

Coordination between Federal and Provincial Governments in Implementing the National Action Plan (NAP): Challenges and Successes

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ABSTRACT

The National Counter Terrorism Action Plan (NAP) introduced in 2014 is a major policy of the Government of Pakistan for counter-terrorism with multi sector representation from federal and provincial authorities. This study explores the structural, political and operating issues that emerge in this relationship and assesses the difficulties and achievements of realising the security objectives of NAP. Due to the use of qualitative data collection techniques, this study aims to explore the various plans and challenges the federal and provincial authorities undergo when implementing NAP. This paper describes how all these governmental layers work together towards the achievement of NAP security objectives while identifying documented integration scenarios that have positively impacted security. Moreover, the study gives examples of the federal and provincial government cooperation in the fight against the threats, showing that this cooperation helps to achieve the results in increasing people's safety and decreasing terrorism occurrences. Also, this study provides prescription on how to enhance intergovernmental relations for better counter-terrorism operations. The following recommendations are intended to enhance better coordinated policy adoption and implementation to meet present and future counter-terrorism threats. Finally, the study helps to provide important conclusions for increasing efficiency of federal-provincial cooperation within the context of NAP, which points to the crucial importance of increased communication, exchange of resources, and development of the federal strategy for counter-terrorism in provinces.

Keywords: National Action Plan (NAP), Pakistan, Federal Government, Provincial Government, Coordination, Counter-Terrorism, Security, Extremism.

INTRODUCTION

The National Action Plan (NAP), initiated in the aftermath of the brutal Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, represents one of the most comprehensive state responses to terrorism and extremism in Pakistan's history. The attack, which

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claimed the lives of over 140 individuals—most of them innocent children—sent shockwaves throughout the country and the international community. This tragic event catalyzed a long-overdue shift in Pakistan’s internal security priorities, prompting a united political, military, and civil response. The result was the swift adoption of a twenty-point action plan aimed at addressing not only the symptoms but also the root causes of terrorism, radicalization, and sectarian violence (Abbas, 2015; Chaudhry, 2017).

NAP was not simply a declaration of intent; it was a multi-pronged strategy encompassing legal, military, political, and administrative dimensions. The plan called for decisive action across diverse fronts—ranging from enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies and establishing military courts, to regulating seminaries, combating hate speech, dismantling terror financing networks, and reforming the criminal justice system. NAP’s goals were as ambitious as they were necessary: to restore peace, assert state writ, and reclaim the public’s trust in government institutions.

However, while the NAP was formulated at the federal level, its success has hinged largely on coordinated implementation by both federal and provincial governments. In a federal structure like Pakistan’s, where law enforcement and certain aspects of internal security fall within the jurisdiction of provincial governments, seamless cooperation between the two tiers of governance becomes imperative. The federal government provides overarching policy direction, manages military and intelligence operations, and sets national security agendas (Mahmood, 2019). The provinces, meanwhile, are tasked with executing these policies on the ground, ensuring local law enforcement compliance, and aligning the national agenda with region-specific socio-political realities (Asghar, 2020).

Unfortunately, this shared responsibility has often revealed significant fault lines. Disparities in administrative capacities, political will, resource distribution, and intergovernmental coordination have hindered uniform implementation of NAP across the country. Provinces differ in terms of political dynamics, institutional readiness, and threat perception—resulting in an uneven, and at times fragmented, response to terrorism and extremism (Baloch, 2018; Butt, 2019). Moreover, jurisdictional ambiguities, bureaucratic inertia, and competing political interests have further strained the federal-provincial relationship, undermining the effectiveness of what is otherwise a robust and necessary national framework.

