

# Policy Recommendations - Pakistan



**Violent Extremism (VE) threatens the security and fundamental rights of peaceful living.** Youth are essential actors in contributing to Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and peacebuilding work. Youth are not only highly affected by VE, but they also play an important role as positive change agents. The way youth resilience manifests is very much dependent on social, political, and economic factors. ALLY intends to amplify young people's constructive voices and agency in addressing diverse factors of violent extremist narratives in South Asia. The recommendations herein were produced by the ALLY youth researchers through an eight months long participatory research with multiple stakeholders, and with further contributions from ALLY staff and fellows.

The following recommendations for the government of Pakistan would, if implemented, facilitate the increased engagement and impact of youth in peacebuilding and the prevention of violent extremism in Pakistan:

## **Local government systems should create space for youth participation.**

Local government represents and acts in the interest of civil society's needs. As such, it is imperative that governments listen to young voices and utilize their energies in serving and advancing their local communities. "Prime Minister Tiger Force" is an example of this kind of youth inclusion in local governance. Proper policy planning is needed to make such initiatives more useful and effective.

## **Ensure youth are represented in decision making processes.**

The government of Pakistan, at all levels, should consider youth as an important stakeholder in all social policy development processes. "National Youth Council" is a great first step.

**Government should strengthen the National Youth Assembly** and take steps to make it a more effective platform for the inclusion of youth in policy making processes.

**Government should promote the spirit of volunteerism** among youth and encourage public trust and confidence in youth through the development of local youth volunteering and community services schemes, such as the Paint to Peace project described in this document.

**Government has the ability to mobilize youth at a national level** with a special focus on youth-led PVE work. There is a need to scale up and create more youth representation and participation programs like "Paigam Pakistan."

**Government should introduce more flexible policies, laws, and regulation process for peacebuilding work.**

**Government should develop ways to channelize international funds** and provide CSOs and youth organizations with easier and steadier access to national and international funds.

**Government should mobilize media for program and policy visibility.**

Government support can be very helpful in creating awareness, especially on issues related religious misinterpretation and manipulation.



**Government should develop protocols for the collaboration between NGOs –**

particularly those concerned with gender and youth – the UN, governments, and YPBs for a systematic inclusion in the design and delivery of PVE programming.

**Government should support research** on factors, including indigenous PVE initiatives, that foster resilience, pluralism, diversity and acceptance.

**Government should expand educational programming beyond**

**schools** to reach children and youth outside of educational institutions who may have suffered trauma or are coping with the impacts of violence.

**Primary Enablers**

**CSOs' varied approaches, from philanthropy to service-delivery,** create multiple avenues through which awareness of peacebuilding opportunities is created. More young people can organize their work on social issues at the community level. Despite restrictions, CSO activities include more community-based organizations and youth groups to come together campaigning for certain issues.

**National and international scholarships and cultural exchange programs** also help young people to interact, understand different cultures, and develop leadership skills for civic engagement. These networking opportunities help youth recognize commonalities among different societies and cultivate the ability, confidence, and motivation to make a difference in their own communities.

**Social media** has played an important role in creating awareness, quickly relaying news and information, as well as engaging more youth through online campaigns. Social media also provides YPBs with multiple platforms to connect and collaborate with likeminded youth working for similar causes.

At the individual level, **personal experience with violence and trauma motivates** individuals to work towards a more peaceful, inclusive society. Many YPBs wish to support others who have suffered similar experiences so that they are not repeated in their communities.

**Political stability and peaceful democratic transitions** in the last two decades have finally provided youth with the opportunity to participate in democratic activities. Youth play a significant role in democracy, comprising a significant percentage of voter turnouts in both the 2013 and 2018 Pakistan general elections. These elections, in turn, have created avenues for democratic activities in which youth may participate, connect, and relay their concerns and interests.

**Primary Barriers**

- **Skills Deficits:** YPBs often do not have the skills or capacity to supply others with tools, support, and encouragement. These limit the work, scope, and impact of YPBs. Most YPBs are self-motivated or inspired by some work done by others. They have may have skill deficits in literacy, language, and/or public speaking, that may limit their work.
- **Lack of Trust and Community Support:** Young people are often portrayed as vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment in Pakistan. A past of youth radicalization and extremism has led to these common concerns and misconceptions. Young people's opinions and abilities are often considered subordinate to that of adults, which becomes a barrier for them to work and creates community resistance. In addition, communities are often resistant towards foreign-funded development work, as it has been portrayed as a threat to national security or different ideological beliefs. Society notable creates barriers for the involvement of young women in youth led activities.
- **Lack of Financial Resources:** Insufficient resources are another major barrier to youth peacebuilding. Cultural and societal norms dictate a young person's lifestyle is dependent on their family until their late twenties. During this time period, energetic youth who are motivated to work depend on social and financial support. YPBs require funds from their families, communities, or outside organizations. Even so, many are often impermanent sources of funding, so the sustainability of initiatives remains insecure.
- **Restrictions and Laws:** New systems of registering NGOs to qualify for foreign funding are not just difficult but also time and resource consuming. As a result of strict government policies, it is very difficult for YPBs, youth groups, and local organizations to register for and receive international funds. This has forced many organizations to scale down significantly.

