

TRUST IN THE STATE UNDER SIEGE: ANALYZING INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN THE FACE OF RISING TERRORISM AND COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SWAT

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15532268>

Received	Revised	Accepted	Published
12 February, 2025	08 March, 2025	23 March, 2025	31 March, 2025

ABSTRACT

Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, the district of Swat has witnessed an upsurge in terrorist instances. The region once plagued by a decade-long insurgency post-9/11, the resurgence has sparked widespread concern among civilians, casting a shadow of doubt in the state's strategies to curtail it. The present study aims to conduct an inclusive examination of how the resurgence of terrorism and state counter-terrorism policy influences the trust relationship between civilians and the state. Guided by the institutional trust theory, the study uses a quantitative research design. Scales are developed applying factor analysis while the data is analysed using simple linear regression analysis. The findings depict significant negative relationships between the dependent and each of the independent variables, confirming the hypotheses of the study. These determine that the resurgence of terrorism and the state counter-terrorism policy have significantly eroded the trust relationship between the state and society. In light of the findings, the study recommends deep considerations of the perception and will of the public for devising effective countering strategies that go beyond kinetic measures. It calls for engaging the victim communities in counter-terrorism efforts to rebuild trust, which if not heeded, may result in the state's legitimacy crises.

Keywords: Counter-terrorism, Civilians' trust, State, Institutional Trust Theory.

INTRODUCTION

An invisible yet crucial element that helps sustain social momentum, trust works as a glue that lubricates social relationships and the inherent processes of social interactions. While conceptualizing trust, scholars like Mayer et al. (1995) and Rousseau et al. (1998) argue that it is the willingness of an entity to become vulnerable to another entity, the trustor and the trustee, respectively. The trustor takes the risk by presuming that the trustee's actions will be

conducive to that of the trustor's welfare despite the trustee's actions being outside the trustor's control. Trust is a foundational element in shaping the relationship between citizens and their state, especially in regions impacted by conflict and terrorism. In times of relative peace, trust in the state sustains societal cohesion, but during crises such as terrorist insurgencies, it is severely tested (Proszowska, 2022). In the context of this study, when the state's counter-terrorism measures fail to

provide security or are perceived as oppressive, trust in the state can rapidly erode.

The case of Swat provides an illuminating example of how these dynamics intersect. The region which was once overrun by insurgency in the post-9/11 era, a short period of military-driven stability was witnessed, driven by numerous military operations (Afridi & Gul, 2018). However, the region again grapples with soaring terrorist incidents since 2021 (PIPS, 2023), which calls into question the effectiveness of the state counter-terrorism strategies. This highlights how these strategies, when perceived as ineffective in delivering lasting peace, may wane public trust in the state. Given this, this study aims to investigate the influence of the resurgence of terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies on the trust relationship between the state and society.

1.2 Civilians' Trust In The State In Terrorism And Counter-Terrorism Context

The relationship between civilians and the state in the context of terrorism is fraught with perplexities because the measures a state takes to counter terrorism can, simultaneously, either protect citizens or alienate them. Globally, the use of counter-terrorism strategies, such as militarization and surveillance, has often resulted in a decline in public trust, particularly when such measures are perceived as heavy-handed or ineffective, or where terrorism and counter-terrorism become indistinguishable (Field, 2017). The case of Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrates the way aggressive military interventions can lead to civilian casualties, displacement, and human rights violations (Weiss, 2005).

In Pakistan's context, the rise of political protests and mass activism like the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) highlights the impact of terrorism and counter-terrorism policies on public trust. The PTM accuses the state of conducting indiscriminate operations that have led to civilian deaths, mass displacement, and a heavy military presence that fosters fear and resentment among the local population (Muhammad, 2019). The movement emerged in response to the alleged human rights violations perpetrated by the military during operations in Pakistan's former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (Wahab, 2024). This movement, which has now gained legitimacy and recognition among the larger population (Jafri, 2021), reflects the growing mistrust towards state

institutions. The paradox that further fuels mistrust is the civilians' commonly held view that the state supports militant groups for geo-political purposes, especially in Afghanistan and northern areas of Pakistan (Tankel, 2013). The underlying perception complicates the relationship between the state and its citizens in conflict-affected regions like Swat, where civilians may view counter-terrorism efforts as either half-hearted or politically motivated.

