and peer debriefing, while strict ethical protocols were followed to maintain participant anonymity and informed consent. This multi-source research design enhances methodological rigor and ensures that the findings are grounded in empirical realities rather than limited to secondary abstraction.

Policy documents form a second layer of evidence. The ADR Act of 2017 institutionalizes non-formal justice mechanisms, granting legal recognition to practices long associated with community arbitration. Examining this legislation allows assessment of whether state recognition enhances or undermines the legitimacy of indigenous practices.

A third strand of evidence comes from secondary sources, including NGO reports, think tank studies, and media accounts. These offer valuable insights into recent initiatives, community responses, and field-level challenges that may not yet appear in academic literature. For example, reports on jirga mediation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, clerical engagement through Paigham-e-Pakistan, or NGO-led youth and women's empowerment initiatives illustrate how resilience is constructed and contested in practice.

The study employs cross-case thematic analysis, comparing tribal, urban, and religious interventions to highlight similarities and divergences in resilience-building. In tribal contexts, such as the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), clan elders and jirgas historically served as primary arbiters of justice. Here, the study explores how these mechanisms have adapted to militancy, military operations, and constitutional reforms. This comparative approach ensures triangulation of evidence, strengthening the validity of findings. Academic research highlights theoretical contributions of traditional systems; policy documents reveal state attempts to codify these

practices; while secondary reporting captures grassroots perceptions and evolving realities. Together, these sources generate a grounded and balanced understanding of how resilience is fostered or undermined.

The methodology is also informed by a decolonial perspective, recognizing that terrorism studies have long been dominated by Western-centric frameworks that marginalize Global South experiences. By foregrounding indigenous justice systems, community interventions, and local religious authority, this study recenters the analytical gaze on those directly affected by extremist violence. This is not merely about adding alternative voices, but about treating local knowledge as a legitimate source of theory and practice.

Nonetheless, the methodology acknowledges limitations. Secondary sources such as news reports may reflect selective reporting or political bias, while policy documents often present official narratives rather than lived realities. Academic studies, though rigorous, may lag behind current developments.

### **Findings**

The findings on community-based mechanisms in countering violent extremism (CVE) in Pakistan reveal a complex ecosystem of resilience that integrates youth organizations, religious leaders, tribal lashkars, universities, families, policing, and indigenous justice systems. Each plays a distinct role in fostering resilience, though structural, financial, and sociopolitical challenges complicate sustainability.

#### **Community-Based Youth Organizations**

In conflict-prone regions such as North Waziristan, CBYOs have mobilized youth for peacebuilding, education, cultural programs, and vocational training, diverting them from extremist recruiters who exploit frustrations and economic vulnerabilities (Yousaf, 2021). These initiatives are vital in areas with weak state presence, but they face sustainability challenges due to reliance on short-term donor funding and logistical constraints (Qazi, 2020). Institutional support and integration within national CVE strategies are needed to ensure scalability and trust.

#### **Religious Leaders**

Clerics in areas like Dir Valley influence community perceptions through sermons, madrassa teaching, and gatherings, countering extremist misuse of religion by promoting peace and coexistence (Ali, 2022). Their credibility makes them indispensable, but risks of politicization, sectarian alignment, and threats from extremists undermine their safety and neutrality (Khan, 2019). Support through capacity-building, protective frameworks, and inter-sect dialogues can enhance their effectiveness in reclaiming religious narratives.

#### **Tribal Lashkars**

Local militias, such as those mobilized by the Mullagori tribe in Khyber, have expelled militants and reasserted community sovereignty (Abbas, 2018). Rooted in traditions of self-defense, lashkars provide immediate relief from militant control. However, reliance on armed non-state actors carries risks of violence, human rights abuses, and entrenched power hierarchies (Yousaf & Javaid, 2020).

#### **University Youth**

In urban centers like Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar, student societies organize debates, arts events, and peace conferences, creating alternative spaces for identity-building and self-expression that counter extremist narratives (Hassan, 2021; Malik, 2019). These activities foster critical thinking and resilience, but vulnerabilities persist due to exposure to online radicalization via social media and encrypted platforms (Khan & Ahmad, 2022). Current state strategies focus heavily on surveillance rather than prevention, highlighting the need for digital literacy, counter-narratives, and student-led monitoring.

#### **Families and Clan Elders**

Families and elders in rural and tribal contexts provide moral guidance, discipline, and early detection of radical tendencies (Khan, 2021). Elders, respected as mediators, can prevent youth from embracing extremism through social pressure and counseling. However, patriarchal dominance often excludes women and youth from decision-making (Shaikh, 2020), limiting inclusivity and leaving space for extremist recruiters to exploit grievances.

#### **Community Policing**

Community policing initiatives aim to bridge the gap between law enforcement and local populations by fostering collaboration in intelligence-sharing and conflict mediation (Rana, 2019). When effective, these efforts reduce perceptions of state coercion and enhance citizen trust. Yet, weak institutional follow-up and under-resourced units limit

impact, as projects often remain short-term and sidelined within militarized counterterrorism frameworks (Abbas & Yousaf, 2021).

### Jirgas and Indigenous Justice

Customary justice systems like jirgas and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) remain central in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former tribal areas, resolving disputes quickly and culturally legitimately (Ahmed, 2018). In CVE, they help reduce grievances that extremists exploit, offering accessible alternatives to communities with weak access to formal courts. However, gender exclusion and elite capture undermine fairness and credibility (Shinwari, 2016).

### Synthesis

Together, these mechanisms illustrate Pakistan's layered resilience against violent extremism. CBYOs highlight youth mobilization; religious leaders reclaim faith-based narratives; lashkars demonstrate community-led defense; universities cultivate critical thinking while facing digital risks; families and elders provide early guidance; community policing fosters state-society trust; and jirgas maintain culturally grounded conflict resolution. Each mechanism carries strengths and vulnerabilities, underscoring that resilience cannot be achieved through top-down security approaches alone.

### Discussion

The empirical findings substantiate and extend the decolonial theoretical framework by demonstrating how community resilience operates as a *form of epistemic resistance* against imposed security paradigms. For instance, jirgas' reliance on consensus aligns with decolonial theory's emphasis on relational knowledge, while youth-led peace initiatives embody transformative agency that challenges colonial hierarchies of expertise. Each finding—whether on CBYOs, clerical counter-narratives, or community policing—illustrates how indigenous mechanisms function as *decolonial counter-epistemologies* that redefine resilience not as adaptation to state power, but as reclamation of local authority and social harmony.

The Ayaz Khan Model operationally maps these connections, linking theoretical constructs (local authority, socio-cultural capital, youth empowerment) with empirical manifestations (jirgas, CBYOs, religious leadership), thus translating decolonial concepts into measurable resilience pathways.

Community resilience in Pakistan is deeply rooted in indigenous institutions that predate the modern state. Clan elders and jirgas have long functioned as justice mechanisms with cultural legitimacy, often outperforming formal systems that lack contextual sensitivity. These institutions sustain cohesion, maintain order, and prevent disputes from escalating into violence.

From a decolonial perspective, these practices highlight how Global South communities generate resilience outside Western epistemologies. Terrorism studies and countering violent extremism (CVE) discourses, dominated by Euro-American models of surveillance and militarization, often overlook relational and cultural mechanisms of resilience. Pakistani communities demonstrate the limits of importing such frameworks.

This interplay between state policy and indigenous institutions calls for hybrid approaches that integrate, rather than replace, local authority. Supporting Community-Based Youth Organizations (CBYOs) with resources while preserving autonomy ensures authenticity in grassroots interventions. CBYOs engage vulnerable youth in constructive activities, leadership development, and peacebuilding, reducing susceptibility to extremist recruitment. Religious leaders also hold significant potential. Religion in Pakistan shapes both private and public life, and while extremist groups exploit it for violence, faith-based authority can also promote peace. The Paigham-e-Pakistan fatwa illustrates this potential, but wider impact requires systematic training of ulema and imams in peace pedagogy—equipping them with skills in dialogue, mediation, and engagement.

Traditional mechanisms such as jirgas likewise require reform rather than abandonment. While effective in dispute resolution, their exclusion of women and vulnerable groups perpetuates inequality. Institutionalizing women's participation, embedding human rights standards, and ensuring transparency could transform jirgas into inclusive vehicles of justice and cohesion.

Enhancing police-community trust is equally vital. Law enforcement in Pakistan often suffers from corruption, coercion, and political interference, breeding mistrust that extremist groups exploit. Building localized partnerships where police collaborate with elders, CBYOs, and religious leaders can bridge this gap.

Ayaz Khan's Model of community resilience offers a useful framework to understand these dynamics. It emphasizes the interconnected role of socio-cultural capital, youth empowerment, and local authority in resisting extremism. In Pakistan, socio-cultural capital is expressed through kinship ties, reciprocity, and collective identity.

Youth empowerment is central in this model. With a majority of Pakistan's population under 30, extremists often target youth grievances and identity struggles. Empowerment through education, training, and civic participation redirects energies toward constructive ends.

Local authority, another pillar of Ayaz Khan's model, intersects with both socio-cultural capital and youth empowerment. Elders and religious leaders embody authority in rural contexts, while in urban areas activists and educators often assume this role. Recognizing this plurality ensures resilience strategies remain inclusive and adaptable. The interaction of socio-cultural capital, youth empowerment, and local authority creates resilience greater than the sum of its parts. This interwoven web sustains trust, fosters cooperation, and marginalizes extremist ideologies. It reflects the dynamic, relational nature of resilience embedded in Pakistani society.

A decolonial reading of these dynamics challenges Western-centric terrorism studies that privilege securitization and surveillance. By centering indigenous systems, decolonial approaches not only critique dominant paradigms but also propose alternative epistemologies grounded in lived realities. This is not to romanticize indigenous practices, which can perpetuate exclusion, but to recognize that resilience stems from cultural continuity and relational networks rather than external imposition.

The broader implications extend beyond Pakistan. Many Global South societies rely on indigenous institutions with enduring legitimacy alongside formal state systems. Lessons from Pakistan's hybrid model, aligned with Ayaz Khan's framework, can inform CVE strategies elsewhere where Western models lack traction.

The future of CVE in Pakistan rests on embracing this hybrid, decolonial approach. Policymakers must move beyond narrow securitized paradigms, recognizing jirgas, clan elders, CBYOs, and religious leaders as legitimate partners. Communities must adapt their institutions to contemporary realities, fostering inclusivity and addressing inequities. The author Khan's model provides a conceptual lens to design interventions that are contextually grounded and forward-looking.

### **Limitations and Implications**

While the qualitative design provides contextual depth, reliance on secondary sources and limited field access in conflict-prone areas constrains generalizability. Interview data are localized to KP and may not represent broader national variations. Future research should employ longitudinal and participatory designs to capture dynamic changes in community resilience.

### **Policy Implications**

The findings offer critical guidance for Pakistan's *National Policy on Preventing Violent Extremism (NPVE 2024)* by emphasizing the importance of institutionalizing hybrid governance that bridges formal justice systems with reformed jirga practices. Policymakers should prioritize capacity-building programs for clan elders and ulema, equipping them with skills in peace mediation, dialogue facilitation, and human rights awareness to enhance the legitimacy and inclusiveness of local justice mechanisms. Similarly, community policing units must be restructured to incorporate trained local mediators who can foster trust between law enforcement and communities, thus transforming policing from a reactive to a preventive model. In addition, sustainable support mechanisms for Community-Based Youth Organizations (CBYOs) should be integrated into district-level P/CVE frameworks to ensure continuity and long-term impact. These measures collectively align national policy with grassroots realities, reinforcing social cohesion, enhancing community resilience, and strengthening Pakistan's overall response to extremist ideologies.

### **Conclusion**

Clan elders, jirgas, and community-led interventions offer culturally resonant and locally legitimate mechanisms to counter extremist ideologies in Pakistan. Their importance extends beyond conflict resolution, representing a long-standing tradition of community governance embedded in Pakistan's socio-cultural fabric, especially in tribal and rural areas where the state's presence is limited or distrusted. These institutions, through their cultural authority and social legitimacy, often command greater trust than state apparatuses, making them crucial in building resilience against extremist narratives that exploit alienation and governance vacuums.

The decolonial value of these mechanisms lies in their ability to resist Western-centric counterterrorism approaches, which often emphasize militarization and surveillance while ignoring local realities. In contrast, jirgas and councils derive authority from traditions of negotiation and consensus-building that resonates with community notions of justice and reconciliation. By restoring dignity, addressing grievances, and reinforcing belonging, they disrupt the social and psychological conditions extremists exploit.

Community-led approaches are also more adaptive than rigid state frameworks. Elders mediate disputes, balance intergenerational tensions, and draw on symbolic authority to enforce agreements, preventing extremists from exploiting social divides. Their capacity to convene diverse stakeholders within culturally legitimate spaces makes them difficult for militant groups to undermine.

Nonetheless, limitations exist. Traditional justice has been criticized for patriarchal and exclusionary practices, particularly regarding women's participation and youth empowerment (Qadir & Rehman, 2021). Excluding women ignores their critical role, as extremists often target them for recruitment.

Another concern is the potential misuse of authority. Some jirgas have reinforced regressive practices or colluded with local elites (Yusufzai, 2019). Balanced integration is essential: state oversight should ensure accountability without eroding community autonomy.

Empirical evidence highlights the effectiveness of such mechanisms. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA, jirgas mediated disputes that could otherwise have escalated into violence and militant recruitment. In Swat, elders facilitated reconciliation and reintegration after the Taliban insurgency (Khan, 2018).

Community-led interventions also address radicalization preventively. Through elders' networks, initiatives have promoted education, counter-narratives grounded in religious moderation, and the revival of cultural practices that affirm communal identity. These resonate with programs like Paigham-e-Pakistan, which mobilized religious scholars and traditional authorities against extremism (Shah, 2020).

Extremist ideologies thrive in contexts of betrayal and alienation, offering belonging and dignity to the marginalized. Clan elders counter this by reinforcing collective identity and demonstrating that grievances can be addressed through culturally familiar systems. This restoration of horizontal trust within communities, and vertical trust between communities and governance, is one of the strongest defenses against extremism.

Moving forward, Pakistan's challenge is to institutionalize these mechanisms without eroding their authenticity. Recognition should not lead to bureaucratic co-optation but to genuine partnership. Practical steps include training elders in human rights principles, facilitating women's and youth participation, and linking traditional mechanisms with formal institutions in ways that preserve autonomy while enhancing accountability.

In conclusion, clan elders, jirgas, and community-led interventions are vital components of Pakistan's counter-extremism strategy. They offer a decolonial alternative to securitized frameworks by privileging cultural legitimacy and community ownership. While patriarchal norms, elite capture, and generational divides pose challenges, these can be mitigated through thoughtful reforms and state-community partnerships.

### **Synchronizing Ayaz Khan's Model (Operational Mapping)**

Ayaz Khan's community resilience model places the community at its core, highlighting the reciprocal reinforcement of social, cultural, and institutional capital. In Pakistan, resilience emerges where traditional authority, state initiatives, and grassroots mechanisms converge against extremist ideologies. Families, clan elders, and jirgas provide early-warning signals of radicalization while mediating conflicts that could fuel violence.

#### **Notes:**

Community-led interventions have gained increasing recognition in countering extremist ideologies in Pakistan, as state-centric approaches alone often fail to address the roots of radicalization. One example is the emergence of community-based youth organizations (CBYOs) in North Waziristan after years of insurgency and displacement. As noted, young people organized cultural activities, promoted education, and mobilized around the slogan "We want peace." This declaration, rooted in local idioms, directly challenged militant narratives that normalized violence. Unlike state-crafted counter-narratives, youth-led strategies are embedded in everyday relations and thus harder to delegitimize. CBYOs highlight youth agency in resisting recruitment and illustrate how education, cultural revival, and creative expression provide alternative pathways of identity formation that undermine extremist appeal.

Religious leaders have also been central to community resilience. In Dir Valley, clerics have used sermons and community gatherings to denounce militancy. Since extremist groups often seek religious legitimacy, such interventions erode their credibility. Locally delivered messages resonate more than state-issued fatwas, which are often viewed with suspicion. By embedding counter-narratives within Islamic discourse, clerics create theological deterrents that delegitimize violence while fostering trust between religious institutions and communities. This strengthens cohesion and narrows the ideological space exploited by extremist recruiters.

Traditional authority has also been mobilized through tribal lashkars. The Mullagori tribe in Khyber District organized 3,000 volunteers to expel Taliban militants, reviving mechanisms of collective defense rooted in the Pashtunwali code of honor. While armed lashkars risk escalation and long-term militarization, they underscore communities' willingness to reclaim security in the absence of the state. Their success challenges portrayals of local populations as passive victims, instead highlighting collective agency. Comparative cases elsewhere confirm that community militias can disrupt extremist networks, though sustaining such mobilization requires integration into broader peacebuilding efforts.

Beyond armed resistance, socio-cultural resilience is a key protective factor. Survey research in Rawalpindi, Islamabad, and Peshawar shows that family bonds, cultural traditions, and peer networks shield youth from radicalization. Resilience theory underscores the importance of social capital in mitigating vulnerability. Youth connected to supportive families and peers are less likely to be swayed by propaganda exploiting isolation. Cultural heritage—poetry, music, storytelling—offers alternative identities incompatible with extremism. These traditions, central to Pakistani social life, reaffirm community agency and pride, while countering narratives of alienation.

Yet vulnerabilities persist, reports that extremist groups exploit unemployment, school dropouts, and social isolation to recruit. Economic marginalization creates openings for extremist organizations to offer financial incentives and belonging. Families and elders, often the first line of defense, face structural barriers such as poverty and lack of educational opportunities. This underscores the need for layered strategies combining vigilance with socioeconomic reforms. Early detection mechanisms that empower local actors to identify behavioral changes before they escalate are critical. Community leaders thus become intermediaries between youth, families, and institutions.

Another important dimension is community policing finds that partnerships between police and communities can disrupt extremist networks if they prioritize trust, dialogue, and cooperation over enforcement alone. Such approaches encourage communities to share information and collaborate with authorities. Public awareness campaigns and involvement of enlightened religious leaders enhance effectiveness. However, mistrust persists due to past heavy-handed operations. Bridging this requires training police in community engagement, human rights, and cultural sensitivity. If successful, community policing can shift perceptions of the state from antagonistic to supportive, embedding resilience within broader governance frameworks.

Indigenous justice systems such as the jirga also play a complex role. Operating as councils for dispute resolution, jirgas derive legitimacy from collective participation and local traditions. In tribal areas, they remain trusted institutions that promote social cohesion by reducing grievances. Yet, critiques highlight gender exclusion and elite domination. The state's attempt to formalize jirgas under the 2017 Alternative Dispute Resolution Act has sparked debate: some argue codification dilutes authenticity, while others see it as enhancing legitimacy. While risks of instrumentalization exist, jirgas' cultural legitimacy makes them indispensable in resilience strategies if inclusivity concerns are addressed.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate the diverse ways communities contribute to countering violent extremism in Pakistan. CBYOs create youth-driven alternatives to militancy; clerics provide theological counterweights; lashkars assert traditional authority in security; cultural practices reinforce identity resilience; families and elders serve as early warning systems; community policing builds trust with state institutions; and jirgas mediate disputes to sustain cohesion. Though challenges remain—gender biases, risks of militarization, structural inequalities—these mechanisms affirm that resilience is not solely the domain of the state but is deeply embedded in local social structures and traditions. Importantly, these approaches embody the principle of local ownership, now recognized as crucial for sustainable peacebuilding. While international counterterrorism frameworks emphasize state-centric models, Pakistan's experience shows that effective resilience emerges from the interaction of grassroots agency and supportive state engagement. By integrating community-based mechanisms with broader socioeconomic reforms, Pakistan can build a holistic model of countering violent extremism that reflects local realities while challenging Western-centric security narratives.

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## Framing Slant of Nepali Print Media about the US during MCC Saga

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This paper examines the United States' image during Millennium challenge Corporation (MCC) in Nepal reflected in three print media outlets in Nepal. News framing of the USA plays the public opinion-making role to the people during mostly debated US's politics and strategy project conceal with economic and development aspects. Explanatory sequential content analysis methods have been applied to scrutinize the contents published from Dec 16, 2021 to March 29, 2022. This study found that the accessibility of US and her initiative in media contents was slightly more negative (35.6%) with a lower percentage of positive tone (34.8%) reflected in news, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks related to it. The aspects like sovereignty and politics, economic, and infrastructure & development aspect frames dominated the positive tone where strategic and cultural aspects frames found with negative tone. Based on Entman's media framing theory, the result highlights the four broad image of United States as confronting global power, geopolitical agendas with faithful economic development, supersede national interests of small country, standing as an instrument in divisive and disruptive politic, grappling with cultural identity .

**Keywords:** Framing, the USA, print media, MCC, content analysis

The five-year agreement with the United States Millennium Challenge Corporation (hereafter MCC) was approved by Nepal's House of Representatives on February 27, 2022. However, it took a fierce battle to pass the accord, the dispute did not end there. The provisions in the agreement (which will supersede Nepal's domestic law and give the United States final audit authority without Nepal's involvement) (MCA-Nepal, 2022) and the overwhelming presence of great power players (Khan & Dawar, 2025) in the Indo-Pacific region have led to growing concerns that Nepali society will be drawn into the military and security entanglements of the US Indo-Pacific strategy. This concern is not unfounded, as the MCC's continued international assistance policies attest and the way it has been discussed during the ratification process, as well as the recent steps taken by the recent Trump administration regarding the MCC, have underscored that it is a more strategic issue than development assistance.

The MCC was first announced in Mexico by President George W. Bush on March 14, 2002, to assist developing countries and to destroy the environment that supports terrorism after the September 11, 2001 Twin Towers attack (Rieffel & Fox, 2008). However, the ultimate objective is to hide the contradictory interests and national colors of US international help while distancing oneself from the problems of traditional aid policies (Nowels, 2004). It was launched as a new channeling system for U.S. foreign assistance to developing countries under Bush's administration's strategy, also called the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) (Parks & Rice, 2013a). According to Tarnoff (2014) and Runde, Milner and Santoro (2017), MCC prioritizes the creation of larger grants, a five-year aid "compact," transformation impact, and development independence. The compact is the main program of MCC, which is an agreement between MCC and a partner country. The United States of America shows the aptitude to identify deficient areas of donation-getting countries and then makes the plan to engage in that area, which explores more chances to flourish the strategic interest with the name of support.

At the time of MCC ratification, the US image was perceived in two ways in Nepal: those supporting and opposing the MCC. These groups including leaders of various political parties, civil society organizations, and the general public. One aspect was that if Nepal joined the MCC without changing any provisions indicate in compact paper, it would contradict Nepal's non-alignment foreign policy as some documents have proven that the MCC is the part of the IPS (Chand, 2021; Roka, 2022). This was reinforced by the IPS 2019 report stating that all investments, whether financial or otherwise, would strengthen national security and military ties (Department of Defence, 2019). The controversy deepened when the US Assistance Secretary of State for South Asia David J. Ranz called the MCC an effort under the Indo-Pacific Strategy (Adhikary, 2022). However, Parks and Rice, (2013b) depicted in their survey report that MCC is the policy and institution reform instrument of the USA in developing countries in regard to corruption

control and fiscal policy than others sector. Whereas domestic stakeholders and actors different narratives make it for national security challenge in Nepal (Adhikary, 2022).

In the context of the world and Nepal, loans and aid have long been provided and received under various projects and characteristics, but have not been very helpful in the national GDP and livelihood of the countries as it depends on the time frame and sustainability of the funded projects (Bhattarai, 2005). However, such aid is framed in different perspectives due to the competition of great powers in the recipient countries. For example, during the Cold War, US aid to Nepal was mainly focused on preventing communist influence from China and the Soviet Union (Khadka, 2000). In addition, Thakuri (2021) had conducted research based on the opinions expressed in English national dailies of Nepal in January 2020 and concluded that a caution approach to superpower involvement in Nepal should be taken. Since, the USA has been presented in different ways at different times, an attempt has been made to fill the gap in the study of what and how the Nepali press has presented this particular subject, and why it has been presented in that way. Because the media has an important role in shaping public opinion and determining the public's perception of any country (Aryal, 2024).

Therefore, there is a study on how the press presented or conducted the debate during the ratification of MCC by the parliament, which was highly debated for and against because of media role in exposing this issue to the public. This research provides insightful findings about how news depictions influence public opinion on sensitive issues like the MCC project and the US image in Nepal. Nepali print media heavily influenced public perception of issues by applying Entman's (1993) functions, locations, and interactions between framing and media bias of framing theory. This study limits closely at three important Nepali newspapers: *Kantipur National Daily* (hereafter KND), *Naya Patrika National Daily* (hereafter NPND), and *Annapurna Post National Daily* (hereafter APND) during the MCC situation, using a method called explanatory sequential content analysis. Additionally, both frequency-based and descriptive methods have been used to examine the content in five areas (sovereignty and politics, economy, infrastructure and development, strategic and culture) to identify the main themes and attitudes in the articles during the MCC ratification period.

### Theoretical approach

The concept of framing was introduced by sociologist (Goffman, 1974), which has allowed many scholars in other disciplines to analyze different perspectives, indicating its importance in social science research (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980; Gorp, 2007; Reese, 2007). Framing theory has been useful in examining how the media portrays protests, influencing public perception and conversation (Gitlin, 1980). Several researchers have used framing theory to provide theoretical and empirical ground for studies on various topics, including military interventions (Edy & Meirick, 2007), poverty (Kim et al., 2010), political scandals (Kepplinger et al., 2012), image framing of country (He et al., 2012), political communication (Busby et al., 2018), BRI framing (Sikandar, 2025) among many others.

Scholars in the field of communication, researchers have utilized various approaches to frame research including topic modeling and network analysis (Walter & Ophir, 2019); experiments (Igartua & Cheng, 2009); surveys (Hameleers & Vliegenthart, 2018); interviews (Lecheler et al., 2015); content analyses (He et al., 2012; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, framing theory has become the standard way for assessing news stories and is often regarded as the most influential conceptual framework in news media research (Chung et al., 2013; D'Angelo, 2018).

Framing theory was integrated into all stages of the research to provide a full understanding of how framing works to produce media narratives. This allows for a more sophisticated comparison of newspapers' framing efforts, demonstrating the pervasive influence of the media in shaping public opinion. To better understand how these Nepali-language legacy newspapers select and accentuate specific events, this study thoroughly examines NPND, KND, and APND's news coverage of the United States in Nepal while MMC was ratifying a contentious issue in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, in this study, the theoretical foundations of framing theory serve as a platform for investigating how the United States' MCC is covered in Nepali print media.

This research has applied Entman's (1993) four functions of frames theory—problem categorization, causal interpretation, moral judgment, and treatment recommendation—for content analysis. On the basis of this theoretical approach, this study examines coverage of the USA during the MCC discussion in these three newspapers, to detect differences in framing and tone with the primary sources of content. Based on framing theory, the research is organized around the following specific research questions.

- How did a prominent Nepali print daily frame the USA during the MCC ratification process?
- What are the dominant frames in three newspapers' published media content?

- How did article tone compare among the three outlets covering the MCC?
- How did prevalent sourcing compare across newspapers related to the USA and MCC?

### Method

This study was applied an explanatory sequential design incorporating content analysis techniques that utilized mixed research approaches to analyze how the news media in Nepal portrayed and framed the United States during the ratification of the MCC (Gaspers & Lang, 2016). Initially, the researchers conducted a quantitative analysis of content published in three Nepali language newspapers: KND, NPND, and APND, from December 16, 2021 to March 29, 2022 (the time of ratification). The MCC was initially signed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on September 17, 2017, and was later ratified on February 27, 2022. In the second step, researchers conducted an interpretive analysis of content, including five aspects of the frame.

Because of their substantial readership, reputable news reporting and diverse political perspectives, these three outlets were selected. Moreover, the market presence of these three newspapers is paramount due to their accessibility and linguistic style (Kaustubha et al., 2021). A total of 264 items were published in these three newspapers during the research period, including news, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks (Golan & Lukito, 2015) on the issue of the US and the MCC. Researchers downloaded data from achieves of these newspapers. Throughout the study period, articles containing the keywords "US," "America," "Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States," or "MCC with IPS" in the headline, lead, or main text were scanned from the database.

Researchers conducted a census of items for the three papers ( $n = 85$  for the NPND;  $n = 107$  for the KND;  $n = 72$  for the APND) within the framework of MCC ratification time. The contents were coded according to the study protocol using a codebook for content analysis by the researchers. The codebook was pre-tested with a second qualified coder using material from outside the research period (after March 29, 2022) to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness. Researchers categorized the articles according to the study protocol, using a codebook for content analysis. A pre-test was conducted with a second qualified coder using content outside the research period (post-March 29, 2022) to ensure the codebook's clarity and comprehensiveness. Each item was classified according to variables organized into four sections: content categories, framing aspects, sources, and tones. Researchers performed a content analysis on the selected news articles, editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks after compiling the content from the newspaper archive corpus. This study was guided by Entman's framing theory, which examines how specific attributes dominate the framing of particular issues, rendering them prominent.

This study customized five frames based on the literature. The frameworks for sovereignty and politics, economic initiatives, infrastructure and development, strategy, and culture aspects are all included. Researchers additionally categorized predominant sources: domestic officials (DMO), US officials (USO), international officials (IO), unofficial sources (UO), and document sources (DO). The primary source was the one most frequently referenced in the newspaper articles. If many sources are cited an equal number of times, the first one referenced in the text is designated as the dominant source. The researchers finally categorized the tone of the stories as positive, neutral, and negative, with an image toward the US and MCC.

After coding, researchers tested an intercoder reliability test using a random sample of twenty percent of contents from each media outlet ( $n = 17$  NPND,  $n = 21$  KND, and  $n = 14$  APND). To ensure coding reliability by the researchers, each variable was calculated using Holsti's (1969) formula for simple agreement. The researcher found the reliability scores for the framing subjects, sources, and framing orientation tone to be 0.90, 0.86, and 0.84 respectively, which gives an average score of 0.86.

### Results

During the ratification of the Nepal parliament in 2022, 264 articles, about the US and MCC, were collected from the corpus of three famous and prestigious Nepali language newspapers. 'News' content has been published in the highest frequency in these newspapers ( $n=264$ ; News=147, 55.7%), whereas editorials, opinions, interviews, and remarks ( $n=7$ , 2.7%;  $n=56$ , 21.2%;  $n=6$ , 2.3%; and  $n=48$ , 18.6%) were published respectively (refers figure 1). The overall tone of the three privately owned domestic print media outlets is slightly negative, with a score of -0.01 (refer to Table 1). The result indicated that unofficial sources (UO) and domestic official sources (DMO) had been dominant sources for three newspapers (refer to Table 3).

## Devkota, Yonghong

Content categories with respect to newspaper and published date (n=264)

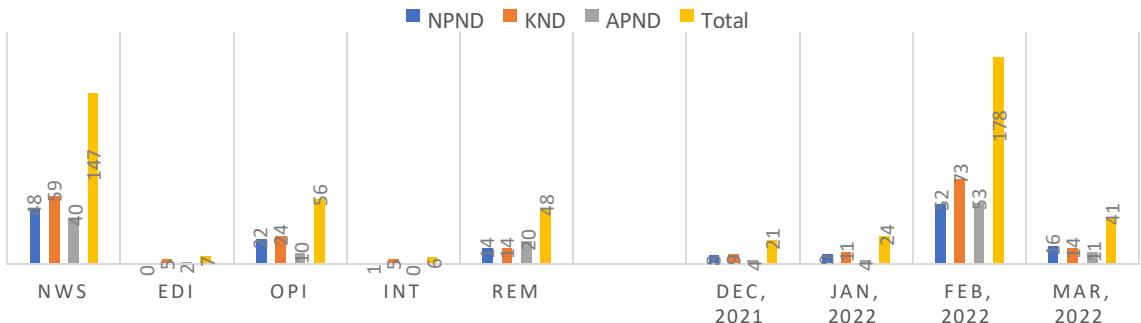


Figure 1 source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. NWS=News; EDI=Editorial; OPI=Opinion; INT=Interview; REM=Remark

### a. Tone analysis

Based on the contents presented in newspaper headlines, the negative tone accounted for 35.6 percent, the highest percentage among 264, with a difference of approximately one percent between the negative and positive tone (34.8%)(refer Table 1). Bleich et al. (2018) conducted a headline tone analysis, using the net tone = (positive tone - negative tone)/total headlines, resulting in a net tone range of -1, 0 to +1 (negative, neutral, positive). The sets of headlines exhibit positive, neutral, and negative tones when the results of the net tone analysis fall within the ranges of 0 and +1, 0, and -1, respectively. The contents framed in NPND and KND are negative in net tone (-0.15 and -0.02), while APND has a positive net tone (0.18), respectively. The net tone for the three privately owned domestic print media outlets is slightly negative at -0.01 (refer to Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Net Tone analysis of newspaper contents (n=264)

Tone	NPND (%)	KND (%)	APND (%)	Total %
Positive	28 (10.6%)	37 (14.0%)	30 (10.2%)	92 (34.8%)
Neutral	14 (6.1%)	31 (11.7%)	29 (11.7%)	78 (39.5%)
Negative	43 (15.5%)	39 (14.8%)	13 (5.3%)	94 (35.6%)
Total	85 (32.2%)	107 (40.5%)	72 (27.3%)	264 (100%)
Net Tone	-0.15	-0.02	0.18	-0.01

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025.

Researchers looked at different themes to evaluate the space and tone of Sovereignty and politics framed content, which made up over half (n=264; SaP=161) at 61 percent, followed by content framed around strategic aspects at 23.1 percent, economic aspects at 10.6 percent, and cultural topics at less than 2 percent (refer to Table 2). The three print media outlets mostly showed a negative view of strategic (-0.39) and cultural (-1) aspects, while the other areas had a positive overall tone. The three print media outlets notably negatively depicted strategic (-0.39) and cultural (-1) dimensions, whereas the remaining components received a favorable net tone rating. Moreover, the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=32.18$ ,  $df=8$   $P<0.05$ [0.00008]) indicates a strong correlation between the topic areas and the tones of the three print media outlets. The general subject areas and tones are negative (-0.01), as indicated in Table 2.

### Table 2

Net tone evaluation in different aspects of contents (n=264)

	SaP (%)	Eco (%)	Inf & Dev (%)	Stg (%)	Cult (%)	Total (%)
Positive	59 (22.3%)	16 (6.1%)	5 (1.9%)	12 (4.5%)	0	92 (34.8%)
Neutral	53 (20.1%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	13 (4.9%)	0	78 (29.5%)
Negative	49 (18.6%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.8%)	35 (13.6%)	4 (1.5%)	94 (35.6%)
Total	161 (61.0%)	28 (10.6%)	10 (3.8%)	61 (23.1%)	4 (1.5%)	264 (100%)
Net Tone	<b>0.06</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>-0.39</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-0.01</b>

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. SaP- Sovereignty and politics; Eco: Economic; Inf & Dev: Infrastructure and development; Stg: Strategic; Cult: Cultural

### ***Sourcing between three mainstream news outlets in Nepal***

Another research objective is to compare the leading source of MCC-related mainstream media content in Nepal. The findings show significant discrepancies in the dominating sources throughout the country's news organizations. Unofficial sources (UO) were the most frequently referenced in the three Nepali newspapers (n = 36, 13.6% NPND; n = 57, 21.6% KND; n = 2, 12.1% APND). Notably, KND got the largest percentage of citations from unapproved sources (21.6%). As a result, domestic authorities' sources were used as the second dominating source (n=26, 9.8% NPND; n=30, 11.4% KND; n=28, 10.6% APND). Furthermore, international officials were the third source of content overall (n=25, 9.5%), but KND chose the US official as the third source (n=10, 3.8%). These three newspapers had the scant document sources (n=5, 1.9% NPND; n=1, 0.4% KND; n=3, 1.1% APND) (refer to Table 3).

The utilization of legitimate document sources differed between the three privately held media outlets. The *Naya Patrika National Daily* received the greatest score for document sources (n=5, 1.9% NPND; n=1, 0.4% KND; n=3, 1.1% APND) compared to the *Kantipur National Daily* and the *Annapurna Post National Daily*. Furthermore, KND selected three sources (domestic officials, US officials, and unofficial) with the highest scores, whereas NPND preferred two (international officials and documents), citing information that APND did not name as main pattern sources. Domestic official sources (n=37, positive; n=26, negative; n=21, neutral), US official sources (n=6, positive; n=4, negative; n=1, neutral), and document sources (n=4, positive; n=2, negative; n=3, neutral) cited a positive tone angle, while unofficial sources (n=33, positive; n=47, negative; n=45, neutral) and international officials (n=2, positive; n=15, negative; n=8, neutral) mentioned a negative tone (refer to Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*Dominant source of contents (n=264)*

		NPND (%)	KND (%)	APND (%)	Total (%)
Source	DMO	26 (9.8%)	30 (11.4%)	28 (10.6%)	84 (31.8%)
	USO	5 (1.9%)	10 (3.8%)	6 (2.3%)	21 (8.0%)
	IO	13 (4.9%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	25 (9.5%)
	UO	36 (13.6%)	57 (21.6%)	32 (12.1%)	125 (47.3%)
	DO	5 (1.9%)	1 (0.4%)	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.4%)
Total		85 (32.2%)	107 (40.5%)	72 (27.3%)	264 (100.0%)

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. (Domestic official-DMO; the US official-USO; International Official-IO; Unofficial-UO; Document Source-DO)

### ***Framing the US and MCC: Comparative analysis***

The research question analyses about the portrayal of the United States by a major Nepali print media outlet during the MCC ratification period. The three Nepali newspapers often talked about the USA in relation to "sovereignty and politics" (n = 50, 18.9% NPND; n = 67, 25.4% KND; n = 44, 16.7% APND), focusing on topics like "internal party conflicts," the "role of parliament and the speaker," "disputes among coalitions and alliances," sovereignty issues tied to "clauses in the Nepal constitution," "political fragmentation," and the use of both soft and hard power. The second primary framework was the "strategic" (n=22, 8.3% NPND; n=24, 9.1% KND; n=15, 5.7% APND), which emphasized "constraining China," US defense policy, promotion of MCC in parliament, the "new cold war," "China's accession to MCC," and considerable "US pressure." The annulment of the MCC agreement may negatively impact the bilateral relations between the two nations, in addition to the geopolitical consequences of the competitive US-China dynamic, which is essential to the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Moreover, the "economic" frame was used in third place (n=7, 2.7% NPND; n=10, 3.8% KND; n=11, 4.2% APND), while the "infrastructure & development" frame was in fourth place (n=4, 1.5% NPND; n=4, 1.5% KND; n=2, 0.8% APND) in all three media outlets, and the cultural frame was the least used (refer to Table 4). KND allocated the biggest percentages to sovereignty and politics, with 25.4% and 9.1%, respectively, whereas in the economic frame, KND was surpassed by APND by 3.8%. Furthermore, the framing pattern exhibited similarities; yet, the tone of framing varied among those media outlets (refer to figure 2).

**Table 4**  
Comparing Frame of Nepali newspaper (n=264)

	Frame	SaP (%)	Eco (%)	Inf & Dev (%)	Stg (%)	Cult (%)	Total (%)
Total		161 (61%)	28 (10.6%)	10 (3.8%)	61 (23.1%)	4 (1.4%)	264 (100%)
Newspe	NPND	50 (18.9%)	7 (2.7%)	4 (1.5%)	22 (8.3%)	2 (0.8%)	85 (32.2%)
pers	KND	67 (25.4%)	10 (3.8%)	4 (1.5%)	24 (9.1%)	2 (0.8%)	107 (40.5%)
	APND	44 (16.7%)	11 (4.2%)	2 (0.8%)	15 (5.7%)	0 (0%)	72 (27.3%)
Tone	Positive	59 (22.3%)	16 (6.1%)	5 (1.9%)	12 (4.5%)	0	92 (34.8%)
	Neutral	53 (20.1%)	9 (3.4%)	3 (1.1%)	13 (4.9%)	0	78 (29.5%)
	Negative	49 (18.6%)	3 (1.1%)	2 (0.8%)	35 (13.6%)	4 (1.5%)	94 (35.6%)
		$X^2=7.96, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0187)$	$X^2=9.11, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0105)$	$X^2=1.20, df=2, p>0.05 (0.548)$	$X^2=13.76, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0103)$	$X^2=7.23, df=2, p<0.05 (0.0269)$	

Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025. SaP: Sovereignty and politics; Eco: Economic; Inf & Dev: Infrastructure and development; Stg: Strategic; Cult: Cultural

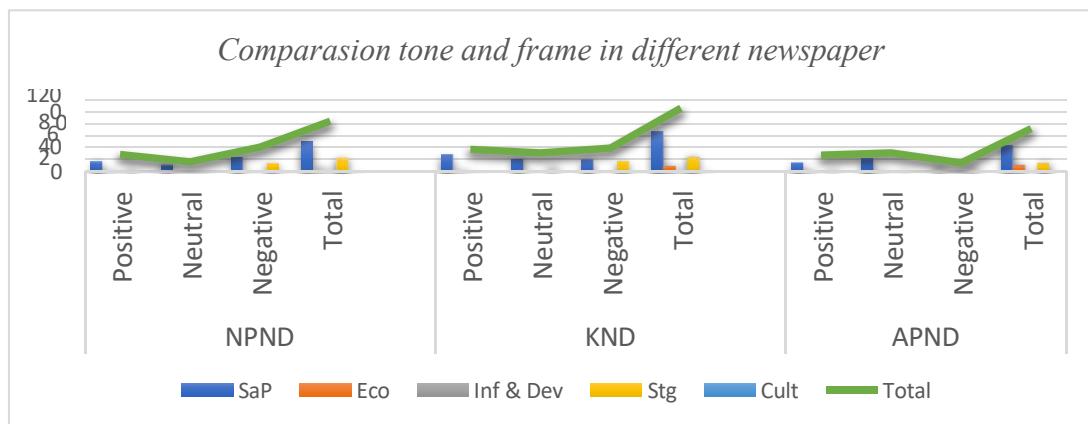


Figure 2: Source: Computed from the contents of the print media, 2025

The numerical data, presented in tables and charts, provides some micro-level insights into the Nepalese major print media's coverage about the USA and MCC during ratification time in 2022, which are seen as fragmented matters of countries' images. Based on the quantitative findings, researchers did an interpretive analysis of all the stories, identifying common themes and giving examples to show how these frameworks work.