This study seeks to investigate these very challenges. It delves into the dynamics of federal and provincial coordination in implementing the NAP, evaluates both successes and setbacks, and identifies gaps that must be addressed to ensure cohesive and effective national security policy enforcement. Understanding these challenges is essential not only for evaluating the progress of NAP but also for proposing reforms that can make Pakistan’s counter-terrorism strategy more resilient, inclusive, and unified. Through empirical evidence and policy analysis, this research aims to contribute meaningfully to the academic and policy discourse on federalism, governance, and security in Pakistan.

Aims and Objectives

This research seeks to:

- i. Analyze the plans and problems that the federal and the provincial government encounter in addressing NAP.
- ii. Examine how federal and provincial governments have cooperated to fulfill the security goals of NAP.
- iii. Suggest concrete measures that could be taken in order to enhance the cooperation between different levels of government in counter-terrorism performance.

Research Questions

- i. What are the main limitation that affect coordination between the federal and provincial governments in implementing NAP?
- ii. What are the successes of federal-provincial coordination application, when it comes to NAP?
- iii. In what ways can greater federal-provincial cooperation be achieved, so that the goals of NAP will be implemented more effectively?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pakistan's alignment with the global war on terror, particularly following the events of September 11, 2001, placed immense pressure on its internal security apparatus. The absence of a unified national policy framework initially limited the state's ability to respond effectively to the escalating threat of terrorism (Jawad, 2022). The situation reached a critical juncture following the December 2014 terrorist attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. This incident spurred national outrage and catalyzed the development of the National Action Plan (NAP), a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy introduced in early 2015.

The NAP encompassed 20 specific objectives aimed at combating terrorism through both military and civilian-led initiatives. These objectives ranged from the establishment of military courts and reactivation of capital punishment for terrorists, to systemic reforms in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the regulation of madrasas, control over hate speech, and the dismantling of terrorist financing networks. These efforts were designed to synchronize federal and provincial responses, ensuring a unified stance against terrorism.

However, the effectiveness of the NAP has been mixed. Asad Ullah Khan, Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, in his 2019 issue brief, emphasized the heavy toll terrorism has taken on Pakistan—over 70,000 lives lost and an economic impact exceeding \$130 billion. Despite some successes, Khan noted persistent implementation deficits, particularly due to weak coordination mechanisms between federal and provincial tiers of government. These issues were most visible in areas requiring localized action, such as

educational reforms, refugee management, and community-level deradicalization efforts (Khan, 2019).

The challenges of intergovernmental coordination have also been highlighted in various institutional assessments. The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), envisioned as the coordinating agency under NAP, has often lacked sufficient autonomy and operational resources. According to Shakeel Ahmed Rama's assessment, without enhanced institutional backing and provincial compliance, many NAP goals remain only partially achieved.

In response to these constraints, policy revisions have sought to enhance adaptability. Ayesha Sohail, Research Associate at the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), in her report titled *National Action Plan: A Quantified Analysis*, offers a data-driven review of NAP's trajectory since its inception. Her research highlights the shift from a broad 20-point strategy to a more focused 14-point revised framework after 2021. This revised plan emphasizes a balanced approach between kinetic operations—such as targeted military action—and non-kinetic strategies, including ideological counter-radicalization, media regulation, and development-led peace building. Sohail underscores the importance of quantifying progress across these dimensions to ensure effective evaluation and course correction.

In parallel, the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) for 2019–2023 builds on earlier frameworks by emphasizing non-military responses to terrorism. It acknowledges the decline in large-scale terrorist operations and refocuses state attention on sustainable peace through institutional reform, community engagement, and deradicalization programs. Initiatives such as social media monitoring, enhanced role for provincial CTDs, and deradicalization centers reflect this evolving approach.

Moreover, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's 2020 report, *Strengthening Governance in Pakistan: Assessing the National Action Plan to Counter Terrorism and Extremism*, provides critical insight into governance-related aspects of NAP. The report particularly stresses the need to prioritize the socio-economic development of the former FATA region, now merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Without delivering on economic and infrastructural promises, the report warns, long-term stability in this geopolitically sensitive area may remain elusive.