The literature emphasizes that the erosion of trust is more pronounced in societies with long-standing social and political splits and suffering from the heritage of colonialism (Debrah et al., 2018). A study by Dilante (2015) has discussed another unique aspect of state-society trust. It argues that in countries with colonial legacies, such as Africa and Pakistan, state violence tends to augment the present hostilities that create a vicious cycle of distrust and retaliation. This situation gets even more complex in multi-ethnic and multi-religious yet colonial states, where actions of the state may be perceived as biased against some groups that feel discriminated against and neglected by the state. Hence, citizens tend to see the state as an oppressor more than a protector (Ndili, 2016).

These dynamics are particularly evident in the Swat's context. Although the military initially succeeded in pushing out insurgents, the return of militant groups has fueled civilian skepticism regarding the benevolence, competence and integrity of the state. The literature primarily discusses trust in the context of terrorism and counterterrorism in broader socio-political contexts. However, no such study has been carried out, particularly in Swat, which explores the trust relationship between the state and civilians in relation to terrorism and the state's counterterrorism policy. Additionally, the literature also highlights the general implications of terrorism and state-sponsored violence on trust across different countries, but there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how specific counter-terrorism measures affect the trust dynamics in conflict-driven regions like Swat while keeping in view its unique historical and cultural experiences. Given these gaps in the literature, the primary question this study answers is; how does the resurgence of terrorism in Swat affect civilians' trust in the state, particularly in light of the state's counter-terrorism strategies?

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST THEORY

Trust, as discussed through various lenses, is shaped by both state actions and broader socio-political dynamics. The resurgence of terrorism in Swat, combined with human rights concerns and allegations of state complicity with militant groups, has significantly impacted civilian perceptions of the benevolence, competence, and integrity of the state. These three dimensions of trust are critical to understanding how public confidence in the state institution is built or eroded, particularly in conflict zones.

Grounded in the positivist paradigm, it is critical to examine trust through a framework that allows for its empirical measurement. The institutional trust theory provides an ideal lens for this analysis. The theory breaks down trust into measurable components, namely, benevolence, integrity, and competence (Bachmann et al., 2015). Each dimension represents a critical aspect of the relationship between citizens and the state, particularly in situations of crises where the state ought to act as a guardian of the subjects. These dimensions are not just empirical categories but are rooted in deeper theoretical debates about governance, power, and ethics.

The dimension of benevolence lies in the general belief of the trustees that the trustor acts in their best interests (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998), the citizens and the state respectively. Benevolence implies the moral responsibility of the state and thus, a central pillar in sustaining trust where the state actions are guided by moral principles, such as acting for the public good, regardless of political expediency (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008). Trust is strengthened when civilians believe their state genuinely cares about them, and eroded when the state is perceived as self-serving or indifferent to the sufferings of its subjects (OECD, 2024). In essence, benevolence can foster a more resilient form of trust, as it is rooted in emotional connection and shared values (Tschannen-Moran, 2015). When citizens perceive that their government has their best interests at heart, they are more willing to tolerate necessary security measures, even those that may limit their freedoms temporarily (Davis & Silver, 2004). It encourages active citizen engagement that contributes to a more cooperative relationship in society.

In counter-terrorism, benevolence is seen when government institutions not only respond to

threats but also communicate openly with the public, provide support to communities affected by terrorism, and ensure that security policies respect citizens' rights (Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017). When counter-terrorism measures result in collateral damages such as civilian casualties, displacement, or violations of human rights, the lack of benevolence is manifested and citizens are less likely to feel that the state is acting in their best interests.

Additionally, the dimension of integrity in institutional trust theory reflects the consistency and ethical standards of institutions (Bachmann, 2023), shaping citizens' perception that institutions will act according to moral and legal norms. This dimension is crucial in maintaining the legitimacy of state authority that makes citizens believe that the state's actions are aligned with legal and moral standards (Kirby, 2022), particularly in conflict situations where the state has the authority to use force. Integrity is critical because it reinforces trust even when state actions are obscured by operational security (NATO, 2016).

