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Disaster Capitalism and the Politics of Relief: How Governance Gaps Enable Violent Extremist Influence After Pakistan's 2022 Floods

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Abstract

Disaster capitalism, a term coined by Naomi Klein, refers to the exploitation of a disaster or calamity hit community for profit and other material gains. Klein (2007) talks about the Disaster capitalism in the context of neo-liberal Policies, however, the idea can be extended to other groups who may not exploit for economic profit in the strict sense but for political and other purposes as well. Disaster capitalism therefore provides an appropriate lens to study the recruitment of people in disaster stricken communities by violent extremist organizations with politico-religious agenda. In this paper, we have analyzed how the Violent Extremist Organization's (VEO) have been able to penetrate into the disaster-stricken communities and what has been the most important factor that has contributed to the success of VEO's penetration. Key informant interviews and FGD's were conducted to have an in-depth understanding of community perceptions, major issues faced and what gaps were exploited by the VEO's. The qualitative data were drawn from 30 key informant interviews and 15 focus group discussions and were analysed through thematic analysis. The locale of the study was Muzaffargarh post 2022 floods. We found that the VEO mainly exploited the governance gaps and this was confirmed by the thematic analysis as well. Therefore the study concludes that there exists a strong relationship between lack of good governance and Influence of VEO's therefore Violent extremism is more of governance issue rather than societal or religious.

Keywords: disaster capitalism; climate-induced displacement; governance failure; trust in government; violent extremism; Muzaffargarh; Pakistan: Extremist Recruitment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a global phenomenon, with far-reaching impacts extending beyond environmental degradation. It is not only responsible for loss of life and intensifying poverty, but also brings loss to the global economy. The frequency of disasters have significantly increased over the last decade, manifesting as floods, droughts, and heatwaves, forcing millions of individuals to migrate to safer areas. The displaced individuals owing to loss of income, domestic animals, cattle and livestock, crop loss and ultimately resulting in a decline in the productivity of their agricultural land, which is often manifested in the form migration to the suburban areas where they lack access to basic services like sanitation, shelter, and water, creating an environment conducive to exploitation by extremist groups (Black et al., 2011; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021; UNHCR, 2021).

In Pakistan, the issue of climate-induced migration and its socioeconomic consequences is of paramount importance. These disasters have resulted in forced migrations, leading to both temporary and permanent displacement forcing the communities to settle in temporary camps or, in some cases, permanently migrate to urban and suburban areas with limited services and infrastructure for living where they lack access to basic services like clean water, sanitation and healthcare. When the government fails to cater to their needs and provide assistance, the feeling of alienation and abandonment in the communities paves the way for them to resort to criminal activity and behaviour for earning a living. Extremist organizations exploit these governance gaps and capitalize on the vulnerabilities of the displaced thus leading to increase in their influence through spread of ideology and making these vulnerable, marginalized communities more susceptible and easy targets for recruitment . The relationship between climate-induced migration and violent extremism has been studied in the conflict-prone regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and some Middle Eastern countries; however, limited exploration has been done in Pakistan's context (Bott, 2016; Iqbal & Khan, 2018; Jamali & Ullah, 2021; Malik & Awan, 2019; Mughal, 2019; Kugelman, 2021).

Thus, this becomes relevant to study as what might be the gaps that the VEO's might exploit? What is it that they would provide and in return get loyalty and support? How should the state respond? Which of the several causes is most pressing in-terms of leading to an increase of the influence of the VEO's? This study attempts to answer this question by analyzing the role of the VEO's in post 2022 floods, the area (locale) of study is Muzaffargarh district.

Muzaffargarh faced one of the most devastating calamity in the form of the 2022 floods. The floods resulted in human and material loss at very large scale for the affected communities People lost their livelihoods, their cattle and shelters. This led to large-scale displacement of communities resulting in sever hardships for the people of the area (HRCP, 2022; NRC, 2015). The 2022 floods devastated Muzaffargarh District, a vulnerable region in southern Punjab, Pakistan, situated between the Chenab and Indus rivers. Fueled by intense monsoon rains worsened by climate change, the floods hit the district's low-lying "Bait" areas particularly hard, leaving behind a trail of loss and hardship (OCHA, 2022). The floods destroyed homes, particularly in the Bait areas where many residents live in fragile katcha (mud) or pucca (brick) structures.

The state therefore has a critical role to play. If the state fails to address the challenges of the community then the gap will be filled by non-state actors which might include NGO's, INGO's and other political/religious or sectarian groups; all eyeing to gain influence. Therefore, for a country like Pakistan which is battling with violent extremism and terrorism, it should be a top priority of the government to not leave any gaps that can be exploited by groups or

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organizations that are or can be a threat to our national security. In the following section, we briefly summarize literature on the subject of Governance failures to deal with disaster-affected areas and how it may help violent extremist or criminal organization to pursue their agendas (UNDP, 2016; Allan et al., 2015; Malik & Nawaz, 2020).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Climate change is increasingly treated in the scholarship not as a direct trigger of violent extremism, but as a structural and environmental pressure that can destabilize livelihoods, institutions, and local political economies in ways that create enabling conditions for violent extremist organizations (VEOs). This framing is captured in the argument that climate change "may not be the direct cause of violent extremism," yet functions as an essential destabilizing force that widens opportunity structures for VEO activity (Romm, 2022). In contexts where adaptive capacity is low, climate-induced disasters disrupt household income, expose existing social inequalities, and generate forms of desperation that can push affected populations toward coping strategies—including illicit or risky economic activities—that heighten exposure to coercion, manipulation, or recruitment by violent groups (Romm, 2022; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021; Allan et al., 2015; Malik & Nawaz, 2020; Gilani, 2022). The literature therefore emphasizes indirect pathways: climate stressors interact with governance quality, poverty, displacement, and social exclusion to produce conditions that extremist groups can exploit.

A common analytical thread in this body of work is the "threat multiplier" proposition: climate variability and disasters do not automatically produce extremist violence, but they can intensify pre-existing risks by magnifying scarcity, economic vulnerability, and political contestation. One articulation of this claim highlights that climate-induced disasters often force displacement, pushing households into new locations where competition over scarce resources and services can increase tensions and the probability of conflict escalation. In this view, climate change indirectly raises the risk of intrastate conflicts by amplifying poverty and economic vulnerability, rather than operating as a standalone causal mechanism (Vitel, 2015). This is consistent with broader scholarship that treats climate stress as a compounding factor that heightens instability and weakens household resilience, thereby lowering the opportunity cost of participation in armed or extremist networks in already fragile settings (Dal Bó & Dal Bó, 2011; Graff, 2010; Nordqvist & Krampe, 2018).