### Sovereignty and politics aspect

The portrayal of sovereign and politically framed contents were more favorable than that of neutral and negative frames. This framework illustrates the involvement of the USA in the discourse around Nepali politics and sovereignty. The newspaper examined several aspects of political and sovereignty frameworks. Tikaram Bhattarai articulates his viewpoint on the sovereignty challenge entitled "*MCC possessed with partisan interests*" (Feb 7, 2022 KND), which indicates Nepal's sovereignty is at risk from the geopolitical interests of big powers. Similarly, Naya Patrika characterized the situation as an "*unnatural rush to Deuba in MCC*" (Dec 19, 2021 NPND), indicating that the USA and MCC are afforded top priority among coalition partners, devoid of sanctions. It also published an article titled "*Political Trauma Induced by MCC*" (February 13, 2022 KND) by Krishna Khanal on the potential shock to domestic politics, which argues that it compromises Nepal's sovereignty.

The MCC is characterized as an intrusive interference in Nepal's internal policy and a diminishment of its sovereignty. While supporters emphasize economic benefits and strategic alignment with the United States, critics have warned of foreign manipulation, hidden geopolitical objectives, and erosion of national sovereignty. The endeavor to enact the MCC faced persistent delays, intense parliamentary discourse, and ultimately conditional approval accompanied by interpretive declaration. The US claimed that the MCC was a transparent, voluntary grant.

Consequently, Annapurna supported this claim by publishing a party decision under the headline “*MCC is being implemented with everyone's support*” (March 1, 2022 APND) that the Nepali Congress Party's project needed the support of all domestic political stakeholders to benefit. In sum, the political discourse surrounding it amplified suspicions of concealed geopolitical intentions. Newspapers have emphasized the political parties' apprehension regarding the rejection of the MCC and the implications of confronting global powers.

### ***Economic aspect***

The United States' involvement in Nepal as an economic initiative has exceeded 75 years. The USA, as Nepal's primary international donor, employs economic assistance with strategic intent. During the MCC ratification period, the project was presented by the Nepali media with a distinct economic perspective. Positive sentiment conveyed a significant proportion of economic content, accounting for 6.1% of the total 10.6% (refer Table 4). This framework has focused the concept of “*tool of corruption*” highlighting both positive and negative dimensions, the impact on private sector, the context of foreign aid, the role in economic assistance, and the anomalies associated with aid. In the economic aspect, these media have highlighted the entanglement of aid in power politics, which challenges then nation's capacity as well as political leaders and the business sector have emphasized that the acceptance of the MCC accord provides substantial opportunities for economic development in Nepal. For examples: *MCC approval motivates private sector* (March 2022 NPND); *That's why MCC is necessary* (Dec 2021 APND); MCC case: illusion and reality (KND, Dec, 2021); *"MCC is not treason"* (Feb 23, 2022 APND MCC caters to the Nepali people, not the leaders (*Fatima Sumar*, Feb 10, 2022 APND). Moreover, it has emphasized to national sovereignty and long-term development objectives, incorporating safeguards like unilateral cancellation in the event of violations of Nepal's laws (Feb 28, 2022 KND).

The MCC accord has faced growing criticism for illustrating the tendency of foreign aid prioritizing elite interests rather than national development. Example: Somat Ghimire noted in “*Foreign aid: a tool of corruption*” (Feb 10, 2022 NPND) that there are growing concerns about the potential misuse of such agreements, which may act as instruments of corruption. The expenditure of four and a half billion on preparations without MCC approval highlights substantial pre-implementation costs that lack legislative authorization, thereby compromising transparency and accountability. In the content “*foreign aid interests*” (Feb 13, 2022 KND), Devendra Raj Pandey argued that the MCC reflects over Nepal's priorities, which raises doubts about whether these projects primarily serve geopolitical agendas instead of faithful economic development.

### ***Infrastructure and Development aspect***

A scant number of contents (n=264, Inf & Dev=10) were published regarding the infrastructure and development framework of MCC materials, while exhibiting a positive sentiment of 1.9 per cent out of 3.9 per cent. This framework emphasizes transparency, development, and nationalism, documenting both the overt and covert motivations behind development, connectivity, transmission lines, and road upgrades, highlighting their positive and negative aspects. Media outlets have emphasized it in their content including significance in enhancing Nepal's infrastructure and development, specifically in relation to cross-border transmission lines and domestic road connectivity. For example, in the content title “*MCC must now be implemented*” (March 2, 2022, NPND), it framed the UML as also in favor of immediate implementation. Furthermore, in content like “*Chinese companies may also secure MCC contracts if deemed exemplary*” (March 3, 2022, NPND); *The usefulness of the MCC agreement* (Dec 2021, KND); *What about MCC?* (Feb 2022, APND), etc. highlighted the developmental value of the MCC agreement as its advantages become apparent.

Nonetheless, there has been also opponent views in contents, like “*MCC conditions are still pending; it will take one and a half years to complete*” (March 1, 2022, KND); *Debate on MCC, development, and nationalism* (March 2022, NPND) illustrate the significant gap between implementation and actual progress. MCC remains entrenched in ambiguity, despite its acceptance. Critics contend that rapid actions that are disguised as development could undermine Nepal's sovereignty and long-term interests. The delay prompts questions regarding the balance between anticipated infrastructural benefits and the associated political costs, thereby intensifying nationalist apprehensions that external conditions may supersede national interests under the guise of aid.

### ***Strategic aspect***

Given the position of Nepal between rising global powers and different political systems, US engagement in the country is not limited solely to development and economic aspects. Moreover, with the rivalry between the US and China, the US has been trying to expand its presence strategically in Nepal since the 1950s. In light of this, the MCC compact has been reflected in these newspapers as more than simply infrastructure financing; it is part of a larger US policy to promote regional stability and partnership. As “*US says: Nepal's sovereign decision in MCC*” makes clear, ratification was Nepal's independent decision. Despite worries about “*politicization and internationalization*,” the MCC

provides strategic cooperation in crisis response and development, as evidenced by the "MCC response letter" and courteous diplomatic exchanges, which include letters from Deuba and Prachanda.

However, the MCC is increasingly perceived as a geopolitical instrument in the US-China rivalry rather than solely a development grant. For example, the opinion of Lan Jinachu, "MCC: US strategy to contain China" (Feb 17, 2022, NPND cited from *Global Times*), helps to portray the deal as a geopolitical maneuver that risks undermining Nepal's long-standing non-aligned status. Similarly, contents entitle "decisive US pressure to pass MCC" (Feb 11, 2022 NPND); *Nepal and the impact of the new 'Cold War'* (Feb, 2022, NPND); *MCC's whirlwind* (Feb, 2022, KND); *MCC's hook and loop* (Feb, 2022, KND); *MCC power struggle* (Feb, 2022, APND, "US warns of reconsidering Nepal policy if MCC is not approved" (Feb 11, 2022, KND), "MCC in the clutches of partisan intrigue" (Feb 24, 2022 APND) etc. have raised concerns about conditional diplomacy, expense of national autonomy an instrument in divisive, disruptive politics.

### ***Cultural aspect***

Culturally, the face of the US in Nepal has not been portrayed positively because of his hegemonic tendency to undervalue developing countries' cultural values. These three newspapers have also given scant contents during the intensive debate about it as cultural aspect. These gave the least (n=264, Cult=4) priority to publishing media content. American society reveals long-term cultural and ideological disputes that transcend national boundaries. Opinion by Binayak Chaturvedi opines that American academic freedom under the influence of the Hindu right wing raises inquiries on the worldwide factors influencing discourse within American universities (Jan 2, 2022, NPND). Furthermore, the headlines "*Racial discrimination: A topic of debate at American universities*" (Feb 27, 2022, KND) emphasizes the ongoing tussle for academic equity, identity, and inclusion. Some unconnected news on the American project emphasizes a country grappling with its changing political and cultural identity.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The coverage of this debate by the Nepali print media, particularly concerning the parliamentary ratification of the project in Nepal in 2022, was notably intriguing. After World War II, American involvement in South Asia exposed two aspects: one to curb the ideological spread of nations hostile to the United States and the other to be the in the name of principal democratic development project leader worldwide. Within these two main motives and strategies, the United States has engaged with countries in diverse ways. On September 14, 2017, four months after joining the BRI, Nepal signed an MoU on the United States' MCC project to build a high-voltage transmission line and upgrade roads. There was no discussion about this project during the MoU period. Nonetheless, once some American officials and the Department of Defense admitted that the MCC is a part of the IPS, a controversy over the MCC and the US's image began in 2019 with the motive of the USA's hidden interests.

As of 2025, the media frames focusing on "sovereignty and politics" and "strategic" implications remain relevant, influenced by U.S. policy shifts and local perceptions. As Trump's second term commenced in the United States, a vigorous discourse emerged regarding the suspension of numerous aid programs, including the MCC which is reinforcing previous narratives of U.S. strategic dominance merits (TKP, 2025a, 2025b). A reduction in the MCC's budget for FY 2026 intensified skepticism regarding the stability of U.S. commitments. Despite the resumption of payments in July 2025, Nepali discourse continued to view U.S. actions through the lens of sovereignty and politics, strategic rather than solely on developmental. Opinion pieces in different media framed the resumption not as a stabilization of aid, but as another indication of U.S. strategic maneuvering (Onlinekhabar, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c; Setopati, 2025). This enduring media framing reflects a deeper structural issue of the U.S. as both a development ally and a geopolitical actor, illustrating how established narratives shape national discourse on sovereignty and corporation. The 2022 ratification discourse in Nepal continues to affect opinions in 2025, demonstrating that established media frameworks have a lasting impact on national narratives regarding sovereignty, reliance, and collaboration. The United States' image as both a development partner and a strategic actor remains central in Nepali media narratives.

Through the Entman's (1993) media frameworks to recognize framing and media bias, this study examined how the United States of America and its contentious aid policy, known as MCC, are represented in Nepal's media, providing a framing analysis of the sentiments expressed by national newspapers regarding MCC. The data show that the Kantipur national newspaper has wider coverage (40.5%) than the Naya Patrika (32.2%) and Annapurna Post (27.3%) newspapers. Furthermore, the study has shown that the "sovereignty and politics" (SaP; n=161, 61%) and "strategic" (Stg; n=61, 23.1%) aspects related contents are main dominant frames of these three newspapers. The study also revealed that cited US-related information as unofficial sources (47.3%) due to the potential for content tampering to cause prejudice. Furthermore, the general net tone was considered slightly negative (-0.01). However, Zhu et al. (2023) notes that research on how news images are presented to influence local views of other countries has mostly been narrow, mainly looking at how positive or negative frames are created and evaluated or examining the image frames used in stories.

The image of the United States has been portrayed in various forms under different circumstances, such as "angel and devil," "coercive democracy proponent," and "unwilling to acknowledge heterogeneity." This framing was particularly evident during Nepal's ratification of US-backed aid programs, as media narratives highlighted Nepal's geopolitical significance while underscoring the precariousness of the current international system. The aid was characterized not merely as economic support but also as a possible instrument for "political meddling" and "fostering domestic instability" instead of promoting democratic principles. As a result, politically neutral intellectuals and civil society have concerned the strategic objectives of the United States. Furthermore, media coverage exhibited political parallelism, generating storylines that favored corporate or ideological interests due to political ties and advertising incentives for their companies. While certain storylines sought to depict American involvement as advantageous for both parties, the dominant media sentiment remained predominantly negative. In the context of the MCC ratification saga, media framing has shaped the perception of the United States in public discourse and policy discussions on aid.

Nevertheless, this study's concentration on domestic outlets and its restricted sample size may limit the global pertinency of its conclusions. Future research could expand upon this technique to examine how media framing strategies influence public perception concerning major powers, especially in politically sensitive contexts. Moreover, research could incorporate additional online media sources, including [onlinekhabar.com](http://onlinekhabar.com), [ratopati.com](http://ratopati.com), and [setopati.com](http://setopati.com), as well as television discussions, utilizing a larger sample size to furnish a deeper depiction of the United States' engagement as it relates to its positioning between the two major neighbors, China and India.

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## From Localization to Globalization: Modern Cultural Hybridization of Centralized Sunni Islamic Indigenous Values

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This study examines how young Muslims negotiate centrally accepted Sunni Islamic traditions while assimilating global modern cultural trends, and how Sunni Muslims respond to these hybrid practices. Young participants' justifications for integrating modern elements into Sunni Islamic traditions reveal personalized interpretations of religious teachings that often diverge from macro-level orthodoxy, generating cultural divisions within society. The data was obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews involving purposively selected university members, organizational members, and senior citizens. The data were analyzed using content analysis that provided two distinct themes which are: i) Youngsters' hybridization practices and justifications for it; and ii) Pakistani society at large disapproves the youngsters' hybridizing tendencies and its justifications. Findings suggest that young participants selectively interpret Islamic principles to legitimize modern adaptations in dress, ritual, and worship, reflecting liberal and global influences on everyday religiosity. Senior citizens and community representatives view these reinterpretations as inconsistent with Sunni orthodoxy and attribute them to the spread of Western cultural norms and insufficient religious instruction among youth. The study offers insight into how globalization, digital exposure, and local orthodoxy interact in shaping contemporary Muslim identities within Pakistan's Sunni Islamic traditions .

**Keywords:** Young Muslims; globalization; hybridization; indigenous values; Sunni Islamic tradition, orthodoxy.

Pakistani society is deeply rooted in Sunni Islamic traditions, which follows a set of fundamental indigenous values grounded in Sunni Islamic traditions. Sunni Islamic tradition encompasses four major Islamic jurisprudence schools; Hana'afi, Maliki, Hanably, and Shafa'i (Hamid, 2018). More specifically, in Pakistani society Hana'afi doctrine prevails and constitutes Sunni Islamic tradition (Hamid, 2018). The rapid expansion of digital and social media has played a defining role in accelerating this process of cultural hybridization (Rashid, 2019; Hashmi et al., 2022a). Continuous exposure to transnational media content, fashion, entertainment, and digital influencers has reshaped how young Muslims perceive and practice Sunni Islamic traditions (Hashmi et al., 2022b; Rana & Chishti, 2019). Through online interactions, they encounter diverse interpretations of religious and cultural norms, which subtly encourage reinterpretation and adaptation of indigenous values. Consequently, globalization and media convergence operate as intertwined forces that mediate how Pakistani youth negotiate between inherited religious expectations and modern cultural expressions.

Historically, micro-cultures in Pakistan, including Punjabi, Kashmiri, Balochi, Pashtun, Saraiki, Sindhi, and Kalashi, represent smaller societal groups with shared values, beliefs, language, history, ethnic customs, and distinct dress codes within the dominant Sunni Islamic traditions. However, contemporary Muslim youth from all these micro cultures negotiate and challenge orthodox religious views under the influences of modern and liberal globalization trends to relate to societal living codes (Mehmood et al., 2023; Rashid, 2019; Shahzad et al., 2024). They usually enact their freedom of choice while navigating through societal norms and expectation in the macro-Islamic cultural context (Bhat, 2014). In Pakistan, majority of the university students studying in Bachelor and Master degrees are aged between 18 and 28 (Higher Education Commission, [HEC] 2021) therefore, youngsters in this study entail the Pakistani university students aged 18 to 28, studying in BS and MS programs. Like the contemporary Muslim youth Pakistani youngsters are also likely to assimilate liberal and modern trends into the indigenous values of Pakistani society such as related to dress codes, bodily outlook, worship practices and rituals.

Moreover, their potential cultural assimilations may involve conscious attempts to avoid negative perceptions of them in the immediate community of their interactions and potentially serious threats in a radical Muslim society such as Pakistan (Javed et al., 2025). Recent studies on the cultural assimilations in a radical society report that such individuals or groups may deny the influence of modern and liberal trends through the strategic framing of justifications for their hybridizing practices.

This study endeavors to investigate the negotiations undertaken by youth concerning the integration of globally recognized indigenous values within the framework of the Sunni Islamic tradition, particularly in the context of contemporary cultural trends. For this purpose, two research questions are framed: i) how does the young generation construct justifications for hybridizing indigenous values? and ii) how does the society at large respond to youngsters' justifications for hybridizing indigenous values?

### Theoretical Framework

This qualitative research, embarks on *Bhabha's* (1994) *theory of hybridization* and *Bakhtin's* (1981) perspectives of *intentional and unintentional hybridity*. *Bakhtin's* (1981) perspectives explain that in *unintentional hybridization*, unconscious assimilation of cultural elements such as language which may have culturally beneficial effects. However, in the context of this study assimilations of technology into cultural practices such as use of speakers and microphones for the call for prayer (adhan) in mosques is considered *unintentional hybridity* because it is not meant to hybridize the cultural practice of 'adhan'. In *intentional hybridization* two points of view are not mixed but set against each other dialogically. *Intentional hybridization* basis on the conscious contrasts which can be used in aesthetic domain such as adaptation of novel trends for the personalized expression of the self (Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, adoption of global fashion trends and assimilations of liberal views in practicing and defining cultural traditions is viewed as *intentional hybridization*.

*Bhabha's* (1994) theory suggests that culture is not fixed, but instead evolves through the blending of multiple influences. A central idea in his work is the *third space*, a space of negotiation where people combine elements of various cultures to create new meanings and identities. This space allows individuals to question fixed norms and reinterpret cultural values. It provides a way to understand how Pakistani youth, influenced by global trends, engage with modern lifestyles while still identifying with Islamic traditions.

*Bakhtin's* (1981) perspective of hybridity distinguishes between *intentional hybridity* and *unintentional hybridity*. *Unintentional hybridity* occurs naturally, such as when modern tools like microphones become part of religious practices without aiming to change their purpose. *Intentional hybridity* involves conscious choices, for example when young Muslims adopt liberal or modern expressions to reshape their appearance, worship, or social participation. These behaviors reflect deliberate efforts to balance religious belonging with the attractions of global modernity. Drawing on *Bhabha's* idea of the *third space* and *Bakhtin's* distinction between *intentional and unintentional hybridity*, this study explores how young Muslims in Pakistan blend Sunni Islamic traditions with global influences, and how these hybrid practices are received by their wider society.

### Recent studies on cultural narratives and hybridization in Muslim societies

Cultural hybridization can be understood to be the encounter and blend of various cultural traditions that slowly give way to the emergence of new identities and perspectives of belonging. In every Muslim community, for instance, this encounter can never take place with a level of reflection or discussion. This goes without saying since many members of Muslim society always search for a means of staying true to their moral foundations despite embracing global trends that promise opportunity and change. Al Areqi (2017) tackles the issue of cultural hybridization by employing perspectives from being postcolonial to being Muslim. This particular argument explains that Islam always considers the notion of cultural hybridization with a level of wariness since it can lead to moral ambiguity. On the other hand, flexibility can be promoted by where innovation can be defended by referring to societal good.

Hybridization can be spotted in an educational setting where students found themselves caught between conventional and global values. Rana and Chishti (2019) studied teacher observations of university-going students in Pakistan and found a blend of eagerness and ambivalence. Students found global culture attractive due to its creativity and the confidence it imbued in them but at the same time feared that Western culture could destroy societal discipline or respect for the family. Rana and Chishti found that hybridization does not mean imitation of another culture. Rather, it can be a move towards finding a midpoint between the attractiveness of modernity and the moral strength of religious beliefs. Students justified their decisions according to the moderation of Islam to illustrate that cultural hybridization can involve personal reasoning.

Social media technology has altered the dynamics of these negotiations. Social media acts as a new opportunity for visibility and for taking part, which enables users to build a public persona that intertwines religious with modern trends. Juliansyahzen (2021) observed that the online behaviour of young Indonesians facilitates the emergence of a space for the Hybrid Muslim. This area allows young Indonesians to combine their religious beliefs with ideas of fun and creativity, and to represent themselves as both religious and modern. This line of reasoning lets young Indonesians see religion and global culture as two components of their public persona on social media that didn't compete with each other but work well together.

Other research has concentrated on cultural hybridization as a form of performance. Civila and Jaramillo-Dent (2022) conducted a study on multicultural connections as depicted on the web and introduced the notion of performative cultural hybridization. This research illustrates that individuals utilize language, symbols, and shared narratives to facilitate coexistence among diverse cultures. This act of publishing or just being involved creates a space where people can say they are part of the global community while yet being connected to their own culture. This can happen without people openly mixing their cultures.

A comparable investigation by Civila et al., (2020) examined the reaction of the Muslim community to online discourse associated with initiatives such as #StopIslam. This study discovered that users responded to hostile representations with positive and instructive content that was aesthetically pleasing. This may be seen to indicate that hybridization can represent a mode of participation rather than a means of defence. This study also revealed that the Muslim community used global media aesthetics to show ideas of equality, peace, and dignity that are part of Islam's moral foundations.

Sayed and Hotait's 2024 study on Muslim women content makers in Germany shed light on the subject. Muslim women were able to create new interpretations of Muslim femininity through modest fashion, spirituality, and an outreach activities. Sayed and Hotait understood the adaptability of interpretations of Islam's ethical principle of doing good to include public expressions of good intentions. In doing so, the women situated themselves within the global streams of culture while being morally upright.

Through the lens of these six studies, cultural hybridization appears as a perpetual process of negotiation rather than a deprivation of identity. In previous interpretations of cultural hybridization for Muslim society, it was explained by domination or imitation (Al Areqi, 2017; Rana & Chishti, 2019). Through more recent scholarship, the active roles of Muslims are indicated by the utilization of technology for the integration of modernity with religious interpretations (Juliansyahzen, 2021; Civila et al., 2020; Civila & Jaramillo-Dent, 2022; El Sayed & Hotait, 2024). Through visibility, association, and interaction, one can state the effects of belonging that are global and local at the same time. Through this perception of cultural hybridization, it becomes a representation of moral creativity. This means the perpetual attempt to co-exist with religion while adding to the common language of modern culture. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study.

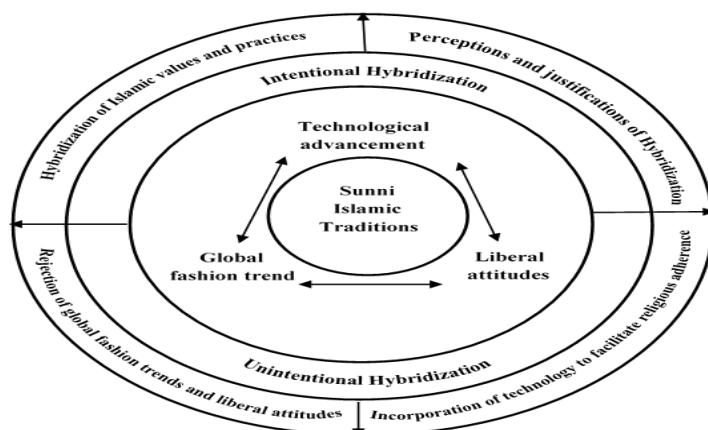


Figure 1: Illustration of Hybridization Theoretical Framework

## Method

This qualitative study used purposive sampling to recruit university students, professionals, and senior citizens from Punjab, Pakistan. These three groups were included to capture generational differences in religious understanding and cultural practice. Earlier research (e.g., Hashmi et al., 2024; Driezen et al., 2021) shows that older Muslims often prefer strict adherence to doctrine, whereas younger people are more exposed to global and digital influences. Professionals in this context represent mid-life negotiation of faith within modern work settings. Therefore, these three groups can provide rich data in relation to their respective cultural adherence practices.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focused group observations involving 20 participants. Each interview was conducted face-to-face in Urdu, lasting between one and two hours. Interviews were translated into English by a language expert and transcribed by the researcher.

### ***Analytical Framework***

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis inspired by the frameworks of Rosendahl et al., (2020) and Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017). The process involved six key phases.

In Phase 1, interviews were transcribed and initial readings identified meaningful units related to the study focus.

In Phase 2, meaning units were highlighted and defined as short phrases capturing the essence of participants' views.

In Phase 3, these units were condensed to summarize ideas while preserving core meanings. In Phase 4, condensed units were coded according to similarities and differences.

In Phase 5, related codes were grouped into subcategories.

In Phase 6, subcategories were abstracted into broader categories that formed the main themes.

This analytical process helped organize complex narratives into clear themes while maintaining a close link to participants' experiences. The approach ensured interpretive depth, allowing the analysis to capture how young and older Muslims understand, justify, or reject cultural hybridization practices within the Sunni Islamic tradition context of Pakistan.

### ***Analysis and Discussion***

The codes were categorized into distinct groups according to their variations and commonalities, identifying ten sub-categories, wherein two distinct themes emerged. The emerging themes were aligned to frame the answers to research questions, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Broader Categories and Themes*

Themes	Research Questions
1. Youngsters' hybridization practices and justifications for it	1. How does the young generation construct justifications for hybridizing Islamic indigenous values?
2. Pakistani society at large disapproves the youngsters' hybridizing tendencies and its justifications	2. How does the society at large respond to youngsters' justifications for hybridizing Islamic indigenous values?

#### ***Theme 1: Youngsters' hybridization practices and justifications for it***

The participants overt expressions of their religio-cultural practices and their stand points on Sunni Islamic traditions provided the insights into their cultural hybridization practices and their justifications for it. The content analysis of the data provided several categories based on code groups which framed this theme. These categories represented the following sub-themes:

- any dress that covers the body is Islamic dress;
- *Quran* and *Sunnah* never taught female Muslims to wear a face covering (Niqab);
- We celebrate Holi because Islam encourages the celebration of rituals whether they are religious or cultural;
- if speakers and microphones are allowed in the mosques, why five times Adhan from the mosque is needed if mobiles fulfil this purpose;
- Online Participation in prayers especially Jumah prayer is convenient for the Muslims;
- Islamic history witnesses male-female gatherings in the mosques and the war field why the society criticizes mutual gatherings now?;

- For mutual harmony in the society, we attend our Christian and Hindu friends' mournings and celebrations;
- Ablution is not needed if a Muslim takes bath daily and adheres to hygienic practices;
- Places are not important rather God's worship is important therefore, performing Hajj online is justified.
- In this era, Muslims' with tough routines such as students during exams, can fast in any other month as convenient and not necessarily in the month of Ramadhan.

The analysis revealed that the participants manipulated Islamic teachings, interpreting them in a manner that aligns with their perspectives and desires. Many participants expressed liberal viewpoints, advocating for modernization, and argued that Islam does not impose any compulsion regarding dress code, mixed-gender gatherings, ritual celebrations, or worship. They argued that certain preachers, referred to as Molvis, who possess limited knowledge of Islamic teachings, have exaggerated these teachings, leading to extreme fear and misunderstandings within society. The participants provided critical reasoning supporting their position, with thirteen out of twenty individuals citing a specific verse from the Quran as evidence.

*You know our religion is very easy and smooth in every filed of life such as "there is no compulsion in religion" (The Quran, 2:256) this verse of the Quran clearly shows that we can live according to our easiness in this society. But in this contemporary era, Islamic scholars so called 'Molvis' spread a fear regarding the punishment on the day of judgment (R3/Q3)*

The excerpt from R3 represents female university students' lifestyle choices based on their understanding of Islamic teachings. R3 initiates her discourse by invoking a Quranic verse to substantiate the integration of diverse elements in their lifestyles. The participants believe that adopting a modern dress code helps them feel socially integrated, and they see no Islamic restrictions that would hinder their commitment to modern or progressive lifestyles. Most of the participants grounded their perspective in the Quranic principle that there should be no coercion in matters of religion. They tended to interpret Islamic teachings according to their preferred ways of life while expressing dissatisfaction with how religious scholars preach and promote Islamic traditions. Participant R3 critiques traditional religious scholars, referred to as 'Molvis,' for spreading fear and misinterpretations of Islamic teachings. In the contemporary Pakistani society, the word 'Molvi' is considered a negatively connoted term which entails a traditional Muslim who pretends to be a religious scholar but does not have profound knowledge of Islam. Participants managed to discredit traditional interpretations of the Islamic authoritative sources by criticizing traditional religious scholars. Their justification for the assimilations involved personalized interpretations of the Quranic verses and Hadiths. The participant R3 manipulated the interpretation of the Quranic verse such as the Islamic authoritative interpretation of her mentioned Quranic verse clarifies that an individual is free to embrace or not embrace Islam and that no individual can be forced to leave his/her religion (Ibn Kathir, 2003). However, she presented it as a justification to assimilate fashion trends into Islamic dress code, which can be seen as a strategy of hybridizing indigenous values and practices by individuals who favor modernization and liberal interpretations (see Albayrak, 2022; Zulkarnain et al., 2025).

The participants' reflections on their beliefs and practices in relation to Sunni Islamic traditions show that in contemporary Sunni Muslim majority Pakistani society, individuals' attitudes towards religious fundamentals shape their adherence to the indigenous values and practices. Following response by R19 stands unique due to the overt reflective account of personalized worship practices and justifications for it.

*I believe in Allah and the Prophet (SAW). You know history of Islamic traditions was written and transmitted by certain Muslim scholars and not by the prophet Muhammad (SAW) or his companions. I believe that certain cultural arrangements for the Arabs at that time and were not meant for ever and for all. For example, performing ablution before every prayer was necessary to teach the dessert people about keeping them clean whole day. But, it is not applicable here in this era where we take bath daily and reside in neat and clean houses. Honestly speaking I just offer Jumah prayer but I don't perform ablution because I take bath daily in the morning which fulfills the Islamic spirit of cleanliness.*

*(R19/Q8)*

The participant (R19) grounds his liberal attitude in his self-interpreted Sunni Islamic traditions in the historical context. The participant strategically avoids blame by first affirming his belief in Allah and the Prophet (SAW) before questioning the necessity of ablution (wudu) for prayer according to Sunni Islamic tradition. Through his personalized interpretation against the centrally accepted interpretation of ablution, he engages in hybridization of Juma prayer which

is a significant ritual in Sunni Islamic worship tradition. To justify his tendency of assimilating liberal concept of hygiene into the Islamic worship practices, he differentiates between immutable tenets of Islam and historically contingent Islamic rituals, arguing that practices like ablution were cultural adaptations for 7th-century Arabian desert hygiene rather than perpetual obligation for Muslims living in this modern hygienic atmosphere. He frames 'daily bath' as a fulfillment of Islam's spirit connected to the ritual of ablution. His practice of Juma prayer, based on his own interpretation of Sunni Islamic traditions, reflects a form of cultural hybridization where believers combine Islamic worship with modern lifestyles (see Albayrak, 2022).

Most of the young participants acknowledged their participation in non-Muslims' rituals such as Hindus' Holi and Christians' Christmas. They viewed their participation in these events as justified in the broader frame of cultural festivity and cultural harmony. The following excerpt by R7 presents his reflections on participating in non-Muslims' rituals.

*In Pakistan, we should respect all ethnicities equally by participating in their rituals like Holi, Christmas, marriages, and funerals to promote harmony and peace. But, religious scholars object to our participation in such cultural event and consider us as lesser Muslims. (R7/Q2)*

The participant (R7) attempted to deconstruct the religious principles in Sunni Islamic tradition which prohibits Muslims' participation in non-Muslims' rituals. He legitimizes participation in non-Muslim rituals by reframing Holi and Christmas as cultural and not religious events, aligning them with Islamic ideals of "harmony and peace." This strategy circumvents Sunni Islamic traditions' interpretation of the Quranic prohibitions stating "and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you. "To each among you, we have prescribed a law and a clear way" (Ibn Kathir, 2003). Sunni Islamic traditions related to the permissible festivals are grounded in the centralized interpretation of Quranic verse, "For every nation we have ordained religious ceremonies which they must follow (The Quran, 22:67; Ibn Kathir, 2003). Based on such Islamic authoritative sources, Sunni Islamic tradition prohibits Muslims from adopting practices tied to other faiths' theological tenets. Participant R7 interprets such festivals as opportunities for interethnic engagement that promote social harmony while maintaining an Islamic identity. However, this distinction conflicts with orthodox interpretations, which view participation in rituals rooted in non-Islamic beliefs as violating tawhid (monotheism). Through this selective reinterpretation, R7 hybridizes Sunni values with multiculturalism, portraying cultural assimilation as a form of piety that prioritizes communal harmony over adherence to Sunni Islamic traditions but with an emphasis on having Sunni Muslim identity. This mirrors Bakhtin's *intentional hybridity*, where adaptive practices are rationalized as enhancing and not diluting Islamic authenticity, despite contestations over theological boundaries.

Some participants, particularly those who exhibit greater sociability and draw inspiration from technology, believe that incorporating technology into our worship practices yields advantages in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The utilization of technology has greatly enhanced and improved our methods of engaging in worship practices. The following excerpt, shared by the R17, represents the collective belief of all study participants that incorporating technology can enhance our worship practices.

*There are many alternatives approved by the Islam such as if we don't have water for ablution, we can do tayammum (symbolic dry ablution). I believe that Islam does not impose going to mosque in scorching summer to offer prayer. Rather, it is better to offer even group prayer in our AC rooms. We should promote Islam's soft image by adopting flexible ways of worship and focusing more on serving humanity like do the believers of other religions. (R11/Q7)*

The Participant (R11) demonstrates an intentional hybridization of Sunni Islamic prayer traditions, blending Islamic teachings of mandatory prayers with adaptive modern practices. Drawing on Bhabha's (1994) notion of the *third space*, understood as a hybrid sphere where meanings are continually negotiated and cultural boundaries become fluid, R11 interprets prayer at air-conditioned homes as comparable to worship in mosques. The emphasis is placed on the intention of the act rather than strict adherence to formal Sunni Islamic traditions which aligns with the concept of the *third space* as a dynamic context where faith, identity, and modernity intersect in practice (see Weerasuriya, 2025; Tatham, 2023; Khu, 2025). Within this view, religious expression is reshaped through everyday adaptation, allowing devotion to coexist with contemporary domestic realities.

He basis his cultural hybridization on the justified alternatives like the flexibility provided in the juristic allowance of "tayammum" (symbolic dry ablution) when water is unavailable. However, no such juristic allowance in Sunni Islamic tradition aligns with the home-centric group prayer rather Islamic authoritative discourse on this topic

discourages offering prayers at homes as Quranic verse states "Certainly, a mosque founded on righteousness from the first day is more worthy of your prayers. In it are men who love to be purified. And Allah loves those who purify themselves" (The Quran, 9:108; Ibn Kathir, 2003). The participant's (R11) view point aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) idea of *intentional hybridity*, where traditional mandates (mosque attendance) and contemporary needs (avoiding extreme heat) coexist in a dynamic interplay, creating a reinterpreted devotional practice that aims to maintain theological fidelity while addressing personalized desires of modern lifestyle. R11's call for "flexible ways of worship" hybridizes Sunni communal ideals with privatized piety, framing adaptability as a way to promote Islam's "soft image" and ethical focus on serving humanity. By challenging compulsory mosque attendance in harsh conditions, the participant's standpoint destabilizes the Sunni Islamic tradition's concept of mosque as a central institution of Muslims' life, grounding his reinterpretation of the mandatory prayers in his proposition of "Islam's soft image". His emphasis on serving humanity "like do the believers of other religions" also reflects his tendency of hybridizing Sunni Islamic traditions and norms of collective worship by assimilating individualistic practices inspired by the modern and global influences, a tendency similarly observed in Muslim youth negotiating religious individualism within super-diverse contexts (Driezen et al., 2021).

To conclude, the youngster participants' reflections on their practices and justifications in relation to Sunni Islamic traditions reflect discursive strategies that redefine Sunni Islamic traditions' orthopraxy through a dialogic engagement with lived experiences, blending tradition with modernity in a way that resonates with youngsters' contemporary Muslim identities.

### ***Theme 2: Pakistani society at large disapproves the youngsters' hybridizing tendencies and its justifications***

This theme emerged from the feedback from senior citizens and community organization members who expressed disapproval of the religious and cultural justifications for blending indigenous values. This theme encompasses two sub-categories;

- senior citizens in particular, disapprove cultural hybridization if Sunni Islamic traditions based on Pakistani macro culture;
- the prevailing ideological beliefs in Pakistani society generally lead to disapproval of youngsters' justifications for accepting global trends.

The participant (R16) elucidated the detrimental impacts of social media and contemporary technology on the young Muslims' understanding of Islamic values and fully rejected the contemporary fashions and life styles.

*Now a days, the internet specially social media is spreading all kinds of misinformation about Islam. Liberals select certain Quranic verses and prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) hadiths which they interpret out of the context to show that religion is a personal matter. Their propaganda is moving the young Muslims away from Islam. Secondly, All the time they watch unethical content and follow Western fashion models in their daily lives that is why they adopt western ways and know nothing about Islamic values. (R16/Q11)*

R16 holds liberals responsible for spreading misinformation about Islam. He believes that the extensive misuse of mobile technology and continuous engagement with social media primarily influences the young generation's understanding of Islam. Participant's (R16) standpoint on liberal's misuse of social media to spread misinformation about Islam and cause confusions among the young Muslims, resonate the recent findings from the studies on this topic (e.g., Habib et al., 2024; Hashmi et al., 2022b; Hidayatullah et al., 2023). However, the participant neglected the positive aspects of social media usage such as disseminating Islamic information from reliable Islamic sources through these platforms enables global circulation within seconds which can guide the masses about Islamic culture (Habib et al., 2024; Hashmi et al., 2023). The participant's rejection of self-interpretation of the Islamic authoritative sources aligns with the centrally accepted Sunni Islamic tradition which prohibits individualistic and personalized understanding of Islam rather it emphasizes the Hanafi jurisprudence for practicing Islam in daily lives. Such adherence contrasts with the trend of religious individualism observed among Muslim youth negotiating faith autonomy within plural contexts (Driezen et al., 2021).

R16 views youngsters' assimilations of modern trends into daily life style as the western ways of life which he perceives as against Islamic culture. He staunchly disapproves the global influences that the youngsters accept due to their perceived flexibility in Islam. His concluding remarks "they adopt western ways and know nothing about Islamic values" present a conflicting contrast between Sunni Islamic traditions and the modern and liberal adaptations by the young Muslim generation, leaving no room for the slightest cultural hybridization of Sunni Islamic traditions.

Several participants who rejected youngsters' assimilations of global trends and their justifications for their beliefs, participate in various social organizations within the community, including the mosque committee, municipal committees, *Haqqani Tanzeem* (a local religious activity committee), and *Tanzeem Ilm-o-Adab* (organization of literature and knowledge). The participants asserted that the young generations' detachment from religious practices paved the way for falling a prey to contemporary Western trends, fashions and beliefs. The following excerpt by R10 presents his rejection of contemporary youngsters' life styles and ideas about Islam.

*I have been the head of Tanzeem Haqqani for the last five years during which we trained youth in different religious activities such as the recitation of the Quran with beautiful reading (Qirat), Naat, and arranged a weekly session of Darood o Salam. Did you believe that we convinced the youth to participate in these activities by giving some kind of lure such as free food at the end, prize money for the winner and etc. Our youth is not serious about religious teachings and values related to lifestyle, they celebrate marriages, ritual of Eids and Meelad un Nabi (Prophet Muhammad's Birth Day in Sunni Islamic tradition) like the non-Islamic celebrations. They invite the Allah's wrath by dancing in the marriages and neglecting the Sunnah of Holy Prophet (PBUH). These liberal trends in religious matters such as marriages, funerals and rituals in Islam are damaging Islam's image.* (R14/Q1)

R14 critiques the cultural hybridization of Sunni Islamic traditions, arguing that modern influences have led young Muslims to adopt practices incompatible with core Islamic values, such as celebratory dancing at weddings and liberalized Eid rituals. The participant's view point aligns with Kirmani (2022) finding of modernization as a key factor in the decline of religious adherence among youth. R14 positions marriages and funerals as sacred rituals rooted in the Sunnah, citing the Quranic injunction "He who obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah" (The Quran, 4:80; Ibn Kathir, 2003) to emphasize strict adherence to Prophetic traditions. His use of material incentives (e.g., prize money, free food) to engage youth in religious activities like Quran recitation reflects Habib et al., (2024) findings on traditional institutions' struggles to counter modernization's appeal. While Hashmi et al. (2021) notes that young Muslims' assimilation of global trends may create uncertainty about Islamic teachings, R14 strongly disagrees with such adaptations, viewing modernized fashions of marriages and funerals as practices that risk diminishing the spiritual essence of Islamic rituals. By equating cultural hybridization with neglect of the Sunnah, he reinforces a binary between "authentic" Sunni practices, governed by Hanafi norms, and assimilated cultural practices, asserting that preserving Islamic identity requires rigid adherence to orthodox rituals. This stance underscores his commitment to countering liberal trends through organizations like Tanzeem Haqqani, which prioritizes doctrinal purity over adaptive reinterpretation.

To conclude, many within society, particularly senior citizens, express reservations about young people's assimilation of global modern trends into Sunni Islamic traditions, offering religious reasoning to support their stance. They contextualize the normative Sunni Islamic traditions into the Islamic authoritative discourse of the Quran and the Sunnah of prophet Muhammad and thereby offer their justifications to reject young Muslims' cultural hybridization tendencies.

### Conclusion

The study explored how young Muslims hybridized Sunni Islamic traditions within the wider Sunni Islamic traditional framework. Findings showed that elements of modern and liberal thought were incorporated into worship, rituals, and dress. Participants often relied on personal interpretations of Islamic sources to justify these practices. Their efforts reflected an attempt to balance traditional Islamic values with ideas of freedom and choices shaped by global influences.

Within Pakistan, where Sunni orthodoxy dominates religious understanding, even slight variations in worship or appearance are often rejected. The reasoning of youth for such adaptations was frequently described by conservative voices as misinterpretation of religious authority. In broader Muslim contexts, similar debates have appeared. In Indonesia, for instance, the long-standing distinction between traditionalist groups like *Nahdlatul Ulama* and reformist ones such as *Muhammadiyah* demonstrates how differing readings of Islam shape opposing debates.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary Muslim youth in Pakistan are negotiating Islamic practices in a globalized world. Future studies may examine comparable patterns of cultural hybridization in other Muslim-majority settings, including Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, to unfold complexity of such opposing stances and the associated cultural practices.