In counter-terrorism, integrity involves transparency, adherence to human rights, and accountability in operations, ensuring that counter-terrorism measures do not become tools for repression (OHCHR, n.d.). This dimension also emphasizes predictability in institutional actions, helping to mitigate fears that counter-terrorism policies may disproportionately target certain groups or infringe on civil liberties (OHCHR, n.d.). As Kirby (2022) argues, citizens are more likely to support government actions when they believe that institutions are acting with integrity, as this aligns institutional behavior with societal values, legitimizing otherwise intrusive measures. When the state's actions deviate from the principles of integrity, especially in a way that appears self-serving or corrupt, public trust diminishes (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996). In times of conflict, the state may justify surveillance and coercive measures as necessary to protect citizens, but these actions can erode integrity if they are perceived as abuses of power (OHCHR, 2024). Integrity, therefore, is not just about following laws but adhering to an ethical framework that prioritizes justice and equity.

Competence, as the third dimension of trust in institutional trust theory, is perhaps the most straightforward dimension of institutional trust, grounded in the public's belief that institutions

possess the technical ability, resources, and knowledge to carry out their designated functions effectively (Wu et al., 2015). In counter-terrorism, this translates into citizens' expectations that the government can protect them from threats through intelligence, law enforcement, and crisis response. According to White and McCarter (2016), competence-based trust is often measured through observable outcomes, such as the prevention of attacks or the rapid and effective response to incidents. However, this dimension is inherently fragile in counter-terrorism; the unpredictable nature of terrorist threats can undermine even the most competent institutions, as single failure can severely impact public trust (Dinesen & Jaeger, 2013). Thus, competence-based trust is often supplemented by other dimensions, especially in contexts where absolute security is impossible.

In light of pragmatism, competence is closely tied to the idea that governance should be judged by its outcomes and that the institutions should be evaluated on their ability to solve problems and deliver results (Ansell, 2022). From the civilians' perspective, the competence of a state in conflict zone is primarily measured by its ability to combat terrorism and provide a stable and secure environment. Given the arguments of Singh (2022), when institutions do not deliver their basic functions or are paralyzed by corruption in regions struggling with militancy, citizens are more likely to perceive the state as incompetent.

An extension of institutional trust theory, calculative and relational trust further provide enriching insights into understanding trust in institutions.

Calculative trust, as the term *per se* depicts, is a rational form of trust, which is grounded in a cost-benefit analysis (Poppo et al., 2015). Calculative trust relates to the evaluation of the previous performance and projected outcomes of institutions' actions by the citizens (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012). Civilians weigh both pros and cons of these actions which ultimately contribute to either trust or distrust, depending upon the nature of implications of a particular action. In the context of counter-terrorism, calculative trust is built when citizens see the state's actions to have successfully mitigated threats or when the concerned institutions demonstrate preparedness through operations, surveillance, and other visible security measures (Clubb et al., 2024). The existing scholarship on trust argues that this form of trust

is more transactional yet less resilient in the face of failure; a single breach or perceived incompetency in managing a threat can erode calculative trust quickly (Poppo et al., 2015). Given its precarious nature, calculative trust is sustained through consistent and reliable performance of institutions, which can be challenging in the unpredictable landscape of terrorism.

Additionally, relational trust is an effective form of trust built on emotional bonds and perceived shared values between citizens and institutions (Hsu et al., 2007). This trust is often cultivated through community engagement, transparent communication, and actions that signal a commitment to societal welfare beyond the mere execution of duties (Lansing et al., 2023). In counter-terrorism, relational trust is fostered when governments demonstrate empathy, include community voices in policy-making, and offer reassurances about the ethical dimensions of their actions (Schmidt, 2024). Relational trust is more robust and less susceptible to fluctuations from single events, as it is built over time and anchored in the perceived character of institutions.