The livelihood channel is central in explaining why the climate–extremism nexus becomes more visible in specific places and sectors. Studies argue that the relationship is particularly salient in regions where income is heavily resource-dependent—especially agriculture—and where disasters destroy productive assets and reduce labor demand. When income opportunities decline and livelihood insecurity rises, the cost-benefit calculus shifts: the opportunity cost of joining extremist groups is lowered because legitimate income alternatives shrink, especially for youth and households already facing hardship (Dal Bó & Dal Bó, 2011; Graff, 2010; Nordqvist & Krampe, 2018). This proposition is highly relevant for the Pakistani context described in the study, where flood-affected districts are frequently agriculture-intensive and livelihoods are closely tied to seasonal production. Here, disaster is not only a natural shock but also a direct financial shock that erodes coping capacity and can increase susceptibility to exploitative recruitment narratives and material inducements.

However, the literature repeatedly warns against mono-causal explanations. Violent extremism is widely treated as a multifactor phenomenon shaped by intersecting economic, political, social, and security drivers (Allan et al., 2015). Even within the climate-security debate, scholars underscore that climate pressures operate through mediating institutions and

local power relations—particularly governance. Governance failure or governance lapses are consistently identified as key contextual conditions that transform stressors into opportunities for violent actors. Weak governance contributes to instability by undermining service provision, constraining public trust, and reducing the legitimacy of the state in the everyday lives of citizens. This can produce a socio-political environment conducive to recruitment and influence building by extremist and criminal organizations (Krieger, 2022; Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). In this formulation, governance has an outsized effect because it shapes multiple dimensions of social life simultaneously: security provision, dispute resolution, welfare distribution, and the credibility of institutions—each of which becomes more consequential during and after disaster.

Empirical work from outside Pakistan often uses fragile-state settings to demonstrate how institutional weakness and poor governance create fertile ground for violent movements. For example, research on Nigeria attributes the rise of extremist violence, including groups such as Boko haram, to state failure, weak governance, and institutional incapacity (Akogwu et al., 2020; Bressler, 2020). In the same broader comparative vein, analyses of Mali and the Maghrib region highlight poor governance and corruption as conditions that coincide with increasing violent extremism and criminal activities, particularly among marginalized youth facing limited employment options (Krieger, 2022; Zoubir, 2017). These contributions converge on the argument that governance deficits do not merely co-exist with extremist expansion; they can help produce the grievances, disillusionment, and practical "spaces" that violent non-state actors use to build legitimacy, recruit, and operationalize influence.

This governance-centered explanation is reinforced by scholarship on human security, which treats the provision of basic necessities of life as a core function of legitimate authority. When a government is ineffective in delivering basic services and social protection, the resulting insecurity can heighten vulnerability and contribute to the spread of violent extremism (Sakota, 2020). Sakota's argument builds on earlier claims about poverty, unemployed youth, and the role of government, reinforcing the proposition that governance quality is a major determinant of whether societies can resist destabilizing pressures (Ehrlich & Liu, 2002; O'neil, 2007). The policy implication advanced in this strand of literature is that non-kinetic approaches—often summarized as governance improvements—are critical in countering recruitment dynamics, especially in post-disaster contexts where people experience acute loss and institutional failure (Aina & Ojo, 2025; Maza & Aksit, 2020).

A further expansion of this perspective is found in work examining how violent or anti-government organizations strategically exploit disaster response. Importantly, this phenomenon is not limited to developing contexts. A study of disaster-hit areas in the United States identifies a set of recruitment and legitimacy-building strategies used by anti-government organizations: leveraging structural violence to increase legitimacy through social and welfare initiatives; cooperating with state authorities to normalize themselves; projecting "goodness" to society; reshaping identity through rebranding; exploiting state failure in social and human security delivery; and, critically, desiring the state to fail because such failure strengthens their own relevance (pudlo & kassab, 2025). This analysis is analytically useful because it frames disaster response not only as a humanitarian arena but also as a contested political space. Even in settings where state capacity is relatively high, the "failure component" of response is what opportunistic groups exploit to legitimize themselves and expand influence (pudlo & kassab, 2025). The implication is that disaster response can act as an arena of reputation competition, where non-state actors attempt to out-perform or publicly outshine state agencies.

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Pakistan-specific literature strongly echoes these global patterns while adding locally grounded mechanisms linked to corruption, institutional legitimacy, and coercive governance. Work on corruption and governance argues that poor service delivery and everyday corruption create opportunities for radical and extremist groups to provide welfare and monetary support, making recruitment more feasible in communities where state agencies—especially local policing and administrative institutions—are perceived as ineffective or corrupt (Louise, 2015). In this argument, extremist groups do not recruit solely through ideology; they exploit governance gaps by offering material support and social services, and by embedding themselves in the everyday survival strategies of poor households (Louise, 2015). This claim aligns with broader scholarship that treats governance deficits as a root condition shaping youth vulnerability and facilitating extremist influence (Krieger, 2022; Kundnani & Hayes, 2018; pudlo & kassab, 2025; Zoubir, 2017).

A related set of studies argues that the link between governance and terrorism in Pakistan is sustained through economic and political exclusion. Poor governance in both political and economic realms can create feelings of alienation and grievance, widening the rift between citizens and the state; regional inequality is also highlighted as a relevant factor (Khan, 2015; MAkki & Akash, 2023). These arguments are consistent with the broader "vacuum" claim in the literature: when governance fails, extremist organizations may fill the gap by providing services, claiming moral authority, and constructing alternative legitimacy. Importantly, Pakistan-specific work on governance also underscores the role of legal and coercive institutions in shaping legitimacy. A CDA-informed critique of Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act (1997) argues that an ambiguous definition of terrorism has enabled overreach and excessive reliance on Anti-Terrorism Courts, deepening social fissures that militant groups can exploit (Khan, Tayyab, & Kalhoro, 2025). Parallel qualitative evidence on the Police Service of Pakistan links contemporary police–public relations to colonial institutional legacies, including a culture of distance from the public and weak accountability (Khan, Alam, & Veserio, 2023). Relatedly, research on custodial policing in Pakistan highlights how coercive practices in custody can undermine perceptions of state authority and generate trauma-driven pathways into criminalization among youth (Khan & Ullah, 2026). Together, these contributions deepen the governance argument by showing how coercive legal and policing arrangements can erode trust and legitimacy—conditions that become more consequential under disaster stress.

Disasters intensify these governance and legitimacy dynamics by sharply increasing humanitarian need while simultaneously straining administrative capacity. The literature suggests that when calamities strike—earthquakes, floods, and other shocks—existing governance problems become more visible, more politically salient, and more costly. In Pakistan, post-disaster settings have repeatedly been analyzed as moments when militant or proscribed organizations become active in welfare and rehabilitation, using service provision to win legitimacy and, in some cases, recruit among marginalized communities. Following the 2005 earthquake, research argues that religious militant organizations were active in relief and rehabilitation and saw this as an opportunity to build legitimacy and expand influence among those who had lost everything (Byramji, 2006). This is consistent with the broader comparative argument that recruitment among disaster-stricken populations is a global phenomenon, and that governance-oriented, non-kinetic approaches are necessary to reduce susceptibility to such recruitment (Aina & Ojo, 2025; Maza & Aksit, 2020).