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## **Navigating the CSR Paradox in Extractive Industries: A Multivariate Study on CSR Performance and Social Acceptance of Local Communities**

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Extractive industry operations often face social challenges, particularly in gaining acceptance from local communities. One common strategy employed by company to secure Social License to Operate (SLO) is through implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs, which typically take the form of either charity-based initiatives or empowerment-oriented interventions. CSR programs that are responsive to the needs and expectations of the community have the potential to foster harmonious relationships between companies and local stakeholders. In contrast, low levels of social acceptance may escalate into community resistance and conflict. Building on this context, the present study aims to examine the differential relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance, based on the distinct characteristics of charity-based and empowerment-oriented CSR programs. This study highlights a paradox in the objectives of CSR practices within extractive industries: the pressure to secure short-term social support through charitable programs often stands in contrast to the long-term commitment to sustainable development through community empowerment initiatives. Data were collected through a structured survey involving 449 respondents residing in proximity to geothermal operations in West Java, Indonesia, utilizing a stratified sampling method. The findings indicate that CSR performance has a moderately strong influence on social acceptance. Moreover, multivariate analysis reveals that CSR performance significantly affects social acceptance, with charity-based programs exerting a stronger influence than empowerment-based ones. This disparity is largely attributed to the characteristics of the local community, which tend to be pragmatic, possess limited formal education, and prioritize immediate tangible benefits.

**Keywords:** CSR Performance, Social Acceptance, Local Community, Charity Programs, Empowerment Programs.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a strategic role for extractive companies—such as those in the oil and gas, mining, and geothermal sectors—in building constructive relationships with surrounding communities. In recent years, local communities have become increasingly critical and assertive in voicing, especially concerning the negative impacts of corporate operations. These communities may exert pressure through protests and blockades, which can disrupt company operations (Prayogo, 2013). The emergence of a ‘sense of localism’ has further reinforced a collective awareness among local communities in asserting their rights to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources in their immediate settlements (Calvano, 2007; Owen, 2013). CSR is therefore expected to contribute meaningfully to enhancing the socio-economic welfare of local communities, supporting sustainable development, and mitigating social impacts associated with corporate activity (Dustin, 2011; Andreea, 2015). However, when such expectations remain unmet, the social relationship between the company and local communities may shift, often resulting in strained relations, reduced trust, and heightened potential for conflict.

Social relations between extractive companies and communities can be manifest in both positive and negative forms. Perceptions of injustice, limited positive outcomes, and poor management of negative impacts from company operations can lead to conflictual relationships. These conflicts may manifest as community protests and blockades, disrupt company operations, increasing security-related expenditures, and negatively affect stock valuations (Davis & Frank, 2011). Given the geographically fixed nature of natural resource extraction, companies must adopt effective social

strategies—particularly through CSR programs—to secure social acceptance and the Social License to Operate (SLO) from local communities (Kemp & Owen, 2013). While conflict is a potential outcome, the implementation of effective social strategies can foster positive relationships between companies and local communities.

There are four key concepts commonly used to explain the development of positive social relations between companies and local communities: social legitimacy, Social License to Operate (SLO), social integration, and social acceptance. Social legitimacy reflects stakeholders' recognition that the company adheres to the prevailing social contract and distributes benefits fairly (Riabova, 2019; Nyembo & Lees, 2020). SLO refers to the specific approval granted by local stakeholders—such as local community and local authorities—toward company decisions and operational projects (Boutilier & Leeder, 2012; Zhang, 2015). Social integration represents the merging of two societal elements (Prayogo, 2011) due to value alignment and responsive actions toward community needs. Finally, social acceptance refers to the community's recognition, positive perception, and trust that corporate operations bring tangible benefits and meet local community expectations (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2011). Positive social acceptance results in benefits such as increased local employment, the creation of new economic opportunities, and more effective CSR initiatives implementation (Prayogo, 2013). Social acceptance is considered an optimal or ideal condition for companies and is shaped by various corporate strategies: enhancing CSR's economic impact, ensuring fair two-way communication, providing compensation for adverse impacts, and prioritizing principles of fairness and justice (Moffat & Zhang, 2013; Parsons, 2014). To achieve social acceptance, companies must develop CSR programs that reflect socio-economic realities of the local context and align with corporate strategic objectives.

The development of social acceptance through CSR depends on how well CSR programs align with the actual needs of local communities. CSR programs that are rigid, top-down, or unresponsive may lead to increased social distance between companies and local communities (Davis & Frank, 2011). Effective CSR should involve community participation, prioritize long-term goals, maintain transparent two-way communication, and include fair evaluation and feedback mechanisms. Unfortunately, the implementation of such participatory and adaptive approaches often encounters tension with standardized CSR frameworks derived from national regulations or global reporting guidelines.

In practice, discrepancies frequently arise between normative CSR—guided by standards such as the UN Global Compact, ISO 26000, or corporate policies—and the expectations of local communities. Several studies have shown that top-down, universal principle-based approaches often fail to address local contextual needs. This divergence gives rise to a legitimacy gap, wherein companies perceive their CSR initiatives as contributing to sustainable development, while local communities regard these efforts as largely symbolic or compensatory (Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012; Idemudia, 2011). The divergence in perceptions underscores differing conceptions of value: corporations often prioritize compliance with global indicators, whereas communities emphasize relevance, immediacy, and direct benefits. This misalignment generates a paradox in the implementation of charity versus empowerment-based CSR programs in extractive industries.

Research has shown that charity-based programs are frequently utilized by company to gain short-term social legitimacy (symbolic CSR), whereas empowerment programs demand long-term commitments and community participation (Gilberthorpe & Banks, 2012; Idemudia, 2009; Frynas, 2005). While charity programs tend to generate immediate positive responses—particularly among communities with pragmatic orientations and lower levels of formal education, owing to their direct and tangible benefits (Eweje, 2006)—empowerment programs are generally regarded as more effective in fostering local capacity, enhancing livelihoods, and promoting long-term well-being (Muthuri et al., 2012). Despite this, limited studies have directly compared the influence of CSR performance on social acceptance, particularly through multivariate analysis of charity versus empowerment programs in the context of geothermal extractive companies in Indonesia.

This study focuses on the implementation of CSR and its relationship with community social acceptance in the geothermal company operating in West Java, Indonesia. The company has undertaken a range of CSR initiatives intended to enhance community quality of life in the focus areas including economy, education, health, infrastructure, and the environment.

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the influence of CSR performance on local community acceptance. The novelty of the study lies in its multivariate analysis of how the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance varies across different program characteristics, namely charity and empowerment-based programs. The underlying argument is that the strength of the correlation between CSR performance and social acceptance differs

depending on program type. While some literature often posits that empowerment-based programs foster stronger social acceptance due to their emphasis on long-term capacity building and quality-of-life improvements, this study empirically tests the validity of that assumption. To support this argument, the study addresses three main research questions: (1) Which CSR program domain—economic, health, education, or environmental—has the greatest impact on social acceptance? (2) Which dimensions of CSR performance most strongly influence social acceptance? (3) How does the strength of the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance vary between charity-based and empowerment-oriented CSR programs?

## Literature Review

The literature review in this study is organized into three main clusters: (1) motives for CSR implementation, (2) the relationship between CSR and social acceptance in the extractive industry, and (3) CSR program typologies. This classification aims to systematically identify the research gap that forms the core focus of this study.

The review begins by examining the underlying motives for the implementation of CSR, which classically mapped into two dominant theoretical frameworks: business ethics and stakeholder theory (Garriga & Melé, 2004; Secchi, 2007). From the business ethics perspective (Lee, 2008), CSR is conceptualized as a moral obligation whereby corporations contribute to the establishment of good society. In this framework, CSR is expected to enhance the socio-economic well-being of surrounding communities. The three main concepts associated with this view are Universal Rights, Social Justice, and Sustainable Development. In contrast, stakeholder theory views CSR as a strategic instrument for managing relationships between corporations and their stakeholders—those groups or individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by corporate operations (Freeman & Phillips, 2002; Elkington, 1997). Under this paradigm, CSR serves not only as a form of social concern but also as a mechanism to secure stakeholder support and ensure company operational continuity. Three key concepts from this perspective are Social Acceptance, Social License to Operate (SLO), and Social Legitimation. Consequently, the rationale behind CSR implementation may vary across companies, depending on whether the emphasis is placed on fulfilling ethical obligations or achieving strategic legitimacy.

Transitioning to the practical domain, the second group of literature explores the relationship between CSR and social acceptance in the extractive industry and is categorized into two perspectives: managerial and socio contextual. The managerial perspective discusses various CSR initiatives and corporate efforts to obtain a SLO (Barrena 2016; Arno, 2019). This approach underscores that the effectiveness of CSR performance and governance of socio-environmental issues are central to gaining social acceptance (Kemp & Owen, 2013; Lamb et al., 2017). Central to this framework are four key operational elements: two-way communication, grievance mechanisms, local employment absorption, and optimization of environmental impact management. Enhancing these four aspects helps foster trust and social acceptance among local communities. Boutilier (2014) asserts that responsive community relations management is a prerequisite for achieving social acceptance.

In contrast, the socio-contextual perspective argues that social acceptance is not solely determined by internal CSR performance (Harvey, 2016; Omar, 2018; Nyembo & Lees, 2020), but is shaped by various complex external factors—often more influential than corporate initiatives themselves (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2011; Boutilier & Black, 2012). These factors encompass the community characteristics, institutional structures, local leadership, government policies, social media dynamics, and civil society movements. As Moffat and Zhang (2013) and Lacey and Lamont (2015) argue, understanding the emergence of social acceptance—particularly in the context of mining and other extractive operations—requires a holistic analytical approach that considers these interrelated dimensions. This literature underscores the importance of companies' capacity to respond to social contexts, rather than focusing solely on internal performance.

The third literature group categorizes CSR program into two typologies: charity-based and empowerment-based initiatives. Charity-based CSR programs—such as donations, provision of basic needs, and infrastructure development—are frequently favored by companies due to their immediate, tangible, and easily communicable benefits, particularly in communities characterized by pragmatism and limited access to education (Eweje, 2006). These programs are often deployed as reactive strategies to mitigate conflict and serve as "firefighting tools" in times of social tension. In the case of Niger Delta, for instance, charity-based interventions like donations enhanced social acceptance among local communities; however, such benefits were largely symbolic and failed to address the structural roots of social inequality, thus widening the legitimacy gap between corporate image and community experience (Frynas, 2005; Idemudia, 2009). As a result, dependency emerged, and community support diminished once aid ceased.

In contrast, empowerment programs—including entrepreneurship training, local institutional strengthening, and participatory decision-making—are recognized for offering more sustainable forms of social legitimacy and acceptance. A study in Kenya showed that CSR programs that actively involve local communities across all stages of the program cycle—from planning to evaluation—can enhance local capacities and contribute to the establishment of a long-term SLO (Muthuri, Moon & Idemudia, 2012). Similar findings from Papua New Guinea and Indonesia confirm that empowerment-based programs foster a sense of shared ownership and mitigates structural conflict that charity programs fail to address (Gilberthorpe & Banks, 2012). However, such initiatives typically require more substantial investments of time, resources, and institutional commitment, leading companies into a paradox: whether to pursue short-term legitimacy through easily implemented charity programs or to invest in long-term, transformative empowerment efforts aligned with national policies and international CSR frameworks such as ISO 26000 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This body of literature underscores the pivotal role of CSR in shaping social acceptance by addressing social expectations and aligning with the local community's needs (Kemp & Owen, 2013; Prayogo, 2013; Lacey & Lamont, 2013). Nonetheless, few studies explicitly compare the strength of the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance based on program characteristics (charity-based versus empowerment-based initiatives), particularly within the context of Indonesia's geothermal industry. This research gap is significant, as charity-based CSR programs, while effective in securing short-term symbolic legitimacy, may ultimately undermine the long-term sustainability goals. In contrast, empowerment-oriented programs are more closely aligned with sustainability principles but may fall short in generating immediate community support often emphasized in stakeholder-driven CSR strategies.

Accordingly, this study examines whether the characteristics of CSR programs function as moderating variables in the influence of CSR performance on social acceptance. Theoretically, the research seeks to bridge two dominant paradigms in CSR scholarship: business ethics approach—which promotes the creation of a good society (Andreea, 2015; Crisan & Borza, 2015)—with the stakeholder perspective, which views CSR as strategic mechanism to gain support and legitimacy from key stakeholders. In doing so, this study aims to explore how extractive companies can reconcile the pursuit of short-term legitimacy—often achieved through charity-based CSR—with the long-term objectives of sustainable development typically embodied in empowerment-oriented initiatives.

### Theoretical framework

This study employs three key concepts—social acceptance, CSR performance, and program characteristics—to examine whether program characteristics moderate the influence of CSR performance on social acceptance.

#### Social Acceptance

Social acceptance refers to the specific approval of corporate decisions and projects by local stakeholders, including certain community members and local authorities (Myllylä, 2014). Prayogo (2013) conceptualizes corporate-stakeholder social relations as existing along a continuum, ranging from social conflict, social resistance, and social acceptance to more favorable positions such as social support and community-based security. A company's position along this spectrum reflects the overall quality of its relationship with the surrounding community. Positive engagement is typically associated with acceptance to community-based security range, while negative relations manifest as social conflict to social resistance (Hilson, 2012; Hindmars & Alidoust, 2019).

This study conceptualizes social acceptance as the condition in which an extractive company obtains social approval from local communities in its operational areas. Such acceptance is achieved when the company is perceived to provide tangible benefits, responsibly manage adverse impacts, and engage with the community through fair and participatory practices (Parsons et al., 2014). Low levels of social acceptance occur when the company secures a social license to operate and is not actively opposed by the community, yet lacks broader community support. In contrast, high levels of social acceptance—referred to as social legitimacy—are characterized by community recognition, active support, and protective behavior, reflecting the company's alignment with local expectations (Prno & Slocombe, 2012). Within this framework, the SLO represents a minimum level of acceptance, while social legitimacy denotes its most advanced and favorable form (Breakey et al., 2025). The findings of Selo and Ngole-Jeme (2022) are noteworthy, particularly regarding the factors that underpin social acceptance among local communities. Their study revealed that the scale of mining operations (i.e., small versus large) is not a decisive factor in shaping local residents' perceptions of the impacts of small-scale mining. Instead, the research emphasizes the paramount importance of the socio-economic context and historical legacy in determining the degree of social acceptance for these projects.

The following indicators reflect the level of social acceptance of extractive companies by local communities:

1. The intensity of positive interaction between the company and the community;
2. The presence of two-way communication and expressions of support;
3. Mutual trust in the good intention between the company and community;
4. Willingness and regularity in collaborative engagement;
5. Positive perceptions and attitudes toward the company's behavior;
6. Active interest and voluntary participation of community in company programs.

**Table 1**

*Operationalization of Social Acceptance*

Variable	Dimension/Indicators	Category	Scale
<b>Social Acceptance</b>	<p><b>Interaction / Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency and intensity of interactions with company employees, including community liaison officers and general staff.</li> <li>• Perceptions and attitudes toward the company's commitment and seriousness in engaging with the community.</li> </ul> <p><b>Social Support &amp; Cooperation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent to which stakeholders are involved in the company's social governance processes.</li> <li>• Frequency and intensity of cooperative support provided to the company.</li> <li>• Willingness of the community to continue engaging in collaborative activities with the company.</li> </ul> <p><b>Social-Based Security</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of trust the community places in the company.</li> <li>• Willingness of community members to help protect the company from potential disruptions or threats.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absolute (option 1)</li> <li>• Semantic Differential (1 = lowest, 10 = highest)</li> </ul>	Interval

### CSR Performance

Robust CSR performance is widely recognized as a critical factor in demonstrating a company's commitment to stakeholder value and plays a pivotal role in fostering social acceptance among local communities (Boutilier & Thomson, 2011). In this context, CSR is viewed as a corporate strategy aimed to enhance social acceptance by delivering meaningful contributions to, and generating tangible benefits for, local stakeholders. The stronger the company's CSR performance and the more positively it is perceived by the local community in terms of tangible benefits, the greater the likelihood that the company will attain a higher level of social acceptance.

Various dimensions are commonly used to assess the performance or success of CSR program implementation. To evaluate CSR performance in this study, several relevant dimensions are adopted from Prayogo and Hilarius (2012), including:

- a) **Relevance** – the degree to which CSR programs align with the needs and capabilities of the local community.
- b) **Participation** – the extent of community involvement in both the planning and implementation stages of CSR programs.
- c) **Impact** – the direct and indirect, tangible and intangible effects of the CSR program on stakeholders, including improvements in community conditions, fulfillment of basic needs, access to public services, and enhancement of local potential.
- d) **Sustainability** – the ability of CSR programs to continue without corporate assistance, indicating the community's independence and capacity to manage the program using its own resources and capabilities.

The geothermal company examined in this study implements five categories of CSR programs: (1) economic development, (2) health services, (3) education, (4) infrastructure, and (5) environmental protection. The more positively the local community perceives the relevance of CSR programs to their needs, the more engaged and acknowledged they feel during implementation. When the perceived impact of these programs is broad and meaningful, and the potential

for long-term sustainability is evident, the level of social acceptance toward the company is likely to increase significantly.

**Table 2**  
*Operationalization of CSR Performance*

Variable	Dimension/Indicators	Category	Scale
CSR Performance	<b>Relevance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment of the program with community needs</li> <li>• Alignment of the program with community capabilities</li> <li>• Alignment of the program with the problems faced by the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absolute (option 1)</li> <li>• Semantic Differential (1 = lowest, 10 = highest)</li> </ul>	Interval
	<b>Participation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community participation in program planning</li> <li>• Community participation in program implementation</li> <li>• Community participation in program monitoring and evaluation stages</li> </ul>		
	<b>Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program effectiveness in improving the condition of beneficiaries</li> <li>• Program effectiveness in enhancing beneficiaries' access to meet other needs</li> <li>• Program effectiveness in leveraging local potential</li> <li>• Improvement of individual or organizational knowledge and skills</li> </ul>		
	<b>Sustainability</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community's ability to continue the program without company assistance</li> <li>• Community's independence in expanding the program without company assistance</li> </ul>		

### CSR Program Characteristics

CSR programs are typically categorized into two primary types: **charity-based** and **empowerment-based**. Charity-based programs refer to direct assistance to local communities. These programs are generally short-term and are not designed to enhance the sustained capacity of beneficiaries. Their principal objective is to respond to urgent or basic needs through activities such as donations, cash disbursements, distribution of goods (e.g., disaster relief supplies), festive contributions, free healthcare services, educational scholarships, support for orphans and economically disadvantaged families, construction of religious infrastructure, and the provision of school-related materials.

In contrast, **empowerment-based programs** are structured to enhance local communities' quality of life, promote active and participatory citizenship, and improve community welfare (Pimentel, 2016). These programs aim to strengthen the potential and capabilities of beneficiary communities in order to reduce their dependence on the company. Empowerment programs adopt a participatory and collaborative approach, actively involving community members in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Activities under this model include skills training, business development mentoring, and support for MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) empowerment.

The indicators for CSR program characteristics are developed based on the types of activities carried out under each program category. The following table presents the operationalization of this concept:

**Table 3***Operationalization of CSR Program Characteristic*

Variable	Dimension/Indicators	Category	Scale
<b>CSR Program Characteristic</b>	<b>Charity</b>	1. Charity	Nominal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of direct assistance (donations, cash or in-kind grants)</li> <li>• Oriented toward meeting basic needs or addressing short-term issues</li> </ul>	2. Empowerment	

### Method

This study employs a **quantitative method** with an **explanatory objective**, aiming to explain the correlation between variables. Data collection was conducted through a structured survey method, employing a standardized questionnaire administered to selected respondents (Neuman, 2007).

The target population consists of families who are beneficiaries of CSR programs in six villages located within the **ring 1 area** (villages directly affected by the company's operations) of a geothermal company in Pangalengan, West Java. These six villages collectively represent a total population of 21,025 households.

A stratified proportional sampling technique was used to ensure that the sample accurately reflected the population distribution across villages and CSR program characteristics. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in a total of 449 respondents.

**Table 4.***Population & Sample*

	VILLAGE	POPULATION	SAMPLE	CHARITY	EMPOWERMENT
1	Wanasuka	1464	31	16	15
2	Margamulya	5141	110	55	55
3	Banjarsari	1821	39	20	19
4	Pengalengan	5696	122	61	61
5	Margamukti	4638	99	49	50
6	Sukamanah	2265	48	24	24
	<b>TOTAL</b>	21025	449	225	224

Each item in the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions using a semantic differential scale ranging from 1 to 10, treated as an interval scale, allowing the total score to be calculated for each dimension and for each program category. For the **CSR performance variable**, only programs that had been implemented continuously for a minimum of three years were included in the assessment. This criterion was applied to ensure the validity and reliability of measuring key dimensions such as **impact** and **sustainability**, which require sufficient time to be meaningfully evaluated.

Data processing was conducted by constructing a **CSR Performance Index** and a **Social Acceptance Index** using a composite index technique, in which respondent scores were aggregated across items.

The composite index was developed through the following steps:

1. Summing the scores of each question item to obtain a total score per indicator, then calculating the average score to derive the *Indicator Index Score*.
2. Aggregating the indicator index scores to calculate the total score for each dimension, and computing the average score to determine the *Dimension Index Score*.

3. Summing all dimension scores to generate a total score for each program, followed by calculating the average score to obtain the *Program Index Score*.
4. Summing the scores across all programs, with the average value used to represent the overall **CSR Performance Index** and **Social Acceptance Index**.

**Table 5***Index Score Category CSR Performance and Social Acceptance*

Category of CSR Performance	Category of Social Acceptance	Score Range
Very Good	Highly Accepted	8,1 – 10
Good	Accepted	6,1 – 8,0
Fair	Moderately Accepted	4,1 – 6,0
Poor		2,1 – 4,0
Very Poor	Less Accepted	0,0 – 2,0

Data analysis in this study was conducted through three main types of analysis:

### 1. Univariate Analysis

This analysis was used to examine data trends within each variable. It facilitated interpretation of index positions and was aligned with the CSR Performance reading standards developed by Pera et al. (2024).

### 2. Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis was employed to explore the correlation between CSR Performance and Social Acceptance.

### 3. Multivariate Analysis

This analysis aimed to explain the differences in the correlation between CSR Performance and Social Acceptance based on CSR program characteristics—charity and empowerment—as control variables.

The multivariate analysis was conducted using **regression analysis in SPSS**. The following regression model was applied in the data processing of this study:

$$SA = \alpha + \beta_1 CP + e1$$

$$PR = \alpha + \beta_1 CP + e1$$

$$SA = \alpha + \beta_1 CP + \beta_2 PR + e2$$

= CSR Performance

= Social Acceptance

= CSR Programs Characteristics

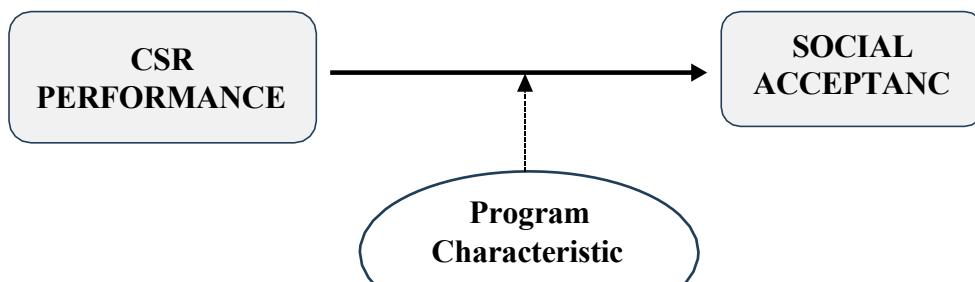
= Constant

$\beta_1$  = Regression Coefficient for CSR Performance

$\beta_2$  = Regression Coefficient for CSR Programs Characteristics

= Error

### 4.1 Analytical Model & Hypothesis



The independent variable in this study is CSR Performance, while the dependent variable is the company's Social Acceptance by the local community. The control variable is the program's characteristics. This research is guided by the two main hypotheses:

1. Higher levels of CSR performance are positively associated with higher levels of social acceptance by the local community. Conversely, lower CSR performance is associated with reduced levels of social acceptance.
2. The strength of the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance differs significantly depending on whether the CSR program is characterized as charity-based or empowerment-based.

## Results and Discussion

### Social Acceptance Index

The level of social acceptance toward the geothermal company located in Bandung Regency, West Java, received an index score of 6.12, which falls under the category of "well accepted" by the surrounding local community. The company holds a relatively positive image in the eyes of the beneficiaries of its CSR programs. Among the three measured dimensions, the highest index score was found in the "Interaction & Communication" dimension (6.47), followed by "Social Support & Cooperation" (6.22), while the lowest score was recorded in the "Social-Based Security" dimension (6.06).

**Table 6**

*Social Acceptance Variable and Dimension Index Score*

Variable & Dimension	Index (Mean Score)
SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE	6,12
Interaction & Communication	6,47
Social Support & Cooperations	6,22
Social Based Security	6,06

The social acceptance index suggests that the intensity of interaction and communication between the company and local communities in the affected villages is relatively well established. However, aspects such as a cooperation, social support, and the community's proactive role in safeguarding the company from external threats remain suboptimal. The local community's acceptance of the company is largely built upon the quality of interaction and collaboration between the two parties (Nyembo & Lees, 2020). The geothermal company is perceived by local stakeholders as a responsive and approachable actor in its community engagement efforts, a perception that contributes positively to its overall social acceptance. Positive interaction and communication have fostered favorable perceptions among local community, such as: (1) "the company demonstrates a genuine willingness to collaborate and listen to community aspirations," and (2) "the company is committed to implementing well-structured and diverse CSR programs."

**Table 7**

*Social Acceptance Dimension and Indicators Index Score*

Dimension & Indicators	Index (Mean Score)
<b>Interaction &amp; Communication</b>	6,47
Frequency/intensity of interactions with employees, social personnel, and company staff in general	6,62
Perceptions and attitudes toward the company's seriousness and commitment	6,32
<b>Social Support &amp; Cooperations</b>	6,22
Tendency to involve stakeholders in the governance of the company's social aspects	6,32
Frequency/intensity of collaborative support	6,18
Willingness to continue cooperation with the company	6,16
<b>Social Based Security</b>	6,06
Level of trust in the company	6,21
Willingness to protect the company from external disruptions	5,90

The social acceptance index scores across various indicators reveal several important patterns: 1) The intensity of interaction and communication indicators is higher than the score for positive attitudes and perceptions indicators. This disparity suggests that although engagement is frequent, it has not yet succeeded in fostering deep trust or a consistently positive image of the company. 2) Community involvement in certain aspects of social governance—such as Environmental Impact Assessment (AMDAL) discussions and grievance mechanisms—received higher scores compared to the intensity of direct collaboration between the company and the community. This indicates that collaboration, particularly in the economic domain, has not yet been evenly distributed across all levels of the local community and remains concentrated among village elites. 3) Trust among community members toward the company is beginning to emerge; however, it has not yet translated into a strong sense of belonging or a willingness to defend the company from external threats. Accordingly, the company has achieved a level of social acceptance corresponding to the third tier in the social relationship index (Prayogo, 2013). The social relations established so far can be categorized as relatively positive, providing mutual benefits and gradually involving local communities in various forms of collaboration (Hilson, 2012; Hindmarsh & Alidoust, 2019; Parsons et al., 2014).



**Figure 2.** Position of the Social Relationship Index between the Geothermal Company and the Local Community

### CSR Performance

The local community's satisfaction with the CSR performance of the geothermal company received an index score of 7.01, which is categorized as "Good." This relatively high score indicates that, in general, the company's CSR programs have been well implemented and their impact has been felt by the communities surrounding the company (Arno et al., 2019).

**Table 8**  
*CSR Performance Variable and Dimension Index Score*

Variabel & Dimension	Index (Mean Score)
CSR PERFORMANCE	7,01
Relevance	8,11
Participation	6,32
Impact	7,93
Sustainability	5,68

The highest CSR Performance index score was observed in the **relevance dimension** (8.11), followed closely by the **impact dimension** (7.93). Both scores are above the overall average CSR Performance index average of 7.01, indicating that the company's CSR programs are well-aligned with the actual problems and needs of the local community. Programs receiving recognition include: (a) educational scholarship assistance, (b) support for agricultural enterprises, and (c) health-related initiatives such as free medical treatment. The high score of the impact dimension (7.93) reflects that the CSR programs have contributed to improving access to secondary and higher education for local youth, enhancing the technical capacity of dairy entrepreneurs in milk processing, improving local health conditions, and supporting the economic well-being of the community.

Conversely, the **participation dimension** (6.32) and the **sustainability dimension** (5.68) received index scores below the average of CSR Performance score (7.01), indicating that these two aspects remain significant challenges in the implementation of CSR programs. The relatively low participation score reflects the limited involvement of local communities during the program planning phase, which is often attributed to the predominantly top-down design of charity-oriented initiatives such as scholarship schemes and micro-loan programs. The **sustainability dimension**, which obtained the lowest index score among all dimensions, highlights the ongoing dependency of community groups on the company as the principal driver of program implementation. For instance, in economic empowerment initiatives, local enterprises continue to rely on corporate assistance to access broader marketing networks. This underscores a critical issue in promoting community self-sufficiency and the long-term sustainability of CSR-driven interventions.

**Table 9**  
*CSR Performance by Program Index Score*

CSR Performance by Program	Index (Mean Score)
Economic Program	6,45
Education Program	7,32
Health Program	7,86
Infrastructure	8,17
Environmental	5,27

Based on the type of CSR program, **infrastructure initiatives** received the highest CSR performance index score (8.17), followed by **promotive health programs** (7.86) and **education-related programs** such as literacy, teacher training, scholarships, and STEM training (7.32). These three types of programs are generally characterized as *charity-based*, involving donations, direct assistance, and short-term solutions to meet the immediate needs of the local community. The scholarship program, for instance, was perceived as highly beneficial, as it provided access to higher education for academically outstanding students from underprivileged families.

In contrast, **economic empowerment programs** (6.45)—such as capacity-building for MSMEs in coffee, mushroom, and livestock sectors—and **environmental programs** (5.27)—including ecotourism initiatives, spring restoration, and forest conservation—received relatively lower index scores. These programs were perceived by the local community as lacking immediate, tangible outcomes and requiring long-term process to demonstrate their full impact. This presents a significant challenge in fostering public understanding and support for programs oriented toward sustainable development. As emphasized by Muthuri, Moon, and Idemudia (2012), empowerment-based programs demand intensive community participation and sustained engagement to achieve meaningful and lasting social transformation.

**Tabel 10**  
*Crosstab for CSR Performance Dimensions and CSR Performance by Programs*

DIMENSION	PROGRAM				
	Economic	Education	Health	Infrastructure	Environment
<b>Relevance</b>	7,36	8,73	8,91	9,26	6,28
<b>Participation</b>	6,93	6,67	6,23	6,57	5,22
<b>Impact</b>	6,68	8,42	9,25	9,53	5,78
<b>Sustainability</b>	5,07	5,64	6,67	6,57	5,17

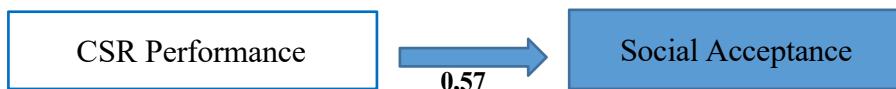
Several notable patterns emerge from the CSR Performance Index by Program and Dimension:

1. The **relevance** and **impact** dimensions consistently obtained the highest scores across all CSR program types, indicating that the programs are generally well-aligned with the local community's needs and potentials. Conversely, the **sustainability** and **participation** dimensions received the lowest scores in all program types, highlighting a significant gap in community involvement and long-term program continuity. The data suggest that program implementation remains predominantly top-down, with limited community consultation and information dissemination, often restricted to a small group of village elites. These findings align with Hindmarsh and Sara (2019), who emphasize that the long-term success of CSR programs is significantly influenced by the extent of community participation, transparency in communication, and the inclusiveness of empowerment processes.
2. **Infrastructure** and **health programs** scored highest across all CSR performance dimensions. This reflects the community's positive perception of charity-based initiatives that provide immediate benefits and address short-term needs. In contrast, **environmental** and **economic empowerment programs**, which are designed for long-term impact, recorded the lowest scores across all performance dimensions. These findings indicate a persistent challenge in the implementation of empowerment-oriented CSR initiatives, particularly in gaining broad community acceptance and active participation.
3. These patterns further indicate that the geothermal company's CSR programs remains predominantly oriented toward **charity-based programs** rather than empowerment-driven initiatives.

#### Bivariate Analysis: CSR Of Extractive Industry For Social Acceptance

**Relational CSR theory**, as an extension of stakeholder theory, emphasizes CSR's instrumental role in fostering and managing constructive relationships between corporations and their local social stakeholders, particularly communities directly affected by corporate operations (Boutilier, 2014). Building on this conceptual framework, the

present study tests the hypothesis that **higher CSR performance is associated with greater social acceptance of the company by the local community.**



**Figure 3.** Correlation Between CSR Performance and Social Acceptance

The findings of this study empirically support the proposed hypothesis, as the regression analysis indicates a moderate<sup>1</sup> correlation (0.57) between CSR performance and the social acceptance index. This suggests that the local community's assessment of the CSR programs they receive significantly influences their level of social acceptance toward the presence of the geothermal company. The relationship between the two variables is positive, meaning that the better the CSR performance, the higher the level of social acceptance of the company by the surrounding local communities.

The moderate correlation score between CSR performance and social acceptance can be explained by several factors: (a) there is a prevailing perception among local residents that CSR program distribution is inequitable, with certain villages appearing to receive disproportionate benefits; (b) the community tends to believe that CSR initiatives predominantly target select groups—particularly influential local leaders who maintain close relationships with company personnel—thus excluding broader community participation; and (c) limited community engagement has led to constrained access to information regarding the design and implementation of CSR programs. Detailed information about CSR program implementation is often known only to specific individuals or organizations that collaborate directly with the company's CSR division. Consequently, social acceptance tends to be limited to particular individuals. These findings align with Nyembo and Lees (2020), who argue that social acceptance is shaped by two groups: vested groups, who hold direct interests or positions, and non-vested groups, who are not directly involved but nonetheless play a significant role in articulating the aspirations of the local community.

**Table 10**  
*Model Summary*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0,57	0,325	0,312

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the  $R^2$  (R Square) value reflects the proportion of variance in the dependent variable—social acceptance—that can be explained by the independent variable, CSR performance. The  $R^2$  value of 0.325 suggests that CSR performance accounts for 32.5% of the variability in social acceptance. Consequently, 67.5% of the variation in social acceptance is influenced by other factors not included in this study. This finding underscores that CSR performance, while influential, is not the sole determinant of community acceptance toward the company; other contextual and relational factors may exert equal or even greater influence in shaping social acceptance.

This condition is consistent with the findings of Moffat and Zhang (2013), who concluded that CSR programs contribute only 26% to the formation of social acceptance. Furthermore, the correlation between CSR performance and social acceptance within the context of short-term, charity-based CSR programs is categorized as moderate. This finding presents a critical challenge, as it exposes a contradiction between the predominantly charitable orientation of many CSR initiatives and the principles outlined in national policies and global CSR frameworks, which advocate for participatory, impactful, and sustainable empowerment-oriented programs.

<sup>1</sup> The categorization of the strength of relationships refers to Healy, Joseph F. (2013). *The Essentials of Statistics: A Tool for Social Research* (3rd ed.), Cengage Learning, Wadsworth, USA, p. 247, as well as Ott et al., (1992). *Statistics: A Tool for the Social Sciences* (5th ed.), Duxbury Press, Belmont, CA. According to these references, correlation coefficients are classified as follows: 0–0.20 (very weak), 0.21–0.40 (weak), 0.41–0.60 (moderate), 0.61–0.80 (strong), and 0.81–1.00 (very strong). A positive correlation (i.e., without a negative sign) indicates a direct relationship, meaning that as the value of the independent variable increases, the value of the dependent variable also increases. Conversely, a negative correlation signifies an inverse relationship—when the independent variable increases, the dependent variable decreases, and vice versa.

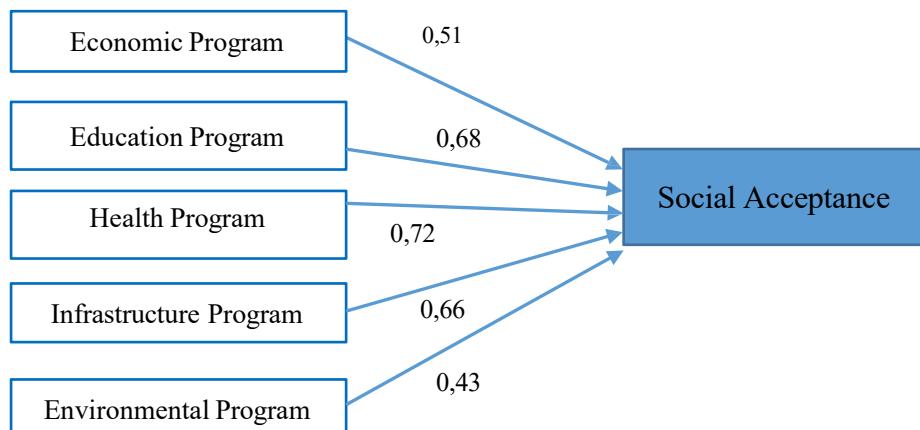
The relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance demonstrates that while CSR is indeed a relatively dominant factor, it must be integrated with other contributing elements. Literature reviews and findings from in-depth interviews indicate that: (a) the existence of two-way communication between the company and the community; (b) opportunities for local employment; (c) effective management of negative environmental impacts; and (d) responsive grievance mechanisms (Kemp & Owen, 2013), are four additional factors that significantly influence social acceptance beyond CSR performance alone.

**Table 11**  
*Correlation Value of CSR Performance (by Dimension)*

Dimension of Independent Variable	Dependent variable	Correlation	Analysis
Relevance	Social Acceptance	0,65	<b>Strong</b>
Participation	Social Acceptance	0,48	<b>Moderate</b>
Impact	Social Acceptance	0,62	<b>Strong</b>
Sustainability	Social Acceptance	0,41	<b>Moderate</b>

Table 11 presents the correlation values between each dimension of CSR performance and the social acceptance of the local community. The *relevance* dimension shows the highest correlation with the Social Acceptance Index (0.65), followed by the *impact* dimension with a correlation value of 0.62. On the other hand, the *sustainability* dimension displays the lowest correlation with the Social Acceptance Index, at 0.41. These findings indicate that, from the perspective of CSR program beneficiaries, the dimensions of relevance (with local community needs) and impact (tangible benefit delivered) are perceived as more influential factors in assessing the company's goodwill and commitment. These two dimensions thus contribute more prominent role in shaping social acceptance toward the company. Conversely, the dimensions of sustainability and participation are not prioritized by the local community, particularly in contexts characterized by pragmatism and a preference for immediate outcomes. As a result, these dimensions exert a comparatively weaker influence on the formation of social acceptance in the study area.

Figure 4 presents the correlation coefficients between CSR performance in each program domain and the Social Acceptance Index. The results show that Health (0.72), Education (0.68), and Infrastructure (0.66) programs demonstrate relatively strong correlations with social acceptance. These findings indicate such programs are well-aligned with community needs, provide tangible benefits, and contribute to building social acceptance. In contrast, economic empowerment programs (e.g., MSME development) and environmental initiatives demonstrate weaker correlations with the Social Acceptance Index. These results further reinforce the hypothesis that charity-based CSR programs—which provide direct and visible short-term benefits—tend to generate higher levels of community appreciation and acceptance compared to empowerment-oriented initiatives, which require sustained engagement, active participation, and a longer timeframe to yield measurable outcomes.



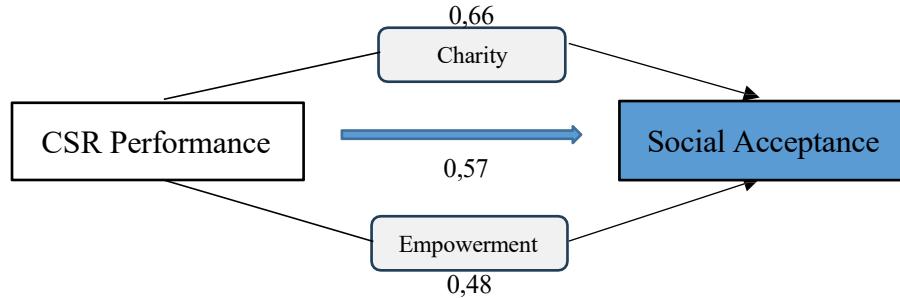
**Figure 4.** Correlation of CSR Performance and Social Acceptance (By Program)

## Multivariate Analysis: The Paradox of Social Acceptance vs. Sustainability

The results of the multivariate statistical analysis support the hypothesis of this study, namely that the characteristics of CSR programs—whether charity-based or empowerment-oriented—moderate the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance. The multivariate analysis reveals statistically significant difference in the

strength of this relationship based on program typology. Specifically, the results show an elaboration specification pattern, indicating that the correlation between CSR performance and social acceptance is notably stronger for charity-based programs and comparatively weaker for empowerment-oriented initiatives.

This disparity can be attributed to community preferences for charity-based programs, which deliver immediate and tangible benefits. In contrast, empowerment programs emphasize participation and long-term sustainability, requiring medium- to long-term commitment from both the company and the community. Consequently, the impact of empowerment-oriented CSR on social acceptance may not be as immediately apparent, thus resulting in a weaker correlation in the short term.



**Figure 5.** Multivariat Specification Correlation Between CSR Performance and Social Acceptance on Different Program Characteristic

These findings align with prior research indicating that charity-based programs are more readily accepted by local communities due to their ability to address immediate and tangible needs (Eweje, 2006; Frynas, 2005). Consequently, local communities often place less emphasis on the participatory and sustainability-oriented aspects that define empowerment-based programs (Andreea, 2015; Lamb & Calain, 2017). This tendency is further reinforced by several contextual factors observed in the study area, including the community's pragmatic orientation, limited educational attainment, low levels of awareness regarding CSR principles, and the lack of exposure to alternative CSR models implemented by other companies. Collectively, these factors support the central hypothesis of this study—that program characteristics significantly moderate the relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance.

