

**Webinar**

**Brief 35:2021**



**Counter  
Violent  
Extremism  
in Pakistan**

**Book Launch Webinar**



**Pakistan Institute of Development Economics**



MONDAY / FEB 15, 2021  
8:00 PM PST

# COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN

BOOK LAUNCH WEBINAR



**AUTHOR :**

Dr. Anita Weiss

**MODERATOR:**

Dr. Nadeem ul Haque

**DISCUSSANTS:**

Saba Gul Khattak  
Political Scientist

Yaqoob Khan Bangash  
Historian

Raza Rumi  
Policy Analyst

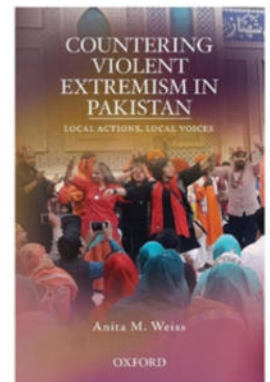
● **ABOUT AUTHOR**

Professor Weiss received her doctorate in sociology from UC Berkeley and is professor of International Studies at the University of Oregon, where she has taught since 1988. She has published extensively on social development, gender issues, and political Islam in Pakistan. She was in Pakistan extensively between 2016-19 conducting interviews for this new book, including six months on a Harry Frank Guggenheim research fellowship; Professor Weiss stepped down after seven years as Head of the Department of International Studies to conduct this research in Pakistan. She is a member of the editorial board of Globalizations as well as a number of journals from Pakistan, has been a member of the Research Advisory Board of the Pakistan National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), and has been Treasurer and Vice President of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies. She was a Distinguished Speaker at the PSDE Annual Meeting in 2002.

● **ABOUT BOOK**

This book identifies and analyzes the impact of the various ways in which local people are responding, taking stands, recapturing their culture, and saying 'stop' to the violent extremism that has manifested over the past decade (even longer) in Pakistan. Local groups throughout Pakistan are engaging in various kinds of social negotiations and actions to lessen the violence that has plagued the country since the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which let loose a barrage of violence that overflowed into its borders. In so many ways, Pakistanis are engaging in powerful actions that transform how people think about their own society, impeding extremists' rants while acting on 'envisioning alternative futures'.

This book, hence, focuses on finding the sparks of hope that local people are creating to counter violent extremism based on close ethnographic study of ground realities about not only what people are doing but why they are selecting these kinds of actions, how they are creating alternative narratives about culture and identity, and their vision of a future without violence. This book is also designed to celebrate what is flourishing in cultural performances, music, social activism, and the like in Pakistan today because of people's commitment to take stands against extremism.



The book is available to order at

<https://oup.com.pk/academic-generalbooks/countering-violent-extremism-in-pakistan.html>



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## **Preamble**

Dr. Anita M. Weiss has written several books based on our areas of academic interests which include

1) *Interpreting Islam Modernity and Women's Rights in Pakistan*

2) *Walls within Walls Life Histories of Working Women in The Old City of Lahore*

Her new book *Violent Extremism in Pakistan Local Actions, Local Voices* is the result of the extensive fieldwork conducted from 2016-2019. In December 2014, an attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar motivated her to write a book on extremism. The book resists poetry, art, music, interactive theater, and religious leaders themselves taking a stand to counter extremism.

So many exciting things are happening throughout Pakistan people are striving to reclaim their culture, society, and state. Dr. Weiss has done a remarkable job that has not been undertaken by many Pakistani and foreign researchers.