Similarly, after the 2010 floods, research examined militant infiltration and expansion through relief efforts and framed these developments in terms of a "broken social contract" when

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disaster strikes. Although the relationship between disaster and extremist influence is treated as complex rather than linear, the mechanism emphasized is that extremist-linked actors can exploit political space opened by disaster by providing social services and aid, thereby building support and legitimacy (Siddiqi, 2014). Supporting this claim, other studies argue that groups linked to militant organizations exploited the vacuum created by weak governance, using relief and aid to gain legitimacy and recruit from affected communities (Masera & Yousaf, 2022). These studies situate post-disaster recruitment within broader security and governance discussions (Amoore & Goede, 2011; Louise, 2015) reinforcing the idea that welfare provision can operate as a political technology of influence.

The literature also highlights the opportunistic behavior of extremist groups in disaster contexts, emphasizing that recruitment tactics frequently leverage victim vulnerability, especially where the state response is perceived as absent, delayed, or biased. Evidence from Pakistan suggests that after extreme flooding in Sindh, a militant organization provided aid and assistance and increased support was observed—particularly in areas where the group already had a stronghold or where the state was weaker (Ahmad, 2018; Shah, 2010). This line of analysis is complemented by research that expands the climate–conflict debate beyond displacement and livelihood loss to include elite exploitation. In this view, disasters can become opportunities for influential elites to control aid distribution, decide beneficiaries, and favor their supporters, thereby heightening conflict risk in the absence of effective regulation (Nordqvist & Krampe, 2018). This is important for understanding recruitment as not only ideological alignment but also a service-delivery mechanism in which aid and access become contingent upon political support and social positioning.

The literature supports three core propositions that are directly relevant to the current study. First, climate change and climate-induced disasters shape vulnerability indirectly by disrupting livelihoods, amplifying displacement, and intensifying poverty and insecurity (Romm, 2022; Vitel, 2015; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021; Allan et al., 2015; Malik & Nawaz, 2020; Gilani, 2022). Second, governance quality is a critical mediator: weak governance, corruption, coercive institutions, and legitimacy deficits create the gaps that violent and non-state actors can exploit to build influence, provide services, and recruit (Krieger, 2022a; Kundnani & Hayes, 2018; Shelley Louise I., 2015; Khan, 2015; MAkki & Akash, 2023; Khan, Tayyab, & Kalhoro, 2025; Khan, Alam, & Veserio, 2023; Khan & Ullah, 2026). Third, disasters make these dynamics more "fertile" by exposing state weaknesses, increasing humanitarian dependence, and creating contested spaces in which non-state actors can compete for legitimacy and control through welfare provision and strategic narratives (Byramji, 2006; Siddiqi, 2014; Masera & Yousaf, 2022; Ahmad, 2018; Shah, 2010; pudlo & kassab, 2025).

This synthesis also clarifies the gap that motivates the present study. While global scholarship has recognized the climate–governance–extremism linkage and Pakistan-specific literature has documented extremist engagement in relief efforts after earlier disasters, the current study contributes by analyzing the spread of VEO influence in the post-2022 floods and examining how weak governance exposed by natural calamity created opportunities for influence-building and exploitation (Allan et al., 2015; UNDP, 2016). In doing so, the study positions post-flood humanitarian space not simply as an arena of assistance, but as a political economy in which service delivery, legitimacy, trust, and vulnerability intersect in ways that can shape recruitment risks and community-level insecurity.

The conceptual literature provides a basis for organizing these mechanisms. Vulnerability theory posits that climate-induced disasters affect communities unevenly, with outcomes shaped by structural conditions—social, economic, political, and environmental—

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rather than by hazard exposure alone. This approach is associated with Zakour & Gillespie's Vulnerability Theory and is reinforced by arguments that disasters have unequal effects across groups due to pre-existing historical, socioeconomic, and political factors (Thomas et al. (2018)). This view emphasizes that vulnerability is produced by inequalities in power, poverty, and social standing, and therefore disaster impacts intensify those inequalities rather than resetting them (Ahmed, 2024). When recovery is inefficient, vulnerabilities can intensify further and become cyclical (Carvalho & Spataru, 2023). Governance is therefore not a peripheral variable: it can lessen vulnerability through fair, timely, and inclusive assistance, or intensify vulnerability through selective distribution and marginalization (Watts & Bohle, 1993). These distortions can erode trust in institutions and create governance deficits that violent extremist organisations can exploit.

The "threat multiplier" lens complements this by framing climate change as an indirect intensifier of existing instability rather than a direct cause of radicalization. The term "Threat Multiplier" is associated with the claim that "climate change" acts as a threat multiplier for instability in volatile regions, indirectly intensifying displacement and vulnerability and thereby increasing the likelihood of violent extremism rather than producing it mechanically (The CNA Corporation, 2007). Within this lens, disasters and displacement deepen socioeconomic vulnerabilities—loss of livelihood, employment, shelter, food, and clean water—creating conditions that extremist organization can leverage (Neef et al, .2024). Accordingly, the literature converges on the proposition that disasters do not automatically generate extremism; they deepen vulnerabilities and widen governance gaps, and it is within these widened gaps that extremist influence and recruitment dynamics become more plausible and more dangerous.

The research adopts a multilayered conceptual framework based on vulnerability theory, and threat multiplier effect. Vulnerability theory posits that the climate-induced disasters have a distinct impact on each community, resulting in unique responses. Instead, it is due to different structural conditions, including social, economic, political, and environmental factors. These pre-existing factors predict how the communities respond and adapt to climate-induced disasters. This highlights that the level of vulnerability of the displaced persons does not solely depends on and determined by natural disasters, but rather is influenced by pre-existing power inequalities, poverty, and social standing within communities (Watts & Bohle, 1993; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021).

The role of government in disaster cases is of paramount importance, as it can either lessen or intensify vulnerabilities based on how the community receives the assistance. The aid is often given based on social status, resulting in some sections of the community receiving assistance while others are marginalized during the aid distribution (Watts & Bohle, 1993). This led to distorted trust in government institutions due to non-service delivery, creating a vacuum due to governance deficit, which the violent extremist organisations can easily exploit. When institutions are unable to perform up to their ideals, in this way, not only socioeconomic vulnerabilities but also the vulnerabilities created by unequal treatment by institutions multiply, leaving communities more vulnerable and susceptible to falling for extremist organisations' agendas (Government of Pakistan, 2013; Kakakhel, 2012). This distortion of trust is also shaped by everyday encounters with coercive institutions—particularly policing and counter-terrorism—where citizens may experience the state as punitive rather than protective. In such contexts, institutional legitimacy erodes further, increasing the appeal of non-state actors that present themselves as providers of order and relief (Khan, Alam, & Veserio, 2023; Khan & Ullah, 2026; Khan, Tayyab, & Kalhoro, 2025).