**Table 12**  
Multivariat Correlation Between CSR Performance and Social Acceptance

Independent Variable	Dependent variable	Characteristic	Correlation
Relevance	Social Acceptance	Bivariate	0,65
	Social Acceptance	Charity	0,71
	Social Acceptance	Empowerment	0,66
Participation	Social Acceptance	Bivariate	0,48
	Social Acceptance	Charity	0,47
	Social Acceptance	Empowerment	0,52
Impact	Social Acceptance	Bivariate	0,62
	Social Acceptance	Charity	0,73
	Social Acceptance	Empowerment	0,54
Sustainability	Social Acceptance	Bivariate	0,41
	Social Acceptance	Charity	0,41
	Social Acceptance	Empowerment	0,43

This condition reflects an inherent paradox in the implementation of CSR in the extractive sector, positioned between two principal objectives: first, as a stakeholder management strategy to secure social acceptance, and second, as a manifestation of business ethics contributing to social development. Extractive companies, by virtue of operating in resource-rich yet socially sensitive areas, frequently employ CSR as a strategic tool to obtain a Social License to Operate (SLO). To secure social acceptance, companies must accommodate the interests and aspirations of local communities as key stakeholders. In this context, CSR often serves as a mechanism for legitimizing corporate presence and sustaining operational continuity. However, when community expectations are primarily focused on short-term, tangible benefits, companies tend to prioritize charity-based interventions, which are perceived as more effective in diffusing potential

resistance and preventing social unrest that could jeopardize their business activities. On the other hand, excessive reliance on charity-based CSR initiatives to secure social acceptance can lead to community dependence on the company, presenting a significant challenge for long-term development. This situation reflects a paradox in CSR implementation: while companies aim to gain immediate social legitimacy through charitable programs, they are simultaneously expected to uphold ethical commitments to sustainable social development. Such long-term goals involve capacity building, community empowerment, and improved quality of life—outcomes that can only be achieved through CSR programs designed as social innovations with empowerment characteristics. It is therefore unsurprising that the dimensions of impact and sustainability are emphasized as core indicators in various CSR standards, both domestically—such as the Indonesian Ministry of Environment's PROPER program—and internationally, including ISO 26000, the United Nations Global Compact, and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). These frameworks explicitly advocate for corporate engagement in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Andreea, 2015).

This paradox is aligned with the **Legitimacy Gap Theory**, as proposed by Marina Grahovar (in Jane, 2004), which highlights the gap between short-term, symbolic legitimacy and long-term, substantive legitimacy. Charity-based programs may be effective in establishing initial social acceptance but risk weakening community capacity and fostering prolonged dependency. Such an approach risks failing to bridge the legitimacy gap, as it falls short of fulfilling deeper, long-term expectations from stakeholders. These expectations—centered on sustainable development, capacity building, and empowerment—can only be addressed through CSR programs that are empowerment-oriented in nature, as emphasized by Harvey (2016).

### Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a **moderate positive correlation** between CSR performance and social acceptance. Thereby supporting the theoretical assumptions of relational CSR theory, which conceptualizes CSR as a strategic mechanism through which extractive companies secure support from local communities for their operational continuity. However, the moderate strength of the correlation suggests that CSR alone is not a sufficient determinant of social acceptance and must be complemented by other factors to optimize community acceptance.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis shows that the *relevance* and *impact* dimensions of CSR—commonly associated with charity-based programs—are perceived as more important by local communities and thus have a stronger influence on social acceptance. In contrast, the sustainability and participation dimensions—central to empowerment-oriented programs—demonstrate a weaker correlation with social acceptance, particularly in communities characterized by pragmatic orientations and a focus on short-term outcomes.

The results of the multivariate analysis further reinforce the paradox of CSR objectives. The relationship between CSR performance and social acceptance strengthens in charity-based programs but weakens in empowerment-oriented initiatives. This reflects a disconnect between the short-term program preferences of local communities and the direction of national and global CSR policies, which emphasize participatory, empowering, and sustainable approaches in line with the principles of the SDGs.

Thus, this study reveals a **paradox and legitimacy gap** in CSR implementation—the dual role of CSR as a stakeholder management instrument for securing short-term social acceptance, and as a normative expression of business ethics aimed at fostering long-term community empowerment and sustainable development. This paradox demands critical attention, as an overreliance on charity-based interventions may inadvertently reinforce community dependency on corporate actors. In contrast, the transformative potential of CSR—aligned with the principles of sustainable development—can only be realized through inclusive, participatory, and empowerment-driven approaches that cultivate local agency and resilience.

### Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study offers several strategic recommendations for companies, policymakers, and CSR practitioners:

1. **For companies:** CSR programs should be aligned with the pragmatic expectations of local communities, while progressively shifting toward sustainable empowerment-oriented approaches. Companies should also integrate community aspirations into CSR planning, while simultaneously enhancing local capacities to ensure active participation and reduce dependency on corporate support. The proposed integration of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) within the Social License to Operate (SLO) framework is crucial for a nuanced understanding of social acceptance, especially in vulnerable settings. This synergistic approach shifts the focus from solely mitigating business risk to proactively delivering demonstrable and directed local development outcomes (Demajorovic, J., Pisano, V., & Pimenta, A., 2023).

2. **For policymakers:** It is essential to establish a regulatory framework that promotes community participation at all stages of CSR implementation—from planning to evaluation—and to provide recognition or incentives for companies that implement long-term, transformative CSR programs in accordance with national regulations and international CSR frameworks.
3. **For CSR practitioners:** A relational approach should be adopted, positioning CSR not merely as a "firefighting" tool to address company-community tensions, but as a **long-term partnership** focused on building community capacity, strengthening local institutions, and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development objectives.

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## China's Realignment Policy in the Middle East after Iran-Israel Conflict

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The Iran-Israel conflict has caused a major geopolitical shift in Middle Eastern politics, particularly in the context of global powers that are keen to exploit the situation in their own favor. China's role in the Middle East has also changed after the Iran and Israel backlash, as its prime goal and foremost objective is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), for the realization of which Beijing is to play the role of mediator and economic partner. This research conducts qualitative content analyses of secondary data from 2020-2025 to compare China's approach with those of its competitors in the Middle East. China's realignment policy requires it to expand its diplomatic, economic, and strategic influences. China, as a selectively neutral and economically vibrant country, is playing its part in the regional peace-building process and is benefiting from the easy flow of energy and trading routes. It does not adhere to the conventional Western model of interaction based on ideological convergence but is more adamant about economic collaboration. Iran is an emerging strategic partner, and it is the second-largest trading partner of China; however, it also involves the risks of American sanctions, and the pro-sovereignty stance is eroding Israel's political trust. The current study delves into the debate of hegemonic powers that balance themselves in finer struggles over regional conflicts alongside the promotion of strategic interests in a multipolar order of world politics. This is indeed a fresh contribution to modern research on the Middle East, as it does not focus on the war alone but on the Chinese realignment policy that tries to gain influence through a more robust economic way. This study attempts to answer the broader question of How China's realignment policy is helping it gain influence in the Middle East in the presence of its Western competitors, particularly the US after the Iran-Israel conflict.

**Keywords:** China, realignment policy, influence, Middle East, Iran-Israel conflict

Geopolitics in the Middle East, particularly Iran and Israel, have always been rich and confusing. The Iran-Israel conflict is one of the oldest and most central conflicts in the region (Bukhari, 2024). After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Tehran-Tel Aviv relations suffered, and the shift in the overall direction of the strategic partnership deteriorated to a situation of existential rivalry, which drastically transformed the security architecture in the region. This animosity has worsened over decades and has involved proxy wars, nuclear wars, and claims to regional domination. This scenario has intensified after recent militarism, which has brought forth unprecedented circumstances for regional balance and global security (Gupta et al., 2025). The conventional superiority of Western powers, specifically the United States of America (USA), regarding Middle Eastern matters has greatly changed over the past few years (Hahn, 2005). The US vested interest, along with political instability and celebrated war history of Asia, has attracted other players to seek influence. The emerging environment corresponds to remarkable Chinese economic growth coupled with its ambitious BRI, making the Middle East an important melting point between Asia, Africa, and Europe (Rehman et al., 2025). The Chinese position reflects a change in the traditional model of great power interaction in the Middle East compared to other former powers, which commonly depended on military or ideological orientation. Beijing followed a pragmatic strategy based on more economic collaborations, diplomatic neutralism, and win-win situations, making it especially useful during the labyrinth of regional rivalries, simultaneously providing an edge for having a successful partnership with conflicting powers (Xinlei, 2025).

The Iran-Israel conflict provides China with unprecedented opportunities to realize its diplomatic potential for greater involvement in the Middle East. In the presence of less credible mediators and a lack of trust within the region, China's role as a neutral and economically influential actor has gained worth. With its more pragmatic approach to cooperation, Beijing presents alternate frameworks for regional involvement that are appealing to different stakeholders

(Hassan et al., 2025). Economic factors take precedence in the way China handles its Middle Eastern policy since the region is a strategic source of energy resources and a market for goods and services produced in China. Iran, with all its oil and gas reserves (significant despite international sanctions), suits China's interest in energy security. On the other hand, Israel can provide high-level technology and innovation, which can support China's development agenda. Chinese economic pragmatism enables it to attract both parties, even when they are hostile to each other (Naha &, 2025). China's activism in the region has occurred during the world power transition is taking place (Liu & Feng, 2025).

The multipolar posture of world during the 21<sup>st</sup> century introduced options to middle powers and regional actors to formulate more independent foreign policies. China's emergence as world superpower is the result of complex diplomatic policies that offers alternative paradigms of international interactions based on win-win collaborations as opposed to zero-sum games (Doshi et al., 2025). East Asian states have responded to Chinese gambits with different levels of enthusiasm, indicating differences in their strategic calculations and domestic priorities (Sims et al., 2025). Some countries see Chinese engagement as a possibility to diversify their international relations and minimize their partnership with traditional Western partners. Other world leaders are wary of China's long-range plans and the consequences of more economic engagement with Beijing (Zreik & Mohamad, 2025).

The security aspects of the Iran–Israel conflict have ramifications beyond regional boundaries (Al-Khaled, Al-Humaidi & Al-Ro, 2025). Middle Eastern developments are linked to international peace and stability in general in the form of nuclear proliferation issues, the threat of terrorism, and energy security. Their solutions, which are a combination of diplomatic activities and economic venturing in China, have been cited as a test of its potential as a responsible world power (Yaron, 2025). The Iran-Israel confrontation has taken a different twist with the consideration of technological and cyber warfare, which has prompted both countries to develop advanced means of fighting wars that have the potential to alter the military dynamics in the region. China's status as one of the strongest technology hubs generates both opportunities and problems in such an environment, as different parties tend to access technological innovations in China, but issues of technology transfer and security remain (Berdaliyev & Muminov, 2025). The other factor is the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a faster pace of global and regional dynamics evolution in terms of economic relationships, diplomatic priorities, and security concerns. China's control of the pandemic and economic recovery since then has earned it a special status among the comity of nations that remained under great domestic stress and prevented them from gaining significant international interactions.

## Literature Review

Dian and Silvia's work, *China's Blueprint for Global Leadership: GSI, GDI, GCI and Xi Jinping's Vision for the International Order*, discusses the coherent grand strategy of China based on global security, development, and civilizational ideological initiatives that were launched between 2021 and 2023 under Xi Jinping to secure a global position as a leader by challenging the Western-led liberal international order (Dian & Silvia, 2025). The book not only lacks a realistic explanation of the initiatives or in highlighting the inherent risks involved in comparing the Chinese model with those of the Western-led liberal models, but it also fails to fully comprehend the Chinese realignment strategies in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel war.

*China's Changing Role in the Middle East: Filling a Power Vacuum* is a book by Chuchu Zhang that is the most relevant to this study as it has already highlighted in its title the change that was occurring in the Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East and was affecting the approaches of other foreign and regional actors (Zhang, 2025). Although the book is a recent publication, it leaves a gap, particularly in China's realignment policy in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel conflict.

The economic statecraft is used by China in the Middle East as an economic condition for attain diplomatic interests. Zhang Xiaotong's *China's Modern Economic Statecraft: A Wealth-Power Dialect* dwells on infrastructure development and trade-facilitating processes other than conflict resolution and the application of diplomatic intermediation tools. It argues that China's economic statecraft is based on a wealth-power dialectic, where it converts its economic strength into political and diplomatic influence and vice versa. For China, economic diplomacy does not mean trade or investment only, but is a strategic process for attaining its set targets (Xiaotong, 2024). Despite such relevant and important information, the book does not cover the entirety of China's realignment policy in the Middle East and limits its scope to particular events.

The edited work of Vinod K, Aggarwal and Tai Ming Cheung, *The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft* contains a chapter titles, "Chinese Thinking of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft" by Norris, Xu and Hu that sheds light on the effectiveness of Chinese mediation. As neutrality, relevance and leverage are the main

concepts of traditional theory of mediation. China has a special power status being a huge player in terms of economic ties without regional divide and such power status offers chances and also challenges to mediating effectiveness which can be examined further (Norris et al., 2025). Despite such a convincing argument, the article missed the important aspect of Chinese policy and strategy for realignment in the Middle East and that particularly after the Iran-Israel conflict.

Mai Alfarhan Alsudairi and Mohammed in their research article “The Past, Present, and Future of Gulf Sovereign Wealth Fund Investments in China” argues that Chinese engagement in the region is viewed differently by different regional actors, as this depends on the national interest and strategic priorities of different countries across the region. The Gulf states tend to cooperate with the Chinese both in terms of investment and technology as long as they retain security ties with western powers. Countries such as Turkey and Egypt are interested in striking the balance between relations with several international players to ensure strategic independence. Such divergent styles lead to complicated field of diplomacy that China has to linger in (Alfarhan & Mohammed, 2024). The current research is a step forward and proves that China has emerged as the most reliable country for Middle East where it is successfully realigning itself with the various Gulf States after the Iran-Israel Conflict.

### Theoretical Framework

China's realignment in the Middle East after the Iran-Israel conflict can better be understood through the blending of the theoretical frameworks of Allison's Thucydides Trap (Allison, 2017) and Robert Greene's theory of power (Greene, 1998). Both these frameworks elucidate and better explain the logic behind the diplomatic, economic, and strategic behavior of China in a transforming Middle Eastern order.

Graham T. Allison in his book, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Allison, 2017) argue that when the rising power threatens to displace the already established power, structural tensions emerge that raise the probability of miscalculation, rivalry, or even direct conflict. In Middle East, China's expanding presence is occurring at a moment when U.S. influence, although still significant, shows signs of relative decline. To support his theory, Allison further argues that despite deep trade, finance and climatic engagements, the risk remains high if both the power favors confrontation over cooperation. As tiny incident can cause a large scale confrontation, both states should try to manage perception, fear and status.

Robert Greene's theory in his book, *The 48 Laws of Power* (Greene, 1998) provides a micro-strategic, psychological lens for understanding how China pursues influence below the threshold of confrontation. Several of Greene's principles align directly with China's behavior in the Middle East. For instance, Greene theory of power says that powerful people do not need power overtly and instead they create conditions where other needs them, the criteria which is met by China as it do not need an empire but it requires dependence in the shape of trade, commerce, ports, energy routes and telecom infrastructure. The second principle that suits current Chinese engagement is that to “never take sides in unnecessary quarrels and instead appear neutral while maintaining hidden leverage.” As Greene suggests, China neither provoke resistance, nor vies for dominance and works below the threshold of a threat. Another principle of Greene China seems to following is power as the game of patience and is buying time as a weapon by making long-term planning and by demonstrating slow accumulation of leverage. Finally China again adheres to Greene's principle of winning through reputation rather than confrontation and thus to build power

### Method

The methodological approach used in the present study is qualitative content analyses of the extensive secondary research conducted to discuss and compare the policy shifts of China with those of the western players in the Middle East after the recent Iran-Israel conflict. The current research is makes content analyses of books, think tanks' reports, scholarly research articles and press coverage during 2020-2025 for clearly elaborating the adoption of different approaches of China in the Middle East in comparison to its experienced competitors. The evidences provided for this study helps to analyze the events as well as to frame the clear picture.

### Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study include:

1. dependence on publicly available information and possible biases as access to confidential and most recent sources is beyond reach at this stage
2. In the absence of concrete primary sources, reliance on secondary data is a compulsion and;
3. The study does not elaborate on the complex internal relations of Middle Eastern Countries as a whole and only focuses on the economic strength of Chinese policy for realignment.

### **Strategic Location and Changing Diplomacy of China**

China's neutral diplomatic posture during the Iran-Israel confrontation corresponds with Greene's 20<sup>th</sup> Law of power that prohibits from taking sides in local disputes and instead favors neutrality (Greene, 1998, p. 145), enabling Beijing to maintain ties with both adversaries without becoming entangled in their rivalry. Such neutrality simultaneously serves the logic of Graham Allison which says that by avoiding overt alignment, China minimizes the risk of provoking the United States while still expanding its regional influence (Allison, 2017, pp. 150-156). Strategic patience in China's diplomacy as compared to traditional ideological or military approaches reflects the laws of Greene which says that "plan all the way to the end" (Law 29) and "master the art of timing (Laws 35) (Greene, 1998, p. 236 and 291). It also reflects Allison's argument that rising powers often remain cautious and adopt incremental strategies as to avoid unnecessary confrontations (Allison, 2017, pp. 112-118).

It is this reason that China has worked smartly on the plan towards engagement in the Middle East by taking benefit from its status of a large power with no indebtedness or relations with any past colonial power and period (Lons et al., 2019). During the recent Iran-Israel tensions, it has canonized its diplomatic efforts by carefully maintaining its neutral posture to attract all sides (Sardana & Fard, 2018). Chinese leaders have repeatedly stressed on sovereignty, non-interference, and mutual respect as an attractive diplomacy model to all the actors in the region as compared to the western tactics of monopolizing mediation initiatives (Yuliantoro, 2025).

Chinese diplomatic change in the Middle East is very flexible as it follows strategic patience. As traditional approaches were usually based on ideological association or joint military work, China offers practical interaction with economic advantage and appreciation to other partners. Such strategy especially works in the unstable post-conflict scenario where states focus on their interests of attaining peace and development instead of relying on military conflict (Chaziza, 2019)

The formation of Chinese' Middle East Peace and Development Initiative' is a unique approach and strategic diplomatic innovation that offer direct solutions to regional conflicts and simultaneously enhances Chinese strategic interests. Economic development is indeed a pillar of sustainable peace and as proverbial alternative to military action or sanction programs. The Iran-Israel conflict as one of the major challenges demanded alternative cooperation mechanisms for mitigating tension with the passage of time (Dandan, Degang & Zhang, 2021).

The diplomatic ventures of China engaged bitter rivals in diversified activities. The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum and the frameworks of cooperation were thought to be catalyst for initiating dialogue rather than engaging in a traditional conflict mechanism. Such overtures elevated the confidence of China in its diplomatic skills and more responsibility to stabilize the region (Noor et al., 2025).

### **Implementation of BRI and Economic Statecraft by China**

Chinese economic policy that revolves around BRI, investments and technological cooperation is the embodiment of the 11<sup>th</sup> Law of Greene that is based on "learn to keep people depend on you" (Greene, 1998, p. 82). China's structured policy of dependence among Middle Eastern states exactly reflects that. This deepening of China's strategic influence without military commitments with the Middle East that might result in Thucydides' dynamic with the US guarantees success for China. On the other hand Chinese expansion is also geopolitically consequential according to Allison. Economic penetration into areas historically dominated by the US affects the balance of power without direct confrontation by intensifying the structural stress characteristic of power transitions (Allison, 2017, pp. 38-41)

The Chinese economic involvement in Middle East has unprecedentedly increased after the recent Iranian-Israeli conflict because regional instability and uncertainty was not only a challenge but also was a blessing in disguise as it offered an opportunity to extend its influence in the region (Saba, 2025). BRI as a mega project and a result of Chinese economic diplomacy proved a step beyond traditional aid and investment approaches (Junhua Chen, 2023). China boasted economic interactions based on infrastructure development, technology transfer, and trade facilitation actually combined leverage and influence in the Middle East region (Mangi, 2024). Chinese BRI reached to \$19 billion in construction in Middle East, the major share being received by Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Wang, 2025). In 2021, China and Iran signed a twenty-five years cooperation agreement of \$400 billion to make a massive investment in Iranian infrastructure and energy sectors despite the fears of American sanctions and it is through this agreement that Iran was linked to Chinese BRI. China and Israel trade started from \$50 million which reached to \$17-21 billion in 2021-2022 and thus, China emerged as the second largest trading partner of Israel after America, with 30 Chinese companies providing jobs to the local Israeli citizens (Force, 2025).

China has also cautiously balanced its economic interactions for avoiding security problems and for achieving strategic advantages. Investment has been made in a varied way to internationalize across states and to limit relying on one entity for offering multiple avenues of geographical levers (Jin Liangxiang, 2024). It is a venture of that directly run counter to the historical approaches of great power that looked for resources or had pursued some strategic gains.

The firms of China not only proved competitive but also added value to the local demands to meet their financing conditions and technological potentials. As opposed to the political restrictions or scarcity of resources, the western competitors faced, the Chinese economic frameworks worked efficiently and enabled it to establish relations beyond ideological and political boundaries so as to counter the regional rivals (Ruigrok, 2010).

Energy proved another tool of Chinese diplomacy in the Middle East as it navigated through the systems of sanctions and political unsteadiness to offer sufficient resource supply (Yaseen, 2023). China-Iran energy partnership is the prime example of overcoming political differences and has proved that economic pragmatism is not the end because both have developed some mutual dependencies and the incentive of stability and cooperation went all the way. The same example is followed in relations with other gulf countries and regional sources of energy (Amjad Abbas Khan, 2024).

Innovation cooperation and technology transfer have been gaining more and more meaning in the context of Chinese economic activities. It is apparent in this analysis that China has successfully positioned herself as key source of modern technologies to the development of the region as well as enjoying access to the Israeli capabilities to innovation and markets in the Middle East (Tallat Yasmin, 2024). The technological aspect introduces a level of reliance that is based on new ways of interacting and forms a new level of interdependence to existing economic relationships.

### **China Amidst of Multilateral Engagement and Regional Power Plays**

China's engagement with all parties while avoiding formal alliances also reflects Greene's flexibility and strategic ambiguity, particularly his emphasis on adapting to shifting power structures while revealing little of one's long-term intentions (Greene, 1998, pp. 29-35). It helps Beijing to escape entrapment and increases its bargaining power, consistent again with Greene's argument that power is maximized by maintaining room to maneuver rather than becoming tied to fixed positions (Greene, 1998, pp. 215-221). Simultaneously, Allison's framework suggests that it is a rational strategy for a rising power seeking influence in an order still shaped by US security architects. China must expand without appearing revisionist, a balance reflected in its multilateral engagement approach (Allison, 2017, pp. 150-160).

The transformation of regional power status with growing importance of China has radically changed the value that conventional powers had in the Middle East, opening the door to the newly emergent opportunities of diversifying the opportunities of international relationships available to the regional actors (Papageorgiou, 2023). Other countries have also adopted Chinese model of interaction as a source of less relying on their traditional western allies for investment and technology which ultimately is helping the smaller powers to reclaim their autonomy and bargaining position.

This interaction of China and the security problem is a complex issue because it is based on the intricate variants of cooperation and competition. China has not threatened the existing partnerships directly but has endeavored to establish similar institutions and arrangements, which do not require of leaving the already established interactions. This strategy has been useful as it has helped to avoid direct clash with established powers as Chinese power is slowly spreading (Nanda, 2025).

Local reactions to Chinese initiatives are varied as it depends on local politics, strategies and history. Dictatorship regimes also tend to have fewer political complications with Chinese involvement than versions practiced by democracies and economies struggling with sanctions imposed by the West have found a strong economic viability with the Chinese (Ivan Campbell, 2012). Such different reactions provide options to China to work out the strategies of engagement thus subjecting to special needs and interests of the nations.

The discussion identifies that through the regional rivalries, China has been able to secure itself without directly engaging into conflicts. Through the existing fruitful relations with other powers in the region, China provides it with incentives to restrain since this makes China a key partner in the stability of the region. This balance policy is a show of advance diplomatic powers that are beyond the alliance system.

### **China's Peace Initiatives and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

China's slow-paced and confidence-building mediation again supports Greene's 9<sup>th</sup> Law that says that "win through your actions, never through argument" and which emphasizes subtle influence and quiet diplomacy in place of overt declarations (Greene, 1998, pp. 69-75). The avoidance of high-profile mediation protects China's reputation, consistent with 5<sup>th</sup> Law of Greene holding that "guard your reputation with your life," which will help minimize risk of public failure while enabling the gradual accumulation of influence (Greene, 1998, pp. 33-38). Similarly, from Allison's viewpoint, such low-visibility mediation helps avoid provoking war with the US while helping China to gradually emerge as an alternative order-shaping actor, a factor Allison identifies as common among rising powers attempting to avoid premature confrontation with the established hegemon (Allison, 2017, pp. 180-83).

The solution of China to Iran-Israel conflicts signifies to a slow process of confidence-building measures, followed by economic collaboration. Chinese statesmen have not adopted high-profile mediatory initiatives that might cause public failure and instead have chosen to promote dialogue through the lower-key mechanisms of practical cooperation. This patient approach is the result of the strategic culture of China as compared to other international experiences of mediation.

Economic regions and development schemes of China will one day ensure the participation of both Iran and Israel and will give a new direction to the confidence-building measures. Although direct cooperation with China is not possible at the moment, but in future whenever the political environment allows, the collaboration might materialize. Such visionary policy hints towards strategic thinking which is not subjected to the short term diplomatic gains (Kalhor & Fakhar, 2023).

For China, peace is conditional with undictated regional ownership and progress and which is not artificially pushed by any deadline. Chinese in their analysis have learnt from their previous experiences of successful and failed international mediation efforts such as the drawbacks of pressure tactics which create resistant merger than relaxation (Yuan, 2022). As Chinese programs are focused on mutual benefit and voluntary involvement, they establish more feasible resolutions to long-term conflicts.

### **Security and Strategic Alliances of China**

China's avoidance of deep military alliances or arms transfers corresponds to Greene's 18<sup>th</sup> Law and 20<sup>th</sup> Law demanding that "do not build fortresses to protect yourself and avoid isolation" and "do not commit to anyone" (Greene, 1998, pp. 137-145, 127-133). By maintaining strategic ambiguity, China must avoid obligations that could drag it into regional conflicts or undermine its balancing posture. This restraint is also suggested by Allison that direct military involvement accelerates the risk of confrontation, especially when rising powers appear to challenge domains in which the already established power enjoys hegemony (Allison, 2017, pp. 210-218).

The attributes of China can be seen in its regional actions in terms of security where great care is observed to maintain its position in its international relationship. China has primarily stopped arms export and military relationships that causes regional tensions and impact civilian technology and economic relations. For Beijing, the economic power is more sustainable than military relations in modern times.

China has achieved mastery in cybersecurity and has formulated some wonderful technological policies the effects of which have gained more significance on regional security. Both Iran and Israel vied for receiving Chinese technological capacity but China observes caution and extends selective cooperation only to meet genuine security requirements of its clients while keeping the sensitive technologies and information with itself (Creemers, 2022). This focus of China on cybersecurity and controlled technology transfers signifies 31<sup>st</sup> Law of Greene which instructs to "Control the options," ensuring that Beijing retains leverage and influence while minimizing exposure and preserving asymmetric advantage (Greene, 1998, pp. 247-254).

With the passage of time, Chinese regional activism and global strategic rivalry interplay has turned into a more complicated situation because it is causing escalated tensions between the United States and China. The affairs of Middle East weigh high and central in the Chinese foreign strategic policies but it also offers some unknown results of intensification of relations with other stakeholders in the region particularly the United States of America which may result in a kind of adventure and mishaps in the long run. Regional stability on the other hand will be in favor of China as it would curb American military dominance in the region and the role of America in the local economies.

### **China's Approach to Economic Integration and Development Partnerships**

China as one of the massive changes has promoted the economic integration of the Middle East over a period of time because its economy always remained dependent on foreign aid and exportation of their resources by the dominant foreign stake holders (Zoubir, 2017). Chinese BRI and its related projects have culminated in opportunities for China to initiate interregional cooperation mechanisms as to define the political boundaries afresh at some point. Such economic integration frameworks are based on interdependent relationships that enabled the partner states to remain stable and cooperative (Liu, 2020).

Chinese development models not only give it leadership roles but also ensure that regional integration can be achieved without political dominance and only to offer immediate benefits. Chinese projects are a step in that direction as it promises the regional countries infrastructures, technology sharing and trade facilities which indeed will culminate in effective relationship formation as compared to the conventional diplomatic activities meant for political agreements (Xinhua, 2023). The regional leaders readily opt to get benefits from such generous offers for their countries and for their people.

The financial institutions of China allocate an important source of capital development with easy, competitive and flexible terms and conditions to the regional projects to meet the local needs. Such finances of China are again a success story as compared to the traditional international financial institutions which holds the seeds of political maneuvering and exploitation. This approach makes China a great bargaining power to determine regional development priorities.

### **Chinese Technological Networks of Cooperation and Innovation**

Chinese regional relations based on technological cooperation have grown so rapidly that it has formed new interactions beside the conventional economic cooperation frameworks. China's rise as a major superpower in technology has also increased the interest of the regional players to have a hand on the sophisticated systems for boasting their economies and sources of beefed up securities. Chinese technology are sophisticated to the level that it helps the receiver countries as well as it promotes the strategic goals of China (Chunjiao Yu, 2020).

The technological conglomerates of China in the Middle East include the installation of telecommunications infrastructure, artificial intelligence and digital platforms for promoting economic capabilities which indeed results in long-term dependency relationships as against the conventional trade, commerce and investment relationships (El-Kadi, 2024). Technology-based relations are more durable and enduring as compared to the traditional political cooperation of vested selfish interests.

The China innovation partnership with regional partners has developed new paradigms of technology development as integration of Chinese capabilities of manufacturing and regional skill and market access. The Chinese-Israel technology relations can serve as an example of how the economic collaboration can be beyond political differences in case the benefits of cooperation are high. China is also surrendering to similar patterns of its relations with other regional innovation centers.

### **Challenges and Limitations of Chinese Engagement**

Although there has been great success, the Chinese presence in the Middle East has to contend with massive obstacles that limit the power of Beijing and its proceedings. As can be seen in the analysis, frequent hurdles facing Chinese efforts that need multilateral involvement are political conflicts among the regional players. Even in terms of the current situation, it is very hard to establish the framework of interaction with competing powers as China could continue the independent relations with them but still learn the interaction (Junhua Chen, 2023).

This reduces the capacity of China to react to every regional demand and expectation due to limited resources and other priorities. It is equally true that Chinese role is not enough to act as a replacement of traditional aid and other sources of cooperation which the regional actors still need. Middle East is bound to accept cooperation from USA or other western nations even when the China as alternative is available to them. Another important barrier for China's close interaction with Middle Eastern states is the language, culture and inadequate local knowledge (Zafar, 2025). These barriers and shortcomings affect the overall interaction despite the fact that many Chinese officials have adapted impressively to the Middle Eastern geo-political and geo-economic environment. Such barriers of course can reduce the depth and durability of Chinese relationships with the regional states of Middle East. Beside technology and cybersecurity fields, China can cooperate with the Middle Eastern states in future are education and cultural exchange programs but that is only possible if China overcome those linguistic and cultural barriers.

Another barrier in relations of China with Middle East is its domestic politics that create certain gaps and that might hinder the future relations. Its policies particularly towards Chinese Muslims of Xinjiang Province and the human rights situation are a major source of concern for some partners in the Middle East. These internal factors in the long run have the potential of limiting the Chinese diplomatic autonomy in case there is increased pressure in the region (Tallat Yasmin, 2024).

China may exploit the changing circumstances in the Middle East to fulfill its own strategic interests. The state of insecurity in the region demand more increased Chinese engagement in the region for securing and protecting its investments, partnerships and dominance as compared to other external stake holders. There is also a possibility of stabilization in the regions which might reduce Chinese engagement but still the developing possibility would be of a more efficient economic integration (Noor et al., 2025).

The nature of China-US global competition will decide the future of Chinese regional interest. The strategic rivalry of both these super powers in Middle East may result in the formation of new political and security alliances which ultimately may result in a limited space for Chinese diplomacy and even an increased pressure for doing more. China on the other looks for ways to avoid such exclusiveness and instead develop closest and stronger relations.

As a regional engagement tool, China benefits from its new technologies and digital economy because its technology particularly offers long-term competitive strength that help boast other economic resources. The increased demand of technological cooperation allows the greater influence of China through innovation partnerships. Besides, environmental issues and climate change also demand the increased role of China as it trespasses the conventional political boundaries. Such issues and problems require accessible solutions to the local issues which the Chinese technological advancement can help to address. Any sort of collaboration in environmental sphere will have its impact on the overall politics in the region.

The balanced approach of China based on economic relations, diplomatic abstinence, and slow accumulation of relation makes it a key geopolitical actor in the Middle East. Such a strategy of China again runs counter to the traditional military interventions, ideological orientations, or any kind of alliances. China has displayed its diplomatic potential and skill in effectively managing the Iran-Israel rivalry by maintaining good relations with both countries (Kalhoro & Fakhar, 2023).

The successful Chinese economic policy in the Middle East is a wonderful example of respecting local behaviors, cultures and religious orientations. There is no doubt in that military strength and protection assurances are still very important but economic and technological integration as well as development projects could ensure long-term influence (Creemers, 2022). Chinese pragmatic cooperation with developing countries has demonstrated its usefulness as compared to the previous motifs of imposing ideas on others or asking them to enter into exclusive relationships. Chinese model offers a flexible multi-alignment approach as compared to the western closed alliance structures.

The active countries of Middle East would adopt more systematic approaches of engagement with China to maximize mutual benefits, strategic autonomy and flexible multi-alignment inclusive relationships. Such institutional arrangements would be made to facilitate multilateral cooperation as against the conventional patterns of rivalry and instead help in fostering more international interactions, for instance, educational cooperation, cultural exchange programs, and language training will increase durability of China-Middle Eastern relations.

China's increased influence could be noted by those international organizations and established powers that do not see relations with the lenses of competition only but for entering into positive relationships (Xinhua, 2023). In order to exploit it, China can forge structures of cooperation in regional development schemes, mediation programs, and management of security issues to meet local needs of the partners and strategic complications because global organizations would not compromise on their principles or activities and instead would design such strategies to meet the diplomatic offenses of China.

### **Conclusion**

China has emerged as a critical and assertive participant in Middle Eastern geopolitics during the recent Iran-Israel conflict, utilizing economic connectivity and diplomatic restraint to consolidate its regional presence. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and related diplomatic platforms, Beijing has offered alternative modes of regional engagement based on mutual gain, non-interference, and sovereignty as emphasized by Greene on indirect power, reputational influence, and quiet consolidation rather than declared hegemony. By prioritizing development-oriented

partnerships rather than ideological interventions, China has positioned itself as a dependable actor in a politically unstable post-conflict environment where regional states sought flexible cooperation and diversified external relationships over rigid alliances or militarized solutions.

China's expanding presence in the Middle East carries significant implications both for regional dynamics and global governance as well as shifting patterns of power. As the region becomes more receptive to economic collaboration over security-centric engagement, China's strategy reflects Allison's logic of a rising power by carefully maneuvering within a system still shaped by US security architects. Instead of directly challenging Western influence, Beijing's slower economy driven engagement correspond to Allison's argument that rising powers often avoid rapid or confrontational moves to reduce the risks associated with structural stress in power transitions. At the same time, its practice of cultivating parallel relationships with states divided by ideology or rivalry reflects Greene's laws of strategic ambiguity and non-commitment, enabling China to maintain influence without becoming entangled.

Yet, China's realignment strategy also faces limitations that reflect both theoretical frameworks of Greene and Allison. Greene warns that power built on ambiguity must be constantly managed to avoid overextension, and China's diplomacy remains limited by internal political considerations, cultural barriers, and reputational vulnerabilities. Similarly, Allison suggests that China cannot escape the structural pressures of great-power competition in the shape of US–China rivalry in the Middle Eastern political space, and any deepening of Chinese influence involves the risks of confrontation from Washington or its local allies.

The future of the engagement of China in the Middle Eastern will be determined by evolving regional alignments, global strategic competition and Beijing's domestic political capacity to sustain its current trajectory. Its shift from long-standing non-intervention to more active involvement generates both opportunities and suspicions among regional actors. The Chinese-Iranian strategic partnership may cause US sanctions while relations with Israel are increasingly strained by Beijing's pro-sovereignty rhetoric and Iran's strategic relevance. During the Iran-Israel confrontation, China's attempt to maintain neutrality while still defending Iran's right to self-defense and urging for restraint and dialogue reflected an effort to avoid alienating either side. This balancing act is emblematic of Greene's principle of avoiding unnecessary quarrels and Allison's insight that rising powers must manage perceptions to prevent escalation with dominant powers.

Overall, China's realignment policy is rooted in economic statecraft, cautious diplomacy, and the strategic patience (highlighted both by Greene and Allison) has allowed Beijing to steadily expand its influence in the Middle East, often at the expense of its Western competitors. By leveraging economic integration rather than force, and by cultivating ambiguity instead of formal alliances, China continues to reshape the regional order in ways consistent with both Greene's subtle mechanics of power and Allison's structural theory of rising-state behavior.

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## Self-reflection and Gender Dynamics: Mapping Perception and Reflective Levels of Prospective Teachers of B. Ed (Hons) program

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Self-reflection is an introspective process that helps to lead a sound consideration of personal and professional experiences. The current inquiry intended to investigate the perceptions of prospective teachers about self-reflection and quantitatively mapped their current reflective levels using a validated self-reported questionnaire aligned with Valli's (1997) typology. The study followed a cross-sectional survey method. 1120 B.Ed. (Hon's) prospective teachers from 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters from public sector universities were involved across Punjab using a census approach. The questionnaire was also validated. The experts ensured the content validity and the overall CVI was 0.86. While construct validity was ascertained through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, to confirm alignment with the theoretical constructs. An alpha coefficient of 0.89 indicates robust scale reliability. Data were summarised and compared using statistical analysis. The results revealed that most of the prospective teachers were aware about their self-reflection but majority of them were at preliminary level of reflection. These findings highlighted that prospective teachers need more guided support to reflect more deeply. Thus, the study concluded that integrating structured reflective practices into teacher education programmes can enhance self-awareness and promote deeper reflective levels, and support the development of effective and reflective practitioners.

**Keywords:** self-reflection, levels of reflection, critical reflection, reflective practitioner

Self-reflection and the reflective practices play a vital function in pre-service teacher education, fostering self-reflective competencies and supporting accreditation standards. As John Dewey (1933) asserts that reflection is an active, consistent, and thoughtful examination of beliefs that supports future conclusions. Lee and Mori (2021) described that reflection helps an individual to interconnected ideas, self-monitoring and professional growth. Schon (1987) has theorized that reflective practice as a solitary and individualized activity. Gläser-Zikuda et al., (2024) argue that reflective practice is a social process used to identify professional gaps and connect theoretical concept with actual classroom practices. This reflective process empowers educators to utilize their learning experiences according to their personal, social and emotional needs and create a dynamic teaching environment. In the teaching profession, this enables teachers to plan, organize, and think critically (Harvey et al., 2025).

The reflective practices like peer observation, micro teaching, reflective journal writing, and action research promote self-reflection and allows the PTs to lift up their confidence and examine holistically the teaching learning environment (Mohammad & Rashid, 2022). During teaching practicum PTs (Prospective teachers) are observed by their peers and supervisors, they guide and support them to reflect on their thoughts and values. Journal writing enhances PTs' self-awareness by helping them articulate thoughts, critically examine judgments, and gain deeper personal and professional insights (Karnieli-Miller, 2020). However, the core aspects of reflection such as describing experiences, sustaining open-mindedness, demonstrating responsibility and wholeheartedness are often overlooked in teaching practices across all levels in Pakistan (Zahid & Khanam, 2019).

Teacher educators are not appropriately instructing the reflective strategies to Pts to improve their reflective levels (Huma, 2017). Moreover, all the Educational Policies of Pakistan focused that there is a dire need to enhance teaching and learning standards remains a significant challenge, especially in adapting to diverse teaching conditions and approaches (UNESCO, 2011). Therefore, it is essential for the professional advancement of PTs, engage in, to reflect on their practices and collaborative inquiry through teaching practicum. The current study examines insights of PTs about self-reflection, their reflective levels, and influence of gender, to understand how these factors shape the growth of their specialized abilities as professional experts.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

This investigation focused to attain the preceding key objectives to:

1. Investigate the perception and level of self-reflection of PTs for enhancing their professional development.
2. Determine the level of self-reflection of PTs relating to the gender, qualification, and semester-wise.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were articulated to align with objectives.

1. What do PTs perceive their self-reflection and its levels for enhancing their professional development?
2. How do the perception of self-reflection and level of reflection differ between male and female PTs?
3. How do the perception of self-reflection and reflective levels vary between PTs based on their qualifications?
4. How do the perception of self-reflection and reflective levels of PTs change across semesters?

### **Review of Literature**

Dewey (1933) introduced the notion of reflection, has evolved significantly over time, this comprehend variations including self-reflection, reflective self-analysis and reflective practice. Initially it theorized as deliberate thought to address challenges, now holds an essential place in teacher education, fostering professional growth by bridging theory and practice. Educators can critically reflect on their practices and adapt to a variety of classroom needs through self-reflection. Scholars have different perspectives on reflection. Some, like Schon (1987), study how reflection takes place, while others concentrate on what teachers reflect on, such as strategies or student engagement. However, it is still essential for enhancing instruction and resolving issues in education (Suryani, 2024).

### **Self-Reflection in Teacher Education**

Self-reflection entails carefully examining teaching experiences. It encourages educators to accumulate their work, analyze results, and modify tactics for significant development (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987). Researchers emphasized the cyclical nature of reflection, promotes ongoing professional development. Karnieli-Miller (2020) highlights its critical role in teachers' professional development by stating that its main goals are to enhance learning quality, expand teaching strategies, and deepen understanding.

Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) presented non-traditional methods of reflection, like guided imagery to assist pre-service teachers in challenging assumptions and making connections between them and classroom realities. Loughran (2002) described three phases of reflection anticipatory, contemporary, and retrospective as supporting critical evaluation throughout the entire teaching process. In a similar vein, Jay and Johnson (2002) proposed a description, comparison, and critique model of reflection to assist educators in identifying problems, looking into alternatives, and putting solutions into practice (Dayan et al., 2022).

The importance of sociocultural context in influencing reflective practice is highlighted by Gläser-Zikuda et al., (2024), while Zhou et al., (2025) highlight its critical role in addressing classroom challenges, incorporating feedback during teaching, and fostering professional development. In order to critically examine the dynamics of teaching, practitioners frequently engage in reflection. However, a number of studies have questioned Pakistan's pre-service teacher education programs' authenticity, teamwork, and institutional support, which may impede the growth of reflective practices (Zahid & Khanam, 2019). Addressing these gaps requires examining perceptions of PTs' and current reflective levels to inform and strengthen future teacher education programmes.