Finally, the legislative foundation for NAP's implementation was laid through the 21st Constitutional Amendment, which temporarily sanctioned military courts. However, long-term counterterrorism effectiveness depends on strengthening Pakistan's civilian judicial framework and building institutional capacities at the provincial level. Disparities in the operational strength of CTDs across provinces point to the urgent need for national standardization and improved federal-provincial cooperation.

In summary, while the National Action Plan represents a significant milestone in Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, its success is contingent on the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms between the federal and provincial governments. Achieving lasting peace and

security will require ongoing policy evolution, institutional strengthening, and inclusive development—particularly in regions most affected by militancy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-method approach combining descriptive, analytical, and empirical methods. The descriptive component presents facts using data from primary and secondary sources such as official reports, policy documents, and academic literature.

The empirical aspect involves structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews with key stakeholders, including scholars, policymakers, diplomats, bureaucrats, and journalists, to gather insights on federal-provincial coordination under NAP.

Analytical methods are applied to compare, interpret, and validate the findings, highlighting trends and challenges in intergovernmental collaboration in implementing the National Action Plan.

The Context of NAP and the Role of Coordination

The National Action Plan (NAP) was formulated as a landmark counter-terrorism initiative in Pakistan, designed to confront the root causes of terrorism and the structures that enable extremist ideologies. Developed in the aftermath of the devastating Army Public School attack in Peshawar, NAP was intended to serve as a national consensus document that would mobilize state institutions against militancy and violent extremism (Iqbal, 2017). It outlines a comprehensive set of measures across various sectors including law enforcement, military operations, judicial reforms, regulation of religious seminaries, counter-narrative strategies, and improvements in education and governance (Lahore School of Economics, 2017).

The effective realization of these goals depends significantly on strong coordination between the federal and provincial governments. Although policy frameworks are largely designed and endorsed at the federal level, the practical implementation of most components falls within the jurisdiction of provincial governments. This includes responsibilities for maintaining law and order, administering education, managing local governance structures, and providing social services. Each province in Pakistan presents a unique political, economic, and cultural context, which requires a nuanced and region-specific approach to counter-terrorism (Cheema, 2016).

Given Pakistan's federal structure, provincial governments play a crucial role in translating federal policy into action. Their active cooperation is essential to operationalize national-level strategies within localized environments. The effectiveness of the National Action Plan, therefore, rests on a collaborative governance model where provincial institutions are empowered, adequately resourced, and institutionally aligned with federal objectives (Hussain, 2018).

However, in practice, this coordination has encountered several persistent obstacles. Political tensions between federal and provincial administrations, administrative inefficiencies, overlapping jurisdictions, and institutional fragmentation have hindered unified implementation. In many cases, there is a lack of streamlined communication and structured mechanisms for intergovernmental collaboration. These challenges have led to uneven enforcement of NAP across provinces and a disparity in outcomes (Naseem, 2021).

While provinces like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have shown measurable progress due to strong intergovernmental engagement and financial support from the center, other regions have struggled to meet the same standards. This unevenness highlights the need for a more integrated and systematic framework for coordination that can bridge the policy-to-practice gap.

To maximize the potential of NAP, coordination must evolve from ad hoc interactions into a well-established institutional process, guided by mutual accountability, transparency, and sustained political will. Ensuring effective communication, clearly defined roles, shared responsibilities, and joint monitoring can significantly enhance the efficiency of counter-terrorism efforts and foster national cohesion in the fight against extremism.

Implementation of National Action Plan Strategy by the Federal Government

The federal government of Pakistan has played a pivotal role in conceptualizing, formulating, and overseeing the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP), positioning itself as the central coordinating authority in the national counter-terrorism agenda. In the immediate aftermath of the tragic Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar in December 2014, the federal leadership responded with unprecedented urgency and political unity. One of its first major actions was to enact swift constitutional amendments to empower military courts for the speedy trial of terrorism-related offenses, reintroduce the death penalty for convicted terrorists, and strengthen the legal architecture of counter-terrorism in the country (Zaman, 2018). These measures reflected a decisive federal initiative to confront terrorism through judicial, legislative, and institutional reform (Afzal, 2021).