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CNA Military Advisory Board coined the term “Threat Multiplier” in 2007, stating, "climate change” acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world. It views the threat multiplier effect not as a direct cause of extremism and radicalization, but as an agent that indirectly intensifies the effect of displacement, increasing the likelihood of violent extremism. Climate-induced disaster and displacement affects the communities by heightening the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that can act as a threat multiplier, leading to deepening socioeconomic vulnerabilities, making the displaced individuals highly susceptible to extremist recruitment and violent extremism (Neef et al., 2023). This shows that the climate disasters and displacement do not directly cause extremism but rather act as a "threat multiplier," deepening the socio-economic vulnerabilities that the extremist organization can easily exploit. The displaced communities face higher socioeconomic vulnerabilities due to loss of livelihood, forgone employment, shelter scarcity, food, and clean water. When the pre-existing vulnerabilities are intensified by displacement, the risks of climate change multiply, making Threat Multiplier crucial subject to study in context of Pakistan (CNA, 2007).

4. METHODOLOGY

The study followed an exploratory qualitative research design to capture the interconnection between climate-induced displacement, governance failure, and vulnerability to violent extremism in the post-flood context of Muzaffargarh. The current study intended to capture the interconnection and causal link between violent extremism, its influence and socio economics conditions, vulnerable group among them the most important variable of interest was governance.

Data Collection

Qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) were also conducted. The total of 30 interviews and 15 FGDs were conducted. The UDCs included community leaders, lady health workers, unemployed youth, university students, social activists, religious leaders, and disabled persons. The objective was to analyse the linkage between climate-induced internal migration and violent extremism.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized for analyzing the key informant interviews and focus group discussions. It is one of the most common tools for analyzing the qualitative data and is used to identify patterns of themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The key themes such as extremist influence, marginalized Sections, socioeconomic aspects of displacement, flood induced migration, trust in Government versus NGOs and community response. All the participants were the victims of the 2022 floods that caused large-scale destruction in the districts of South Punjab. Recurring issues were identified, for example, displacement, lack, and provision of medicine by the government, community, as well as the welfare wings of militant organizations.

Sampling

For the interviews and focus group discussions, non-probability, convenience sampling was employed to collect the data. The flood-affected UCs of district Muzaffargarh, were identified first, and administrative data of the affected of the UCs of tehsil Muzaffargarh were obtained from NRSP. Using the UCs data, the villages and Bastis that faced floods and displacement were identified. The villages include Jhugi Wala, Basti Shedi, Taleri, Basti Doaba, Basti Sunakki, Jhoke Fazlo Wali, and Basti Bhuggi Wala. From this data, the displaced persons or households were identified to be included in the study. Key informants, including Community Leaders (Numberdar, Wadeera), unemployed youth, members of vulnerable communities, Members of religious groups, Govt officials/ civil society organizations, University students,

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and FGD participants with relevant experience and knowledge, were selected to ensure that either the participants were directly affected by or were actively engaged with issues of climate-induced disasters or displacement.

Recruitment was facilitated through local community leaders and relief committees, who helped identify displaced households, women-led households, and youth groups willing to share their experiences. Interviews and FGDs were continued until thematic saturation was reached, i.e., when additional accounts largely repeated the themes already captured. All participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, assured confidentiality, and provided informed consent prior to participation.

Ethical Considerations

The research followed strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection, respect, and rights of all the involved participants. The participants of the KII and FGD provided informed consent in urdu so that the participants could understand the purpose of the study. Participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's aims, their voluntary involvement, and their freedom to omit answers or withdraw at any point. Personal identifiers were anonymized; however, names were used after their approval. To mitigate political and psychological risks, sensitive topics, especially those concerning extremism, were introduced hypothetically.

Reliability

To strengthen reliability and Credibility of results, the study relied on triangulation across key informant interviews and focus group discussions, careful documentation of field notes, and iterative theme development during coding. Quotations are used selectively to preserve participants' meanings and to illustrate how themes were grounded in the data.

5. FINDINGS

The 2022 floods in Pakistan were one of the most catastrophic and destructive multivariate shocks in the recent history of environmental disasters. These floods led to the large-scale displacement of communities, destroyed their livelihoods, and, as always, the already vulnerable groups were most affected. At the same time, environmental disasters lead to numerous problems, including loss of employment, shelter, and deprivation of basic health care, ultimately making it impossible to live a normal life. The current study adds to the literature by highlighting the linkage between the rise in violent extremism, the recruitment of youth and other marginalized groups by violent extremists, preying on their vulnerability, which is in fact a result of the environmental disaster.

Themes	Description	Example
Extremist Influence	The floods led to destruction of poverty, means of livelihood, shelter, health and loss of loved ones. The extremist groups exploited these vulnerabilities through various means and used it as a recruitment strategy.	Unemployed Youth Nasrullah "some (militant welfare organization) offered food but wanted loyalty"
Marginalized Sections	Segments that are already vulnerable and their risks increased when faced with such a calamity, including women, children, minorities and persons with disability.	Salma Bibi "disabled people were left out"
Socioeconomic Aspects	People were already employed and	NGO member, Muhammad

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of Displacement	had sources of livelihood, but after the floods, livelihood sources were destroyed and poverty increased, which made them more exposed to extremist groups and ideologies.	Ismael "youth with no jobs were approached by extremist groups"
Flood Induced Migration	Because of the floods, people faced economic instability, lost their livelihoods, and their homes; hence, large-scale migration in camps and other adjoining areas occurred.	Teacher Abul said "flood washed away our field"
Trust in Government VS Ngos	Effectiveness of government intervention vs NGO integration, and how much did the people trust these two types of interventions.	Member of Civil society Organizations, Waris said "NGOs helped quickly"
Community Response	Communities demand education, restoration of livelihood sources and jobs.	University Student M Tahir "Education helps us handle situations"

Theme 1: Extremist influence

Most of the respondents reported that the recruitment by extremist organizations was not open and visible. However, they were all in consensus that extremist organizations exploited their vulnerable state, which was worsened by the lack of proper government support. For example, Taj Bibi, an unemployed youth, said that

"There were certain groups that offered food in exchange for loyalty." This claim is further supported by a representative of a civil society organization, Waris, who also said, "Extremist groups used to come and offer food to the hungry people and in return demand support."

This opinion was shared by many others, for instance, Usman, who is an unemployed youth, said this in a very frustrating and sad tone *"youth with no jobs after the flood were approached by certain groups and were offered money in return."* appreciating the fact that the floods have devastated these regions, destroyed all or most of their sources of livelihood. It is quite understandable that extremist organizations would lure youth and other unemployed segments using financial incentives.

"Some individuals handed over ID cards and other documents –under the guise of offering help would comfort people and take money before leaving."