### **Typologies of Reflection**

The typology serves as a framework for erecting reflection structures. It is adaptable enough to accommodate evolving modes of thinking, used as a tool to guide deeper reflection and analyze the levels of reflection (Minott, 2008). Various educationists have discussed significant typologies or level of reflection, including Van Manen (1977), Lasley (1992), Colton and Sparks- Langer (1993), Taggart & Wilson (1996) and Lee & Loughran (2000).

### **Valli's Typology of Reflection:**

Valli (1997) developed a typology based on Van Manen (1977) and Shon's (1987) framework of reflection. She identifies five reflective levels: technical, reflection in/on action, deliberative, personalistic and critical reflection. Valli's typology of reflective levels was chosen because it highlights both *what* teachers reflect on and *how deeply* they engage with their reflections. The content of self-reflection relates to the teacher's consideration, whereas the quality of reflection focuses on how they interpret their thought processes which guiding their decisions.

**Technical reflection:**

This level focuses on the practical aspects of instructional strategies, tactics, and methods that are typically guided by established standards and research.

**Reflection-in/on-action:**

At this level, educators must consider their teaching choices, convictions, and classroom interactions while considering both their personal experiences and the context.

**Deliberative reflection:**

This level considers a variety of instructional components, including students, curriculum, teaching strategies, and classroom organization. Teachers' opinions, experiences, and peer discussions influence these decisions.

**Personalistic reflection:**

This type of reflection emphasizes both professional and personal development. It emphasizes fostering relationships between teachers and students that are sympathetic and assisting students' holistic and emotional growth

**Critical reflection:**

At this level, educators are encouraged to discuss the moral, social, and political aspects of education, with a focus on equity, moral instruction, and helping underrepresented groups.

In support of Valli (1997), Van den et al., (2023) warn against considering these levels as hierarchical, pointing out that every type of reflection has its own worth. In addition to being useful for evaluating reflective depth and analyzing participants' reflective abilities, the typology is also approachable and practical. This study, which draws inspiration from Dewey, Schön, and Valli, sees reflection as a shift from basic awareness to more deliberate, thoughtful inquiry. It assumes that how aspiring teachers develop as reflective practitioners is influenced by their perceptions and the role gender plays in shaping them collectively. The framework merely describes how these elements support their development of reflection.

**Gender Dynamics and Reflective Levels**

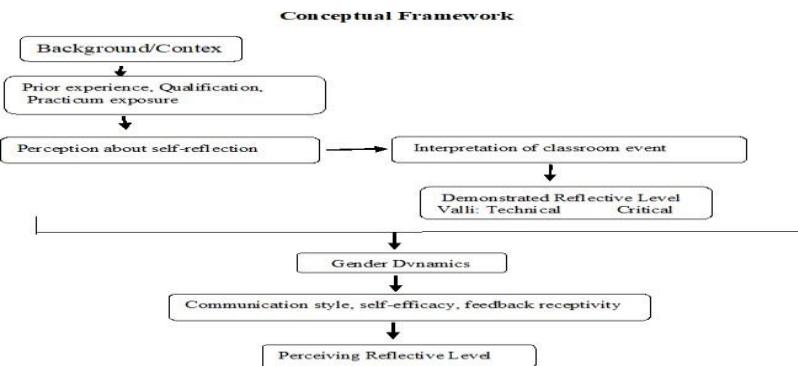
Gender diversity reflects the range of psychological characteristics and viewpoints that exist between genders. As reflective practitioners, educators observe difficulties in the classroom, challenge their methods, and look for ways to make improvements (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987; Valli, 1997). According to Almusharraf and Almusharraf (2021), gender influences how PTs reflect, with women frequently exhibiting more in-depth reflective practices. Gendered interactions, dialogue-based learning, and social expectations all impact the transition from technical to critical reflection in Pakistan (Nasur et al., 2024).

Gender-based mapping of initial reflective levels promotes fair and significant reflective development. Gender, experience, and qualifications did not significantly affect reflective levels, according to Khan et al., (2022) study of 60 instructors at a Turkish university. On the other hand, Sammaknejad and Marzban (2016) found that while experienced male and female teachers generally showed similar reflective attitudes, female teachers tended to participate more favorably in self-reflection and classroom management, with experienced women exhibiting the highest reflective awareness.

**Conceptual Framework**

The framework, is based on Dewey, Schön, and Valli, shows how PTs' prior experience, credentials, and practicum exposure influence their perceptions of self-reflection, directing how they observe and understand classroom events. Their reflective levels are determined by these processes (Valli: technical → critical), and the form and depth of reflection are moderated by gender dynamics like communication style, self-efficacy, and feedback receptivity.

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework



## Method

The present study employed a descriptive, quantitative design using a cross-sectional survey to explore perception of prospective teachers about self-reflection and their reflective levels. This involves collecting data from all persons at a specific moment in time and offer a snapshot of prevailing behaviors and attitudes within a population. These studies typically precede a starting point for cohort studies (Cohen et al., 2008). Therefore, this design was chosen to collect the data from the current population of B. Ed (Hon's) from different semesters at single point at the same time.

The population of the study were the PTs of B. Ed (Hon's) from the province of Punjab. Only six public sector universities were selected based on their B.Ed. (Hon's) enrolment over the past five years. Only public universities were selected due to their standardized B.Ed. (Hons) programs under HEC guidelines, which provide reliable comparable practicum experiences, curriculum design, and assessment practices across institutions. Private universities differ widely in structure, creating variations that could affect the reliability of the data. Therefore, All PTs enrolled in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters of public sector universities in Punjab were included in the study.

All the PTs of these semesters have at least one-time teaching practicum experience in school during their course of study in their previous semester. This was employed to ensure fair representation of key subgroups, based on demographics such as semester, gender, and prior qualifications and supports meaningful conclusions (Gay et al., 2012).

**Table 1**

*Demographic detail of subgroups of the study (N= 1120)*

Subgroup	F	P(%)
<b>Semester</b>		
4	247	22%
6	416	37%
8	457	41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	155	14%
Female	965	86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Qualification</b>		
F. A	722	51%
F. Sc	398	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1120</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Tool for data collection

The data was collected through QASRPL (Questionnaire for assessing self-reflective perceptions and Level). A deductive approach was adopted to develop the questionnaire. Valli's (1997) framework was utilized to investigate the perception about self-reflection and reflective levels of prospective teachers. This framework was based on Van Manen (1977), Shon (1987) themes of reflection. Valli (1997) describes five levels of reflection. These are Technical reflection, Reflection in/on action, Deliberative reflection, Personalistic reflection and Critical reflection. Keeping in view the major constructs, an extensive literature was reviewed and sub-constructs were identified. The researcher developed items according to the constructs and sub-constructs about the self-reflection and their reflective levels. Initially 80 number of

items were developed. The questionnaire statements were reviewed, revised and double-barreled statements were eliminated, only 64 were persisted. A five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, was administered to gather responses. The QASRPL consisted into 2 parts. The part: A is related to the informed consent, demographic information, Part: B consisted on 42 items. The item no (1-5) statements related the concept of self-reflection and next (9-42) were rendering to the Valli's (1997) reflective levels.

### Pilot testing

A pilot study was conducted with 50 B.Ed (Hon's) PTs from the target population, excluding the main sample, to enhance the credibility of the tool (Bell, 2014). The Cronbach's alpha in SPSS 25.0 was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. Only 64-items questionnaire was piloted to check clarity and consistency. Reliability analysis refined it, retaining 42 clear, reliable items for the study. It indicates high internal consistency of .089. The adequate values between .70 and .90 are generally considered acceptable (Norman, 2010).

**Table 2**

*Reliability of the QASRPL*

Total items	Cronbach Alpha
42	.89

### Validation of Instrument

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was applied to ensure item relevance, with the construct. Six field professionals assessed each item of the questionnaire based on appropriateness, representativeness, precision, and simplicity, through a four-point ranging from (Not relevant=1 to High relevant =4). Keep in view experts' response, overlapping statements were eliminated, retained components were refined to better reflect the construct. The overall CVI was 0.86, above the adequate benchmark of 0.80 (Polit & Beck, 2007).

### Construct Validity

To ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis were used as part of the construct validity process. EFA helped to identify the underlying structure of the tool, while CFA tested the fit of the proposed model, confirming its theoretical alignment and measurement accuracy (Brown, 2010). This process also helped to reduce the number of items and clarify the connection among observed variables and underlying constructs. To examine and confirm the construct validity of the instrument, EFA was carried out in SPSS and CFA in AMOS.

**Table 3**

*Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin and Bartlett's Test*

KMO statistics (Sampling Adequacy)	.872
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square)	11,865.24
Degree of freedom	1900
Significance (P-value)	.000

Results mention in the above table show that KMO value is .872 indicated that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis, while a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed sufficient correlations among items ( $\chi^2 = 11,865.24$ ,  $df = 1900$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Kaiser (1974) described that a strong level of adequacy lies between the values of 0.8 and 0.9 which confirms that the data were well-suited for exploring the underlying factor structure.

**Table 4**

*Results of CFA Model Fit*

Index	CMIN/DF	RMR	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Model	1.87	0.029	0.942	.918	.934	.041
Results						

Sample size 350

The CFA results show a strong model fit. It was assessed using standard indices as recommended by Byrne (2001) and Hair et al., (2010). The final model, consisting of 42 items, presented a suitable model fit: CFI (0.934), TLI (0.918), and IFI (0.942) all exceeded the 0.90 threshold. The CMIN/DF (1.87) and RMSEA (0.041) met the accepted thresholds limits, and the RMR (0.029) was well below 0.05, indicating minimal residual error. These results confirm that the remaining items align well with the theoretical structure and support the model's validity.

### Ethical Consideration and Data Collection

Before collection of the data, researcher received ethical approval from the university's research board. Prior permission was also secured from the administrations of the six participating public universities. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires and followed all ethical protocols. Participants were fully informed about the study's aims, assured that their participation was voluntary, and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. QASRPL with five response options from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was employed for its clarity, ease of use, and effectiveness in capturing nuanced opinions. This format allowed for practical analysis and meaningful comparison of participant responses. Only 1120 respondents out of 1250 responded and the response rate was 89%.

### Results

This section presents the analysis of data collected from B.Ed. (Hon's)PTs. Descriptive statistics, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to examine their perceptions of self-reflection and their current levels of reflection. Likert scale data were considered as interval to allow inferential statistics (Cohen et al, 2008). Thus, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess the assumption of normal distribution before applying inferential statistics to treat Likert scale data.

**Table 5**

*Shapiro-Wilk test*

Test	N	Shapiro-Wilk W	Sig. (p)
	1120	0.987	

The above table result generated a significance value of .078, that is above than the conventional threshold of .05, showing that the data exhibit an acceptable level of normality. Therefore, it was appropriate to proceed with parametric tests, including t-tests and ANOVA, to examine the variances in perception and their reflective levels regarding demographic variables. To highlight PTs' responses to each statement, data arranged into tables, aiming to identify variations in response levels across participants.

**Table 6**

*Perceptions of PTs about self-reflection*

.no	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un. D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	SD
1	Self-Reflection is a process of reflecting on oneself to analyze experience	212(19)	433(39)	158(14)	168(15)	149(13)	3.34	1.31
2	It helps to analyse ones thinking and practices	265(23)	473(42)	105(9)	152(13)	125(11)	3.5	1.30
3	Self -reflection helps to increase self-awareness	360(32)	439(39)	133(12)	102(9)	86(8)	3.6	1.38
4	It involves a cyclic process of problem identification and plan of action	214(19)	422(37)	154(14)	148(13)	182(16)	3.30	1.35
5	It helps to develop personal and professional ability	258(23)	440(39)	150(13)	98(9)	174(15)	3.0	1.34

**Table 7**

*Perception of PTs' about Technical-level of reflection*

S.no	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un. D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	S. D
6	I identify students' learning problems	242(22)	410(37)	138(12)	168(15)	162(14)	3.3	1.30
7	I analyze students' learning problems	194(17)	398(36)	198(18)	144(13)	186(16)	3.24	1.32
8	I support pupils to identify their learning difficulties	285(25)	426(38)	165(15)	159(14)	85(8)	3.5	1.22
9	I adapt informed decisions to progress teaching	241(21)	309(28)	178(16)	187(17)	205(18)	3.1	1.31

10	I discuss with colleagues to guide decisions for students' learning.	221(20)	386(34)	152(14)	214(19)	147(13)	3.2	1.33
11	I effort to know the varied demands of learner	226(20)	362(32)	119(11)	197(18)	216(19)	3.0	1.14
12	I admit several resolutions of learning complications	197(17)	343(31)	186(17)	258(23)	136(12)	3.1	1.01
13	I appreciate students to ask questions	228(20)	353(32)	180(16)	235(21)	124(11)	3.3	1.34

**Table 8***Perceptions of PTs about level of Reflection in/on Action*

S. No	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un. D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	S. D
14	One-way communication is a learning hindrance	221(20)	294(26)	189(17)	156 (14)	260(23)	2.90	1.29
15	I find out chances for students' learning	196(18)	262(23)	178(16)	210(19)	274(24)	2.65	1.45
16	I monitor students' involvement in learning tasks	188(17)	247(22)	168(15)	246(22)	271(24)	2.80	1.43
17	I adjust my lesson based on students need	167(15)	242(21)	169(15)	248(22)	294(26)	2.56	1.42
18	I assemble my class observation to analyse my teaching	183(16)	225(20)	182(16)	244(22)	286(26)	2.49	1.44
19	I record journaling to reflect on teaching experiences.	162(14)	251(22)	174(16)	237(21)	296(26)	2.41	1.33

**Table 9***Perceptions of PTs about Deliberative level of reflection*

S.no	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un. D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	S. D
20	Journaling helps to recognize areas for progress in teaching	143(12)	254(23)	182(16)	247(22)	294(26)	3.02	1.42
21	I develop plan to support my teaching	157(14)	239(21)	182(16)	245(22)	297(27)	2.7	1.41
22	I utilize pupils' feedback to progress in instruction	221(20)	294(26)	189(17)	156 (14)	260(23)	2.6	1.38
23	I observe all indications that encounters the instructional process	254(23)	286(25)	161(14)	175(16)	244(22)	3.12	1.32
24	I observe that each student reflects when guided properly	295(26)	337(30)	164(15)	126(11)	198(18)	3.21	1.39
25	I identify collaborative learning improves teaching	214(19)	422(37)	154(14)	148(13)	182(16)	3.0	1.25

**Table 10***Perceptions of PTs about Personalistic level of reflection*

S.no	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un. D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	S. D
26	I communicate advanced procedures with peers to enhance students learning	125(11)	167(15)	187(17)	298(27)	343(30)	2.31	1.36
27	I follow expert's opinion for professional growth.	95(8)	176(16)	165(15)	328(29)	356(32)	2.20	1.31
28	I identify how learning process effect my teaching.	84(7)	145(13)	192(17)	311(28)	388(35)	2.21	1.27

29	I up-to-date research to improve instructional process.	58(5)	125(11)	220(20)	348(31)	369(33)	2.20	1.31
30	I believe that continuous self-improvement, enhance learning process	67(6)	132(12)	194(17)	335(30)	392(35)	2.0	1.12
31	I effort to learn even out of the worst relationship	52(5)	134(12)	168(15)	382(34)	384(34)	2.1	1.14
32	I develop collaboration for effective instructions.	62(6)	128(11)	197(18)	336(30)	397(35)	2.2	1.22
33	I engage students to adapt an optimistic view towards challenges.	32(3)	139 (12)	204 (18)	355 (32)	390 (35)	2.1	1.20

**Table 11**  
*Perceptions of PTs about Critical level of reflection*

S.no	Items	S. Ag f (%)	Ag f (%)	Un-D f (%)	D. Ag f (%)	S. DA f (%)	M	S. D
34	I know the cultural morals that may affect instructions	52(5)	142(12)	178(16)	364(33)	384(34)	2.10	1.12
35	I know the societal inequalities that may affect learning	51(5)	132(12)	155(14)	388(34)	394(35)	2.14	1.14
36	I engage learners in journaling to become reflective	65(6)	124(11)	167(15)	377(34)	387(34)	2.13	1.16
37	I engage learners in dialogues to develop open minded	57(5)	120(12)	172(15)	379(33)	392(35)	2.23	1.15
38	I engage learners for the common good of the society	78(7)	134(12)	156(14)	366(33)	386(34)	2.20	1.19
39	I foster awareness about societal responsibilities in learners	67(6)	123(11)	144(13)	388(34)	398(36)	2.12	1.13
40	I show dedication to societal values	72(6)	122(12)	158(14)	379(33)	389(35)	2.10	1.20
41	I engage myself in democratic practices during teaching	55(5)	120(11)	170(15)	378(34)	397(35)	2.10	1.12
42	I encourage learners to talk on societal problems.	46(4)	123(11)	176(16)	377(34)	398(35)	2.0	1.10

**Table 12**  
*Semester wise Comparison of self-perception and level of reflection of prospective teachers*

Factors	Semester	No	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Perception about S. R	4 <sup>th</sup>	246	2	210	21.37	.00002
	6 <sup>th</sup>	417	1117	10		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	457				
Levels of Reflection	4 <sup>th</sup>	246	2	5470	12.72	.00014
	6 <sup>th</sup>	417	1117			
	8 <sup>th</sup>	457				
		1120				

**Table 13**  
*Gender wise difference*

Components		N	M	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
Perception about Reflection	Self- Male	155	20.33	3.108	1118	-1.48	.139
	Female	965	20.41	3.204			
Level of Reflection	Male	155	132.04	19.17	1118	-14.35	P <.001
	Female	965	169.95	21.23			

**Table 14**  
**Qualification wise difference**

Components			N	M	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
Perception about Self-Reflection	F. A		722	20.75	2.11	1118	1.60	.110
	F. Sc		398	20.45	3.57			
Level of Reflection	F. A		722	173.02	15.20	1118	2.133	.033
	F. Sc		398	170.43	22.59			

### Findings

1. The conclusions about the perception of self-reflection demonstrate that the highest mean score is ( $M=3.6$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ) and the lowest mean score is ( $M=3.2$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ). The average mean score ( $M=3.34$ ) recommends a moderately homogeneous perception among PTs regarding the concept of self-reflection. The finding revealed that most of the PTs are cognizant about the notion of self-reflection.
2. The results show that PTs primarily operate at the initial three levels of Valli's (1997) reflective framework technical ( $M = 3.23$ ), reflection in/on action ( $M = 2.64$ ), and deliberative reflection ( $M = 3.00$ ) which focus on general teaching practices. These findings suggest a need for greater engagement in reflective practices to deepen their reflective thinking.
3. Personalistic reflection, which supports teachers' holistic development, had a low average mean score ( $M = 2.16$ ). Item no 26 indicates the maximum mean ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), though item no 30 related to time management had the lowest ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ), indicating a major barrier in reflective growth is time management. These findings present that there is a dire need for the structured training to support PTs manage time effectively.
4. Critical reflection, which concentrates the morality, socio- political dimensions of education, presented the lowest average mean ( $M = 2.12$ ). The highest mean score of critical level of reflection is ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) reflected a general commitment to morality, while item 37 had the lowest ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), indicates partial engagement with democratic practices and open discussions. These results highlight that there is a need to train PTs, promote critical thinking, and arrange meaningful social dialogue in the classroom.
5. To examine the variances in perception and reflective levels across the B. Ed (Hons) 4, 6, and 8 semesters a One-way ANOVA was operated. Results showed significant differences for both perception of self-reflection, ( $F=21.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and levels of reflection, ( $F = 12.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Post hoc Tukey tests indicated that 8-semester PTs scored higher than 4 and 6 semester PTs, while 6-semester PTs scored higher than 4-semester PTs. These results suggest a progressive increase in reflective awareness and depth as PTs advance through the B. Ed (Hons) program.
6. Results related to gender-wise difference in perception show that there is no significant difference in perception of self-reflection regarding males ( $M=20.33$ ,  $SD=3.108$ ) and females ( $M = 20.41$ ,  $SD = 3.20$ ),  $t = -1.48$ ,  $p = .139$ . The other dimension of results concerning the reflective level showed that there is a significant difference in males ( $M=132.04$ ,  $SD= 19.17$ ) and females ( $M=169.95$ ,  $SD= 21.23$ ;  $t = -14.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This shows that female students demonstrate a substantially higher level of reflective engagement compared to male students. Therefore, it is concluded that males and females have no difference regarding perception of self-reflection, but there is a significant difference regarding their reflective levels.
7. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare perceptions and level of self-reflection between F.A and F.Sc PTs. The findings showed that the difference was not statistically significant regarding perception thus, PTs having F.A. ( $M=20.75$ ,  $SD=2.11$ ) and F. Sc ( $M=20.452$ ,  $SD=3.573$ ;  $t = 1.60$ ,  $p = .110$ ) demonstrated similar perception about self-reflection. But their reflective levels regarding F. A ( $M=173.02$ ,  $SD=15.20$ ) and F. Sc ( $M=170.43$ ,  $SD=22.59$ ;  $t = 2.133$ ,  $p = .033$ ) are statistically significant, which shows that PTs of F.A have higher levels of self-reflection than the PTs of F.Sc.

## Discussions and Conclusions

The primary emphasis of professional development lies in encouraging educators to involve in day-to-day reflective practices. For effective implementation, it is crucial that teachers not only grasp the concept of reflection but also assess their current level of reflection. Valli's typology of reflection was used to analyze the data and findings revealed that majority of the PTs perform at preliminary reflective level which require deep consideration, to comprehend theory and practice gap and contextualize their action corresponding to broader educational landscape. The findings of the study sustained with Arshad and Malik (2023) who described that deep self-awareness support to reflect more critically and more thoughtfully respond instructional challenges.

The findings reveal that PTs demonstrate overall awareness of self-reflection, a gap exists between their perceived and actual reflective levels during the semester. The mean score for the technical level of reflection exceeds the personalistic and critical reflection. It is indicated that PTs have an inadequate awareness of their reflective growth. Kamali and Javahery (2025) further emphasize the strong influence of reflective awareness on instructional practice of teachers. The results also highlighted that male and female PTs have no difference regarding their perceptions of self-reflection, but there is a major difference in their reflective levels.

Consequently, it is imperative for PTs, often confined to the initial, routine level of critical thinking. Zhou et al., (2025) claims that PTs are involved in supporting reflection and cross-examinations should learn suitable way to critically reflect on their actions. This helps them to examine their teaching, and understand why they teach as they do. In the same vein, Hussain et al., (2023) and Ndelu and Utete (2025) emphasizes that developing reflective awareness among PTs supports their professional growth and can lead to more meaningful and effective classroom experiences. These findings align with the earlier work of Almusharraf and Almusharraf, (2021) presenting deeper reflection among female teachers. The study results concluded by Ullah et al., (2025) emphasizes on reflective dialogue also help explain females' stronger reflective engagement. The findings of the study of Dayan et al., (2022) also indicates that establishing a conducive environment support PTs to reflect and make them responsive to perform their instructional and professional practices.

The present study concluded that PTs commitment with contextualized activities primarily at surface level. The findings also revealed that reflective competences of gender also influence the depth of reflective consideration. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate reflective practitioners, embed reflective practices in teacher education which help to produce more thoughtful reflective practitioners.

### Key Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The current study maps the initial reflective level of PTs' and present how gender engage in the reflective process. It bridges theory and practice gap by connecting with Dewey, Shon and Valli's model with the teaching practicum of PTs which contribute practical insights for teacher education. The findings provide directions for planning and designing gender-responsive reflective activities and a practical method to assess reflection in B.Ed. programs, that support to develop reflective practitioner.

In spite of careful planning the study represents some limitations. The sample was restricted to only public sector universities of the Punjab, excluding private institutions and other regions. The use of self-reported Likert scale data may have introduced socially desirable responses, while treating such data as interval remains debated. Additionally, relying primarily on quantitative methods limited opportunities to explore deeper, personal aspects of reflection. While the current study provides useful insights into PTs' self-reflective practices, future research could adopt longitudinal and qualitative methods to explore deeper, personal dimensions of reflection. Interviews, focus groups, or reflection journals could help uncover nuances that structured survey responses may overlook.

To address the complexities of the current situation, there is a need for universities to design reflective teaching practicum programs and arrange seminars. Teacher educators need to be encouraged to incorporate reflective tools such as dialogue journals, interactive discussions, classroom observations, informal assessment, like development of rubrics and engage in shared action research in their day-to-day teaching practices. These reflective activities are intended to support PTs in enhancing their engagement with reflective practices during their teaching practices and transform them as reflective practitioner.

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## **The Trilateral Impasse: The Strategic Rivalry and Complex Interplay of Pakistan, India and Iran**

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The trilateral relationship among Pakistan, India, and Iran exemplifies the complex geopolitical manoeuvring that shapes the regional strategic landscape. This paper analyses how regional security dynamics within one context can destabilize others and influence mutual perceptions, thereby complicating this triangular relationship. Each nation is prompted to reassess its strategies and alliances. The interplay of converging and diverging factors defines this relationship: India's pursuit of regional dominance and external balancing, Iran's need for internal stability, the ideological rift with Pakistan, and Pakistan's proactive engagement in regional affairs serve as key catalysts. Recent tensions, such as India-Pakistan escalations and Iran's conflict with Israel, have altered regional dynamics. This shift provides Pakistan with a strategic opportunity to align with Iran, potentially counterbalancing India's influence in the region.

**Keywords:** India-Iran nexus, Pakistan relations with Iran & India, foreign policy, South Asia.

The geopolitical landscape of South and West Asia is significantly influenced by the complex and often contradictory relationships between India, Iran, and Pakistan. These neighboring nations weave a tapestry of shared objectives, deep-rooted rivalries, and strategic maneuvers that affect both regional stability and global power dynamics. Their interactions involve a delicate balancing act, shaped by historical legacies, economic dependencies, security concerns, and evolving diplomatic relationships with external powers.

Today, relationships between states and societies are categorized by a captivating combination of cooperation, competition, and even rivalries. Initially, India had no strong relations with Iran. However, these ties were strengthened by Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's landmark visit to Iran in 1993, marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister since the 1979 Revolution. India's expanding economy and strategic goals have driven its engagement with Iran, notably through projects such as the Chabahar Port. Moreover, Iran values India as a major energy market and a potential partner in regional connectivity, as reflected in its strong interest in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). India has allied with Iran to strengthen its regional position and to counterbalance Pakistan's influence. Conversely, Iran views India as a valuable economic, political, and strategic partner to meet its domestic needs and enhance trade, especially as it faces diplomatic isolation in regional and global affairs since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. At the same time, Iran seeks to sustain its longstanding, albeit sometimes complex, relationship with Pakistan.

It is important to mention here that Pakistan's relationship with Iran has always been a complicated balancing act. The reasons for the complications include: a long border; mutual interests in regional stability and counter-terrorism, particularly with a focus on cross-border militancy in Baluchistan; sectarian tensions; and Pakistan's strong ties with Saudi Arabia and America, which often create friction. Additionally, the alleged support for opposing proxies in Afghanistan and cross-border terrorism in Baluchistan are some of the high-order concerns that further complicate the security cooperation mechanism between the two neighbouring countries. More concerning for Pakistan is Iran's initiative with India, such as Chabahar Port, to undermine the geostrategic importance of Gwadar Port. These factors helped India and Iran to strengthen their bonds and cement their nexus. Despite divergent state ideologies, political systems, and worldviews, India and Iran have remained allies at least in the recent past. On the other hand, despite historical and religious affinities between Iran and Pakistan, both nations have taken different routes and stayed on divergent pages in regional affairs.

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Keeping the backdrop in view, this study aims to unravel the historical nexus between India and Iran, its negative influence on Pakistan, and how it complicates this triangular relationship, prompting each nation to re-examine its strategies and alliances. To achieve this goal, this paper addresses the following important questions: Why is there a strong nexus between India and Iran despite the prevalence of historic and religious ties between Iran and Pakistan? and, how does this nexus between India and Iran affect Pakistan's interests?

This study is important because it explores the complex historical and geopolitical connections among India, Iran, and Pakistan—three key states whose relationships have significantly shaped the region's political and strategic landscape. By examining the historical nexus and its subsequent influence on Pakistan, this research offers deeper insights into the roots of diplomatic alignments and regional tensions. Practically, the insights derived from this study can inform policymakers, diplomats, and strategic analysts in understanding the evolving dynamics of regional alliances and rivalries within the India-Iran-Pakistan triangle. Despite its critical importance for regional peace and global geopolitical stability, this triangular impasse is rarely a central focus of academic research. Furthermore, this study lays a foundation for identifying pathways toward regional harmony, rapprochement, cooperation, and joint action.

#### Theoretical Framework

Despite a few hiccups in the recent past, the partnership between New Delhi and Tehran has expanded smoothly in the realms of business, trade, energy, defence, communication, and regional developments. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), in particular, helps to explain the patterns of divergence and convergence among the three states in the region, shedding light on their security dynamics and interdependence. It provides a framework for understanding the behaviour of states within the international system and their interactions with other countries. The RSCT, as developed by Barry Buzan but later expanded upon by Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde in the Copenhagen School of security studies, is a paradigmatic shift in the way in which thinkers inside the field of international relations put the regional level of security analysis to the forefront as analytically generative and politically significant (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Buzan, Wæver, & De Wilde, 1998). It is not only that this theoretical framework throws light on the interdependent textures of friendship and enmity in particular geopolitical geographies, but also sets out an essential window through which the chain reaction of local conflicts in a global strategic balance can be investigated (Buzan, 2003).

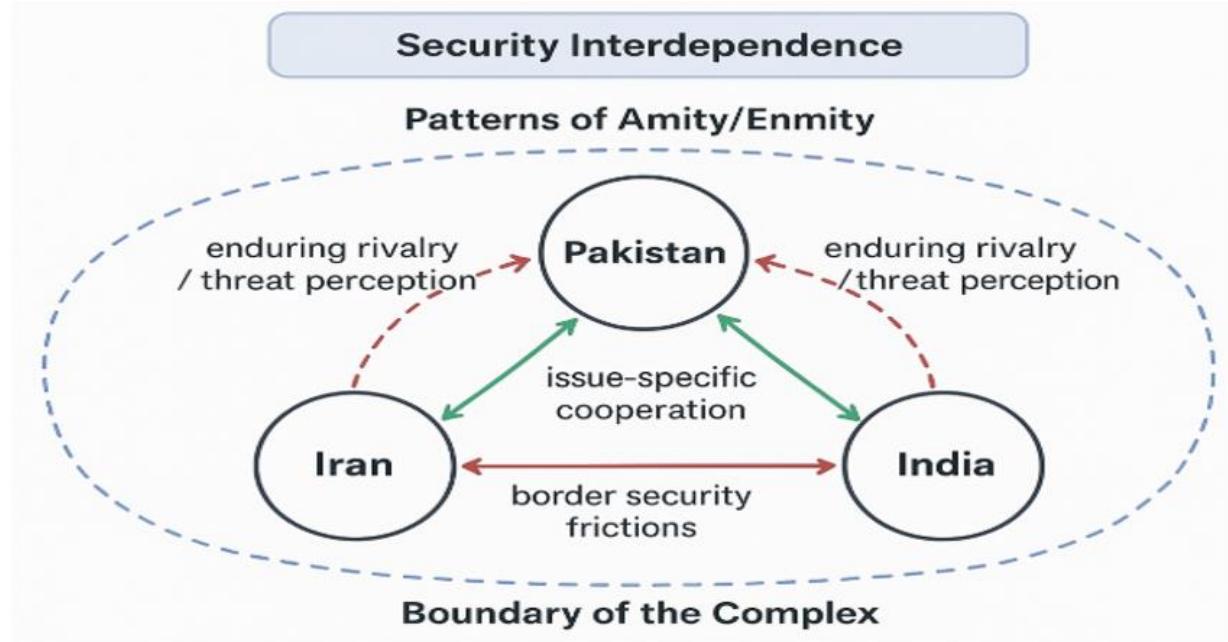
In essence, the notion of RSCT is based on the assumption that security interdependence poses the greatest strength when it is borne on states with closeness to each other (Frazier & Stewart-Ingersoll, 2010). A collection of these states constitutes what Buzan calls a Regional Security Complex (RSC) a set of states with such reciprocally interlocked principal security interests that their national securities cannot be fairly discussed outside of each other (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Proximity creates this form of interdependence, so that any conflict or cooperation at the regional level is also bound or contained to that region, unless there is some great outside interference (Buzan, 2003). In turn, RSCT can offer an effective counterargument to the excessively Universalist aspirations of conventional neorealism and liberal institutionalism. Both schools tend to lose the specifics of the neighbourhood arrangement (Buzan, 2003; Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

How threats are socially constructed within a region significantly influences the nature and intensity of security dynamics there (Taureck, 2006). For instance, the securitization of water resources, nuclear doctrines, and cross-border terrorism between India and Pakistan cannot be fully understood without considering their history, contested identities, and spatial proximity.

In addition, RSCT also considers structural hierarchies both within and across regions, utilizing the concepts of insulator and penetrated regions, as well as superpower overlay. For example, South Asia and West Asia are often described as penetrated RSCs due to the consistent, multidimensional interventions of world powers. These are Cold War superpower engagements and modernist U.S., Russian, and Chinese strategic entanglements with Pakistan, India, and Iran. The other major strength of RSCT is its policy relevance. It offers a more nuanced map of security relations that spans artificial Westphalian borders, providing insight for decision-makers and analysts.

The 'enigma' of India, Pakistan, and Iran arises from inter-regional dynamics and the ways in which the dominant security complex—India-Pakistan—is influenced by Iran, creating a complex web of overlapping security and cooperation challenges. While India and Pakistan are engaged in an enduring rivalry within the South Asian security complex, Iran functions as an 'insulating' nation, geographically bridging the Persian Gulf/Middle East, Central Asian, and South Asian security complexes. This means that Iran's security interests are shaped by its Western neighbours, yet its growing economic interests with India (e.g., Chabahar Port) is considered by Pakistan as an encirclement policy creating a complex web of mutual suspicion and indirect competition with each other, thereby demonstrating how regional security dynamics in one complex can dominantly destabilize and influence each other (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Pakistan-India-Iran Trilateral Impasse



### Method

The secondary data for this research was collected through a qualitative methodology. It includes a diverse range of reports, articles, historical records, geopolitical histories, books, and policy papers. This study is guided by an interpretive epistemology. Qualitative research adopts an inductive approach, beginning with the formulation of research questions and the collection of data. Through analysis, interpretations emerge from the data itself, rather than being driven by predefined hypotheses at the outset of the study. This approach is more workable for analysing social and political issues and perspectives, and grasps a real understanding of particular geographical contexts, especially in secondary data analysis (Bryman, 2008). This study's analysis includes: reviewing data collected from various sources, assigning meaning (coding), classifying data into basic themes, identifying emerging patterns, assessing the applicability of the findings to the questions posed in the study, and ultimately writing up the findings and interpretations (Peterson, 2017).

### The Rationale behind the Growing India-Iran Nexus

Several rationales and deep-rooted historical reasons exist behind the India-Iran nexus. Since 1993, both nations have overcome past differences and established strong relations, driven by shared national objectives. Being an Islamic country, Pakistan follows the policy of good relations with all Muslim countries. Iran was the first country to recognise Pakistan as a sovereign state in 1947, and Raza Shah Pehlevi was also the first head of state from a foreign country to visit Pakistan. In 1950, Shah noted, "What could be more natural than the love between two nations that are neighbours and profess the same faith? Iran will never forget the affectionate regard and sincere feelings of this sister and co-religion nation" (Ramana, 2012). Even the Shah of Iran once said in the context of the Pakistan-India 1965 war that it would not accept any attempt to liquidate Pakistan (Choudhary, 1974). All of these show that they enjoyed good relations from the beginning, but later their relations became strained for several reasons. Those reasons have paved the way for the growing nexus between Iran and India.

In modern Iranian history, the 1979 revolution is an important event that has influenced both the country's internal politics and its external affairs with the rest of the world. It is important to note that Pakistan was also the first country to recognise the new government of Iran established after the 1979 Islamic/Khomeini revolution (Belal, 2017). The USSR's attack on Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution in 1979 complicated the relationship between Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan became a frontline ally of the Cold War troika of (Pakistan, the US and Saudi Arabia) and played a crucial role in the Afghan resistance against the USSR. Pakistan's closer alignment with Cold War allies created a significant rift with Iran. This was further exacerbated by the mushroom growth of Saudi-funded Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan. Consequently,

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Pakistan became a site for the testing of regional rivalries by supporting hard-line Shia and Sunni ideologies. The trend that emerged in regional politics, particularly after the USSR invaded Afghanistan, led to the alignment of India's and Iran's regional policies.

The rise of the Taliban due to the fall of the USSR further complicated the regional dynamic. Pakistan's support for the Taliban and Iran's backing of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance created a rift, prompting Iran to forge a closer relationship with India, a fellow supporter of the Northern Alliance. In the 1990s, Iran and Taliban relations were primarily hostile due to the killing of thousands of Taliban fighters by Shia and Northern Alliance forces, and then the retaliatory persecution of the Shia Hazara minority in Afghanistan. Additionally, in 1998, Iran responded to the murders of its diplomats and a journalist in Afghanistan by threatening war against the Taliban by mobilising its troops near the Afghan border. Third, Iran's tilt toward India has been influenced by its policy of "looking East" (Roshandel, 2004). Fifth, energy security is another factor in India-Iran's growing nexus. India seeks affordable energy, while Iran looks for new markets to export its energy resources.

Pakistan and India are two neighbouring South Asian countries with a long history of coexistence and significant potential for improved relations, particularly in trade and economic ties. However, geopolitics has heavily influenced their relationship, even affecting their Most Favoured Nation status for each other. Due to these geopolitical tensions, their relations have not developed smoothly; instead, both countries have sought regional allies to counterbalance each other's interests.

#### Historical Overview of India-Iran Bilateral Engagement

The India-Iran relationship is multi-dimensional and offers a variety of opportunities to both countries in key areas. Their partnership has become increasingly important as regional dynamics have changed. Since 1950, when they signed the Treaty of Friendship and Perpetual Peace, they have enjoyed good relations. In contrast, Pakistan and India have had intense relations since their independence in 1947. Iran is very important to India from the geopolitical, geo-strategic, and geo-economic perspectives. Its policy toward Iran has been influenced by different strategic and economic interests. Their ties were initially bolstered by the visit of Indian PM Rao to Iran in 1993, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Tehran since the 1979 Revolution. His visit was followed by a reciprocal visit by Iranian President Rafsanjani in 1995 (Fair, 2010).

Since then, their relations have become multidimensional and strengthened in different areas, particularly in energy, trade, and diplomacy. Moreover, the most significant milestones in Indo-Iranian relations occurred in 2001, when Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee visited Tehran, followed by Iranian President Khatami's reciprocal visit to New Delhi in 2003, being the guest of honour at India's Republic Day celebrations, an honour reserved for India's closest friends (Berlin, 2014). Following the New Delhi Declaration of 2003, Iran and India referred to each other as "strategic allies" and began conducting joint military and naval exercises to demonstrate their solidarity.

Iran is a significant regional economic partner of India. Trade and energy security are the two most important sectors in which bilateral cooperation has significantly increased. The main exports of India to Iran are sugar, rice, fruits, tea, medicines, manufactured fibers, electrical equipment, and artificial jewellery, while the main exports of Iran to India include dry fruits, organic and inorganic chemicals, glassware and glass, pearls, gemstones, gypsum, and leather (Table 1). Recently, both countries agreed to trade in Indian rupees. Oil and gasoline imports from Iran to India totalled \$12.3 billion (Sen, 2020).

**Table 1**  
India-Iran Year-wise Trade (US\$ Million)

Year	Export	Imports	Total
2015	3126.8	6225.32	9352.18
2016	2412.5	8253.7	10666.2
2017	2596.8	11089.4	13686.2
2018	2845.3	14730.8	17576.2
2019	3855	3375.4	7230.4
2020	2243.7	297.12	2540.8
2021	1284	408.6	1692.6
2022	1839.5	653.6	2493.12
2023	1660	672.12	2332.12
2024	1680	520	2300

Source: Author's illustration from the World Bank Database 'World Integrated Trade Solution'.

New Delhi has also invested in other projects in Iran, including the 840-megawatt thermal power plant, the sugar and fertiliser sectors, cement industry, and Abadan oil refinery. More than 8,000 Iranian students are enrolled in various

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disciplines at Indian educational institutions. It offers 67 scholarships each year to Iranian students in different subjects (Usman, 2018).

For India, Iran serves as a gateway to Central Asia and Afghanistan. To further expand its trade and economic relations with Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, India is developing the Chabahar port, and worked on Chabahar-Zaranj railway line in Afghanistan. The 218-kilometer Zaranj-Delaram road connects Iran and Afghanistan, facilitating direct connectivity of Central Asia with the sea, providing an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan.

### Ramifications of India-Iran Nexus for Pakistan

Historically, Iran and Pakistan maintained amicable and cooperative relations. However, a combination of evolving strategic interests, changing policy priorities, and alignment with opposing regional actors has contributed to divergence in their bilateral engagement. These shifts have created space for the expanding India-Iran relationship. Iran is increasingly viewed as a potential strategic partner by India. Given the pragmatic approach of both Delhi and Tehran and the broad range of interests their partnership advances, it is likely that their relationship will continue to deepen. The growing Indo-Iranian alliance has significantly influenced key regional issues, including energy, trade, and political developments in the region. Despite ongoing external geopolitical challenges, India's and Iran's shared interests, particularly in regional connectivity, remain strong, underscoring the resilience of their partnership.

As a result, Pakistan's interests are undermined, and the country is pushed into isolation in regional affairs. Partnership with Iran benefits India by providing it with a regional partner that counterbalances Pakistan. It is believed that Tajikistan, a Persian-speaking nation, was persuaded to provide its Farkhor airbase to New Delhi because of Indo-Iranian collaboration (Khan, 2011). The example exemplifies how India has benefited strategically from its relations with Iran. It gave India an edge over Pakistan in Central Asia. Likewise, their security ties had strengthened considerably since Iranian President Khatami's official visit to India as the guest of honour at India's National Day. The two countries reached an agreement that allowed Iran to use Indian military technologies. It also allowed India access to Iranian bases. The first Indo-Iranian joint naval drill is another recent development (Sen, 2020). Iran has also supported India's bid for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

It is also evident that a prominent challenge in Pakistan-Iran relations stems from Pakistan's security concerns regarding the alleged use of Iranian territory by India. The case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, brought these concerns to the forefront. Pakistani authorities contended that this incident revealed a sequence of Indian intelligence allegedly using Iranian soil to facilitate infiltration and support militant activities within Pakistan. While acknowledging that Iran is not directly involved in sponsoring such activities, the case generated unease in Pakistan regarding the potential use of Iranian soil by external actors.