Institutional trust theory is particularly well-suited to studying trust in the context of terrorism and counter-terrorism in Swat. The three dimensions: benevolence, integrity, and competence provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how civilians evaluate the state's performance during times of crisis. Based on these dimensions, the study's hypotheses are as under:

H1: The resurgence of terrorism negatively influences the trust relationship between the state and society.

H2: The state's counter-terrorism measures negatively affect the trust relationship between the state and society.

2 METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Research Design

The study employs a quantitative research design. Technically, quantitative research design is primarily concerned with unveiling facts pertaining to social phenomena while assuming a measurable and fixed reality (Cornell, 2022). This approach offers a variety of stats-based insights and is a critical part of primary research.

2.2 Population and Sample Size

The researcher intended to target participants who understood the issue under investigation. Therefore, the data was collected from the educated including both males and females above 25 years. As the population was substantial, the researcher utilised the Sekaran table to draw the sample size, which became 384. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling. Proportionate allocation method was used to ensure gender inclusivity. Based on this method, the male respondents were 275, while the female were 109.

2.3 Tool of Data and Collection Process

The current study has made use of one pre-existing, validated and reliable scale; "Citizen Trust in Government Organizations Scale (CTGO)", developed by Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies (2017) to measure the dependent variables i.e. trust relationship between civilians and the state. Although the mentioned scale is comprehensive, it was modified and contextualized to meet the study's objectives in the best way possible.

Concerning independent variables, i.e., the resurgence of terrorism and the effectiveness of the state counter-terrorism policy, no specific scale was available. Following a rigorous literature review of the relevant literature, the researcher developed items by drawing insights from the recurring themes. A five-point Likert scale was developed to measure all the variables, and responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

2.3.1 Reliability of the Tool

The tool underwent the Cronbach Alpha Reliability test. It is the measure of assessment for the reliability or internal consistency of a scale or

set of items. Cronbach's Alpha is the way to measure how much the items of the instrument are strongly consistent. As a general rule, the coefficient value between 0.7 and 1 is considered the most reliable index (Setyaedhi, 2024). During the current study, most of the coefficients remained between the desired threshold, ranging between 0.8 and 1. Consequently, the internal consistency of the data is proved to a remarkable degree.

2.3.2 Factor Analysis of the Tool

After the items were clarified through pretesting and reliability, it was crucial to determine their factor structure. For this, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed on the collected data. The details for each scale are given below.

Trust Relationship between the State and Society Scale: For this scale, the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was within the recommended range; .802, greater than .60 (Effendi et al., 2019). The value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was (2558.353, $P = .000$), indicating the factorability of the correlation matrix and fulfilling the significance level. Following this, the EFA was employed using the principle component analysis (PCA) technique. Those items that have low communalities or missing factor loadings below .5 were identified and thus avoided in the final scale, aligning the set forth criteria (Goretzko et al., 2021). Thus, a single-factor structure with a total variance of 66.267 was obtained. The factor loadings of the total six items ranged between .719 and .772 with a Cronbach Alpha for internal consistency coefficient of .934.

Table A: EFA Results of the Trust Relationship between the State and Society Scale

Items	(N=100)		
	Factor Loadings	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. If citizens need assistance, the state (Pakistan) provide them support.	.719	.517	.783
2. The state acts in the interests of its citizens.	.904	.817	.864
3. The state is competent in ensuring the security of its inhabitants.	.904	.818	.874

4.	The state addresses the root causes of terrorism.	.764	.584	.766
5.	The state addresses the grievances of its citizens.	.803	.644	.891
6.	The state is expert in forecasting any future terrorist threats.	.772	.597	.741

(%) Total variance Explained	66.267
Cronbach Alpha	.934

The Resurgence of Terrorism Scale: Prior to executing EFA, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett tests of sphericity were conducted. The KMO measure was .722, which lies above the recommended threshold of sampling adequacy; .60 (Effendi et al., 2019). The value of Bartlett's test of sphericity was (229.334, $p = .000$), fulfilling the significance level and indicating the factorability of the correlation matrix. Furthermore, by using principal

component analysis (PCA), the scale's items were subjected to EFA. Items having less or missing factor loadings along with those produced low communalities were detected and thus dropped from the final scale. A single-factor structure that explains the total variance of 50.864 was obtained, with the factor loadings of four items ranging between .787 and .569, which are above the desired criteria of greater than 5 (Goretzko et al., 2021). The Cronbach Alpha for the internal consistency coefficient was established to be .837.