Moreover, the federal government assumed a commanding role in directing large-scale military operations designed to neutralize terrorist networks and reclaim state authority in insurgency-hit regions. Notably, operations such as Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan were launched and led by the federal government and the Pakistan Armed Forces with the objective of dismantling terrorist safe havens, cutting off logistical networks, and restoring peace and security in strategically significant tribal and border areas (Khan, 2020). These operations were accompanied by extensive intelligence coordination and air-ground synergy, underscoring the federal government's capacity to lead kinetic responses against terrorism (Fair, 2012).

However, while the federal government provided the overarching vision and strategic direction for NAP, its effective implementation required the active involvement and cooperation of provincial governments. Pakistan's constitutional framework grants significant autonomy to provinces in areas that are central to NAP's success, such as policing, criminal justice, regulation

of religious seminaries (madaris), local governance, and educational reform (Haider, 2016). This necessitated a shared responsibility model in which the federal government coordinated national strategies, ensured legal and financial support, and facilitated policy harmonization, while provincial authorities were tasked with translating these directives into action at the ground level.

Challenges emerged when this vertical coordination did not operate seamlessly. In some cases, provincial authorities lacked the institutional capacity or political will to enforce the more sensitive or controversial elements of NAP, such as the registration and regulation of madaris or the crackdown on sectarian hate speech. There were also instances where delays in implementation stemmed from unclear jurisdictional boundaries, insufficient financial transfers, or inter-provincial disparities in administrative capabilities (Ghumman, 2014).

Despite these challenges, the role of the federal government remains crucial as both a catalyst for national counter-terrorism initiatives and a central actor in fostering inter-provincial consensus. By maintaining strategic oversight, allocating resources, and facilitating capacity-building among provinces, the federal government ensures that the spirit of the National Action Plan transcends political divides and becomes a genuinely national response to extremism. A reinvigorated commitment from federal authorities to improve coordination mechanisms, invest in provincial capacities, and institutionalize intergovernmental cooperation would significantly enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of NAP's implementation.

NAP Implementation with particular reference to the Role of Provincial Governments

The success of the National Action Plan (NAP) in Pakistan critically hinges not only on the federal government's strategic direction but also—perhaps more importantly—on the active and coordinated involvement of provincial governments. Given Pakistan's federal structure, provinces are endowed with significant responsibilities in areas such as law enforcement, education, local governance, and social welfare—sectors that are directly implicated in the execution of NAP objectives. As such, the provincial governments form the operational backbone of the plan's implementation, translating national policy into concrete, localized action (Gillani, 2021).

One of the most important roles provincial governments have undertaken under NAP pertains to education reform, specifically the regulation and reform of religious seminaries (madaris). These institutions, while historically rooted in community-based religious instruction, have in some cases been used as recruitment grounds or ideological support systems for extremist organizations (Raza, 2019). The responsibility for registration, curriculum standardization, and monitoring of madaris largely rests with provincial education departments and home ministries, making their role essential in neutralizing potential radicalization at its roots (Ali, 2017). However, this is a deeply sensitive issue, particularly in regions where religious influence is politically significant, making enforcement a complex task that requires both administrative courage and political consensus.

Provincial law enforcement agencies, particularly provincial police forces, are also at the frontlines of counter-terrorism operations. While the federal government oversees national-level security and intelligence through agencies like NACTA and ISI, it is the provincial police, Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), and local security apparatuses that conduct day-to-day operations, surveillance, and enforcement. In high-risk provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, provincial authorities are tasked with managing cross-border terrorism, ethnic violence, sectarian clashes, and insurgency-linked criminal networks. Moreover, provincial governments must contend with the challenges posed by the influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) following military operations, managing their rehabilitation, social services, and reintegration—functions that are not just logistical but crucial to preventing the re-radicalization of displaced populations (Cheema, 2016).