Iran holds 1,183 trillion cubic feet of gas, the world's second-largest (17.3%) reservoir (Worldometer). India imports a substantial amount of energy resources from Iran. This is further underscored by their recent deal to supply India with 5 million tonnes of liquefied gas annually for the next 25 years (Sen, 2020). The IPI gas pipeline, which later became the IP gas pipeline after India withdrew from the project due to regional geopolitics. This joint gas pipeline was considered a confidence-building measure between two traditional rivals, Pakistan and India; however, it did not proceed. New Delhi believed that this pipeline would give Islamabad a decisive level of leverage over its energy security. The Iranian authorities had received assurances from the then-Pakistani President Musharraf that his country would ensure the pipeline's security and safe transit through Pakistani territory (Pachauri, 2003). Iran also promised to compensate India through LPG if Pakistan stopped supplying it (Naaz, 2001). However, the promise could not work. It is worth noting that, prior to the concept of the IP pipeline, India and Iran had planned to develop an underwater pipeline to be built by the Russian Energy Giant Gazprom. For this purpose, negotiations have continued since 1993. However, the project's high costs led them to adopt an overland route through Pakistan, which gave rise to the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (Ramana, 2012).

Trade and economic cooperation lead to the development and prosperity of states; therefore, India is trying to establish good trade relations not only with Iran but also through Iranian ports with Afghanistan and Central Asia. By doing so, one of India's main objectives is to marginalise Pakistan from the regional trade and economic relations arena. For this purpose, India has also constructed roads in Afghanistan, such as the Delaram-Zaranj Highway, to connect Afghanistan with the Chabahar port. It bypasses Pakistan to connect Afghanistan with the international market.

Ports and sea routes have always been of great importance in the context of the world economy and international trade. Through its investment in the Chabahar Port, India is seeking to provide an alternative port facility for Afghanistan and the Central Asia to reduce their dependency on Pakistani ports (Figure 2), effectively circumventing Pakistan. Gwadar Port is strategically important as it serves as a gateway to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital passage connecting the oil-rich Persian Gulf with the Arabian Sea. As a regional transit trade hub, its development has annoyed India (Malik, 2012). The

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main goal of Indian investment in the development of Chahbahar port is to develop a competitor to Gwadar port, reduce its significance, and reduce the reliance of regional nations for their trade over it. Geo-strategically, Iran is crucial to India because it offers an alternative gateway to Central Asia and Afghanistan. For international trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia, Pakistani ports are very cost-effective because they are close, but they are affected by a number of internal and external factors.

Figure 2: Map showing the importance of Gwadar Port vs Chabahar Port



Source: Pmfias.com

India aims to diminish the scope of the Gwadar port. The recent statement of the Shipping Minister of India, Mr. Sarbananda Sonowal, confirms it. He said, "India is working towards unlocking trade potential with Central Asia through the Chabahar Port" (Sonowal, 2022). Gwadar port is giving these nations greater trade prospects and easier access to the Arabian Sea. However, Iran and India see it as counterproductive to their national interests since it strengthens Pakistan's geostrategic and geoeconomic position.

In 1995, during the visit of the President of Iran, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, to India, a tripartite agreement to build a North-South Transportation Corridor (Figure 3) was signed by India, Iran, and Russia (Berlin, 2014). He was promoting economic reconstruction and foreign policy after the Iran-Iraq War. It has reduced cargo expenses by 30% and travel time by 40%, contrasting with the traditional route through the Suez Canal (Shukla, 2022). In July 2022, Iran began transiting Russian cargo to India via a new trade route along the INSTC. Iran and Russia are promoting the route as an alternative to Egypt's Suez Canal (Lucente, 2022). It has connected India, Iran, Russia, and Europe. This project connects the Mumbai port to Europe through the Bandar Abbas port. At present, 13 countries are its members. On the one hand, it bypasses Pakistan; on the other, it reduces the scope of the Gwadar port.

Figure 3: Map Showing the Route of the North-South Transportation Corridor.



Source: Shukla (2022).

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India has made significant investments in the Port and associated rail and road linkages. Since the port's opening, Indian operations have handled more than 2.5 million tonnes of cargo as of 2023. In May 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement to operate the Chabahar Port, reaffirming their long-term commitment to counterbalance Gwadar Port. From FY 2022–2023's 9,126 TEUs to FY 2023–2024's 64,245 TEUs, container traffic increased 600% (Raghbir, 2025). This is the most evident instance of strategic cooperation between Iran and India. Perhaps India's plans to counterbalance the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar through the Chabahar Port project.

Pakistan always needed the support of Muslim countries over the Kashmir dispute with India. It is pertinent to mention here that the Kashmir dispute is the core reason behind Pakistan-India hostility and the leading cause of three major wars (1948, 1965, and 1998) and many border skirmishes respectively. Iran was also one of the main supporters of Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. However, as India's relations with Iran improved gradually, the Iranian stance on the Kashmir issue weakened somewhat. Their growing nexus is meant to reduce the support of Iran for the ongoing struggle of the Kashmiri people against Indian occupation. Iran has often helped India defuse international pressure over the Kashmir issue. During a UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) meeting in Geneva in 1994, Iran displayed its efforts to protect the interests of India while maintaining its good reputation with Pakistan too (Ramana, 2012). Iran was instrumental in convincing Pakistan to withdraw its proposed resolution on Kashmir. It was expected that if the resolution was passed, it would have significantly strengthened Islamabad's claims over Kashmir. Dinesh Singh, India's former foreign minister, travelled to Tehran and received a promise from Rafsanjani, then Iran's president, that Tehran would do all it could to ensure that no harm came to India. Islamabad had to revoke the resolution at Tehran's advice, which it saw as a form of backstabbing on its part (Ramana, 2012).

States manage their security and strategic interests within this international self-help system through alliances and defence agreements with their neighbours. Iran and India have also cooperated in Afghanistan, while "Afghanistan is the strategic depth of Pakistan" (Parkes, 2019). New Delhi and Tehran have joined hands to protect their respective interests in Afghanistan (Khan & Rahman, 2020). It became one of the important areas of collaboration between the two nations. Since the rise of Sunni militant organizations in Afghanistan, the Shia have become a marginalized community in the country (Awan & Shifa, 2025). Iran believes the Sunni extremist elements backed by the Taliban pose a terrifying threat to the Shia. On the other hand, in the past, India regarded the Taliban as a threat to its occupation of Kashmir. However, now India and Iran want to mend their tie with the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the past, both countries backed the Northern Alliance, which was confronting the Taliban in Afghanistan. India's links with Iran supported its desire to avoid Pakistan in its western backyard. India successfully attempted to undermine Pakistan's interests during the US occupation of Afghanistan to draw the country into its sphere of influence (Sohail & Iqbal, 2017). They continue to exploit the crises in Afghanistan and Central Asia to advance their political agenda openly (Khan, Dawar & Khan, 2023). According to Iran's former Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, establishing a representative government in Afghanistan is one of their common objectives (Cheema, 2010).

Despite a strategic partnership between India and Iran, recent developments in international politics have influenced their relationship. For instance, during Israel's aggression on Iran in June 2025, Pakistan expressed support for Iran, and India chose not to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) condemnation of Israel's attacks on Iran. These events have brought Pakistan and Iran closer once again.

Strong cooperation with Iran offers numerous advantages for Pakistan, including economic benefits, energy security, and the potential to help resolve the Afghan issue regionally. It also serves to limit India's influence and engagement in Afghanistan. Additionally, collaboration with Iran can aid Pakistan in addressing its Baloch conflict, as India has been exploiting Iran's territory to manipulate the Baloch insurgency—a long-standing issue, with India supporting Baloch separatists (Kupecz, 2012; Bansal, 2008).

Currently, Iran's nuclear issue has imposed certain limitations on its engagement with India. The differences in the direction and objectives of their relations—namely, Iran's effort to balance the US and India's approach of cooperating with both Iran and the US—have resulted in some restrictions on their partnership (Soltaninejad, 2017). A nuclear deal and reconciliation of Iran with Arab countries will help India move forward and further strengthen its cooperation without the fear of US sanctions and losing out to other friends in the Middle East, like Arab countries and Israel. In the case of a nuclear deal, India will further increase its oil and gas imports from Iran. Iran was supplying about 10% of India's total oil requirements before India ceased purchases due to Western pressure (Agarwal, 2022). It is also pertinent to note that, before the US-led sanctions, India was the second-largest importer of oil from Iran after China (Ashwarya, 2017).

New Delhi has significantly benefited from all these events since it maintains strong ties with Israel, Iran, and the Gulf States. Given that it enjoyed the goodwill of all parties and proved to be a good partner of all these countries, despite the fact that these countries have strained relations with each other. India has avoided bilateral differences in its relations with them, but Pakistan has not, as it has aligned with the Saudi Arabian bloc. Therefore, there are numerous opportunities

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for partnership between the two countries. India's proactive diplomatic approach—focused on supporting its allies and neighbours while advancing its national interests—has helped it achieve key foreign policy objectives and has created significant potential for collaboration in its favour.

### Conclusion

It can be safely argued that Iran's foreign policy towards India has been shaped by Tehran's "look East" strategy, efforts to break its diplomatic isolation, and the pursuit of potential markets for its energy resources. Conversely, India's policy towards Iran is driven by energy security, access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, alliances against its primary rival, Pakistan, and regional strategic partnerships. In India's regional strategy, Iran holds a critical position, vital for India's energy needs and regional trade, given its geographic location spanning the Strait of Hormuz, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan, and providing access to Central Asia. Moreover, a stable Iran is essential for India's interests in the volatile Middle East and South Asia.

Since 1993, the growing India-Iran relationship has impacted Pakistan's strategic, economic, and political interests in the region, straining Pakistan-Iran relations. This close relationship has enabled India to advance its regional objectives, but has had negative repercussions for Pakistan. It has undermined Pakistan's interests by weakening the Iran-Pakistan (IP) pipeline, limiting the potential of Gwadar port for Afghanistan and Central Asia, eroding Iran's political support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, and creating opportunities for India to leverage Iran against Pakistan.

How can Pakistan navigate this dilemma created by the expanding India-Iran nexus? The most viable policy approach for Pakistan is to resolve issues with Iran through dialogue, mutual understanding, and trust-building initiatives. Strengthening Iran's reliance on Pakistan, such as through the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, could help keep Iran neutral or aligned with Pakistan rather than India. Additionally, Pakistan should focus on improving its soft power in Afghanistan and Central Asia by encouraging these countries to align with Pakistan in regional economic partnerships rather than India and by promoting the use of the Gwadar port for their imports and exports rather than Indian-designed routes. A core challenge in the Pakistan-Iran relationship stems from political and religious differences. Iran, predominantly Shia, and Pakistan, with a Sunni-majority population, have a history of tensions rooted in sectarian and religious distinctions. These differences have often translated into political manoeuvring, affecting bilateral diplomacy, trade, and regional alignments. Both Iran and Pakistan, as Muslim states, should work to reduce sectarian tensions, foster mutual understanding, and resolve their disputes. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) could play a pivotal role in normalizing relations between the two countries. Recognizing this, India actively works to curb ECO's influence, seeking to limit the emergence of a unified Muslim economic and political bloc in the region.

At the core of this complex web is the persistent rivalry between India and Pakistan, which drives regional dynamics and influences the actions of other actors. Iran, a key stakeholder in the Middle East, also plays an influential role within the South Asian security complex. Essentially, the RSCT affirms that the security of India, Pakistan, and Iran is interconnected, with the actions of one country reverberating through the others, shaping their strategic decision-making in a single, interdependent system.

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## A Cross-Linguistic Study of Grammatical Nominalization in Pakistani Languages

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This study compares the nominalization systems of Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko. It focuses on their morphological features and shared structures. The data were collected from five native speakers of each language, resulting in a total of twenty speakers. First, a list of Urdu nominalization constructions was compiled with the help of native speakers, based on Shibatani's (2019) framework, including relational, participle, genitive, and appositive constructions. Then, the five native Urdu speakers were recorded to verify the markers of compiled sentences. Subsequently, five speakers of each selected language translated the same Urdu sentences into their native languages. This process was documented through written and audio records. Urdu employs the marker *-wa:la:*, while the other languages use *-a:la:*. In relative constructions, Urdu uses *jo:*, whereas Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko use *jirrha:*, which varies by gender and number. Additionally, Pahari and Hindko exhibit relative-correlative structures. All four languages utilize participles for nominalization and share genitive constructions. Urdu's genitive markers are *ka:*, *ki:*, *kay*, while Pahari has *nā:*, *ni:*, *nay*, and Punjabi and Hindko include *da:*, *di:*, *day* — all of which agree in gender and number. Appositive constructions are generally similar, though Pahari uniquely features two forms: *kay* and *khay*. While each language maintains distinct morphological traits, the shared nominalization markers and genitive structures highlight their deep linguistic connections.

**Keywords:** nominalization, Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, Hindko, morphological markers

Pakistan is a multilingual country with diverse languages spoken across its various regions. Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko are the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Pakistan (The Indo-Aryan Languages, 2014). Urdu, spoken in India and Pakistan, belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Pahari is spoken in the Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muree, and Hazara districts of Pakistan (Khaliq, 2014). Punjabi is spoken in the Punjab region of Pakistan and India. Hindko is primarily spoken in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and in adjacent areas of Punjab by a small number of people (Sohail et al., 2011). Pashto is the primary language of KP, one of Pakistan's major regional languages (Sardaraz et al., 2021). Overall, around 2.5 percent of Pakistan's population speaks Hindko. Its dialects vary in their lexicon and syntax; however, the phonemic inventories are broadly similar (Nawaz & Afsar, 2019). The linguistic map of Pakistan illustrates the boundaries of various languages, as shown in Figure 1.

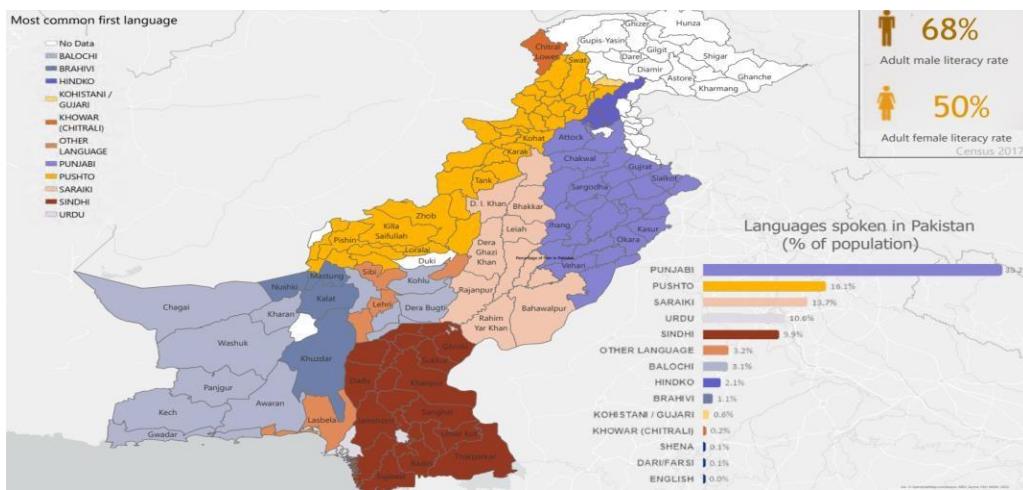


Figure 1: Linguistic map of Pakistan. (Source: Google Images)

The linguistic map indicates that Punjabi accounts for 39.23%, Pashto for 16.11%, Saraiki for 13.66%, Urdu for 10.64%, Sindhi for 9.86%, Balochi for 3.08%, Hindko for 2.11%, Brahui for 1.10%, and others for 3.22%. Pahari is included in the broader category of other languages. The four specified languages, Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko, share various commonalities and differences in their structures. Previous studies on the selected languages have explored their morphological, syntactic, and semantic aspects; however, they have neglected to examine how nominalization systems function across various linguistic levels and within Pakistan's typologically diverse linguistic region.

Generally speaking, nominalization systems, an important morphological aspect, have already been studied in major world languages such as English (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), Arabic (Ryding, 2005), and Spanish (King, 1992), as well as in crosslinguistic and typological works (Comrie & Thompson, 2007). Specifically, in South Asian languages, Nishioka and Kumar (2021, 2025) analyzed Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili in Hindi, as well as the languages of Bihar, using grammatical nominalization according to Shibatani's theory. Such syntactic and morphological investigations enhance the pedagogical implications, preservation, and documentation of these languages.

The present study examines the nominalization patterns of the four Pakistani languages. It explores how these patterns reflect sociolinguistic variation in South Asian languages. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of nominalization across languages. It also evaluates the applicability of Shibatani's (2019) framework in less-studied linguistic contexts. A data-driven approach supports this positioning and contributes to theoretical discussions on typology, language change, and South Asian linguistics in multilingual contexts.

## Literature Review

Nominalization, in its basic meaning, refers to the phenomenon by which nominal expressions are derived. Nominalization turns something into a noun (Thompson, 1985). Nominal expressions can be derived from verbs and adjectives (Foong et al., 2011). They state that clauses can also be nominalized. Nominalization constructions can be categorized into participant vs. event, lexical vs. grammatical, and embedded vs. non-embedded.

Participant nominalization refers to first-order ontological entities, such as persons, places, or objects. These participants assume the role of agents, patients, locations, or instruments. Event nominalization refers to the nominalization of events. Lexical nominalization resembles non-derived nouns in terms of morpho-syntactic characteristics. Lexical nominalization receives genitive and plural markings, and the nominalizer may have scope over the entire clause (Comrie & Thompson, 1985). They further argue that clausal nominalization may not possess nominal features but verbal ones, such as person-number agreement. They cite the example of Korean, where nominalization constructions have both tense and case. Clausal nominalizations, as Foong et al. (2011) describe, are embedded as arguments of a matrix clause in most cases, though not always. Non-embedded nominalizations express speakers' attitudes. Key linguistic patterns in the regional grammatical distinctions of South Asian languages have been largely overlooked in previous research.

In this regard, Shibatani's (2017, 2018, 2019) typological works which has rich morphological marking specifically for South Asian languages may provide a more comprehensive account of nominalization according to the

Around 70 Languages are spoken in Pakistan  
**Punjabi 39.23%**  
 Pashto 16.11%  
 Saraiki 13.66%  
**Urdu 10.64%**  
 Sindhi 9.86%  
 Balochi 0.308%  
**Hindko 0.211%**  
 Brahui 01.10%  
 Others 3.22%  
**(Pahari etc)**

nature of the specified languages' data, classifying it into lexical and grammatical categories, shown in the following flow diagram:

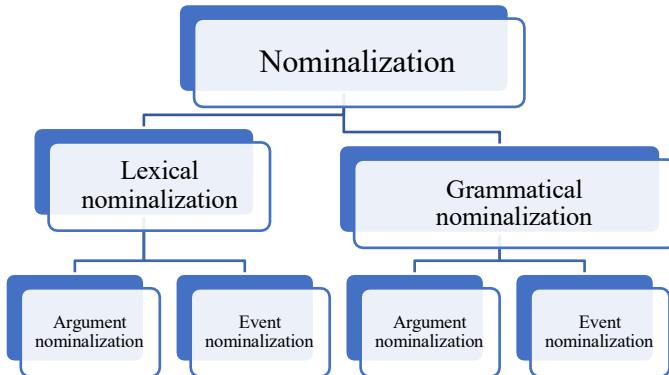


Figure 2: Categorization of nominalization based on Shibatani's typological works  
Nishioka and Kumar (2021: 65)

Noun-based nominalizations denote entities related to the concept. They can have both activity and agent/instrument readings, while verbal nominalizations denote activities. Grammatically nominalized expressions denote concepts that are closely associated with their originals and are understood in context. The Gricean maxim of relevance also contributes to the interpretation of grammatical nominalizations (1975). They can function as modifiers in a noun phrase or an adverbial. Grammatical nominalizations include stem nominalizations and participles, which require a copula as an evidence marker.

Generally speaking, Shibatani's theory of nominalization is a development of functionalist linguistics, including cognitive linguistics. It solves conventional problems by reanalyzing various languages. Specifically, nominalization elucidates the cognitive motivation underlying syntactic structure and discourse function, including basic concepts such as "clause" and "sentence". This groundbreaking study examines word derivation and its relationship to relative clauses and embedded constructions across diverse languages worldwide. It demonstrates how neo-nominalization theory provides a unified view of phenomena traditionally treated separately in grammar, generative grammar, and linguistic typology.

According to Yoshio (as cited in Shibatani, 2019), more categories of grammatical nominalizations can include true grammatical, abbreviated, and clausal nominalizations. Event nominalizations denote abstract concepts and their related entities. Argument nominalizations denote event participants, using relatives, including subject and object nominalizations. Genitive case markers have varied functions and denotations that are understood in context. It can make possessive constructions in nouns and occur with non-finite verbal forms. The appositives take non-appositive forms, such as relatives and genitives. They also modify the head nouns. The actual denotation of argument nominalization is determined by context.

Studies have focused primarily on lexical nominalizations, despite the broader scope of grammatical nominalizations. This is due to continuous variation in the forms of grammatical nominalizations, as they exhibit structural properties similar to those of clauses. However, these typological works lack application to South Asian languages. These languages have numerous complex examples that can be integrated into the regional linguistic literature. This paper examines nominalization of the four Pakistani languages based on the following devices:

The concept of Relatives belongs to the category of central determiners. Words like which, who, whose, whatever, whichever, etc., are relatives (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). Relative clauses function as modifiers of noun phrases and other categories. The relatives may be restrictive or non-restrictive. These clauses have the same structure as Wh-question sentences, although they do not ask a question (Roberts, 2016). The relative clauses may be embedded in noun phrases (Chalker & Weiner, 1994). This study examines the structural and functional aspects of relative clauses in the selected languages.

The general concept of the Participle is defined as a non-finite form of the verb that ends in either -ing or -ed in the case of regular verbs. In the case of irregular verbs, the -ed participle may have a -en form or may have a change of vowel from its base form (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). Two general forms of participles are named as present and past,

but neither of these names is true. This is because they occur in various tenses, allowing them to refer to present, past, or future time. So, it is preferable to use the -ing and -ed forms of participles.

The concept of Genitives shows possession or belonging. They may be dependent and independent genitives (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). The possessive pronouns are the genitives of the personal pronouns. A generally applied strategy for making genitives in English is adding an apostrophe or the addition of a prepositional phrase. In contrast, genitive markers in South Asian languages nominalize complete clauses, as in possessive constructions.

The concept of Apposition refers to a relation between two noun phrases that have the same referent. These phrases are parallel to each other (Chalker & Weiner, 1994). In grammar, apposition occurs when two words or phrases are placed side by side in a sentence so that one defines or describes the other. An example is the phrase, "My dog Woofers". Here, "my dog" is in apposition to the name "Woofers".

In addition to the Shibatani's (2019) theory markers, the marker of *-wa:la:* is a particle used in Urdu and *-a:la:* in many other languages of Pakistan. These perform a variety of functions making nouns from verbs. It denotes agents of action, such as the -er inflection in verbs like *clean*, which performs a similar function. Thus, the syntactic roles of the like *-wa:la:* and *-a:la:* constructions are central to South Asian languages in general and Pakistani languages in particular, providing a regional linguistic analysis.

## Method

The data were collected from 20 native speakers across the four selected Pakistani languages: Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko. The speakers were chosen at random to maintain linguistic bracketing and ensure a diverse representation of language use. First, a list of Urdu nominalization constructions was compiled with the assistance of Urdu native speakers. It consisted of four sentences for each of the four categories, including relative, participle, genitive, and appositive, based on Shibatani's (2019) framework. To verify the accuracy of these sentences, five native Urdu speakers were consulted and recorded, ensuring the correct identification and construction of nominalization markers in the language. Subsequently, the verified Urdu sentences were translated into Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko by five native speakers of each language. Parallel patterns from Urdu were employed throughout the translation process to maintain cross-linguistic consistency (see Section 4). It was ensured that all selected speakers were also proficient in Urdu, thereby enabling reliable cross-linguistic comparisons. Their Urdu proficiency was informally confirmed through pre-session discussions on language background. The data collection process was documented in written and audio records for morphological and syntactic analysis. The data were analyzed using Shibatani's (2019) framework, which examines relative constructions, participles, genitives, and appositives across all four languages.

## Results

The analysis of Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko is guided by Shibatani's (2019) theoretical framework, categorizing nominalizations into relative, participle, genitive, and appositive types. The relative markers of Urdu are analyzed using four examples, followed by those of Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko. The descriptions of all four languages are then provided, followed by a tabulated summary of the findings.

### Relatives

The data on relative markers are provided with the morphological description and an English gloss. The examples are labelled as a, b, c, and d. The data is provided with double inverted commas (""), and their English gloss with single inverted commas (''). The abbreviations used during the analysis are given after the reference list.

### Relative in Urdu

- a) "jo: chakki: ab bhi: chalti: hai."  
 which (REL) mill (F.SG.) now too work/function (IPFV.F. SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- b) "chakki: jo: ab bhi: chalti: hai."  
 mill(F.SG.) which (REL) now too work/function (IPFV.F. SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'

- c) "jo: ganā: chahṭā: hai."  
 one (REL.) sing (INF.) want (IPFV.SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'one(person) who wants to sing.'
- d) "jo: ho: chukka: hai."  
 one (REL) be (STEM) complete (PFV.M.SG.) COP.PRS.  
 'One (thing) which is done.'

### Relatives in Pahari

- a) "jirhi: chakki: hun vi: chalnī: zi:."  
 which (REL) mill (F.SG.) now too work/function (IPFV.F.SG.) COP.PRS.F.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- b) "oh chakki: jirhi: hun vi: chalnī: zi:."  
 COR mill (F.SG.) which (REL.F.SG.) now too work/function (IPFV.F.SG.) COP.PRS.F.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- c) "jirha: ganey chhanā: za:."  
 one (REL M.SG.) sing (INF) want (IPFV.M.SG.) COP.PRS.M. SG.  
 'One(person) who wants to sing.'
- d) "jirha: hoi rhya za:."  
 one (REL.M.SG.) be (STEM) complete (PFV.M.SG.) COP.PRS.M.SG.  
 'One (thing) which is done.'

### Relatives in Punjabi

- a) "jirhi: chakki: hunrr vi: chaldj: ey."  
 which (REL.F.SG.) mill(F.SG.) now too work (IPFV.F. SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- b) "chakki: jirhi: hunrr vi: chaldj: ey."  
 mill (F.SG.) which (REL.F.SG.) now too work (IPFV.F.SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- c) "jirha: ga:nra cha:ndā: ey."  
 who (REL.M.SG.) Sing (INF) want (IPFV.M. SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'One who wants to sing.'
- d) "jirha: ho chukia: ey."  
 which (REL.M.SG.) be (STEM) finish (PFV.M.SG.) COP.PRS.SG.  
 'One which is done.'

### Relatives in Hindko

- a) "jirhi: chakki: hunrr bi: chaldj:."  
 which (REL.F.SG.) mill(F.SG.) now too work (IPFV.F.SG.)  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- b) "oh chakki: jirhi: hunrr bi: chaldj:."  
 that (COR) mill (F.SG.) which (REL.F.SG.) now too work (IPFV.F.SG.)  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- c) "jirha: ga:nra: chandā:."  
 who (REL.M.SG.) sing (INF) want (IPFV.M.SG.)  
 'One(person) who wants to sing.'
- d) "jey kuj ho: gey/ga:."  
 which (REL) be finished (PFV.)  
 'One(thing) which is done.'

### Description of Relatives

The Pakistani languages use relative markers for nominalization, forming relative subordinate clauses. Urdu involves the relative marker *jo:* for making nominal expressions. This relative marker may be positioned before or after the noun phrase modified by the relative marker, as in 4.1.1a. However, the relative *jo:*'s position influences the sentence's

emphasis. In 4.1.1a., the relative *jo*: at the initial position emphasizes *ab bhi* (even now), while placing the noun phrase at the initial position as in 4.1.1b. shifts the emphasis from *ab bhi* (even now) to *chakki*: (mill). The relative *jo*: is not expressive of gender and number, for instance, in examples 4.1.1a and 4.1.1d. The verb phrases like *chalqī*: determine the gender *hai* (works) and *chukka: hai* (is done). The *i* and *a* at the end of *chalqī*: and *chukka*: determine the masculine and feminine genders, respectively. Moreover, the number (singular) is represented by these letters at the ends of verb phrases and the copula *hai*, which shows the singularity of the noun phrase. There is no apparent distinction between the relative standing of a person and a thing in Urdu, as seen in 4.1.1c and d, where the same relative marker is used for both person and thing.

Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko share the same pattern except for having the embedded gender marker in the relative nominalizer, such as *jirrhi*: and *jirrha*: (in examples b. & d. of sections 4.1.2, 4.1.3, & 4.1.4) for feminine and masculine genders, respectively. The verb phrases independently represent the gender as well, as in *chalnī: zi*: in Pahari, where the *i*: of the verb phrase *chalnī*: and copula *zi*: determine the feminine gender. In 4.1.2d, in *hoi rhya za*: (is done), the *a*: at the end of the verb *rhya*: and copula *za*: determine the gender. Similarly, the number is determined by the helping verbs *zi*: and *za*:, representing singular feminine and masculine genders, respectively. Apart from this, Pahari experiences the same shift of emphasis by varying the positions of the relatives, as in 4.1.2a. and 4.1.2b. By shifting the position of the relative *jirrhi*: before and after the noun, the emphasis of the clause shifts from *chakki*: (mill) to *hunh vi*: (even now). Pahari shows the relative-correlative construction COR+NP+REL as in 4.1.2b., where the correlative *oh* (also functioning as a determiner) is incorporated to render more specificity and clarity to the noun *chakki*: (mill). This construction is absent from Urdu and Punjabi.

Punjabi uses the same relative markers, *jirrha*: and *jirrhi*: to mark the singular masculine and feminine genders, respectively. In 4.1.3a, for instance, *jirrhi*: is the relative marker modifying *chakki*: (mill) and showing singular feminine gender. 4.1.3c. shows a nominal expression where the relative *jirrha*: represents the singular masculine gender. The copular verb *ey* does not show the gender in Punjabi. Moreover, if the relative *jirrha*: is shifted from the initial position to after the noun *chakki*: the stress of the clause shifts from *chakki*: to *tho hunrh vi*: (even now). Punjabi shows no apparent distinction between the forms of relatives used to describe things and people. In 4.1.3c. and 4.1.3d., the same relative *jirrha*: is used to nominalize the expressions involving people (one person who wants to sing) and things (which is done), respectively.

In Hindko, the relative markers *jirrha*: and *jirrhi*: are used similarly to express gender and number, as in Pahari. However, the relative markers for people and things are distinguished forms, as shown in 4.1.4c. and 4.1.4d. In 4.1.4d, *jay/jay kuj* are the relative markers for specifying the thing(s). Additionally, Hindko exhibits a shift in emphasis similar to that of Urdu, Pahari, and Punjabi, as evidenced by the relative *jirrhi* position, as in 4.1.4a. and 4.1.4b. The relatives *jirrha*: and *jirrhi*: in Hindko demonstrate gender and number agreement, where *a*: and *i*: at the end of the words represent singular masculine and feminine genders. Hindko exhibits the relative-correlative construction COR+NP+REL, as seen in 4.1.4b. Like Pahari, the language uses the correlative marker 'oh' before the noun.

**Table 1**

*Summary Table of Relative Markers*

Language	Relative Marker	Gender Marker	Number Marker	Emphasis Shift by Position
Urdu	<i>jo</i> :	None	None	Emphasis changes by position
Pahari	<i>jirrhi</i> : (fem.)	<i>i</i> : (fem.)	<i>zi</i> : (sing. fem.) <i>za</i> : (sing. masc.)	Emphasis changes by position
Punjabi	<i>jirrhi</i> : (fem.)	<i>i</i> : (fem.)	None	Emphasis changes by position
	<i>jirrha</i> : (masc.)	<i>a</i> : (masc.)	None	
Hindko	<i>jirrhi</i> : (fem.)	<i>i</i> : (fem.)	None	Emphasis changes by position
	<i>jirrha</i> : (masc.)	<i>a</i> : (masc.)	None	
	<i>jay/jay kuj</i> (thing)	None		

### Participles

This section contains data on the participles of the languages and their analysis.

## Participles in Urdu

- a) "mera:                    pakka:                    hua:                    khanā:."  
 my (GEN.M.SG.)        cook (PFV)                    COP.PFV. M.SG.food (M.SG.)  
 'My cooked food.'
- b) "ab bhi                    chalṭi:                    hui                            chakki:."  
 nowtoo                    flow (IPFV.F.SG.)                    COP.PFV. F.SG/PL.                    mill (F.SG.)  
 'The mill which works even now.'
- c) "chalṭi:                    chakki:."  
 work (IPFV.F.SG.)        mill(F.SG.)  
 'Working mill.'

### 4.1.1 Participles in Pahari

- a) "mari:                    pakki:                    roti:."  
 my (GEN.F.SG.)        cook (PFV.F.SG.)                    food (F.SG.)  
 'my cooked food.'
- b) "aja:n                    vi:                            chalnī:                    chakki:."  
 nowtoo                    work (IPFV.F.SG.)                    mill(F.SG.)  
 'The mill which works even now.'
- c) "chalnī:                    chakki:."  
 work (IPFV.F.SG.)        mill(F.SG.)  
 'Working mill.'

### 4.1.2 Participles in Punjabi

- a) "maira:                    pakya:                    kha:nrā:."  
 my (GEN.M.SG.)        cook (PVF.M.SG.)                    food (M.SG.)  
 'My cooked food.'
- b) "ha:lay                    vi:                            chalḍi:                    chakki:."  
 nowtoo                    work (IPFV.F.SG.)                    mill (F.SG.)  
 'The mill which works even now.'
- c) "chalḍi:                    chakki:."  
 work (IPFV.F.SG.)        mill (F.SG.)  
 'Working mill.'

### 4.1.3 Participles in Hindko

- a) "marra:                    pakey                    ḍa:                            khanrrā:."  
 my                            cook (PFV.M.SG.)                    COP. PFV. M.SG.                    food (M.SG.)  
 'My cooked food.'  
 "hunrr                    bi:                            chalḍi:                            chakki:."  
 nowtoo                    flow (IPFV.F.SG.)                    COP.PFV.f.sg                    Mill (F.SG.)  
 'The mill which functions even now.'
- b) "chalḍi:                    chakki:."  
 work (IPFV.F.SG.)        mill (F.SG.)  
 'Working mill.'

## Description of Participles

The use of participles to derive nominal expressions is reflected in the data. Consider 4.2.1a from the Urdu data; the participle "cooked" is broken down into *pakka: hua:*. This nominal expression incorporates the contribution of *pakka:*, which generally means "cooked," and the additional use of *hua:*, which serves as a copula. PFV. Hence, Urdu has nominal expressions involving participles, such as the perfect participle and COP.PFV. tend to modify the head noun, that is, *kha:nā:* (meal). In 4.2.1b., the imperfect participle *chalṭi:* (working) and the perfect form of the copula *hui:* are used to modify the head noun. Both participles and the copula are gender markers. The letters *a:* and *i:* at the end of the words *pakka:* and *chalṭi:* represent the singular masculine and feminine genders, respectively. Participles can modify head nouns without the copula. For instance, in 4.2.1c, we observe a pattern of IPFV+N in nominalization.

The use of participles in Pahari follows the same pattern as in Urdu, except for the copula.PFV. Between the IPFV and the noun, it is not found in Pahari, as seen in 4.2.1a. and b. From 4.2.2a to 4.2.2c, the nominalized expressions like *pakki: roti*: (cooked food) and *chalni: chakki*: (working mill) exhibit a constant absence of the copula. PFV. Other than that, in 4.2.2a, the perfect participle *pakki*: (cooked) is modifying the noun *roti*: (food) by associating an attribute with the noun. In 4.2.2b., a participle *chalni*: (working) modifies the noun *chakki*: (mill). This is an imperfect participle, demonstrating the progressive aspect. Other than that, these participles express gender and reflect number agreement. The participles in 4.2.2a, b, and c. represent singular feminine nouns. As noted above, the final-i marks the gender and number.

Punjabi employs participles with patterns similar to those in Urdu, but there is no regularity in the use of the copula.PFV. Between the head noun and the participle, both the patterns PFV/IPFV + COP. + N and PFV/IPFV + N are in application. In 4.2.3a, the perfect participle *pakya*: (cooked) is positioned before the head noun. In 4.2.3c, the pattern is the same as 4.2.3a, except for an imperfect participle before the noun.

Hindko also exhibits no regularity in using the copula between the noun and the participle. In 4.2.4a, the use of COP. PFV, additionally, marks the perfect aspect. The case is similar in 4.2.4b, where the COP is placed between the noun and the participle, marking the expression's progressive aspect. In 4.2.4c, the application of the copula is absent. Like Urdu and Punjabi, the number and gender are reflected by the participles and the copular verbs.

**Table 2**  
*Summary Table of Participles*

Languages	Examples	Participles	COP.PFV.	Gender Marker	Number Marker	Position
Urdu	4.2.1a	<i>pakka: hua:</i> (cooked)	<i>hua:</i>	<i>a:</i> (masc.)	Sg.	Before/After noun
	4.2.1b	<i>chalti: hui</i> (working)	<i>hui:</i>	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before/After noun
	4.2.1c	<i>chalti:</i> (working)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun
Pahari	4.2.2a	<i>pakki: roti</i> (cooked food)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun
	4.2.2b	<i>chalni: chakki:</i> (working mill)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun
Punjabi	4.2.2c	<i>chalni:</i> (working)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun
	4.2.3a	<i>pakya:</i> (cooked)	None	<i>a:</i> (masc.)	Sg.	Before noun
	4.2.3b	<i>chaldqi: hoi</i> (working)	<i>hoi:</i>	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before/After noun
Hindko	4.2.3c	<i>chaldqi:</i> (working)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun
	4.2.4a	<i>pakey</i> (cooked)	None	<i>a:</i> (masc.)	Sg.	Before/After noun
	4.2.4b	<i>chaldqi:</i> (working)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before/After noun
	4.2.4c	<i>chaldqi:</i> (working)	None	<i>i:</i> (fem.)	Sg.	Before noun

## Genitives

This section presents data on genitive markers and the analysis.

## Genitives in Urdu



## Genitives in Pahari

- a) "Ahmed nī: kiṭā:v."  
Ahmed GEN.F.SG. book (F.SG.)

- ‘Ahmed’s book.’  
 b) “unā:           lokā:           nī:           tareef.”  
 those           people           GEN.F.SG.           praise (F.SG.)  
 ‘The praise of those people.’
- ‘The praise of those people.’  
 c) “dabbay           nā:           dūdh.”  
 pack           GEN.M.SG.           milk (M.SG.)  
 ‘canned milk.’
- d) “suttay           nā:           waila:”  
 sleep (INF.OBL)           GEN.M.SG.           time(M.SG.)  
 ‘The time to sleep.’

### Genitives in Punjabi

- a) “Ahmed           dī:           kitā:b”  
 Ahmed           GEN.F.SG           book (F.SG)  
 ‘Ahmed’s book.’
- b) “unhā:           lokā:           dī:           tareef.”  
 those           people           GEN.F.SG           praise (F.SG.)  
 ‘The praise of those people.’
- c) “dabbay           dā:/a:la: dūdh.”  
 pack           GEN.M.SG.           milk (M.SG.)  
 ‘canned milk.’
- d) “soonrr           dā:           waila:”  
 sleep (INF.OBL)           GEN/PTCL.M.SG.           time (M.SG.)  
 ‘The time to sleep.’

### Genitives in Hindko

- a) “Ahmed           dī:           kitā:b.”  
 Ahmed           GEN.F.SG.           book (F.SG.)  
 ‘Ahmed’s book.’
- b) “unā:           logā:           dī:           tareef.”  
 those           people           GEN.F.SG.           praise (F.SG.)  
 ‘The praise of those people.’
- c) “dabbay           dā:/a:la: dūdh.”  
 pack           PTCL.M.SG.           milk (M.SG.)  
 ‘canned milk.’
- d) “sainray           dā:           waila:.”  
 sleep (INF)           GEN.M.SG.           time.  
 ‘The time to sleep.’

### Description of Genitives

The general pattern for nominalization in Urdu, using genitive markers, is NP + GEN + NP. In 4.3.1a, we observe this pattern, where the genitive function is performed by *ki*:. The genitive is placed between two noun phrases involving proper and common nouns. This genitive marker illustrates that the subsequent noun phrase has the noun placed before it. In 4.3.1b., the same pattern continues. The genitive marker *ki*:, placed between two nouns, modifies the noun *lefseen* (praise). The genitive *ki*:, used in these instances from the data, also marks the noun’s gender following it. It marks the feminine gender that it modifies. In 4.3.1c, the genitive marker *ka*: between the noun phrases is not performing its usual function of demonstrating possession. The genitive *ka*: is associating an attribute to its subsequent noun *doodh* (milk), just like *ed* in “packed milk” associates an attribute to “milk.” In this case, the genitive and the noun phrase before it work like participle adjectives do in English. Additionally, the genitive marker *ka* also expresses the singular masculine gender. Likewise, in 4.3.1d, the genitive *ka*: does not show possession *per se*. The phrase conveys the meaning of “the time to sleep,” involving infinitives.

Pahari has a general pattern of Urdu, except that the orthographic and phonetic realizations of genitive markers differ from those in Urdu. In 4.3.2a., and b., the genitive marker *nī*: occurs between the noun phrases Ahmed, *kitā:v*

(Ahmed, book), and *lokā*; *tareef* (people, praise) respectively, and qualifies the noun phrases afterwards. However, in 4.3.2c and d, there is a variation in the function of the genitive marker. The genitive *nā*: in 4.3.2c, combined with the noun *dabbay* (pack), performs the attributive function like participle adjectives in English. Likewise, in 4.3.2d, the genitive *nā*: occurring between *suttay* (sleep) and *waila* (time) gives the meaning “the time to sleep”. The genitives *nī*: and *nā*: used in Pahari also express gender and number agreement to the noun they modify. Genitive *nī*: is used in Pahari for singular feminine, while *nā*: is used for singular masculine.