Table B: EFA Results of the Resurgence of Terrorism Scale

(N=100)			
Items	Factor Loadings	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. I am aware of an increase in terrorist activities in District Swat.	.787	.619	.651
2. Residents, including myself, have observed suspicious individuals more frequently, which might indicate an inflow of militants in Swat.	.728	.530	.802
3. Community members are more worried about possible terrorist activities.	.749	.561	.790
4. Terrorist force community members for economic support.	.569	.521	.621
(%) Total variance Explained		50.864	
Cronbach Alpha		.837	

Effectiveness of Counter-Terrorism Policy Scale: The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) for this scale was .838, and the value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was (700.957, $P = .000$). Both fulfil the recommended requirements and indicate the factorability of the correlation matrix (Effendi et al., 2019).

Additionally, the scale went through EFA using the PCA method, in which items with missing or low factor loadings or with low communalities were found and then dropped from the final scale. Consequently, a single-factor structure explaining the total variance of 52.911 was acquired. The Cronbach Alpha for the items' internal consistency

of .813 was found, whereas the factor loadings of the six items ranged between .791 and .738.

Table C: EFA Results of the Effectiveness of the State Counter-Terrorism Policy Scale

Items	(N=100)		
	Factor Loadings	Communalities	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. The security situation in Swat has been improved due to the counter-terrorism policy of Pakistan.	.791	.478	.651
2. I have confidence in the government's efforts to combat terrorism in Swat.	.730	.533	.641
3. The counter-terrorism policy of Pakistan respects human rights.	.706	.499	.548
4. In order to effectively combat terrorism in Swat, hard actions like military operations and offensives are necessary.	.705	.497	.590
5. The National Action Plan (NAP) has been effective in addressing terrorism issues within Pakistan.	.789	.623	.547
6. There is a strong collaboration among law enforcement, the judiciary, and the residents in Swat.	.738	.545	.582
(%) Total variance Explained Cronbach Alpha			52.911 .813

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of the study, it was essential to qualify for the ethical standards. During the course of data collection, the very first statement of the questionnaire asks respondents' consent for the collection and use of their data for academic purposes only. The study ensures anonymity and confidentiality of participants, making it optional for participants to either write their names or mark themselves anonymous. No names and personal data of the respondents were entertained throughout the course of this study that may lead to potential harm.

2.5 Data Analysis

After the final data collection, it was analysed using proper statistical technique i.e. regression analysis. Regression analysis refers to a set of techniques in which the result reflects a straight-line relationship between two or more than two variables (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). Before the application of this analytical technique, it was ensured that the data met all the assumptions of simple linear regression, such as linearity,

homoscedasticity, independence of error, and normality. In the context of this study, there are two independent and one dependent variable, where the regression tests elucidate the relationship between each independent variable with the dependent one.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Relationship between the Resurgence of Terrorism and State-Society Trust Relationship Hypothesis

H= The resurgence of terrorism negatively influences the trust relationship between the state and society.

The analysis reflects that the resurgence of terrorism (RT) has significantly eroded the public trust in government (TR), $F(36.819), P < 0.01$, depicts that RT has a significant level of influence on TR, $(\beta = -.541, P < 0.01)$. As evident, the analysis firmly supports a strong negative relationship that suggests that the reappearance of terrorist activities has dramatically eroded citizen's trust in their state. Given the details, the hypothesis is strongly supported.