Additionally, provincial governments have been tasked with curbing hate speech, promoting inter-sect harmony, and enforcing bans on militant and sectarian organizations operating under new identities. These responsibilities require robust legislative action at the provincial level, coordinated intelligence sharing, and active public engagement—domains where progress has been uneven. Some provinces, such as Punjab, have demonstrated more institutional capability and political will in fulfilling these duties. Others, however, have lagged due to various structural, political, and financial constraints (Golovina & Ali, 2017).

Despite the clear mandate and importance of provincial roles, several challenges continue to impede effective implementation of NAP at the provincial level. Foremost among these is the lack of institutional capacity, particularly within provincial police departments and law enforcement agencies. Many forces are under-trained, under-equipped, and lack specialized counter-terrorism units capable of dealing with sophisticated and evolving threats (Jaffery, 2018). For instance, Balochistan's security landscape is particularly volatile, yet its police infrastructure remains chronically under-resourced. Similarly, in Sindh and parts of KP, law enforcement has often been politicized, which undermines professionalism and reduces effectiveness.

Furthermore, inter-governmental tensions and political divergences between federal and provincial entities can stymie cooperation. In cases where provincial governments are run by political parties in opposition to the federal ruling party, there have been delays and disagreements in operationalizing NAP mandates. These rifts often result in fragmented implementation and a lack of policy continuity (Iqbal, 2017). Moreover, the absence of a clearly defined operational framework delineating federal and provincial responsibilities under NAP leads to confusion and delays. The division of labor between Islamabad and provincial capitals is not always well-articulated, resulting in either duplication of efforts or a complete neglect of certain policy components.

In summary, while provincial governments are indispensable stakeholders in the realization of NAP's goals, their effectiveness is frequently compromised by institutional limitations, political misalignments, and unclear role definitions. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive, multi-layered reform strategy that enhances the capacity of provincial institutions, fosters political cohesion, and clearly demarcates roles and responsibilities. Only

through such systemic alignment can NAP achieve its transformative potential in countering terrorism and extremism across Pakistan's diverse provincial landscape.

ANALYSIS

The National Action Plan (NAP), launched in 2014, emerged as a national security framework intended to neutralize terrorism and extremism in Pakistan through coordinated efforts among federal and provincial stakeholders. While its policy design was commendable and generated an initial wave of political consensus, the plan's execution has revealed significant challenges rooted in governance, inter-governmental dynamics, and resource disparities.

Governance Challenges and Institutional Capacity

A key finding is that governance deficits—rooted in anti-intellectualism and weak political institutionalism—have significantly hindered the implementation of NAP. Both federal and provincial administrations have struggled with institutional inertia, inefficiency, and resistance to reform, particularly in sectors that require long-term transformation such as education, religious discourse, and local governance. These structural governance issues reduce the agility and responsiveness of government actors, making it difficult to operationalize NAP's multidimensional objectives in a coherent and timely manner.

Furthermore, the nature of Pakistan's federal structure places considerable responsibility on provincial governments to translate national security policies into actionable outcomes on the ground. However, disparities in institutional capacity are stark. While Punjab and, to a certain extent, KP have shown relative progress, provinces like Balochistan and Sindh continue to lag due to weak administrative setups, under-resourced law enforcement, and fragmented political will (Khan & Saeed, 2016).

Political Dynamics and Federal-Provincial Tensions

The political landscape has also emerged as a critical determinant in the success or failure of NAP. Pakistan's provinces are governed by diverse political parties, often in opposition to the ruling party at the federal level. This has given rise to inter-party rivalries and friction, which have in several instances disrupted cooperation between federal and provincial authorities. In such a polarized environment, the implementation of centrally conceived strategies like NAP becomes hostage to partisan considerations, leading to selective execution, delays, or even outright resistance to federal directives (Macdonald, 2021).