From the interviews and FGDs, it appears that in the aftermath of the floods, the influence of the extremist organization propagating violent ideologies increased. Other than the direct help offered in the form of money and food, the security situation in the affected areas also led to a vacuum, which was exploited by extremist organizations. There was a clear consensus among the participants that criminal activity has increased in the area since the floods. For example, Wadera Ali Daad reported,

"There has been an increase in thefts; we can't go out at night because everything gets looted on the way. There have been thefts, it's not that there were none."

While Social Activist Rahim Bakhsh, depicting a similar incident, reported that;

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"Theft was becoming rampant, as hungry people resorted to stealing to feed themselves...but we tried our best to keep our village safe from such people...For example, some people came to conduct a survey, and a polio worker supported them. The next day, the worker was abducted, and a large amount of money was taken from his family."

This shows that the security situation post-flood deteriorated, and many resorted to all sorts of criminal activity to do anything they could to help them survive. However, we cannot justify the acts, but the reason for resorting to these activities was the loss of livelihood, employment, and lack of support from the government. However, the participants of the FGDs were in consensus that we advise our youth and community to stay away from such people, which shows that the community was aware of the dangers of such recruitment by extremist organizations. Therefore, from the interviews and FGD responses, it can be inferred that, while on one hand, recruiters for violent extremist organizations did use money and other services in order to recruit people; their influence was limited and cannot be generalized to the entire community. However, this also does not mean that the efforts of these groups to prey on the vulnerabilities of the public are ignored. The risks of recruitment, as evident from the accounts of the respondents, are not logical, but rather out of economic necessity.

The views of the respondents, the stories they narrated, and the picture they presented have striking similarities with the concept of 'Disaster Capitalism" by Naomi Klein presented in her book Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism. Disaster Capitalism is a concept where, when an environmental calamity, a disaster, war, or anything that hits a community or society, brings in opportunities for groups who exploit that calamity for their economic and political objectives (Klein, 2007). While the recruiters of violent extremist organizations offered help in times of need and money to those who had gone penniless, they exploited the weak points of the community, tried to get committed recruits, and left a bigger footprint on the area and the displaced community. The same sentiment was expressed by a female in FGD, while telling about the dangers of a vulnerable and already struggling population being influenced and pulled by the groups that promise them help and a better future. She said,

"People who are struggling with poverty, young people without jobs, or those who have lost their homes because of floods are more likely to be targeted by extremist groups. They feel helpless and may be drawn to groups that promise support or a better future."

However, the FGDs reveal a very striking positive attitude of the society in terms of its response to extremist recruitment. For instance, religious Leader Ghulam Muhammad said that, *"we advise our people to stay away from these trouble-making groups."* Furthermore, unemployed youth Muhammad Tahir was of the view that education is an excellent preventive measure against the strategy of these extremist organizations. While explaining his point, he explicitly said

"First and foremost...people need awareness and knowledge to navigate such situations. They should be informed about the risks of sharing their personal data with anyone who might misuse it. If someone suspects foul play.... it is essential that people question and verify intentions before sharing their information. Awareness is key to protecting oneself .Education is the most critical factor in this. With education, people can better understand situations and respond appropriately. It fosters awareness and empowers individuals to help others effectively. Education plays a pivotal role in dealing with any crisis and preparing communities to face future challenges."

This showed that the community was united and fully aware of the dangers of joining such organizations, given that respondents also focused on the fact that the members of the

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extremist organizations used either money, food, or, in some cases, shelter, which shows that interventions in these areas would block the roads or avenues for these extremist organizations.

The displaced communities face a myriad of challenges, including economic pressure, security challenges, and psychological stress. When coupled with the neglect and lack of support from the government, they become more susceptible to being influenced by violent extremists and non-state organisations. Which not only supports them but also listens to their voices, shows empathy and provides them a sense of belonging, naturally getting on their favour, making them susceptible to voluntary recruitment in these violent groups. The theme also aligns with the Threat Multiplier Effect, positioning climate change as a factor that exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created favourable conditions for the extremist organisation to gain support by filling the vacuum left by institutional lags.

Theme 2: Marginalized Sections

The effects of climate-induced disasters and displacement are not uniform. Disasters, such as floods, cause widespread disruptions, including loss of shelter, income, and unemployment, affecting the entire community. However, the marginalized sections experience more severe effects. The interviews and FGDs predominantly agreed that the women, children, and marginalized sections, including PWDs and religious minorities, were more vulnerable to the impacts of displacement and flood. These groups are more affected because of the social and gender norms, health and safety risks, and, most of the time, economic dependency on the male members for survival. University Student Shazia Bagum

"The community members who have been most affected are children, women, transgender individuals, and people with disabilities because these groups are generally not as strong. The younger people are able to manage and survive, but these specific groups have been severely impacted."

From the interviews, it also appears that the negligence faced by the marginalized sections during inequitable aid distribution not only delayed the recovery of the marginalized sections but also reinforced the feeling of invisibility and neglect. A response received in FGD, where a female participant said that,

"The situation worsened when aid was delivered to feudal landlords, who restricted it to their close circles and ignored the poor. This injustice pushed the marginalized groups into even greater hardship and left them completely abandoned."

This excerpt shows that the aid distribution was often based on loyalty or relationship; the community leaders responsible for the distribution of the aid favoured their close circles, pushing the marginalized sections further back in line for the support.

Sub theme 2.1: Gender based marginalization

Most respondents of the interviews and FGDs were of the opinion that among the marginalized sections, along with women and PWDs, transgender persons were the most vulnerable section and received little support after the floods, which makes them a prime target for recruitment. A community leader said,

"Women, transgender individuals, and minority groups face heightened risk of extremist violence due to social neglect after floods." While another expressed the same sentiment in the FGDs, one of the respondents reiterated the same thought,

The interviews also revealed that marginalized sections faced security challenges and discrimination post-flood during aid distribution. A female, while talking about this issue, said

"Women encountered significant challenges due to the destruction of their homes and limited access to basic necessities, with pregnant women and those caring for young children being

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particularly affected. Children were at high risk of diseases from contaminated water, and their education was disrupted as schools were either closed or destroyed. Older adults experienced health complications due to insufficient medical care. People with disabilities were especially vulnerable, as they often struggled to evacuate on their own or access relief services. These groups were the most impacted due to their physical limitations, heightened health risks, and lack of immediate resources."

Sub-theme 2.2: PWD based Marginalization

The majority of the respondents of key informant interviews were concerned about the marginalized sections of the community, including women, children, PWDs, religious minorities, and transgender individuals, as they lack support during and post-flood period. A person with disability, Mukhtiar said,

"Mostly the disable persons faced many difficulties for the movement and getting something to eating."

Rahim Bakhsh, a social activist, while talking about the lack of help received by the marginalized sections, specifically transgender and persons with disabilities, said,

"Transgender people and persons with disabilities were the most affected, and they needed the most help. I am not sure about the extent of the violence they faced, but no one has provided assistance to them. Their homes are still in ruins, and no one has come to help them yet."