Table 4.4.3 Relationship between RT and TR

Hypothesis H	Regression Weights RT→TR	B	R ²	F	P-value	Hypothesis Supported
		-.541	.088	36.819	0.000	Yes

Note: N=384, **p< .01 RT: Resurgence of Terrorism, TR: Trust Relationship

The findings resonate with those of Akbar and Ahmad (2023), who argue that following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the resurgence of TTP in Pakistan has led to an increase in terrorist violence, which has dramatically eroded public trust in the government's ability to maintain sustainable safety and security of the residents. In addition, the role of Pakistan's government has always been dubious due to its strategic relationship with extremist groups for realising domestic and international interests, which has consistently been seen as inadequate and against the public well, further eroding trust in government institutions (Ahmad, 2022). Javaid (2016) indicates that Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy focuses on immediate solutions despite heeding the fundamental reasons for terrorism. Without addressing issues from the grassroots, such as poverty, lack of education, and political instability, the short-term military responses have been criticised for being failed to come up with sustainable solutions to terrorism. However, the political landscape and institutional weaknesses have made the scenario of terrorism and counter-terrorism more perplexing in the region. As evident from the study of Fair (2009), the failure of the state to address the root causes of terrorism has detrimental consequences for the trust relationship between the state and society. It requires balanced policies for addressing both immediate threats and underlying socio-political issues to achieve long-term stability.

Additionally, Pakistan's engagement in the US-led War on Terror has had lasting consequences on public trust by exacerbating political instability and fragmented governance (Bashir, 2022). These circumstances have resulted in a sense of disillusionment among the populace and further fuel their existing grievances and erosion of trust in government institutions. As evident, citizens' expectations from the state to protect them from terrorist violence remain unmet, resulting in the trust-deficit between the state and society.

Similarly, the perceived lack of support by the state has led the Swat region to grapple with terrorism.

Elvy (2011) maintained that the public often holds the state accountable for its inability to provide adequate security and support. During times of crises, the lack of consistent and effective support from the state exacerbates the trust deficit between the state and society which is a common consequence of repeated security breaches and inadequate state intervention. The trends in trust level are more likely to be higher in regions where state has successfully managed to curb terrorism than those where state interventions have proved counter-productive (Khattak, 2018). The state actions often do not align with the local socio-psychological context, therefore leading to perceptions of state actions being contrary to local interests. When the state's actions are perceived by citizens against their interests, erosion in trust becomes evident, particularly in areas with a high intensity of conflict (Deglow & Sundberg, 2020). It is worth noting that such perceptions of ineffectiveness and misalignment of the public towards the state actions further contribute to the persistence of terrorism and instability in regions like Swat.

3.2 Relationship between the Effectiveness of Counter-Terrorism and State-Society Trust Relationship

Hypothesis

H= The state counter-terrorism measures negatively affect the trust relationship between the state and society.

The analysis reveals that the CTP significantly affects TR, $F = (354.375)$, $P < 0.01$, showing a significant impact of CTP on TR; ($\beta = -.726$, $P < 0.01$). Consequently, the findings negatively support the relationship between the given variables, which depicts that the measures taken by the state to eradicate terrorism are ineffective, thereby leading to the erosion of trust between the state and society. Owing to this, the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4.4.4 Relationship between CTP and TR

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	B	R ²	F	P-value	Hypothesis Supported
H	CTP→TR	-.726	.481	354.375	0.000	Yes

Note: N=384, **p< .01 CTP: Counter-Terrorism Policy, TR: Trust Relationship

The results are in close compliance with the study of Gabbay (2023), which found that widespread corruption undermines the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures and leads to a lack of accountability and resources, ultimately eroding public trust in their state. The ineffectiveness of the state counter-terrorism approaches has also resulted in both political and economic instability, resulting in decreased trust in government efforts to combat terrorism (Jabeen & Naz, 2022). The social impact of terrorism on public attitudes and behaviours is multifaceted. It has been documented that repeated exposure to terror and violence can foster feelings of fear, mistrust, and alienation among the citizens, which not only weakens community resilience but also undermines faith in government institutions to provide adequate protection and security (Rasheed & Beaujouan, 2023). As Ifeanyi (2023) states, prevailing instabilities of such kinds and a heightened sense of insecurity among the populace have undermined investor confidence, hampered economic growth, and perpetuated a vicious cycle of violence. In the same context, ineffective communication and lack of transparency and accountability in the countering measures of the state institutions often results in mismanagement and ineffective implementation that perpetually undermines the state's capacity to address security challenges and fosters a perception of state incompetence and neglect among the population. As highlighted by the study of Siddiqa (2009), who argues that the state's capacity and will to effectively combat terrorism and ensure security have been questioned by the civilians, which cast a shadow of doubt on the state's competence. The provision of security is not only the state's primary objective but also a critical determinant of trust. Research has found that higher bureaucratic and administrative capacities of a state are associated with lower instances of terrorism, which reflects that enhancing its capacity can improve public trust in security measures (Hendrix & Young, 2014). Public confidence in state security measures can be greatly influenced by their historical experiences, which either build or erode calculative trust. Regions witnessing repeated episodes of terrorist