For instance, measures such as madaris regulation, hate speech monitoring, and community policing have seen inconsistent implementation due to lack of alignment between federal objectives and provincial political agendas. This politicization of security undermines the very essence of a unified national response to extremism and terrorism.

Resource Allocation and Implementation Capacity

A recurrent issue hampering NAP's progress is the inequitable distribution of financial and human resources. Provinces have repeatedly expressed concern over inadequate federal support in terms of funding and logistical assistance (Kayani, 2011). Counterterrorism initiatives require robust infrastructure, trained personnel, and modern equipment—all of which are scarce in several provinces. The lack of a clear, needs-based formula for resource allocation has created disparities, limiting the capacity of smaller provinces to contribute effectively to national objectives.

This imbalance is particularly pronounced in areas like Balochistan and the former FATA region, where security challenges are acute but institutional and fiscal support from the federal level remains insufficient. The 2020 report by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung emphasizes the need for sustained investment in such strategic regions to uphold national security and developmental goals.

Law Enforcement and Operational Effectiveness

The role of law enforcement agencies—especially the provincial police—has been pivotal yet problematic. Many police forces across provinces are undertrained, underpaid, and lack the technical capacity to counter sophisticated terror networks. While the federal forces, including the military and intelligence agencies, have supported counterterrorism operations, their involvement often overshadows or bypasses provincial actors, thereby creating coordination gaps (Rana, 2017).

This duality in operations—where federal and provincial forces work in parallel but not always in tandem—undermines cohesive security management. Furthermore, the absence of a unified command structure or integrated intelligence-sharing platform exacerbates the fragmentation, leading to redundant efforts and missed threats.

CHALLENGES

Despite the National Action Plan being a landmark policy framework aimed at eradicating terrorism and extremism from Pakistan, its implementation has encountered several structural and operational challenges, particularly in terms of intergovernmental coordination. The following are key categories of challenges that have persisted in hindering the smooth execution of NAP initiatives:

Slow Decision-Making Processes

One of the primary impediments to effective NAP implementation is the sluggish and often bureaucratic pace of decision-making at both federal and provincial levels. Many NAP-related actions require prompt coordination and consensus between multiple departments and tiers of government. However, due to the absence of time-bound decision-making frameworks, critical decisions are delayed, thereby diminishing the impact of policy measures (Haider, 2014). This

delay is especially detrimental in high-stakes counterterrorism contexts where immediate responses are crucial. The inertia within administrative structures not only obstructs proactive engagement but also causes backlogs in the execution of essential reforms and security operations (Rana, 2016).

Lack of Clear and Consistent Communication

The success of a national-level security policy like NAP heavily relies on transparent and continuous communication between federal ministries, provincial governments, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence institutions. However, one of the recurring challenges has been the fragmentation of communication channels. Information asymmetry—where provinces either lack updated directives from the federal level or fail to report progress consistently—has weakened coordination efforts. The absence of a centralized and digitized mechanism for intergovernmental communication has further contributed to misinterpretations, duplications of effort, and missed opportunities for joint operations. Moreover, the limited integration of institutions like the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) into provincial decision-making processes has reduced its potential as a coordination hub (Imran & Qasim, 2020).

Bureaucratic Red Tape and Procedural Complexities

Pakistan's bureaucratic system, characterized by layers of formalities and complex administrative hierarchies, often creates bottlenecks in the operationalization of NAP measures. Even when there is political will, the implementation process can be slowed down by procedural requirements such as multiple levels of approval, redundant documentation, and limited devolution of authority. For instance, reforms related to madrassa regulation, banning hate speech, and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons often get caught in a cycle of interdepartmental referrals, delaying practical action. Furthermore, the lack of empowered local governance structures means that provincial authorities are often dependent on federal permissions or funding, further entangling the process in bureaucratic gridlocks (Iqbal, Zafar, Kalim, & Mehmood, 2019).