Theme 3: Socioeconomic Aspects of Displacement

The 2022 flood led to massive displacement, resulting in economic instability. Moreover, due to the loss of loved ones, core members and caretakers of the family units, the flood affected social and familial structures that created a space, which the violent extremist organization could exploit.

Fakhar Nisa, while explaining the problems faced by displaced persons, said,

"Look, there were many problems. People became homeless, their livelihoods were lost, and we saw people dying. Children died, there were many deaths here, and women, who used to work in homes, were supporting their husbands. Now, their husbands have no jobs. Some took such huge loans that it became impossible to repay them. The money from the Benazir Income Support Program is considered a great help because without it, I do not know what would have happened. The unemployment of men has also made life extremely difficult for the women. Look at the condition of the children—schools are not functioning properly. When there is no home, how can there be schools?"

The socioeconomic impact of displacement is seen throughout the corpus. All respondents had reported disruption of their normal community life. Everything was shattered as if they had been transported to a new world. A quote from the respondent, Person with disability, Shehzoor Ali,

"Being forced to leave my home and move to another place was a monumental challenge. When I reached the new location, there was a house to shelter us, but the area lacked any infrastructure.... However, at that time, simply having a roof over our heads was a great relief. I decided it was best to stay there, even though the pain of leaving my home and familiar surroundings weighed heavily on my heart. The emotional toll of leaving my homeland was immense. I became deeply distressed, often feeling lost and overwhelmed by thoughts of how I would provide for my family. There were moments when I would look at my wife and children and break down in tears, questioning whether life was worth living under such circumstances. The despair was so intense that I occasionally wished for death rather than enduring such misery. Currently, our survival hinges entirely on the Benazir Income Support Program funds

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that my wife receives. It is our only means of sustenance. Unfortunately, I am unable to start any business or work due to our dire circumstances and my physical limitations. I believe the government should extend more assistance to people like us—those who are struggling to survive and rebuild their lives. Such support could enable us to live with dignity and provide for our families without depending solely on handouts."

Due to displacement and economic plight that came with the disaster, the psychological trauma, along with the worsening financial conditions, exacerbated the effects. People were left helpless and without hope, relying on meagre cash transfers of the Benazir Income Support Programs. In such situations, people often went for loans or credit. However, since financial institutions did not cater to this segment, they took informal loans from other people at higher interest rates. As a result, their debt accumulated, and their financial situation worsened compared to before.

"As I previously mentioned, the livelihood of our village is primarily dependent on farming and agriculture. Our women also contribute by working in the fields alongside taking care of household chores and livestock. During this disaster, not only did we suffer losses to our crops and livestock, but our homes were also destroyed. The situation was so dire that our primary source of income vanished entirely, leaving us in a state of severe crisis. The devastation of our crops and the loss of livestock have put us in a position where we must borrow money to restart farming. However, the borrowing system here is extremely harsh. For every loan we take, we are required to pay nearly double the amount. For instance, if we borrow one lakh rupees, we have to pay an additional 25,000 rupees every month as interest. Farming and land are deeply connected to our livelihoods. Without being able to work on our lands, it is impossible for us to sustain ourselves. This has created a massive financial burden on us, and we are now drowning in debt. Unfortunately, we see no viable solution or alternative path to escape this crisis."

This theme identified the socioeconomic challenges of the climate-induced displaced persons, including loss of livelihood, death of cattle, destruction of farmlands, unemployment, and psychological trauma and stress from the experience, are central to the argument of the vulnerability theory. Showing that not only economic stressors but also other factors, when combined, deepen the frustration among displaced persons, further corroborating the threat multiplier effect.

Theme 4: Flood-induced Migration

In the 2022 floods, the entire rural life was dismantled entirely. Farmers lost their land, crops were destroyed, labourers lost their wages, houses were submerged, and livelihoods were lost. People moved to nearby urban centres, wherein the society, the economy, and sources of livelihood were all different, and what made things even more difficult was that they were internally displaced persons(IDPs).

The significant effects of climate-induced displacement included the loss of livelihood, such as livestock and crops, loss of shelter that created housing insecurity, and disruption in community life. University student Muhammad Tahir said

"The damage was so extensive .... The damage caused was so severe that it's difficult to recover from. People lost everything, homes, crops, livestock, and their livelihoods. Diseases spread among both humans and animals, and people had nothing to eat. Unemployment had increased so much that people were starving. The government did provide cooked food rations, but the loss was so immense that it could not be fully compensated. We had never seen people in such dire conditions, and no one had ever witnessed such a destructive rainfall and devastation."

Taj Bibi expressed in a very detailed manner. She acknowledged that the loss of livelihood, death of cattle, destruction of crops, and loss of shelter were some of the significant impacts

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leading to migration. Her insights also highlighted another aspect of health, which was consistent in the responses of many other respondents as well. When we probed into it, diseases turned out to be one of the most drastic effects of the 2022 floods. For instance, community leader Muhammad Ramzan said,

"The floods caused widespread health issues, including rashes, eye diseases, malnutrition, and a lack of adequate medication in the community."

This shows that health deterioration and the spread of disease were rampant in the post-flood situation. This, while also being a cause of displacement, added agony to the troubles of the affectedees, especially when health costs are high and the provision of medicine by the government is far from enough. In a situation like this, if they are offered medicines, medical aid, or some financial aid by militant organizations, they become easy targets for violent extremist organizations for recruitment. As we could see in other interviews and here too, this spread of extremist ideology, the recruitment and loyalties of the people towards them were a result of the vacuum that was created by the lack of support, and was supposed to be filled by the government, which was not well equipped to intervene as required. A study supporting this narrative says that the primary cause of displacement in Nigeria, other than climate, was socioeconomic status, access to water, and wealth, showing that the migration decision was greatly influenced by factors other than conflict and resource scarcity (Kamta et al., 2020). This theme identifies climate disasters and migration as a threat multiplier. The already disaster-stricken communities, with fragile socioeconomic backgrounds, faced with forced displacement, exacerbate their vulnerabilities and make them more vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups as compared to others. The vulnerability theory holds that migration is forced, but it is not merely a reaction to disaster; it reveals a lack of adaptive capacity among these fragile communities living without institutional support.

Theme 5: Trust in Government vs NGOs

There was a stark difference of opinions relating to trust and the role of the government. It appeared that people expected the government to provide support, and their expectations from the government were quite high; however, the government did not meet those expectations. From the interview excerpt, it appears that people looked up to the government in this time of need and expected that the state would ensure shelter, rehabilitation, and restoration of livelihood sources and would ultimately bring them back to settle in their lands. Some of the responses about the government were harsh and strongly worded. A university Student, Nisha Ghafoor said,

"Compare to the government, NGOs work door-to-door, but the people of the government facilitate their people not the poor."