violence have found with low public confidence exacerbated by the communication gap and lack of transparency from state institutions in counter-terrorism efforts (Baldwin et al., 2008). This further undermines the state's integrity: a major dimension of institutional trust.

Furthermore, the military operations against insurgency in the Swat region have often fuelled the grievances of locals rather than addressing them effectively (Rashid et al., 2016). Being focused on immediate and kinetic solutions to terrorism, the long-term socio-economic development and political reforms remain unrealised, that further contributes to the perception among the locals that their issues and grievances have been ignored (Khan & Khan, 2021). As terrorist's tactics and strategies are often evolving, the lack of systematic efforts and theoretical foundations have been major barriers in the predictive efforts of the state (Bakker, 2012). The capacity to forecast the threats of terrorism requires strong analytical competence and people's integration into decision-making processes which is mostly hampered by lack of implementation due to political and institutional factors.

CONCLUSION

The current study was a scholarly endeavour that aimed to investigate the trust relationship between the state and society in the context of the resurgence of terrorism and the state counter-terrorism policy. As the region already witnessed a decade-long conflict with everlasting repercussions on its socio-political, economic and cultural fabric, the resurgence has been a matter of great concern among the civilians that raises questions about the effectiveness of the state counter-terrorism policy, which ultimately influences the level of trust citizens have on their state. To guide this complex investigation, the institutional trust theory was utilised, which provide a roadmap for how to measure trust with quantifiable dimensions. The study employed a rigorous quantitative methodology to statistically address the hypothesis. The regression test was employed to understand the relationship between the resurgence of terrorism and the trust relationship between the

state and society. The findings clearly depicted a negative relationship between these variables that suggests that the more there is a rise in terrorist incidents, the less civilians trust their government. These findings also supported the hypothesis and are further enriched by the theoretical debates of institutional trust and similar scholarship. To determine the relationship between the counter-terrorism policy and the trust relationship between the state and society, the result was found to be negative, which shows that measures taken by the state to eradicate terrorism are ineffective, thereby leading to the erosion of trust between the state and society that further weaken institutional trust. In light of these, the hypothesis is accepted, and the findings are further supported by the literature that brings a similar understanding of the phenomena. Considering the study's limitations, this research offers potential gaps that scholars may consider to further their future studies. As the current study is confined to representing the educated population of Swat, future studies shall focus on investigating the same phenomenon from the perspective of the general population. It is also advised for future researchers to perform a longitudinal study that tracks the trust relationship with the changing dynamics of time and security situations. Additionally, qualitative research is recommended to put forward an in-depth explanation of the trust dynamics between the state and society in the context of terrorism and counter-terrorism.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study suggests these recommendations:

- Kinetic and military-led approaches to eradicate terrorism have always garnered widespread criticism and disapproval by the residents due to the fact that these have perpetuated a more vicious cycle of violence. Given this, it is suggested that counter-terrorism requires a blend of both hard and soft measures that closely consider the sociocultural, economic, and political aspects of combating terrorism in the long run.
- As trust is the basic unit of any functional state-society relationship, the findings reveal a significant trust deficit between the state and society, causing alienation among the vulnerable communities, which may lead to the legitimacy crises of the state. Therefore, policymakers need to devise strategies that aim to rebuild trust in the context of counter-terrorism, which can be realized

through the support of the public and the genuineness of the state's actions and interventions.

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Disclosure:
The authors report no conflicts of interest in this research work.

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