Jurisdictional Ambiguities and Overlapping Mandates

Another significant barrier is the lack of clarity in jurisdictional responsibilities between federal and provincial institutions. Since security and law enforcement are constitutionally shared subjects in Pakistan, the ambiguity over 'who should do what' often leads to conflict or inaction. For example, while the federal government may formulate a directive under NAP, its actual enforcement often falls under provincial police and administrative departments, who may lack the resources or legal clarity to execute such orders effectively. Additionally, the lack of a legally binding framework to operationalize intergovernmental collaboration under NAP has allowed many institutions to operate in silos, weakening synergy and accountability (Qureshi, 2017).

Influence of Political Dynamics and Partisan Interests

Coordination under NAP has also been affected by Pakistan's volatile political landscape, especially when different political parties govern the federal and provincial levels. In such cases, party politics often overshadows national interest, with provinces showing reluctance in fully aligning with federal directives due to ideological or political differences. This dynamic is particularly evident in the uneven enforcement of NAP points across provinces, where some regions have shown more commitment and progress than others (Sherazi, 2014). Political competition may also result in blame-shifting, resistance to joint action, and selective implementation of security measures. In extreme cases, politically motivated decisions may even obstruct reforms related to hate speech, banned outfits, or the madrassa sector, as these issues are often entangled in local vote bank politics (Jawad, 2022).

Disparities in Resource Allocation and Institutional Capacity

Resource distribution between provinces remains a significant challenge in the implementation of NAP. Many provinces, especially those with less developed administrative setups, struggle with the technical, financial, and human resources required to carry out comprehensive counterterrorism measures (Shah, 2022). For instance, establishing well-equipped Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), deploying trained law enforcement personnel, or managing de-radicalization programs requires substantial investment—resources that some provinces may not possess independently. The federal government, while responsible for the broader policy framework, often falls short in ensuring equitable support to provinces, resulting in a fragmented and inconsistent application of NAP across the country. Additionally, the lack of performance-based monitoring systems further compounds this problem, as there is little pressure or incentive for provinces to enhance their capacity or align their resources with national priorities (Karamat, Muzaffar, & Shah, 2019).

The challenges outlined above underscore the critical need for institutional reforms, capacity-building, and trust-building measures between the federal and provincial governments. Without resolving issues of communication, jurisdiction, political friction, and uneven resources, the goals of the National Action Plan cannot be fully realized (Khan, 2013). Strengthening intergovernmental coordination is not only essential for effective policy implementation but is also a prerequisite for sustainable peace and internal security in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the identified challenges—ranging from bureaucratic inefficiencies to jurisdictional ambiguities and political dynamics—effective implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) requires a series of well-structured reforms and strategies to improve federal-provincial coordination. The following recommendations are proposed to address these structural and operational gaps:

Establish a Unified Intergovernmental Coordination Mechanism

A permanent Federal-Provincial Coordination Council on National Security should be established under the aegis of the Ministry of Interior or NACTA. This body should include representation from all provinces, autonomous regions, and key security institutions. Its role should be to synchronize planning, monitor progress, and resolve intergovernmental conflicts in real time (NACTA, 2021).

Strengthen NACTA's Role and Legal Mandate

NACTA must be revitalized through amendments in its legal framework to give it binding authority for policy coordination, monitoring, and implementation at both federal and provincial levels. It should act as the central data and communication hub for all security-related efforts under NAP and should be adequately resourced for this role.

Streamline Bureaucratic Processes

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and time-bound action plans should be introduced for all NAP-related initiatives to reduce bureaucratic red tape. This includes delegating specific authorities to provincial and district-level officers and eliminating redundant approval stages. Integration of digital governance tools can also speed up inter-departmental coordination (Yameen, 2020).