NGOs played a significant role by offering direct support to those in need, whereas government aid was perceived as biased towards specific groups. The respondents expected the government to respond to their needs; however, their feelings later changed to mistrust when the government did not help as expected. The mistrust and anger towards the government stemmed from the belief that the government's actions were insufficient and aimed at furthering its personal political interests. Another respondent, showing deep resentment for the government, in a very frustrating, aggressive, and visibly angry tone said,

This excerpt shows the frustration of the displaced flood-affected persons. When they did not receive the support they expected from their government, they felt abandoned. Psychological trauma from the disaster, along with anger for the government, when it did not provide help, puts them in a more vulnerable state, where the violent extremist groups can easily exploit their vulnerabilities. Literature also supports the idea that the level of trust in the

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government can both mitigate and compound vulnerability (Mackenzie, 2020). According to the respondents, NGOs were more effective in providing relief. For instance, NGOs adopted a grassroots approach, going door to door, whereas the government took a centralized approach, requiring people to visit centers for services. However, displacement, health impacts, and disabilities restricted access, and these proved to be a hindrance in reaching those government centres. Therefore, in comparison, some respondents praised NGOs. Like LHW Farzana said,

"NGOs have done great work and have earned the trust of the communities. Their timely intervention in providing essential aid such as food, medicine, shelter, and psychological support has been highly appreciated. They have played a critical role in filling gaps where government support may have been limited, and their efforts have brought tangible improvements to many displaced families. NGOs are often seen as more accessible and responsive, which has contributed to their credibility and trustworthiness in disaster relief efforts."

It was evident from the interviews that the NGOs were praised for the speedy delivery and ease of access that the government organization did not offer. In most cases, NGOs supported the displaced persons on an equity-based approach, and therefore, were able to cater to some of the immediate needs of the flood-affected people. This might be one of the reasons some respondents trusted NGOs more. However, across all KII and FGDs, whether it was the government or an NGO, there was a unanimous agreement that neither of these two entities was able to do all that was required or expected of them. The role to support, in some cases, was limited to areas designated for groups.

"In 2022, the NGO did not do anything significant in our area. They had done some work in the past, and people trusted them because they usually perform good work. However, their efforts are short-term. If they were to work consistently, they could achieve better and more lasting results."

This theme shows the presence of both government and non-governmental organisations working to support disaster-stricken communities. However, it illustrates the lack of support from government bodies, aligning with the vulnerability theory, and highlights the governance deficit and the apparent dissatisfaction and distrust of the government. However, a few also criticise the NGOs; apparent loss of confidence in the state for aid and the dependence on NGOs and other organisations expose an extreme governance crisis and extreme dissatisfaction among communities, which now lean on these organisations for support. The threat multiplier mirrors this logic: NGOs now fill governance gaps, while non-state actors can exploit them and leverage the vulnerabilities of already distressed communities.

Theme 6: Community Response

The responses in the interviews and in the FGDs reflected the resilience of the community. Facing such devastation at such a large scale, losing an entire source of livelihood, when the house made of mud was taken from them; their only shelter was destroyed, and their loved ones were lost. It was heartening to see the community stay together, help each other out, and not rely solely on external support from the government or NGOs. The community was the first responder, and a careful analysis reveals it as the most efficient intervention. A Religious Leader, Ghulam Muhammad, while explaining the relief efforts by the community, said,

"We worked for the community when the flood came. We helped people by announcing in the mosque to move to safer places and continuously motivated them to stay strong. Those whose homes were damaged took stay in the mosque. We arranged food and water for them, and local people would come to help as well. Until now, no help had reached us....We tried to

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help ourselves. During this time, the situation was such that everyone was in distress and looking for help."

The community members who were also part of NGO efforts, the rescue office, or the government went an extra mile, not just responding as an official duty but also going out of their way to help their community. For example, Lady Health worker Farzana said,

"I am working with the health department. We set up medical camps during the floods, helped people with the food and medicine provided by our department, and did whatever we could with our own assistance. We worked for women, children, the elderly, and differently-abled individuals. We evacuated them and relocated them to safe places. In 2022, there was heavy rainfall, and the floodwaters caused a lot of damage. After the flood, many diseases spread, so even after the flood, we continued to work for the people. We raised awareness about health and hygiene."

It was not just the people who were either helping as part of their official duty by the government, or religious leaders, or community leaders who had to help the community. However, the common folk had volunteered and offered their services—individuals with no formal training in rescue but a strong motivation to assist communities in need. For instance, a young student, when asked, said the following.

"In 2022, when the flood occurred, I was a student. I worked as a volunteer with health workers to deliver medicine to people. I also went from house to house to administer polio drops to children. Along with other students, we collected some funds, which were used to buy milk for children and distribute it to those in need When I helped the people in my village, the situation at that time was such that everyone was in distress and looking for help. So, I also tried to help people in my own way."

The community showed an awareness and vigilance that serves as a safeguard against the rise, increase, infiltration, and violent extremist elements. They understood the dangers of extremist violence. In the FGD, conducted for males and females, a community leader said the following,

When people use any aid or assistance for political purposes and deprive others of their rights, such behaviors lead to social inequality and injustice, which can push individuals towards extremism. Therefore, this indicates that the community was aware of these threats. Once people share this collective awareness, it becomes clear that the community recognizes the dangers, which makes it difficult for violent groups to operate, recruit, and infiltrate society. This shows the unanimous agreement in the community despite being neglected by the government. Yes, the violent extremists have tried to exploit, but the community was fully aware of the threat; therefore, the violent extremist organizations could not infiltrate or recruit on a large scale despite bringing aid during this calamity.

6. DISCUSSION

Whenever a calamity strikes, it destroys everything. A multivariate shock such as that of the 2022 floods brought with it complete destruction of families, shelters, sources of livelihood, and huge-scale displacements. Disasters, while on the one hand are calamities for the masses, on the other hand, provide opportunities for groups. This phenomenon is captured by the term disaster capitalism coined by Naomi Klein (2007) in her book "Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism". She explained the exploitative nature of groups, whether political or otherwise, when a disaster occurs; these groups exploit the affected to further their own goals. In this study, we conceptualize the climate disaster as an agent that intensifies existing vulnerabilities, leading to a heightened chance of affected individuals resorting to criminal activities and being influenced by extremist groups for recruitment (Aina & Ojo, 2025). This

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indirect relationship between climate disasters and violent extremism has been the focus of interest for many researchers in recent times. As climate change and its effects intensify, disasters become more frequent, and the need to study the direct and indirect effects of climate change has become particularly relevant and urgent now, than ever before.

However, various other factors contributed to the institutional space that the violent extremist organizations exploited. For instance, extremist groups exploited the absence of state machinery, attempting to lure potential recruits with financial aid, medical assistance, food, and, in some cases, shelter. The analysis reveals that the vacuum created by the government's inefficiency is reflected in various excerpts from the preceding chapters, where people express their frustration with the government, the institution they most look up to. If the government had reached the maximum number of affectedees, and had relocated them, and restored their livelihoods, the vacuum created by the disaster for violent extremist organizations would have vanished (Gilani, 2022; Malik & Nawaz, 2020; UNDP, 2016).