Genitives *da:*, *di:*, etc., are used in Punjabi to derive nominal expressions. The genitives can also perform the attributive functions when combined with nouns, as in 4.3.3c and d. In 4.3.3c.; genitive *da:* works in the same manner as discussed in the case of Urdu and Pahari. Similarly, 4.3.3d yields the same sense as in Urdu and Pahari. However, the Punjabi language also uses the *-a:la:* marker interchangeably with *da:*, which serves the same function as *da:* does here. The genitives *di:* and *da:* in Punjabi indicate both gender and number. The *di:* is singular feminine, and *da:* is singular masculine.

Genitives are also used in Hindko. *da:*, *di:* marks the gender and number, similar to Punjabi. These genitives show the possession of nouns before them. Besides this, genitive in 4.3.4c performs the function of English participle adjectives, as discussed in the case of Urdu. In 4.3.4d, the genitive *da:* combined with *sainray* (sleep) functions like an English infinitive, and it would mean “to sleep.” In 4.3.4d. *-a:la:* similar to Punjabi *-a:la:* performs attributive functions like *da:* is performing here. In other words, it can be said that NP + GEN + NP results in participle + noun here.

## Appositives

The data of the languages' appositives with the description is given in the following:

## Appositives in Urdu

- a) “mā: school band, ka: apnay baitay se: kehnā: keh us dīn  
 mother (F.SG) (GEN.) her son (M.SG.) to saying that (APP) that day school  
 off was (COP.PST.M.SG.).  
 ‘Mother’s telling her son that school was off that day.’

b) “yeh haqiqat, hai keh walidqain apnay bachoona kayliey  
 mehnat, kertay hain.”  
 its fact (F.SG.) is (COP.SG.) that (APP) parents their children for  
 hardworking do COP.PL.  
 ‘It is true that parents do hard working for their children.’

c) “un ka: helf keh voh paspa: nehi: hō: gey.”  
 theyGEN.M.SG. oath that (APP) they retreat not be COP.PL.  
 Their oath that they will not retreat.

d) “yeh khabar hai keh chor pakrra giya: tha:”  
 its news COP.SG. that(APP) thief catch be(PST.M.SG.) COP.PST.SG.  
 ‘It is news that the thief was caught.’

## Appositives in Pahari

- a) “ma:u nā: apny putray ki d̥asna: keh /khay school us t̥eharay band,  
                  a:sa:.” mother (GEN.) her son to saying that(APP) school that day  
                  off COP.M.SG.  
                  ‘Mother is saying to her son that school was off that day.’.

b) “yo sach za: keh ma: peyo apnay bachyā: n̥i: galla:  
                  mehnat̥ kernay zey.” its true COP.PRS.M.SG. that (APP) parents their children for  
                  hard working do (IPFV.PL.) COP.PRS.PL.  
                  ‘It is true that parents do hard work for their children.’

c) “unā: na: helf keh oh pichey naey hatney.”  
                  theyGEN.M.SG. oath that (APP) they back not (PL.) move (M.PL.)  
                  ‘Their oath that they will not retreat.’

d) “ey khabar zi: keh/khay chor pakrra: wa: asa:.”

it news COP.PRS.F.SG. that (APP) thief catch COP.PST.M.SG.  
 'It is news that the thief was arrested.'

### Appositives in Punjabi

- a) "ma:u **da:** apnray putray ki: **da:snra** keh us **djhary** school  
 mother her son to saying that (APP) on that day school off  
 COP.PST.F.M.SG.  
 'Mother's telling her son that school was off that day.'
- b) "ey **haqiqat** ey keh ma: peyo apnray bachya:n  
 lai mehnat karday nain." parents their  
 its true is (COP.PRS.SG.) are (COP.PRS.PL.)  
 children for hard working do (IPFV)  
 'It is true that parents do hard work for their children.'
- c) "unhā: **da:** half keh oh pichay nī: hattanrr  
 their GEN.M.SG. oath (M.SG.) that (APP) they back not move  
 will (COP.FUT.M.PL.)  
 'Their oath that they will not retreat.'
- d) "eh khabar ey keh chor nappanr gya." (COP.PST.SG.)  
 it news is (COP.PRS.SG.) that (APP) thief (M.SG/PL.) catch (INF)  
 'It is news that the thief was arrested.'

### Appositives in Hindko

- a) "ma:u **da:** a:pnray putray ka: a:khnra: keh us  
 tairrhay school band, a:hey." son to saying that (APP) that on  
 mother (GEN) GEN.M.SG/PL. her that day school off COP.PST.M.SG.  
 'Mother's telling her son that school was off that day.'
- b) "ey sach **thia:** keh ma: pe: apnray bachyā: a:stay mehnat  
 kerdey." parents their children for hard work  
 its true COP.M.SG. that (APP) do+COP.PRS.M.PL.  
 'It is true that parents do hard work for their children.'
- c) "unā: **da:** heluf **thia:** keh oh pichey nā: hetley."  
 their GEN.M.SG. oath COP.M.SG. that (APP) they back not move  
 COP.FUT.PL.  
 'Their oath that they will not retreat.'
- d) "khabar ey **di:** keh chor pakri:/a: ga:" goPFV.PST.M.SG.  
 news it is(COP.SG.) that(APP) thief catch  
 'It is news that the thief was arrested.'

### Description of Appositives

The data from Urdu exhibits the use of the appositives *keh*. Urdu, Punjabi, and Hindko share the same pattern for apposition. Appositive *keh* is used in these languages. Pahari uses the appositive *keh*, with the phonetic form *khay*, which has the same meaning. The use of *keh* and *khay* is not regular in Pahari.

Table 3

Summary of Appositives

Language	Appositive Form	Notes
Urdu	keh	Consistent use
Punjabi	keh	Consistent use
Hindko	keh	Consistent use
Pahari	keh, khay	No regularity in use

### The *-wa:la:* in Urdu

This section discusses the *-wa:la:* marker using the data from the Pakistani languages:

#### *-wa:la:* in Urdu

Consider the examples from Urdu incorporating the use of *-wa:la:*:

- a) “ab bhi chalney wa:li: chakki:”  
nowtoo work (INF.OBL.) PTCL.F.SG/PL. mill (F.SG.)  
‘The mill which works even now.’
- b) “kabba:rr lainay -wa:la: a:dmī:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL) PTCL.M.SG. man (M.SG.)  
‘The man who buys scrap.’
- c) “kaba:rr lainay -wa:la:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL.) PTCL.M.SG.  
‘The one who buys scrap.’
- d) “kabba:rr -wa:la:”  
scrap SUF.M.SG.  
‘The scrap man.’
- e) “kabba:rr -iya (kabba:rriya)”  
scrap man (SUF) scrapman  
‘The scrap man.’

#### *-wa:la:/-a:la:* in Pahari

- a) “aja:n vi: chalnay -a:li: chakki:”  
nowtoo work (INF.OBL.) PTCL.F.mill  
‘The mill which works even now.’
- b) “kachra: (k)hinday -a:la: banda:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL.) PTCL.M.SG. man.  
‘The man who buys scrap.’
- c) “kachra: (k)hinday -a:la:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL.) PTCL.M.SG.  
‘The one who buys scrap.’
- d) “kachray -a:la:”  
scrap (M.SG.) PTCL.M.SG.  
‘The scrap man.’

#### *wa:la:/-a:la:* in Punjabi

- a) “ha:lay vi: chalanr r -a:li: ‘chakki:’”  
now too work (INF.OBL.) PTCL.F.SG. mill (F.SG.)  
‘The mill which works even no6325.w.’
- b) “kabba:rr lainrr -a:la: banda:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL.) PTCL.M.SG. man (M.SG.)  
‘The man who buys scrap.’
- c) “kab:rr lainrr -a:la:”  
scrap buy (INF.OBL) PTCL.M.SG.  
‘The one who buys scrap.’
- d) “kabba:rr -a:la:”  
scrap SUF.M.SG.  
‘The scrap man.’

#### *-wa:la:/-a:la:* in Hindko

- a) “hunrr bi: chalnay -a:li: chakki:”

- nowtoo work (INF.OBL.) PTCL.F.SG. mill (F.SG.)  
 'The mill which works even now.'
- b) "kabba:rr kin-nay -a:la: banda:"  
 scrap buy (INF) PTCL.M.SG. man (M.SG.)  
 'The man who buys scrap.'
- c) "kabba:rr kin-nay -a:la:."  
 scrap buy (INF.) PTCL.M.SG.  
 'The one who buys scrap.'
- d) "kabba:rr i: (kabba:rri:)." "  
 scrap man (SUF) (scrapman)  
 'The scrap man.'

### Description of *-wa:la:/-a:la:*

In Pakistani languages, the suffix *-wa:la:/-a:la:* plays an important role in nominalization, transforming verbs into nouns that describe people or things associated with a particular action. This linguistic feature *-wa:la:* is consistently observed in Urdu, and *-a:la:* in Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko, showing similarities and unique variations. The *-wa:la:/-a:la:* marker nominalizes verbs and creates nouns that mean 'the one who' or 'the person who'. This marker also follows gender agreement rules, with *-wa:li:/-a:li:* used for feminine nouns and *-wa:la:/-a:la:* for masculine nouns. For example, in Urdu, *kabba:rr lainay -wa:la:* translates to 'the man who buys scrap metal,' while *kabba:rr lainay -wa:li:* would refer to a woman performing the same action. Each language has distinct forms and usage patterns. Urdu, for example, employs variations such as *-wa:la:*, *-wa:li:*, and *-iya*, the latter of which is interchangeable with *-wa:la:* in specific contexts. In contrast, Pahari and Punjabi predominantly use *-a:la:* and *-a:li:*, while Hindko has both *-a:la:* and *-i:*. These differences highlight the linguistic diversity within the region. In addition, the frequency of use of *-wa:la:/-a:la:* and its specific vocabulary vary between languages. For example, *kabba:rr* is 'junk' in Urdu, while *kachra:* is used in Pahari. These lexical choices further distinguish the unique identity of each language. In summary, while the *-wa:la:* marker serves a similar grammatical function in Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi, and Hindko, the specific forms, frequencies, and vocabularies differ, reflecting the region's rich linguistic diversity. This interplay of commonality and variation highlights the dynamic nature of language and its capacity to adapt to diverse cultural contexts.

### Discussions and Conclusion

Pakistani languages use relatives, participles, genitives, appositives, and the *-wa:la:* markers in their nominalization system. A key structural feature of Punjabi, Pahari, and Hindko is the embedded gender and number agreement within relative markers, which distinguishes them from Urdu and Hindi, where the relative marker "jo" remains uniform across animacy distinctions. Hindko and Pahari further exhibit relative-correlative constructions, thereby increasing their syntactic complexity relative to Urdu.

Nishioka and Kumar's (2021, 2025) discussion on Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili provides insight into comparative patterns. Bhojpuri differentiates "who" vs "what" using distinct relative markers, akin to English. In contrast, Punjabi, Pahari, and Hindko employ gender-based distinctions, reflecting a morphosyntactic agreement system rather than an animacy-based opposition. This difference underscores that Western Indo-Aryan languages employ typologically distinct nominalization strategies compared with their Eastern Indo-Aryan counterparts.

Participle constructions also play a crucial role in nominalization. Urdu uniquely inserts a perfect participle of the copula (COP.PFV) between the modifying participle and the head noun, forming a structure like [IPFV/PFV + COP.PFV + N]. This syntactic behavior is absent in Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili, as well as in Punjabi, Pahari, and Hindko, aligning these Pakistani languages with broader Western Indo-Aryan trends.

Furthermore, variations of *-wa:la:/-a:la:* in Punjabi, Pahari, and Hindko originally denote agency. In Urdu, the suffix *-iya:* can substitute *-wa:la:*, leading to lexical nominalization. According to Nishioka's study of lexical nominalization in Hindi (2020: 398-400), Hindi presents additional forms, such as *-ha:ra:*, as seen in *chuurri:ha:ra:* (bangle seller) or *lakarrha:ra:* (woodcutter). While these markers are productive to varying degrees, *-wa:la:* remains the more dominant form across Pakistani languages.

As seen in other nominalization studies of world languages, the analysis of Pakistani languages provides key insights into morphosyntactic and typological contexts, particularly for relative, participial, genitive, and appositive markers. This study identifies the *-wa:la:/-a:la:* nominalization markers and their functional roles, reinforcing language

preservation, pedagogical implications, and theoretical advancements in South Asian linguistics. The identification of these markers may help learners and teachers in learning these languages. Such markers are rarely found in the most-studied languages, such as English.

While nominalization patterns largely align with Urdu, subtle differences emerge upon closer examination. Future investigations could explore the distinction between nominal expressions like *qūudh-wa:la: marad* “the milkman” and infinitive-based constructions such as *a:ne wa:la: pal* “the moment to come” versus *a:ne ka: pal* “the moment of coming”. Similarly, structural ambiguities in participle constructions, such as *us larrke: ke: a:te: vaqṭ* “at the time when the boy comes” vs. *us ke: ka:m walli: company* “the company where he works,” warrant deeper syntactic analysis.

Since Japanese lacks relative markers, relative clause equivalents often rely on participle non-finite constructions. Further examination of these cross-linguistic differences can refine our understanding of nominalization strategies in Indo-Aryan and other language families. Empirical corpus analysis and speaker testimony could significantly enhance future studies, offering broader insights into cross-linguistic variation in nominalization.

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Abbreviations used are as follows. F = feminine; M = masculine; COP = copula; OBL = oblique; PVF = perfective; IMPF = imperfective; ADV = adverb; PRS = present; PST=past ; FUT = future; SG = singular; PL = plural; 1SG = First person singular; 1FSG = First person female singular; 1MSG = First person male singular; CON=conjunction; AUX=auxiliary; GEN=genitive; APP= applicative; REL=relative; INF=infinitive; COR=correlate

## Quality Learning Management: Framework Design to Support and Understand in the Digital Era

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The development of technology is a challenge and at the same time provides benefits for the element of education. The main factor that education can be part of development is having the management ability. The purpose (1) to know the aspects that modern teachers need to have in educating and (2) to create a conceptual framework for student management. The research method is qualitative with a case study design. Data collection using interviews. Data validity using source triangulation. The research procedure uses the Yin model. Data analysis is done with the help of Atlas.ti software. The result is that children's education according to their time has important indicators. Research novelty that needs to be understood are aspects of teachers and learning management. The integration of teacher skills aspects is to be a learning partner, active-creative-and-innovative, to be a role model for students, and to have broad insights, while novelty from the learning aspect is two components, namely synergy and tool design. The conceptual framework of the results describes the whole circle of learning management consisting of collaboration between parents-students-teachers in utilizing technology to improve the development of thinking patterns, and learning models, and improve learning achievement.

**Keywords:** conceptual framework, development of technology, teacher aspect

Times are changing along with the sophistication of technology. Likewise, the conditions of the social order of society and education make it possible to keep running by utilizing the latest technology. The use of technology cannot be separated from how the elements of education organize and convert into educational activities. It takes real effort from various elements to use technology by the portion of education. This needs to be accompanied by real and competent abilities to support the quality of education (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). Especially in learning that requires innovation to be able to develop according to the era (Syakdiyah et al., 2019).

The sophistication of technology that currently supports daily needs. People depend on themselves to complete work and activities assisted by technology. This is the main reason for teachers to be able to apply it in the learning process. Learning that is conventional and dominated by teachers will not be able to achieve the expected goals by the development of the era. The involvement of teachers in the learning process, system operations, and utilization of technology plays an important role in the development of the current era. This is in line with the research conducted by Mahmudah et al., (2021) that it is necessary to increase knowledge, skills, and education by teachers to be able to master technology and apply it to learning.

Based on the Technology Adoption Life Cycle (TACL), the average ability to use technology and utilize it in life and learning has a high percentage rate.

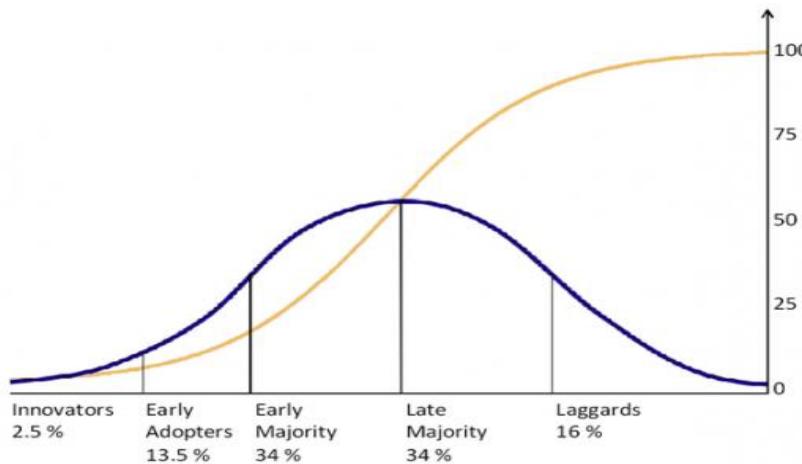


Figure 1 above explains that the highest percentage of everyday technology utilization is due to the early majority and late majority. The initial majority (34%) can be interpreted that in this category people adopt technology to support their daily activities after various levels of time. The time in this category has a much longer vulnerability. Meanwhile, the late majority is a category of average members of society who adopt the latest innovations and technology. Society has innovation with a high level of skepticism. The skeptic in question has little finance and a social status below average. This means that if TALC is adopted into the field of education, progress in the field of education, especially in learning, will depend on how teachers have technological skills, utilize technology in learning, and can be used to improve the quality of learning.

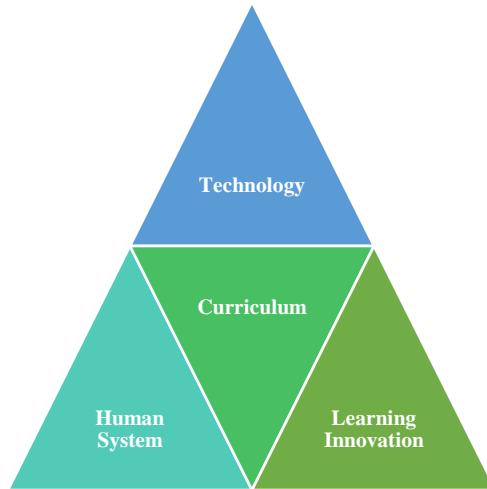
The slow teacher usually focuses on "tradition", where he is reluctant to take advantage of the latest technology. Likewise, this age factor is an important factor in upgrading skills and abilities to increase competence in learning (Cahyono et al., 2021). Learning that still uses conventional traditions while technology has rapidly developed is just as hindering. Because the quality of learning management will depend on how well the teacher can make learning interesting and attractive to students. Understanding changing learning strategies carried out by teachers is one form of skill that must be developed. Teachers' skills in computational thinking and digital utilization are of important things to change the way of learning (Tripon, 2022). The digital competencies and skills that teachers bring into play when using devices in classrooms in innovative educational experiences (Rodríguez Hoyos et al., 2021). Teachers possess digital attitudes and skills that allow them to carry out dynamic adequate, current, and innovative work, which transforms and improves teaching-learning processes while making them more flexible (Fernández-Morante et al., 2023; George-Reyes & Glasserman-Morales, 2022). The development of these skills is not only associated with the use and access to technologies but with the knowledge, skills, and correct attitudes in this use (Martins et al., 2023). These skills are an important part of teacher self-development to face challenges in the increasingly rapid development of technology.

The educational challenge in the era of the digital era is how educational institutions can produce high-quality and highly competitive graduates. This requires powerful strength and integration between educational institutions and the government to jointly support the success of realizing the challenges of education in the era of the digital era. Lase (2019) states that the education digital era is a response to the need for the digital era, where humans and technology are converging to create new opportunities creatively and innovatively. The digital era not only "shakes" the existence of management education but also challenges the progress of better education in the future (Kalargyrou & Pescosolido, 2012). Educational institutions in the digital era must be aware of the emergence of learning style trends in students (Heriyanto et al., 2020). The same thing was also conveyed by Lawrence et al., (2019) that in today's fast-changing technology world. The digital era has set the need to redesign the education system mainly on transforming the learning and teaching strategies around the world (Allen et al., 2016).

Many things need to be done by educational institutions to face the digital era competition. Combination and collaboration in the delivery of education require a close relationship between human resources and developing technology. As conveyed by Mian et al., (2020) this new industrial era of digitization was initiated with the emergence of electronics. The digital era has changed the thinking of educational leaders in terms of technology usage (Huang et al., 2021). Technology has a major role that can be used by educators and educational institutions in the challenges of the digital era (Altowairiki, 2021). This is stated by Hermann et al., (2016) as a collective term for technologies and

## QUALITY LEARNING MANAGEMENT

concepts of value chain organization. So the productivity of the digital era challenges in education is the performance and quality of learning provided by teachers that can improve the quality of graduates.



**Figure 2. Education Component in Facing the Challenges of the digital era**

The quality of learning management in the digital era can be seen from three things, namely people and strategy. The teacher is one of the fundamental things for improving the quality of learning in schools. Teachers who have expertise, skills, and competencies in teaching and in making learning innovations will be able to provide learning that is acceptable to students at school. Likewise, when you can take advantage of technology for the effectiveness of learning in this digital era. Need systematic steps to be able to develop teacher performance. As stated Ghozali (2018) the efforts offered by the government to enhance the quality of education have also been conducted by launching a teacher certification program. Likewise, when teachers have a contemporary and comprehensive understanding, they will certainly have concrete steps to improve the existing curriculum (Madsen et al., 2019); (Funa et al., 2022). Darma et al., (2020) state that the education in question is a phenomenon that responds to the needs of the industrial revolution by adjusting the new curriculum to the current situation. Afrianto, (2018) says that professional teachers must be aware of and adapt themselves to this development.

Teachers in the challenge of the digital era have a role that technology cannot replace. The role of the teacher is especially important for character-building students in utilizing technology, especially elementary school students (Sumiran et al., 2022). The existing technology will not be able to teach students how to be kind, think positively, and have enthusiasm for problem-solving. This is also related to innovative learning in the classroom (Venkateswara et al., 2022). Technology is only a tool used, while the main role is a teacher. Teachers provide appropriate direction for the development of potential primary school students regarding the use of technology and other skills. The statement was supported by Heriyanto et al., (2019) that education needs to improve the quality of workforce skills, digital talent, and social skills.

One way to face the digital era is to have the right strategy. In all discussions, the most important strategy in playing a role in the digital era is people. In education, people are the principal, teachers, and students. These three main components contribute to making a concept used for learning in the digital era. It is the relationship between these main components that will shape educational change, learning concepts that are in line with the needs of the digital era, and digitization that can be used as needed. The strategy needed is a qualified skill. When the digital era is taken into consideration, future engineers need to enhance their professional, social, methodical, and personal competencies (Mohy & Din, 2020). Of course, a strategy that has an approach related to learning patterns in elementary schools. Students who are increasingly in touch with the latest technologies such as gadgets and laptops need good skills so that they are not misused.

Schools have different strategies. This is possible because of the performance of school principals and teachers who are leaders and decision-makers (Widodo et al., 2022). In general, the right strategy is to increase the capacities, capabilities, skills, and competencies needed to face the era of the digital era. The teacher who is the main role is ideally capable of operating the latest technology. Data and technology tools are passive, so they only act according to the user's wishes. The framework of reference for digital era skills will be working life skills, which are defined as the knowledge, skills, or attitudes that are needed to perform a job successfully (Clovert, 2011). This can be seen in Figure 3

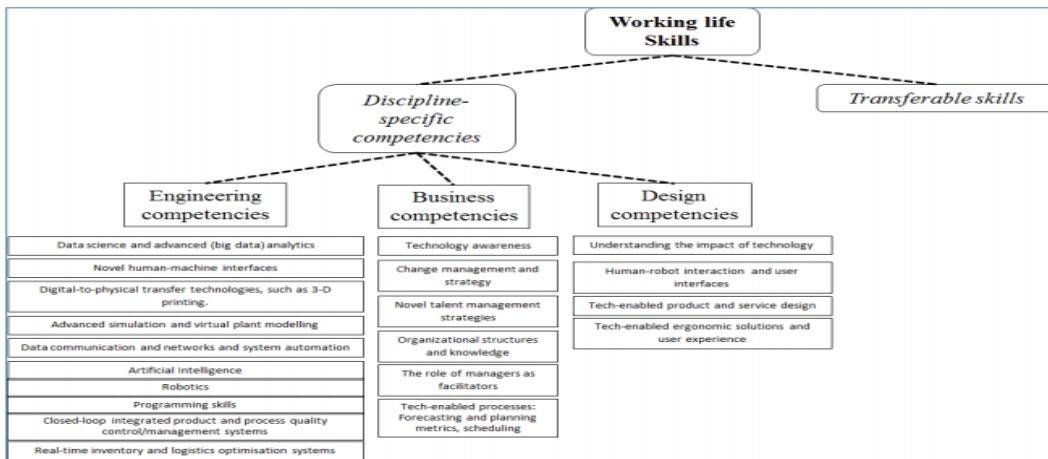


Figure 3 General taxonomy of working life skills found in the digital era (Clovert, 2011)

Various explanations above, this research is a solution to be able to provide provisions for teachers in learning management according to the times. This research supports the various theories and results of previous research related to the readiness of teachers to use technology in learning. Important aspects in improving the quality of education through learning. Thus, the main objectives of writing this article are to (1) know the aspects that modern teachers need to have in educating students after the development of the digital era; and (2) create a conceptual framework for student management according to the digital era.

## Method

### Research Design

The method used in this research is qualitative with a type of case study. The function of all science is to investigate answers to questions about the evolution of an experience or case via interview (Ii et al., 2007). The reason for using this type of qualitative research is because it explores the meaning related to learning management in the digital era at elementary school. This type of research is able to reveal the meanings that can be taken from learning activities. Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Creswell, 2007). The approach used in this research is a case study. The reason for using a case study approach is to focus on quality learning management in the digital era at elementary school which is then raised as a case to be studied in depth so that it is able to uncover the reality behind learning management activities that have been carried out by elementary schools in the face of the digital era. Case study to investigate a research issue (Yin, 2003). The reason for choosing this method is to dig deeper into information from teachers related to learning management carried out in the digital era.

### Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia with the three best primary schools. There are only 1,863 elementary schools in Yogyakarta. The selection of primary schools as objects in this study uses strict selection criteria in accordance with the research objectives, namely teacher competency scores, school performance, student academic achievement, and public opinion about the quality of the school concerned. The school which is the object of this research has utilized technology that does not exist in other schools. This is what interests researchers to deepen and explore the meaning of developing learning management in the digital era.

The participant-taking technique used was purposive sampling. The purpose of research synthesis is to produce new knowledge by making explicit connections and tensions between individual study reports that were not visible before (Suri, 2011). Of the thousands of primary schools in Yogyakarta, both public and private, three primary schools were selected to participate in this research using interviews. In the interview session, researchers chose teachers because they have the ability to organize classes directly, teachers also directly utilize technology in learning, and teachers also understand how the methods used for millennial children today. Teachers who are directly involved in classroom learning then become participants in interviews. On the other hand, researchers also have teacher selection criteria, namely those who have teaching experience for the last 10 years, have teacher competency values above average and have the ability to operate learning technology. Data support in this study was the principal and vice principal in the curriculum field. Table 1. Below are the data collection methods used and the participants in the study.

**Table 1***Data Collection Matrix – Type of Information by Source*

Participants	Total	Type of Information
Headmaster	3	Interview
Deputy Principal of Curriculum School	3	Documentation
Teacher	3	Interview

**Data Collection Technique and Guidelines**

The data collection technique in this study used two things, namely interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted openly and systematically. Interviews are widely used as a research strategy to gather information about participants' experiences, views, and beliefs concerning a specific research question (Ryan et al., 2016). The purpose of using interview data collection techniques is to explore the meanings that have been carried out by school principals, vice principals in the field of curriculum, and teachers in preparing for learning in the digital era. Of course, things related to learning activities by utilizing the latest technology. The following are the data collection guidelines for this study:

**Table 2.***Interview Guideline*

The role of the teacher in learning	Teacher's attitude Teacher development The teacher's ability to teach The knowledge the teacher has Teacher competence Teacher communication required
Teacher interaction using technology	The way teachers build networks Ability to utilize technology Learning equipment Teacher's relationship with parents
Learning at school	Supporting data Information used Applications that are utilized Learning materials

**Trustworthiness**

One of the things that must be considered in research is the quality of the research process to obtain data with high credibility. The trustworthiness of qualitative content analysis is often presented by using terms such as credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). Trustworthiness that the researcher does in completing this research is by using triangulation methods, namely by participatory observations when learning at Elementary School takes place. The researcher checked the data collected with the activities carried out at school.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is carried out throughout the research process. In this practice qualitative research stands on its own, this "pure" type has taken many different forms in subject research (Ospina, 2004). Starting from the selection of participants to drawing conclusions. In this study, data analysis was carried out using the Yin model combined with the researcher's integrated steps. Every case study analysis should follow a general analytic strategy, defining priorities for what to analyze and why (Yin, 2016). Furthermore, after the data is ready, the analysis step uses software assisted by Atlas.ti version 8. The following are the analysis steps used in this study:

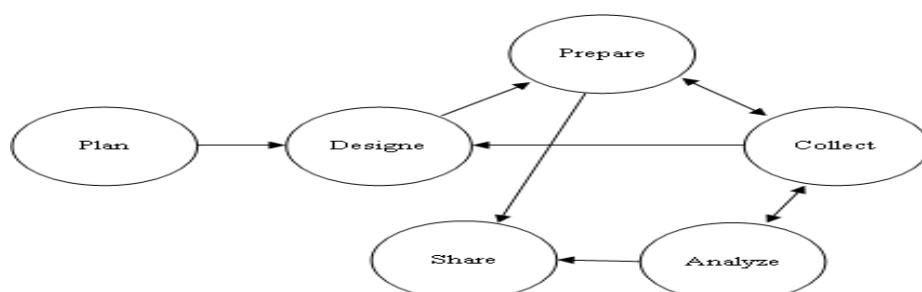


Figure 4. Yin Model Data Analysis

Source: *Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods* Yin (2003)

## **Nurmahmudah, Putra, Rahman**

This research procedure in detail can be explained as follows:

### **Plan**

At this stage of the plan, researchers conducted a preliminary survey, namely by looking for objects and research subjects related to learning management in the era of digital by using the latest technology for learning activities. From 1,852 elementary schools in Yogyakarta, researchers found 8 elementary schools that met the criteria of the researcher. Then the researcher did the elimination to get 3 elementary schools according to the indicators that the researchers made.

The benchmarks for the characteristics determined by the researcher are seen from (1) accreditation score, (2) primary school teacher competency test scores, (3) student achievement in participating in competitions at all levels (regional, national, international), (4) test scores nationally, (5) utilizing technology in the learning process; In addition, researchers also collect literature reviews, to (a) identify research gaps, (b) formulate research problems, (c) determine research locations, and (d) conduct pre-research. In the pre-research stage, researchers compiled a research design that included an outline related to learning management in the era of digital by compiling interview guidelines that would be used in field data collection.

### **Design**

The research design used is a case study with a descriptive approach. The main data collection uses the interview method, while the data for support use documentation.

### **Prepare**

The preparation made by researchers is to compile protocols in taking field data using interview protocols and documentation. Next, contact the participants and confirm the schedule for field data collection interviews.

### **Collect**

The preparations made by the researcher were to compile a protocol for field data collection using interview and documentation protocols. Then contact the participants and confirm a schedule for conducting interviews for field data collection.

### **Analyze**

The fifth stage is field data analysis. At this stage, the researcher carried out a series of qualitative data analysis processes with the help of the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti 8.3.17 to do coding, make categorization, create themes, and make concept maps of the research, namely learning management in the digital era. Atlas.ti software is used to make it easier to manage and organize data from transcripts to the preparation of research concept maps (Mahmudah, 2021).

### **Share**

The final stage of this research is to disseminate the research results by making articles and submitting them to journals.

## **Results and Discussion**

The object of this research is to explore the meaning of student management in the present. Data were collected using open and in-depth interviews with three participants in three private elementary schools in Yogyakarta. The school indicator chosen is because it has a different educational character from other schools, such as elementary schools whose learning activities are carried out with various research, exploration, experimentation, prioritizing practical life, and complete facilities that support the success of student education in schools.

Based on the results of field data collection through interviews teachers have a major role in learning at school. Active teachers are able to involve all students in various school programs both inside and outside the classroom in developing the ability to interpret and understand. This is in accordance with statement 1 / w / 1, that, "teachers who are active and have many ideas in learning development will definitely be closer to students", as well as statement 2 / w / 2-3, that:

"Teachers who are not active will kill potential students. This can be ensured that students will never develop properly. Mmmm .... especially if the student is silent. He will definitely not be able to open up and explore himself. Quiet person, a quiet teacher. It's over "

The statement of the participants above is the importance of the teacher's ability to provide assistance to students to be able to optimize their potential in understanding knowledge. The teacher is the most important part of the process of increasing student understanding. This statement was emphasized by 2 / w / 2, that "teachers must be fully involved and understand the characteristics and development of students". This is possible so that "the teacher

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becomes part of the student development process", 3 / w / 2. So that the teacher is not just a 'teacher' in a profession but a teacher who has good role models for the progress and learning achievement of students.

Therefore, the basic understanding of teachers is also a focus to be able to develop current education for students. 1-3 / w / 4 gives a statement that is in the same sense, that "teachers who have broad insight will be easily accepted by students with motor development commensurate with the times". The various statements of the participants above were then analyzed using the Atlas.ti 8 software so that a pattern can be found for educators today in providing learning to students according to their time.

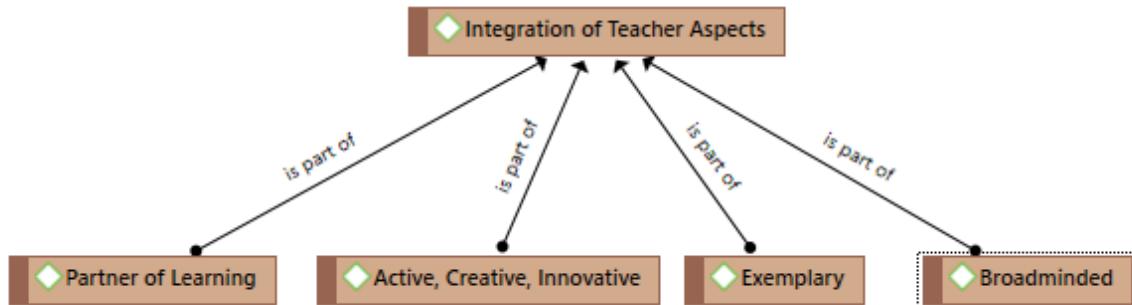


Figure 5. The findings of data analysis assisted by atlas.ti software 8

One of the effective ways to develop schools is to have teachers who are able to create networks both in other agencies and with stakeholders. This ability is one of the formations of professional teachers. "Expanding the network to gain knowledge, gain experience, and become one to prioritize the development of teaching materials for students by prioritizing current and future development knowledge such as technology, the ability to operationalize, and self-potential insights that need to be developed," 1-3 / w / 5. This is in line with the latest technological developments that teachers do not just stand idly by waiting for assignments to complete work and learning, but are up-grade and up-to-date related to technological advances and can be used in learning. The statement of resource persons 1-3 / w / 6 supports that "the need to increase the ability of teachers to develop themselves is not only welcoming the coming technology but also having the willingness to learn and welcome with all the openness of insight".

Technological progress that is not supported by the preparation and adequacy of learning equipment means that teachers cannot take advantage of existing technological advances. Likewise, students will really lack an understanding of various technological advances and less understanding of the benefits of existing technology for learning. The carrying capacity is in line with human resources in education and the involvement of parents in supporting and utilizing learning tools. This was conveyed by 1 / w / 8, that "technological advances and the availability of adequate learning equipment allow the creation of a globally competitive learning environment". The participant's statement was also supported by other participants 2-3 / w / 8 that "the learning process that takes advantage of technological advances by having easy access to various learning resources is a positive impact that must be accompanied by complete facilities". Various statements of the participants above, it can be found a result of data analysis assisted by the Atlas.ti 8 software, which can be seen in Figure 3.

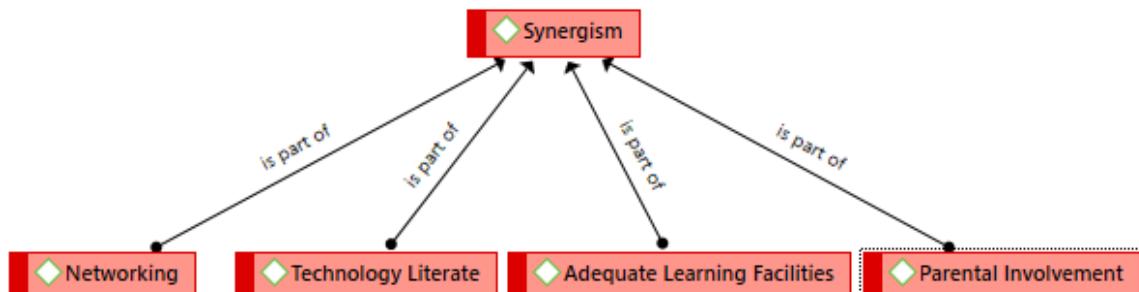
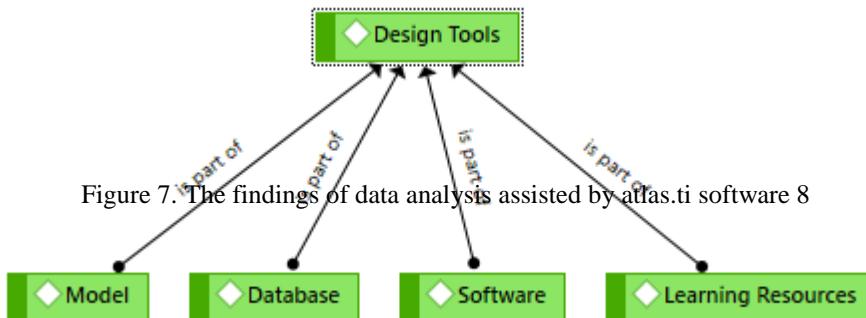


Figure 6. The findings of data analysis assisted by atlas.ti software 8

Technological advances such as these devices change lifestyles. Likewise the pattern of learning arrangements. 1 / w / 9 states that "times change so that learning patterns are also presented with changing times" because, with the changing times, students and teachers have full access to information. "The openness of access affects the students'

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mentality if not given the right learning model", 2 / w / 9. This statement is also supported by 3 / w / 9 that "children who are allowed to access any information may become addicted if they are not given the right learning method". The development of this increasingly modern era does not need to be confused about how to record and report student progress. Likewise, teachers do not miss the opportunity to follow the flow of technological developments. More and more models and methods can be used in the application and software-assisted learning. The findings from the various statements of the participants are summarized in Figure 4.



### Discussion

Based on the results of the research and data analysis above, this article discusses the teacher's ability to educate students today and the conceptual management of learning according to their time.

#### Aspects need to be owned by today's teachers in educating

The findings of the research results in Figure 1 explain that an ideal teacher has aspects that must synergize between environmental conditions, abilities, and technological advances. The integration of the teacher's aspects from the research results is exemplary. The findings of this study are in line with the statement of research findings Wati & Kamila (2019) which states that over time, the role of teachers also changes in instilling character values because these aspects cannot be taught by machines.

The solid personality of a teacher can create a learning atmosphere and a learning process that can provide good examples. Teachers who have mature abilities and attitudes will be able to do more easily and flexibly face the times. The estuary of teacher readiness will be formed in the learning patterns of students who can take advantage of the latest technology to support the success of learning and the goals of the school that has been set.

Integration of other aspects of educators in research findings is the partner of learning. Collaboration between teacher-students and parents is important in today's education. Education without good cooperation between the core education can be sure that there will be gaps in improving the quality of education. Parents have an important role in education. This role is to ensure that the condition of students at home has a high carrying capacity in completing assignments and learning at school. The relevance between these three things makes success for students and the collectivity of school success in education. This is confirmed by Patrikakou (2015) that parent-student-teacher involvement is "more positively involved had higher levels of prosocial behavior and more academic success". The same statement was also conveyed by Pirchio et al. (2013) that "the parent-teacher partnership has been identified as having an important role in children's development".

Active-creative-innovative is one of the keys of a teacher in improving skills and competencies in today's education. Being active in providing contemporary learning resources to actively creating learning media that is attractive and not boring for students is a characteristic of successful education today. This statement is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Kudryashova & Rybushkina (2016) that "active and creative can escape the traditional role of passive receptors and learn and practice how to apprehend knowledge and skills and use them meaningfully". A similar statement was also conveyed by Subramani & Iyappan (2018) that "innovative and creative teaching and learning methods are critical if we are to motivate and engender a spirit of learning as well as enthusiasm on the part of students".

In connection with the above, with the times, teachers are also required to have broad insights. Broad insight is one of the foundations for teachers to be involved in technological developments. Susilo (2015) states that "a teacher should be broad-minded to help students to become more broad-minded and expand the lens through which they experience the world". Having broad insight for teachers is an important part that must be owned because one of the sources of knowledge is having insight. Having insight is also the main asset for teachers to improve their abilities and

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to give birth to the next generation who are intelligent and have high knowledge absorption. This statement also emphasized Oktradiksa (2012) that "the teacher's personality has an effect on mental development and scientific insight which can determine the extent to which he will bring all the potential that exists in students".