## **Key Messages**

- Since the 1980s, Pakistan has been faced with the menace of terrorism violent extremism. It can't be blamed completely on the cold war politics because, at the same time, we undertook a domestic project that has far-reaching consequences.
- In the 1980s, state-sponsored Islamization, the insertion of jihadist ideas and ideology in the curricula of public and State narratives. All the sorts of clerics with really radical ideologies were being given this extraordinary space in the public domain.
- In the last decade, we saw thousands of casualties both civilian and military in Pakistan. It probably affected our psychology forever. But we woke up after the tragic incident of army public school in Peshawar
- Many believe that military solutions are exactly the lasting solutions and these solutions lie everywhere.
- After the Peshawar incident, the government announced the National Action Plan to deal with terrorism. The National Action Plan is an action plan that was established by the Government of Pakistan in January 2015 to crack down on terrorism and to supplement the ongoing anti-terrorist offensive in Federally Administered Tribal Areas. It is considered as a major coordinated state retaliation following the deadly Peshawar school attack. The plan received unprecedented levels of support and cooperation across the country's political spectrum, inclusive of the federal and provincial governments.
- National Action Plan was consist of 20 points to counter terrorism but unfortunately, the most difficult ones have not even been addressed.
- This book revolves around the research question; 'What happens at the societal level?' Navigating the 1980's, searching through the time – Understanding the transformations on the geopolitical aspect and impact of these transformations on the very fabric of the social and political structure in Pakistan.
- This book sheds light on another very important aspect that 'What were people of Pakistan doing in the most difficult of times?' The book is the most valuable document of the responses by Pakistan's vibrant civil society that refuses to bend down, suppress, or be silenced. The study of the movement and initiatives led by educationalists, poets, writers, and musicians were intuitively put forward. Most of these initiatives that have been meticulously documented, analyzed, and put into the context in the book were being led by the younger lot, which is quite reassuring. Interesting to see the case studies ranging from school systems to musical bands to resistance poetry. These case studies testify to the zeal and spirit of Pakistani society fighting violence and terrorism.
- Referring to the article named 'Mandela's in our closet' written by Farooq Solani, one of the panelists; that writer at the end of the article writes that 'we meant Mandela's for others, and we don't want to recognize our own. This book is identifying and recognizing the many local Mandela's at the grass-root level, who are not recognized by our society or are just illustrations on the pages of history.



- In her book, the author is searching for the islands of hopes, and giving recognition to the voices of many buried Mandelas. This is the major contribution of the book, in the sense that it brings out the other side of Pakistan, which many are not accustomed to. Many complex ideas are made easily readable, which will greatly benefit those who want to know; 'What is it like to be in Pakistan with all its contradictions.
- This book moves away from the popular and dominant discourses and explores the aspects of society that are usually not investigated. The complicated issues are not seen through the lens of dominant discourse, but through the lens of hope and resistance of the Pakistani society against violence and extremism.
- Panelists applauded the book for its 'Honest approach' – the balance was maintained through the identification of pitfalls and loops alongside the vibrant hopeful aspect.
- Another important aspect that this book documented is the 'Live Reality' of the people of Pakistan to their history, environment, and the situation at that time, in a very powerful and real manner.
- This book documents the resistance to violence and terrorism from within the Pakistan society into one larger 'Movement of Resistance'. The highlight of the book is the responses that are not influenced by the national or international agenda.
- Discussing another aspect of the book was the music – The musical bands which were integral to bringing the change, and interestingly, bringing these bands to the public schools of far flung areas, where the majority of the students came from dirt poor families, targeting the right audience, inculcating the motivation for change.
- The most challenging part of the book was a translation of Sindhi resistance poetry. In comparison to Pashto resistance poetry; Sindhi poetry translation came as a big challenge for the book. The choice of choosing Pashto and Sindhi poetry over Punjabi and Balochi was the fact that 'How they bind together in the sense of the resistance.
- The major motivation behind the book was the local actions and local voices that had animated and excited the author, and to represent a real and honest picture of Pakistani society and how it is actively combating extremism.
- Her work looks at very interesting case studies and brings them together into a large picture that emits the turmoil that keeps on increasing in Pakistan on a small minute level.

### **Way Forward**

The discussants called for more research on the vital aspect of the Pakistani society that Dr. Weiss has identified, discussed, and recognized in her book. More interestingly, these ideas weren't highlighted or studied before, which increases the significance of these aspects to many folds.

The discussants stressed the need for the translation of this valuable book into the national language, as said beautifully by one of the discussants that 'that stories of people should go to the people. The panelist urged the dissemination of the book to the general public, so the people could connect to their culture, history, and society.

# COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN PAKISTAN

LOCAL ACTIONS, LOCAL VOICES



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