The findings also suggest that the 'governance gap' is not only a gap in welfare delivery; it is also a gap in credible, rights-respecting security governance. Where legal categories are broad and coercive practices are normalized, state authority can be experienced as arbitrary, which can compound post-disaster grievances and facilitate militant narrative-building. Evidence on the Anti-Terrorism Act's definitional ambiguity and its implications for coercive governance, as well as qualitative evidence on colonial institutional persistence and custodial violence in policing, provides a relevant Pakistan-specific lens for interpreting how mistrust and insecurity can become part of the opportunity structure for extremist influence (Khan, Tayyab, & Kalhoro, 2025; Khan, Alam, & Veserio, 2023; Khan & Ullah, 2026).

Another important finding is that the already vulnerable groups, such as women, children, PWDs, etc., were the most affected due to this calamity. Some had lost their sole breadwinners, while others lost cattle, livestock, and crops. Scientific literature and policy logic dictate that such a group should have been a priority for the government to support, and yet they were not. Therefore, this group was found to be most susceptible and vulnerable to extremist influence. Among them, the unemployed youth were a prime target of the violent organizations as revealed by the thematic analysis. Despite all these factors, the community's resilience and its awareness as a group were instrumental in stopping and blocking the infiltration of the violent extremist organizations. The findings of the study are consistent with the theoretical framework given, which outlines a similar pattern by discussing vulnerability theory and the threat multiplier effect. It outlines that the displacement amplifies the vulnerabilities created by the disaster. When the vulnerable population suffering from the loss of shelter, unemployment, and psychological trauma experiences no institutional support, it creates an exploitable space or vacuum for the violent extremist organizations. The prevailing themes show that, in the event of a climate disaster, the vulnerability theory and the threat multiplier effect, in the presence of an institutional gap, exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. The pre-existing vulnerabilities are not only intensified but also provide the optimal conditions and fertile ground for the extremist organisation to exploit this vacuum to influence, recruit and expand their agenda within these marginalised communities (Watts & Bohle, 1993; Neef et al., 2023; Mackenzie, 2020).

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed based on the study's findings to combat violent extremism.

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Prioritizing the Most Vulnerable Community

In the event of disaster, the women, children, transgender persons, disabled persons, and minorities must be prioritized for financial assistance and rehabilitation through targeted interventions like a rapid cash transfer program. Institutions, whether government or humanitarian organizations, should prioritize vulnerable groups in all phases of disaster response.

Disaster Preparedness and Contingency Rehabilitation Planning

To minimize the adverse effects of disasters, the government should strengthen preparedness and planning, ensuring that if a disaster occurs, its impact is minimized. Early warning, disaster risk reduction system, and coordination among the National, Provincial Disaster Management Authorities, and local level departments

Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Building Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

The government should prioritize building climate-resilient infrastructure to support the rehabilitation of populations in disaster-affected areas, thereby mitigating the need for forced migration.

Provision of Psychosocial Support

The disaster-affected migrants who suffered trauma are susceptible to being drawn into criminal activities by exploitative groups. As such, it is indispensable to provide psychosocial support in camps so that they can recover from trauma and can be protected from the influence of exploiting groups.

Rights-based Security Governance and Legal Clarity

Post-disaster stabilization should integrate credible, rights-respecting security governance alongside relief delivery. This includes clarifying counter-terror legal categories to reduce overbreadth and misuse, strengthening police accountability and custody safeguards, and adopting community-oriented and trauma-informed policing approaches in affected districts. Reform efforts should also attend to police institutional culture and incentive structures, including the role of power and status in making police service attractive, because these dynamics shape citizen trust and everyday experiences of state authority (Khan, 2023; Khan, Alam, & Veserio, 2023; Khan & Ullah, 2026; Khan, Tayyab, & Kalhoro, 2025).

Targeted Regulation and Transparency in Relief Governance

Relief governance requires clear, transparent rules for beneficiary selection, grievance redress, and oversight of relief supply chains and contractors. Regulatory interventions should be targeted and predictable rather than sweeping or ad hoc, because broad interventions can distort incentives and weaken performance (Khan, 2025).

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study offers valuable insights into climate disasters, displacement, governance failure, and violent extremism. However, contains some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in one district only, which limited the generalizability of the findings to other regions or Pakistan as a whole. Second, the data collection was deliberately conducted in June and July 2024, following almost two years of flooding. Although the data were collected from displaced individuals during floods, the bias in the responses may exist due to changes in household conditions over time. Thirdly, the literature review is predominantly reliant on African and international studies due to scarce availability of literature from Pakistan and south Asian countries. The study was predominantly focused on the perception of displaced individuals, so institutional perspective was not obtained and is missing in the research, however the future studies should incorporate the institutional perspective to yield robust findings and recommendations.

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9. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of the study contribute to filling the literature gap but also open avenues for future research that remain unexplored. First, the current study faced several constraints, including time, cost, and access to disaster-affected communities. A larger and more representative probability-based sample will be recommended to enhance the generalization of the results, as probability sampling will lead to better and robust conclusions than the non-probability sampling used for this study. Future studies should broaden their scope to conceptualize and measure vulnerability more effectively. This research focused on income, displacement, and trust in government; however, vulnerability is a multidimensional component, and the researcher should incorporate psychological, social, and political aspects to capture the complexity of susceptibility to violent extremism and extremist influence. Furthermore, future research should consider the social hierarchies and inequalities in the form of caste and class systems. There exists a very strong caste system that is embedded in power relations and plays a crucial role in determining access to opportunities and resources. These inequalities in the form of a power and class system already exist, which makes these communities vulnerable. Hence, the research should be done to investigate how the caste system and gender dynamics influence the radicalization and extremism risk when coupled with the climate-induced shocks. The social and societal structure in Pakistan is also very strong and static. In an event of disaster, the marginalized communities face downward mobility in social structure, which reinforces the existing hierarchies.

10. CONCLUSION

The research explores the effect of climate disasters, induced displacement that leads to exacerbating existing socioeconomic conditions of the affected population, and loss of trust in government due to failure to deliver in times of need, ultimately increasing the vulnerability to violent extremism. The population, which is already struggling and living hand to mouth, is displaced, forced to flee their homes, lose their livelihood, crops, and cattle that is their source of income, and are forced to live in extreme conditions.

The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for integrated policies that address the socioeconomic needs of displaced persons, not only by targeting their economic welfare and introducing schemes that restore trust in government, but also by incorporating their preferences for the type of policy they would like the government to adopt to support them. Focusing on these can help reduce the vulenrabilities and risk of violent extremism in the climate-displaced communities. While the study focuses on the respondents from one district only, and may not fully capture all regional variations, the research design (mixed method approach) provides a solid base for the investigation across all the climate-affected regions in Pakistan. The intricate nexus between climate change, disasters, Climate-Induced migration, government failure, and vulnerability to violent extremism not only required driven insights but also an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences that often stay untold behind the numbers, the very perspective this study sought to provide.

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