Clarify Jurisdictional Responsibilities

A clear division of responsibilities should be outlined in a NAP Implementation Charter, which defines the role of each stakeholder—federal, provincial, and local. This should be aligned with constitutional provisions and updated regularly in response to changing ground realities. Joint task forces may be formed for areas with shared jurisdiction, such as intelligence gathering, madrassa reforms, and hate speech control (Sherazi, 2014).

Promote Cross-Party Political Consensus

Regular All Parties Conferences (APCs) or bipartisan security briefings should be institutionalized to insulate the implementation of NAP from political volatility. National security must be treated as a non-partisan agenda, and all political actors must commit to the continuity of counterterrorism efforts irrespective of who is in power (Iqbal, Zafar, Kalim, & Mehmood, 2019).

Ensure Equitable Resource Allocation

The federal government should allocate funds to provinces based on a needs-based formula linked to security vulnerability, administrative capacity, and past performance. There should also be provision for federal technical assistance, such as training, equipment, and infrastructure, particularly for under-resourced regions.

Develop Capacity-Building Programs

There is an urgent need to train law enforcement officials and civil servants on their roles under NAP. Specialized programs should be developed in collaboration with national universities and think tanks to enhance provincial capacity in counterterrorism operations, policy implementation, and conflict resolution (Yameen, 2020).

Institutionalize a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

A robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system should be established to track NAP's implementation through quantifiable indicators. Regular progress reports should be published by NACTA or an independent oversight body, and provinces should be held accountable for delays or non-compliance (NACTA, 2021a).

Focus on Conflict-Affected Regions

Special attention should be given to regions such as the former FATA areas, now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as recommended in the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung report. Federal commitments to infrastructure and socio-economic development must be honored to eliminate the root causes of extremism and improve local ownership of NAP objectives.

Improve Public Engagement and Transparency

Public trust and support are critical for the success of NAP. Governments at all levels should engage in public awareness campaigns and ensure transparency in the implementation of security measures. Engaging civil society and local communities in dialogue can also help in de-radicalization and resilience-building efforts (Karamat, Muzaffar, & Shah, 2019).

For the National Action Plan to achieve its full potential as a cornerstone of Pakistan's internal security strategy, the federal and provincial governments must operate in a spirit of cooperation, clarity, and commitment. The above recommendations provide a pathway to overcoming systemic obstacles and fostering a coordinated, efficient, and inclusive approach to counterterrorism governance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights both the successes and challenges faced by Pakistan in the coordination between federal and provincial governments in implementing the National Action Plan (NAP). While significant strides have been made in counter-terrorism and security, challenges such as slow decision-making, lack of clear communication, bureaucratic red tape, and jurisdictional ambiguities have hindered the full potential of NAP's implementation. These challenges, compounded by political dynamics and resource disparities, have created operational bottlenecks that have impacted the effectiveness and efficiency of the plan. Despite these challenges, the paper has also pointed out positive outcomes of various initiatives. Notably,

provinces like Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have demonstrated success in implementing NAP with the help of federal cooperation and financial support. These provinces have shown a strong commitment to counter-terrorism measures, providing a model of effective federal-provincial coordination. However, the success of NAP across the country remains inconsistent. For the plan to have a uniform impact, it is imperative to address the structural and operational barriers to coordination.

To achieve sustainable progress, this paper suggests that strengthening inter-governmental coordination is critical. The establishment of clear roles and responsibilities, a streamlined process for resource allocation, and the creation of a dedicated coordination mechanism at both the federal and provincial levels are necessary steps for ensuring effective implementation. Moreover, increasing the capacity of provincial governments, ensuring consistent monitoring and evaluation, and fostering a non-partisan political consensus around NAP's objectives will help overcome the existing challenges. Ultimately, while there have been notable achievements, the implementation of NAP requires a more comprehensive, cooperative approach, where both federal and provincial governments align their strategies and resources for the common goal of national security and counter-extremism.

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