### Learning management conceptual framework according to its era

Various results and discussions about the aspects that today's teachers need to have in contemporary learning for students, so it also needs support from school management in learning. The findings of the research that have been carried out are as shown in Figure 2, that education today requires teachers who have synergy which includes networking, technology literacy, adequate learning facilities, and parental involvement. Likewise, the findings described in Figure 3 have the understanding that learning management in today's students requires a model that is appropriate to the times, databases, the use of software, and the availability of learning resources. In summary, the findings can be seen in Figure 2

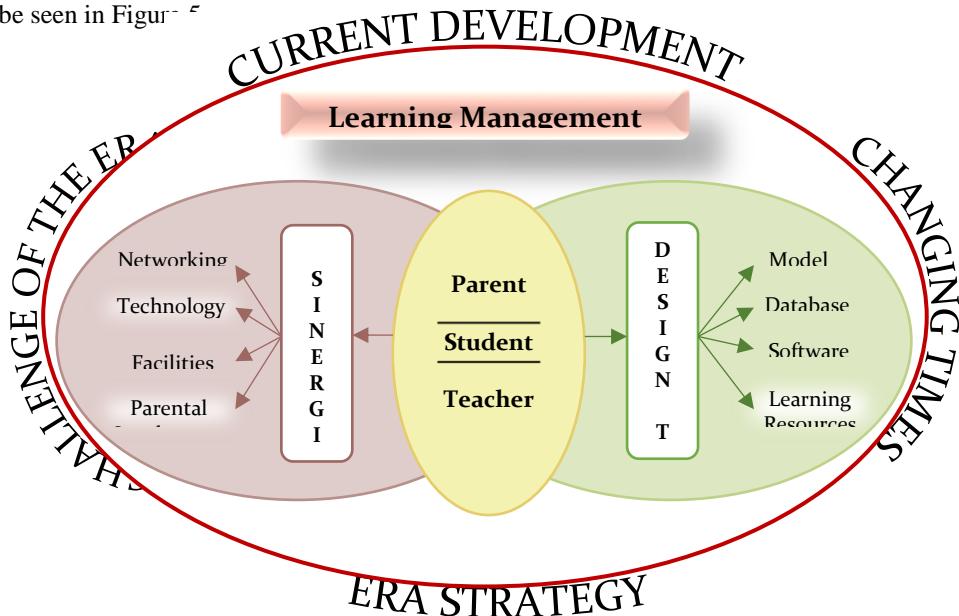


Figure 8. Conceptual framework of learning management according to the time's digital era

Figure 8 above means that one of the new paradigms of education management in the digital era has an important component in learning. These components are synergy and design tools. The two components, which are field findings, each have different indicators and are continuous with one another. Learning management in the digital era is the process of improving and changing learning according to the times. Redesigning to synchronize existing resources to the needs and technological developments that need to be utilized. The use of this technology aims to support and change the learning patterns and mindsets of students to follow current trends. Many are found in the digital era developing new applications that provide more interesting learning (Waluya & Asikin, 2019). Therefore, learning management needs to be upgraded with more varied new breakthroughs (Tampubolon, 2019), so that the era of digital has a positive contribution to student development (Febryani, 2019). Teachers in overcoming the challenges of digital transformation in education. Possible interventions encompass better tech access, enhanced training, fostering innovation in classrooms, and professional development (Anh et al., 2023).

As times change very rapidly has a very significant relationship with learning management. This requires a strong strategy so that the changing times can be faced by many elements of education. Not become a burden and not as a wind without being used. The findings of this study provide information that one of the strategies needed is parent-student-teacher synergy. The main source of the success of education is the existence of a triangular relationship between parents, students, and teachers in an educational institution (Wahidy, 2010). Teachers and parents can act as facilitators, and motivators, and can nurture the student (Lo et al., 2013). Students' achievement and adjustment are influenced by teachers and parents (Desforges & Abouchara, 2003).

Education for students is mainly from parents, while teachers in schools are partners or partners of parents. Many parents do not realize that their main education is not from educational institutions. Working parents can only ensure that children's education is fulfilled through educational institutions. Meanwhile, only the teacher knows about children's development, while parents are too busy at work. Therefore, with the changing times of the digital

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era, parents have an important role and guardianship for the progress and development of children's potential both at home, environment and at school.

The role of parents and teachers in realizing student academic achievement is also supported because of the facilities in learning. The development of the times and the latest technology will be of no benefit if it is not supported by the availability of facilities for learning. The problem of educators in the digital era is caused by the lack of educational facilities (Prasetyo, 2020). The facilities will greatly affect the effectiveness and acceleration of the achievement of learning outcomes in this digital era (Afrianto, 2018). Therefore the need for support facilities is something that must be provided if you don't want to be out of date. Technology that is used to facilitate receiving knowledge and improve student skills.

Facilities cannot stand alone without being accompanied by technology literacy by parents-students-and-teachers. Technological literacy is very important in facing the times and technology. Technological literacy is the activity of understanding and being able to use increasingly sophisticated equipment in learning. Teachers who do not understand how to use and utilize the latest technology will find it difficult to keep up with the current development of student abilities that are increasingly complex and understand current technology. Likewise, parents who do not understand the ability to use technology will inevitably experience difficulties in monitoring the development and potential of their children.

This meaning is the development in the manufacture of armor specifically designed for soldiers in war. Not only armor but also an iron hat and bulletproof vest. This activity is a development of technology that Allah has taught the prophets according to the times. The same thing Allah also taught Prophet Sulayman Alaihissalam by lowering the wind. Allah shows the developments at the time of the Prophets. Likewise, as the times change to the present and future. The uncertain future development needs to be accompanied by the readiness of teachers-students and parents to meet it.

Technological literacy alone is not sufficient for the learning strategies of the digital era. The results showed that the teacher-parent-student synergy in times of development is networking. Professional teachers are those who are able to have many links to increase competency capacity in learning. Likewise students and parents. Networking is a way for teachers to collaborate with other teachers or with other institutions. One way to improve teachers professional competence is to have many networks (Wartomo, 2016). Because of that, the teacher will learn a lot, understand, and be able to add insights related to renewable technology (Ahmad, 2016).

The existence of a person with other people as an individual or group to provide mutual understanding. This includes that individuals in a social environment need help from others to survive, help each other, and develop. Human interaction to make networking involving multiple tasks is becoming more achievement (Lucas et al., 2018). The importance of networking for all elements of education is to improve achievement both study and work achievement so that it will open insights, and increase experience, and complex understanding of learning theory and practice such as the development of the era of digital.

The second component of this finding is the design of tools that have model indicators, databases, software, and learning resources. The design tools in this finding cover learning from teachers to students that involve parents. The right learning model for students is one that is associated with the era. Parents who have a conventional and hereditary learning model for children at home will not be used as a benchmark for providing appropriate learning today for children. Likewise, teachers who provide learning to students at school using contemporary models, ideally, share these experiences with parents. So that the models used in learning are interrelated and have the same direction so that there is no miss-match between teachers and parents.

The Flipped Classroom Model is a model that can be used by teachers in the era of digital (Soetanto, 2019). The Flipped Classroom model is a learning activity that students can complete at home (Nofrion, 2007). The teacher gives assignments to be completed first at home then the teacher explains in class. This is very appropriate for involving parents in the learning process. This Flipped Classroom model utilizes learning media that can be accessed online by students (Maolidah et al., 2017) and these full access materials are very supportive of student learning in schools. Of course, the teacher better understands the characteristics of students so that they are able to analyze to select and adjust the right model in the learning of the digital era.

The ease of learning in the digital era is also marked by the existence of a database. Presentation of information stored on a computer in a systematic manner. The database or database of the findings of this study is an easy way for teachers and/or students and parents to access all available information related to learning. Big data is the key to learning

in the digital era (Maulida et al., 2020). Information in one room can be accessed easily and informatively. With data-based information literacy skills, at least students, parents, and teachers are able to improve their communication skills well. So that information inequality or ignorance of information can be minimized. Likewise, the ease of access to learning resources for students.

Regarding the database, it is necessary to have software that supports these activities. The software from the findings of this research is related to all applications that can be used for learning both in the classroom, outside the classroom, and distance learning. Software concepts that need to be developed in learning are those that provide convenience (Wibowo, 2019). One of the things that need to be understood is e-learning (Natasuwarna, 2019). It is intended as an interactive and educational media for the core triangle of education, students-teachers-and-parents. Learning in the digital era without using software means that education actors are still unable to use and take advantage of the latest technology in improving learning achievement for students.

The various discussions regarding the conceptual framework of learning management according to the times above are interpretations of a combination of research findings and theory of research results. The perspective of this research has implications that need to be applied by parents, students, and teachers in improving learning in the digital era. This research becomes the foundation theme for further research related to learning models digital era, big data, and data mining, as well as interesting applications that can be used. The various existing findings constitute the latest information that needs to be studied in depth for future strategies in facing the changing era periodically.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that children's education according to their time has important indicators that need to be prepared in the face of changing times of the digital era. Two things that need to be understood are from the aspect of teachers and learning management. The integration of educational aspects in the development of the era digital ideally can be a partner of learning, be active-creative-and-innovative, be a role model for students, and have broad insights. The next aspect is related to the learning management of the digital era, there are two components, namely synergy and tool design. The two indicators are in harmony with the core education triangle, namely parents-students-and-teachers. Synergy has indicators of networking, technology literacy, adequate learning facilities, and parental involvement. While the second indicator is the design of tools consisting of learning models, databases, software, and learning resources. Some of these findings can be concluded that learning management in the era of digital is inseparable from human system. This means that as long as the existing technology develops, it will be in vain if it cannot be utilized properly by educational actors. The need for a balance of this is to create and improve good learning outcomes, according to the motoric and pedagogical development of students, and according to the times. This research can be continued in the next research to further produce the complexity of the research method, namely confirmation using quantitative in various areas.

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## Discursive Construction of Gendered Nationalism in Armed Conflict of Pakistan and India: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

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Idealized masculine discourse is often used to define nationalism. 'Rescue of women' and the motherland by the state and military legitimize the gendered power within contemporary discourse. This study employed a feminist critical discourse analysis perspective to reveal gendered ideologies in the discourse surrounding the Pakistan-India armed conflict in May 2025. It examined four special briefing documents released on May 8-9, 2025, by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. Using the qualitative research method, the study applied Lazar's Feminist CDA to analyse power, ideology, representation, and silence in these documents. Braun & Clark's thematic analysis helped identify themes of militarized masculinity and silencing, reinforcing gendered nationalism exercised by both nations. The findings demonstrate that states strategically construct national identity through gendered discourse. This research is significant for highlighting the powerful feminist discourse embedded in the geopolitical context of South Asia, which often propagates military conflicts through nationalist, gendered, and strategic narratives. It adds to existing feminist scholarship by showing how representational strategies influence public perceptions of war. The study also offers new insight for rethinking national identity, especially in South Asia, amid social, political, and military tensions.

**Keywords:** militarised masculinity, silencing, gendered nationalism, FCDA

National narratives are often constructed not only as communicative acts but as ideological tools. These are disseminated through media briefings and press releases to shape national identity. Nationalist discourse revolves around a glorious past, patriotism, and protection within the South Asian patriarchy. Political discourse becomes effective when rhetoric is supported by historical evidence of masculine power (Rai, 2012). 'Rescue of women' and the motherland by the state and military legitimize the power of contemporary discourse. Idealized masculine discourse is often used to define nationalism. Gendered power structures are reinforced during times of political and military conflict. For feminist scholars, nationalism is not a gender-neutral term. Nations are described through 'gendered metaphors—feminized land and the masculine warrior' (McClintock, 1993). Men seek to control women's mobility, sexuality, and political 'agency,' claiming these are to be protected. In patriarchal culture, women symbolize honour and continuity, and 'women often serve as boundary markers of national identity' (Yuval-Davis, 2004).

The recent Pakistan-India military conflict initiated intense discourses across the border. Military and political leadership discussed the geopolitical implications of war on the countries; however, each side feminised war and constructed the image of militarised masculinity to protect the motherland.

A body of feminist scholarship on militarized nationalism in South Asia is already established (e.g., Dahl & Manchanda, 2001; Enloe, 2000; Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997). The scholarship focuses on how women's bodies, honour, and roles are vital to nationalist projects, and such discourses make war and partition gendered

experiences. These significant studies have discussed women's experiences, activism, and representation in memory and partition studies in state-authored war narratives.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) focuses on state institutions, i.e., foreign ministries, offering critical insight into how gendered power is determined through authoritative language. FCDA gives a gendered feminist lens to the discourse of the Pakistan–India war, i.e., Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos and Operation Sindoar, which was conventionally dominated by strategic or security-concerned analyses. Rather than treating war discourse as neutral statecraft, FCDA demonstrates how national ideology is pronounced through gendered language and silences.

Applying Lazar's FCDA framework systematically to official press briefings adds a linguistic-discursive perspective to the current feminist analyses. The concepts of interdiscursivity and silencing highlight how texts employ and reproduce larger cultural discourses, such as martyrdom, honour, and motherhood, while simultaneously silencing other alternatives. This discursive mechanism is less theorized in the previously established South Asian feminist discourse, which is more inclined towards social practices and impacts. FCDA emphasizes official war discourse as text and relates it to the linguistic reproduction of power, which complements and extends the contemporary feminist South Asian scholarship.

Therefore, the novelty of the present work lies in unravelling the supremacy exercised through gendered discourse, remembering, narrating, and justifying the Pakistan and India conflict—a topic largely invisible in the mainstream war and security discourse. Previous South Asian feminist discourse is rich in ethnography, oral history, and sociological analysis. The present study aims to synthesise political discourse and gendered power dynamics to expose how language, representation, and silencing operate in narratives to construct and promote gendered nationalism in South Asia.

## Literature Review

### Gender and Nationalism

Feminist scholarship has widely focused on the intersection of gender, power, discourse, and nationalism. The studies have particularly investigated the entanglement of national identity and militarisation. Nationalism has been defined within the parameters of gendered ideologies. It frames discourses to promote the development of an agenda favouring elites. In the entire process, women and 'subaltern' men of the weak economic class are marginalised (Gramsci, 1920). Although nationalist discourse promises to provide women 'new spaces' and mobilization (Guha, 1982), a large number of women are excluded from the mainstream discourse (Bereswill & Wagner, 1998). Enloe (1989) discussed the different roles of women, such as 'the participant in national economic, political, and military struggle' as the most 'crucial projects' in the contemporary world. Gender relation conformity is possible by foregrounding nationalist ideology. McClintock (1993) argued that all nationalist discourses were gendered (p.63). She further maintained that the possibility of discussing gender was disregarded in general discourse by referring to men and women as 'men'. Moghadam (1994) deemed nationalism as incompatible with feminism.

Yuval-Davis (2004) explored the concepts of gender and nationalism. The study illustrated how the sexual division in the military contributed to the formation of these notions. Feminists resisted their unequal representation in combat roles, thereby affecting the promotions on an equal basis with men. Chopra (2002) discussed the political crises and the illumination of the masculine gender role in South Asia. She refuted the concept of masculinity as 'a universal category'. Rather, it was a construct by the state and its institutional forces. She argued that masculinity as a significant part of nation-building was shaped by postcolonial states such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, where gender performance was equated with nationalism. Gender tropes are manipulated during war conflicts. Chopra's argument conforms to the stance of the present study, which aims to investigate how the language of state narratives embeds gendered ideology to maintain the status quo. Feminist scholars helped 'raise the status of women as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups' (Rai, 2012).

Thomson (2019) also viewed nationalism as a 'gendered phenomenon'. Idealised concepts of masculinity and femininity shaped national identity. The nation is represented by 'feminine body'; a motherland, whereas the state and military act as saviours and protectors. Building her argument on Yuval-Davis (2004) and Enloe (2004), Thomson argued that the feminine body was the core focus of all nationalist discourses. However, women's role in leadership and decision-making remained 'politically marginal' (Thomson, 2019). Moreover, the idea of hegemonic masculinity was glorified to justify wars. Women of the elite class found a representation in such contexts. However, the instrumentalization of women remains a tool to maintain national dignity.

The concept of 'women to be rescued' symbolises masculine pride in wartime. Masculine ideology promotes protecting the household's manager, and her struggle is valued. Nationalist discourse constructs gendered power

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relations of masculinity. Such discourse excludes women from conversations. Partiality and exclusions appear in war discussions, where masculinity is linked to battles (Rai, 2012). Although universalised discourses rendered women 'invisible' in nationalist discourse, feminists have managed to find spaces for themselves. Haycock (2004), Connell (2009), and Khalid (2015) discussed the use of masculine strategies to achieve a global geopolitical dominant position.

Feminist scholarship perceives state narratives building 'gendered identities' (Kaufman & Williams, 2017). 'Women do not figure in the analysis of nationalism and citizenship in the mainstream'; hence, excluded from public. The terms nationalism and feminism thus 'are historically and geographically contingent and diverse' (Knight, 2018).

The review of the above studies dismantles masculinity embedded in the nationalist discourse. The present study further contextualises the conflict between Pakistan and India through FCDA within the framework of gendered nationalist discourse.

### Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a synthesis of feminist theory and critical discourse analysis. Patriarchal ideologies are embedded in linguistic assumptions and practices (Cameron, 1992). Feminists in academia sought to establish a feminist perspective in language and discourse studies (Spender, 1981; Harding, 1986; Gordon, 1986; Cameron, 1992; Mills, 1995). It was required due to its explicit political stance of interpreting and evaluating various gender inequalities and injustices hidden in the state structures. Feminist CDA aimed 'to establish a feminist politics of articulation' (Wetherell, 1995). Secondly, it aimed to organise and name feminist scholarship on a common platform. 'Feminist CDA as a political perspective on gender' elucidates the power relations between gender, ideology, and discourse (Lazar, 2005). Lazar pointed out the 'multimodal view of discourse [having] great value for a holistic feminist critique of discursive constructions of gender (1999, 2000, 2005).

South Asian feminism has posed challenges to militarism and nationalism; however, FCDA situates its critique within the global feminist discourse (Riaz, 2025). It connects South Asian cases to international debates on performativity, intersectionality, and gendered security. Performativity, intersectionality, and gendered nationalism mainly expand Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and critique its limits. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016) broadens FCDA beyond its initial "gender-first" focus by arguing that inequalities are reinforced through class, race, nation, gender, and religious conflicts. It also challenges the mostly Eurocentric and reductionist scope of FCDA. Butler's concept of performativity (1990, 1993) improves FCDA by highlighting how gender is performed through discursive repetition, moving beyond simple representation to actual practice. At the same time, it critiques FCDA's tendency to see gendered positioning as more stable than Butler's theory suggests. Gendered nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2000) applies FCDA to examine the intersection of state, war, and nation, showing how political legitimacy is built through militarized masculinities and sacrificial femininities. This widens FCDA's scope to include geopolitical and war discourses, and also challenges its core institutional and textual biases by supporting a decolonial, transnational perspective. In sum, these approaches expand FCDA's analytical framework, identify its gaps, and direct it towards more reflexivity, intersectionality, and global relevance.

Noakes (2001) argued that political conflicts shape 'war memory'. War is constructed as a 'male domain' active for national defence. Contrarily, the role of women is reduced to passivity. A gendered memory of war silences the 'female agency' and confines it to the 'auxiliary roles' (Noakes, 2001). Noakes (2001) invoked the reclamation of silenced and forgotten voices, encouraging a pluralistic and inclusive approach to war memory. The study highlighted the gendered nationalism in war remembrance, arguing that memory was a political necessity to sustain gender power dynamics.

Shepherd (2010) explored 'gender violence and discourse', which aimed to guide the practitioners of policy making who used different forms of words 'unintentionally' in policy documents. The study found that practices, though unintentional, led to political crises. Shepherd evaluated a crucial policy document, i.e., the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and focused on three critical strands significant during the writing process of a policy document: 1) language, its drafting and revision, 2) translation policy, and 3) temporal mapping. The study proposed the 'reconstruction' of gender issues in the policy documents.

Noor et al. (2022) examined ideology and power conveyed through language in Pakistani dramas. The study analysed dialogues to identify four gender tropes: patriarchy, chauvinism, self-reliance, and stereotyping of women. The discussion showed how male characters assert dominance over females through language. Khalid et al. (2024) conducted a study to explore feminine resilience, solidarity, and abuse in Moriarty's novel. FCDA challenged stereotypical ideas of gender dominance. The study implored for the 'voice' of women against discursive social practices that silenced them. Sanjarani et al. (2024) applied FCDA to investigate 'gendered spirituality and the

representation of women in Panjabi and Urdu Sufi poetry'. The research found that Sufi poets used feminine imagery and symbolism to depict the 'journey of the soul'. The female figure represented surrender, patience, and resistance. Reali (2023) studied 'war metaphors' in discourse to portray female activists as 'warriors'. The study found a 'subversion' of traditional norms. It analysed ideas of gender, sex, and 'sexuation' to highlight the roles of 'victim/warrior' signifiers. The study suggested 'de-victimisation of women' to align with the Lacanian idea of feminism, focusing on how gender is shaped through symbols.

Ali, Ali, and Usman (2024) conducted a study by applying FCDA to Kincaid's *Girl*. The study focused on masculine hegemony and the struggle of women. It found that patriarchal restrictions in African society threatened the exposure of women to social life. It also emphasised how language was instrumental in social control. Conventional patriarchy and discourse helped to maintain stereotypical gender roles. The study reflected that everyday language shaped the gendered ideology operated by power and control. The present study focuses on the role of gender in meaning-making during the process of building national ideology.

### **Gendered Narratives & South Asian Militarism**

Militarism and state-building in postcolonial societies are intertwined notions with gender ideologies. Political trajectories are not the same in Pakistan and India; however, their use of political and military discourse shares similar patterns to elevate masculinity in public briefings and press releases. Female voices are often silenced in the state narratives during military conflicts. Women are framed as mourners. Manchanda (2017) applauded women's participation during peacebuilding in 04 South Asian post-conflict contexts: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The process included contributions to the political process and the writing of the constitution. The Kathmandu Declaration, '*The Changing Dynamics of Peacebuilding*', asserted women's participation in peacebuilding. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 also ensures their role as stakeholders, particularly their involvement in post-conflict governance. Joseph (2013) explored the construction of gendered identities between the relations of states. An intimidating 'other' is always constructed in the state discourse. Modern nation-state and masculinity-femininity are considered 'binary'. All activities involved in the making, such as taking over territories, war decisions, founding a state, building a nation, and establishing a government, are perceived as masculine. Women are there 'to eulogise' (Joseph, 2013). The state, a symbolic mother figure, needs protection from the outsiders. In the South Asian context, the state is recurrently viewed as 'a woman under threat', and her sons safeguarding her honour and dignity. Political discourse and media use 'gendered metaphors' as weapons in war situations (Joseph, 2013). Such conceptions lead to 'national mythologies' built on conventional gender roles. Critical historical events and political crises, such as civil wars, state formations, colonialism, and religious conflicts, have shaped the South Asian identity of men and the concept of masculinity (Chakraborty, 2017).

The literature review demonstrates that previous scholarship agrees on the idea of militarisation and its elevation as a form of gendered nationalism. However, the FCDA approach to analysing official documents of India and Pakistan intervenes by examining language constructs and the sustenance of gendered power relations within national narratives during conflicts. Existing scholarship highlights that national identity is often masculinized, linked to heroism, protection, and sacrifice. Women are symbolically positioned as mothers or passive bearers of cultural purity. The present study examines the reproduction and reinforcement of patriarchal structures in discourse through metaphors of honour, homeland, and purity using a feminist lens. It extends previous work by critically analysing gendered language in political and media texts that normalize exclusionary nationalisms, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of how the discursive reproduction of gendered power shapes nation-building processes.

### **Method**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis model by Lazar (2005) provides a theoretical perspective for analysing and assessing the special briefings released on May 8-9, 2025, by the Foreign Ministries of India and Pakistan in the wake of armed conflict. FCDA, as a potential framework for interpretation, is compatible with the present study, as it dismantles the gendered ideologies hidden in discourse, thereby isolating female agency. It helped to recognise the discursive nature of reality during times of armed conflict.

Using FCDA to dismantle the complex gendered power dynamics, this study explores how official discourse shapes the ideology of gendered nationalism. It identifies 'the complex, subtle, sometimes not subtle ways', which 'produce, sustain, negotiate and challenge hegemonic power relations discursively in different contexts' (Lazar, 2005). It asserts that social practices are gendered. It questions the 'asymmetric meanings of male and female'. The approach

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helps highlight the role allocation to one or the other ‘within concrete practices’(Lazar,2005). It aims to achieve an effective social transformation by theorising ‘gendered discourse practices’, constituting ‘analytical activism’. It understands ‘gender as an ideological structure...based on hierarchical relations of domination and subordination’(Lazar,2005). A social gender dichotomy is constructed, varying as per time and situation. Conventional gender norms are disrupted in ‘masculinization of talk by women in power, and feminisation of forms of masculinity in the home’. FCDA examines the discourse production and resistance of power relations through texts or interactions. It considers discourse as ‘an element of social practices...discursive in character’. It both challenges and legitimises gender power hierarchies by focusing primarily on the intersection of gender with social and national identities within the political, historical, and social contexts.

This study selected four official documents to balance rich qualitative insights with contextualized interpretation, enabling cross-text comparison and ensuring consistency in FCDA’s critical-interpretive methodology. This approach enhances the credibility of the findings while reducing the risk of overgeneralization. The choice of official documents, such as government briefings, was primarily due to their authoritative nature, as they discursively construct and legitimize gendered power, nationalism, and ideology (Lazar, 2005, 2007). These four documents provided adequate material to identify common discursive patterns such as protective femininity, militarized masculinity, othering, and silencing. Documents from the same dates were useful for establishing intertextual connections. This sample also supported comparative analysis. Paired themes, context, and timeline facilitated the exploration of recurring gendered discourses. Methodologically, this selection allowed for a focused yet rigorous analysis, examining how state discourse constructs gendered power relations within specific political or military contexts. Analysing four documents also ensured that the findings were not limited to a single source and revealed patterns and variations across institutional discourse.

Official statements in the Asian socio-political context do more than just record events; these also project moral legitimacy, unity, and national honour (Acharya, 2011). The official documents serve as discursive spaces where gendered nationalism is expressed through metaphors of ‘sacrifice, mother love, martyrdom’. These symbols are deeply embedded in South Asian cultural codes of honour, safety, and traditional gender roles (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Enloe, 2000). Moreover, in Asian contexts where a few key speeches or press briefings shape the national image and collective memory, the discursive compression of state power and cultural meaning becomes apparent (Lazar, 2007).

Grounded in feminist discourse analysis, the study used the thematic analysis model by Braun and Clark (2005) to identify, analyse, and report themes. Four documents (two from each country’s foreign ministry official website were selected for an in-depth micro-level analysis of recurring patterns of meaning. Meaningful patterns such as words, phrases, and ideas were identified and labelled as codes. Codes were further grouped into themes based on relevance, namely: 1) militarised masculinity, and 2) silencing and dissent for a more focused and nuanced analysis. The selection of these themes was due to their potential for internal consistency and recurrence in the selected data. FCDA helped in interpreting the themes in gendered and ideological contexts. The documents were chosen for their high official authority and significance in shaping public perspectives.

## Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Discourse Strategies FCDA**

Strategy	Textual Evidence From Indian official Discourse/ Words & phrases	Textual Evidence From Pakistani Official Discourse/Words & phrases	Implication
1. Elevated masculinity	Assassination, Control, precision, hierarchy, and aggression, terrorists, not surprised, terror attack in Pahalgam, only the terrorist infrastructure targeted.	Martyrdom, terrorism, responded, bringing down five Indian fighter aircraft, the right to respond, and the victims of the Samjhota Express tragedy,	Affirming valour, dominance, and discipline through the use of words, phrases, and remembrance of war history
2. Representation of Gender	Operation Sindoor, Use of pronoun I, WE	Martyrdom of women and children,	Feminising the state, and necessitating male defence. Women are erased in these discourses.
3. Otherization of enemy	Construction of the enemy as the other Deranged fantasy of Pakistan, well-versed in such actions, imparting communal hue, terrorists, disinformation, epicentre of global terrorism, cross-border terrorism	Terrorists, misinformation, farcical, a deliberate strategy, manufacture a pretext for aggression, violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, illegal acts, India's jingoism and war hysteria	Construction of the enemy as uncivilised, barbaric, crafty, false and untrustworthy
4. Binary of Victim and Saviour	Pakistan/India, State and military as rescuers/Civilians & children as victims, sikh community,	Pakistan/India, State and military as rescuers/Civilians & children as victims	Justification of militarism as necessary.
5. Moral Framing	provocative and escalatory actions, targeted at Indian cities and civilian infrastructure, draped in Pakistani flags, targeted Sikh community, enter into negotiations, yet another blatant lie,	Endangering regional peace, martyr civilians, agrarian economy, weaponizing water, heinous and shameful crime, places of worship, endangering the lives of thousands of on-board passengers, mosques were destroyed, international community should ...	Construction of the state as upright Issuing measured responses following International law.
6. Silencing and Exclusion	feminising war labelled as Operation Sindoor.	absence of women's voice, bodies, and Pakistani political discourse. innocent women and children, 'martyr women'	A single mention of women as victims on both sides. No hint of their security role. Discourse symbolizes the state and the military as saviours. No mention of women leadership role.
7. Reinforcement	Repetition of words and phrases, e.g. "controlled, measured, precise, clear, terrorism, killing, attack, responded," etc. Use of adverbs, e.g. proportionately, adequately, and responsibly, blatantly.	Indeed, I may repeat, unprovoked and unjustified attacks,	Construction of the armies and states as masculine and brave. Discourse is far detached from emotions, embedded in rationality and logic to legitimise militarisation.

### Militarised Masculinity

Table 1 summarises the discourse strategies of FCDA, aiming to expose and challenge gender hierarchies. Feminist CDA interpreted the official documents to expose militarised masculinity, exclusion, and erasure of female discourse. Normalisation of patriarchal nationalist ideology dominated by militarised masculinity is the undercurrent of the special briefings released by the foreign ministries of Pakistan and India. The State narratives reflect a reproduction of masculine ideology in the context of the May 2025 armed conflict. These narratives legitimised the

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gendered ideology under the pretext of morality and rationality. Indian discourse reframes the airstrikes and cross-border attacks as logical, morally sound, and calculated. The state of India claimed to be a masculine power ready to defend. It reflects the 'gendered discursive move' (Lazar, 2005), showing itself as a hegemonic entity to respond to and control a critical situation. It characterises itself with masculine features such as discipline, responsibility, rationality, and control in wartime. These features are associated with men in conventional patriarchal structures. Words such as 'precise', 'target', 'measures', and 'non-escalatory' equated the actions of the Indian State and army as morally superior and justified responses to the enemy's provocative initiation. Likewise, the Pakistani foreign ministry briefing implies similar notions. This is the strategy of moral framing to invoke public patronage. The firm and controlled tone of the official briefings displays hegemonic masculinity. Indian discourse uses words such as 'provocative and escalatory actions, targeted at Indian cities and civilian infrastructure, draped in Pakistani flags, targeted Sikh community, enter into negotiations, yet another blatant lie'. This is to mould the public perception of war by emphasising moral values. The interplay of political, military, and moral processes influences public opinion in South Asian societies (Appadurai, 1984), where gender discrimination and masculine power are pervasive. Pakistani documents also exhibit such vocabulary, 'Endangering regional peace, martyr civilians, agrarian economy, weaponizing water, heinous and shameful crime, places of worship, endangering the lives of thousands of on-board passengers, mosques were destroyed, international community should ...' It not only targets the public but also invokes the sympathy of the international community.

Moral framing in both cases explicitly displays value-laden and ethical language. Emotional responses of the public are invoked by emphasising and repeating that 'innocent civilians, women and children', 'minorities', and 'religious worship places' are targeted by the enemy.

Reinforcement strategy is recurrent in these official briefings by both ministries, constructing an image of the armies and states as masculine and brave. Discourses are far detached from emotions, embedded in rationality and logic to legitimise militarisation and assert hegemonic masculinity, and the nation is equated with a woman, silent and guarded.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a pattern of behaviour and views within the society that normalises the dominance of men over women (Connell, 2005). The concept serves as a foundation for militarism. 'The production and maintenance of masculinities' was shaped by men since the international sphere was largely formed by men (Hooper, 1999). The Pakistani official documents reflect a highly charged language. Lexical choices such as 'martyrdom', 'respond', 'bringing down five fighter aircraft', 'the right to respond', replicate the supremacy and dominance. Feminised nations need protectors.

The Indian discourse portrays Pakistan as a deceitful and terrorist state. It invokes a gender binary of rational masculinity (India) and disordered anomaly (Pakistan). It imagines India in manifold meanings: 'powerful, controlling, and upright' (Sutherland, 2005). The stance of both governments is defensive, echoing 'masculinized values' (Haycock, 2024). The statesmen employ masculine strategies to achieve geopolitical domination (Haycock, 2025; Khalid, 2015; Connell, 2005). In Pakistani briefings, FCDA unravels heroic framing as a strategy of national survival. Reference to 'martyrs' rationalises their retaliation to Indian strikes. Pakistani discourse indicates a distinct tone enfolded in a gendered dichotomy, presenting an aggressor versus a protector. Referring to the 'victims of Samjhota Express', declaring it a 'tragedy' and rejection of the alleged Pahalgam attacks, Pakistan denies the role of an aggressor as depicted in the Indian discourse.

Wars cost human life, economy, and prosperity; however, masculinity imposes its understanding to view the armed conflicts. The documents show restraint through language, the 'right to respond', and the international community should... Words frame the armies as defenders, and in sacrificial roles. War is glorified to strengthen the image of armies on both sides, using 'otherization' as a strategy, framing the enemy as 'other' and constructing images of 'farcical', 'terrorist', 'disinform [ed]' enemy. Pakistani discourse exhibits its technological capacity and warfare claims, 'bringing down five aircrafts', constructing the enemy as uncivilised, barbaric, crafty, false, and untrustworthy, however, completely under control, pacified, and contained. Indian discourse represents Pakistan as 'the epicentre of global terrorism, framing it as a violent and terrorist state harming borders. Lexical choices create an evasive and volatile picture of Pakistan in contrast to a logical and responsible India.

The use of gendered metaphors is another strategy to assert superiority. Words, e.g., 'martyrdom, terrorism, victims', are implicatures that denote that the masculine body (army) provides a shield to the feminised nation. These words in the Pakistani document refer to India as a 'hypermasculinized' terrorist, irrational, and uncontrolled. The use of the first-person pronouns 'I & We' by the Pakistani spokesman establishes the military role as logical and responsible in controlling the situation. The success narrative of hitting Indian aircraft is also a metaphor that stands for masculine

potency. It conforms to the concept of masculinity as 'a universal category' (Yuval-Davis, 2004). Samjhota Express tragedy metaphorically elevates masculinity and demands for revenge to redeem honour. A patriarchal tone sustains throughout the discourse rather than challenging the norms. Power relations are focused more. Who is involved in the action? Who will respond? Who is silenced/harmed? Who are used as victims? South Asian historical context forms the entire discourse.

### Silencing and Dissent

Situated in South Asia, India and Pakistan reproduce gendered ideologies that are politically strengthened in the backdrop of internal skirmishes and international armed conflicts. The projection of militarised masculinity undermines the role of females in the region. The feminisation of war indicates that state narratives illuminate masculine gender roles and exclude or erase women on political platforms, particularly in war contexts (Chopra, 2002).

India's naming the conflict as 'Operation Sindo' is a significant step towards the construction of gendered nationalism. 'Sindo' is a cultural term signifying a vermillion mark on the married woman's forehead, right between the two eyebrows. It indicates the marital status in South Asian societies, promising a woman's chastity, protection by the husband, and devotion to husband and family. This marks the woman's identity and her relationship to man. It symbolizes marital fidelity and the sanctity of the wife. This feminized metaphor combines nationalism with cultural-religious identity to produce a Hindu moral legitimacy for state action. The state of India strategically beseeched the image of the Indian nation as a married woman, whose dignity, honour, and respect were violated by an external enemy. The image invoked public emotions to rationalise the strikes against Pakistan. The image produced a binary of victim and saviour. The moral framing of 'Sindo' is an effective signifier, arousing public sentiments to mobilise public support. Such discourse integrates the concepts of gender, religion, and nationhood, framing the state as patriarch and guardian of its "faithful" citizens, and it completely excludes the minorities from the symbolic national body.

In contrast, Pakistan's national discourse focuses on the safeguarding of faith and honour, illuminating martyrdom (*shahadat*), founding legitimacy on Islamic symbolism. The verbosity constructs the nation as a holy community under threat, where men's duty is to defend religion and women's honour. Through the mobilization of religious sentiment, the discourse of both states functions as an affective mechanism that moralizes militarization and establishes a sense of collective unity, while simultaneously overpowering dissenting voices and reinforcing patriarchal authority.

South Asian people conventionally respond immediately to such calls with zeal, and it is easier for the State to conflate the military actions with the moral obligation. Such a projection, however, does not empower women but further reduces their status to traditional roles, namely honour and submission. The situation leads to their exclusion or erasure in the national discourses. This discursive choice in the documents is intentional: an identity marker of womanhood, reinforcing gendered nationalism. The position of the State and military is elevated as protectors. Embedded in patriarchal assumptions, 'sindo' reassures the binary of male/female and nation/other. Otherization discloses gender power relations in these discourses. The dominant group constructs the image of the opponent as 'other' (Lazar, 2005).

Indian discourse fuses gender with religious-cultural symbolism, and Pakistan connects it to faith, producing legitimacy and emotion through different semiotic routes—Hindu domestic piety versus Islamic sacrifice reveals that gendered nationalism is culturally specific yet functionally similar to sustain exclusionary power. The national discourses also represent a discursive silencing and erasure of women within these narratives of war. Women are absent as subjects of voice or agency. Not neutral, this omission reflects the gendered restructuring and production of patriarchal hierarchies in which the authority and legitimacy are coded as male, and the experiences of displacement, loss, or resistance of women remain invisible.

The special briefings indicate that both states maintain gender power hierarchies by attributing stereotypical feminine characteristics to their enemies, such as being provocative, deceptive, and irrational. These features are associated with females in South Asian society. The role of the military is rationalised by the state's briefing to defeat and subdue such an enemy. This is 'silencing and erasing women's role and a civilian perspective' (Lazar, 2005). The idea of the nation as a 'feminised space' is pervasive in these discourses. The feminisation of the enemy reinforces gendered nationalism (Yuval-Davis, 2004). Frequent reference to civilian women and children raises a question of whether the civilian martyrs are gendered.

The symbolic repertoires and discursive effects of Pakistani and Indian discourse differ significantly. The war briefings by both States employ the image of 'woman to be rescued' (Rai, 2012) with a strong partial exclusion of the feminine role. Ironically, situated in 'Operation Sindo', the Indian discourse renders women 'invisible' (Rai, 2012). It reflects the 'discursive absence/erasure' of females in political discourses, and the concepts of morality and

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masculinity are reinforced (Lazar, 2005). It normalises masculine authority by use of universal 'I and We' for the Indian and Pakistani nations, excluding female presence. Partially referring to victims, including women and children, it positions the conflict in a man-only territory. The discursive effect of such discourse legitimises military control sponsored by the state.

Women conceived as 'dissents', opponents, merely passive recipients of terrorism and cross-border attacks, are not visible in these discourses as active subjects, even in the Indian ministry briefings where the operation was led by two women positioned in higher ranks in the Indian Army. This non-reference or omission may be (un)intentional outcome of the strong patriarchal system in the region, or it may be necessitated to win the war and assert dominance over the enemy. This silencing strategy is the dismissal of the female gender. Such discursive practices minimise the possibility of peace-building narratives.

### Conclusion

FCDA exposes the discourse that sustains the gendered nationalist narratives of Pakistan and India, imposing an embargo on any non-military alternative or solution to the conflict. The state ministries otherize each other through rhetorical strategies. The documents assert the military attacks of India and Pakistan as masculine and morally justified by reinforcing their protective and defensive roles. Demonising and feminising the enemy to restore control and honour of the nation replicates the gendered nationalist ideologies of Pakistan and India. FCDA helped to conclude that the briefings illuminated masculine power and undermined the feminine presence. The discourses framed the armed conflict purely within strategic and nationalist terminologies. It was also concluded that gender and nationalism are constructed simultaneously by adopting the idealised notions of masculinity and femininity. A soldier's identity is valour and a protector. During crises, the State prefers to glorify the role for its benefit. Nationalism becomes more of a gendered performance connected to the integrity and honour of the nation. To maintain the status quo, female representation is limited to the affected civilian segment. Silencing of females perpetuates a strong image of the State as a dominant male. The assertive male-oriented language of the documents demonstrates reinforcement of myth-making. Metaphors aligned with a feminine vision reinforce the gendered concept of nations as women. The discussion agrees with Lazar's argument that institutional discourse reduced women's position to invisibility. The study concludes that both states have been successful in constructing a gendered discourse to enhance militarised masculinity for political aims across the borders.

The originality of this work lies in its use of a feminist critical discourse analysis lens, applied to the official statements celebrating 'bravery', 'martyrdom', and 'decisive retaliation' as a construct of militarized masculinity embodying national honour. FCDA exposes militarized masculinity and shows how the state frames itself as a protector-father and the nation as a vulnerable motherland. Foregrounding silences and exclusions of women and their roles reduced to victims or mothers of martyrs, FCDA illustrates that these silences are not accidental omissions but active strategies of discourse. It brings a gendered, feminist lens to a field traditionally dominated by strategic, realist, or security-focused analyses. Instead of treating war discourse as neutral statecraft, FCDA shows how national power is asserted through gendered language and silences.

### Future Implications

This study opens new avenues for future researchers to rethink South Asian national security discourses, which are overtly gendered and exclusionary. It also implies a need to reimagine national identity, particularly in the South Asian region, through social, political, and military encounters. Feminist ideas should be welcomed in policymaking to give equal representation to women in all facets of public and political life.

The significant policy implications of studying gendered nationalism through FCDA in South Asia emphasize the need for gender-sensitive national and security policies surpassing militarized and patriarchal frameworks of defence. Governments should sponsor narratives of citizenship founded on equality. Secondly, education and media policies should be directed to reform the gender biases rooted in national textbooks, histories, and public discourse. Thirdly, reconciliation and peacebuilding measures should dynamically include women, involving them in decision-making rather than as symbols of peace. Ultimately, regional cooperation among South Asian states should adopt an inclusive approach to nationalism through regional collaboration, fostering more equitable, democratic, and peaceful societies.

In the particular context of India–Pakistan, both nations employ gendered metaphors to reinforce patriarchal norms and militarized masculinity. Policymakers must work to deconstruct such gendered national ideologies in education, media, and political rhetoric. Moving beyond an idealized image of Bharat Mata in national discourse, India should highlight women's actual political and social agency. In Pakistan, policies should focus on the connection

between national honour and female modesty. Furthermore, narratives of citizenship based on equality should be promoted. Both states must integrate women more substantively into peacebuilding and security frameworks, such as diplomacy and cross-border dialogues. Hypermasculine nationalism should be discouraged by forming mutual understanding through collaborative educational and cultural exchange programs. Gender-aware policymaking can best help shift national narratives of identity from protectionism to inclusivity and dignity.

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