



# Misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism; A futuristic actions study amidst COVID-19 pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the shadow economy of violent extremism through charity lenses and factors associated with misuse of charitable giving in a global financial system. It reviews the emergency response situations like COVID-19 when financial needs are urgent with lacked monitoring and control over payment disbursement to vulnerable groups. It highlights several governments' significant steps to counter the illicit finance flow through 'public-face' charity organizations. Descriptive research was used to gather secondary data insights using published reports, articles, news portals, and policy briefs from renowned institutions. The findings depict four factors known as economic and capacity, socio-cultural, politico-legal, and global networks support in misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism. This study claims not all charitable giving misused for extremism and violence. However, there is a possibility that extremist groups could take advantage of using humanitarian organizations' face to finance violent extremism. Two possible recommendations have been made to overcome this issue by adopting digital payment mechanisms and community engagement to design and deliver the COVID-19 response recovery programs.

## 1. Introduction

"Charitable giving is a big business" (Tait, 2015). It is the act of giving money, goods, or time to the unfortunate either directly or using a charitable trust or other worthy causes (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2016). It has been noticed that charitable giving has become a significantly important subject of discussion and concern. As seen in history, the collection of quick response funds for disaster response at the county or global level is managed by fundraisers. But the effective monitoring aspect is a missing part to track utilization of those funds, explicitly measuring the impact. Since COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is hovering worldwide, extremist groups across the ideological spectrum are taking it as an opportunity to shadow their extremist operations and financial flows (Basit, 2020). Several governments and global financial institutions like World Bank Group have released significant funds to the fragile communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since the financial form of charity is comparatively more desirable, it has been abused by individuals and organizations who seek funds to support violent extremist activities. Though violent extremist activities can be supported with limited finance (Mai, 2016), these funds' flow

requires maximum secrecy with the high demand for non-traceable channels like cash payments, which remain anonymous and fall outside the scope of tracking banking or digital systems (Ecorys, 2017). There is a strong connection between extremism and terrorism financing and the direct involvement of cash (Schneider, 2017). Levey (2005) stated that charity organizations' ability to receive unwetted money makes more money available to terrorists as a one-directional flow of funds leaves little suspicion. If charity organizations prioritize relief operations in fragile and conflict areas, it can provide excellent cover to the extremist and terrorists under their supplies. Extremist groups have heavily misused charity organizations as front organizations by naming their program areas around humanitarian and relief services. COVID-19 has amplified the intersectionality of misusing the pandemic to wage violent extremism (Concannon, 2020). It allows extremist groups to raise funds as cash packages and goods, which can generate cash. The Shadow Economy of charities is there only to shadow latent goals or activities (Constable, 2017). Recently there is much discussion regarding the funds of such organizations or groups that promote radical and extremist narratives in different contexts (Keatinge, 2017).

There is limited literature discussing the misuse of charitable giving

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to finance violent extremism. The limited academic literature offers intense debate over terrorism financing, and it also lapses in defining factors that support and impede in promoting violent extremism finance. This paper explores and understands the shadow economy of violent extremism through charity lenses by identifying its key resources, often religion-oriented, in a global financial flow. It emphasizes emergency response situations like COVID-19 when financial needs are urgent with lacked monitoring. It also intends to highlight the different governments' significant steps to counter the illicit flow of finance through 'public-face' charity organizations. Recommendations are made for governments and financial institutions to restore charity's utilization and its concept in the best interest of humanity, particularly in pandemics like COVID-19. This paper does not claim that all charities operate only to pursue extremism or violence goals. It focuses on the research question that supports understanding the misuse of the charity concept by violent and extremist actors. The paper structure comprises of three sections: first, types of charity and global financial system; second, factors of extremism finance and COVID-19 pandemic; the third, role of governments to counter the misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism. The last section presents a succinct conclusion.

### 1.1. Practices of charitable giving in the financial system

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various practices have been identified by several countries to disburse cash assistance to families. "Give the poor cash so they can afford to stay home to slow down the pandemic" (UNDP, 2020). UN estimates for \$199 billion per month to give those living under the poverty line in 132 developing countries. The United States has provided a monthly allowance to people who lost their jobs due to a pandemic in their bank account by the federal government (Clifford, 2020), in addition to a stimulus check for all Americans. Pakistan initiated a relief package of PKR 144 billion to low-income families by giving PKR 12,000/- for four months using biometrically enabled branchless banking operations for payment disbursement (Ehsaas Emergency Cash, 2020). In India, cash transfer programs launched of amount INR 500 in the account of women already enrolled in financial inclusion programs. In Kenya, 2,000 Shillings cash received per month by over a million people. Several other countries introduced social protection programs in response to Covid-19 by using cash transfers, such as Cuba, Fiji, Guernsey, Slovakia, Zambia, Malta, Curacao, and the Caribbean Netherlands. (Amundsen, 2020). Pandemics provide various avenues for extremists to exploit the uncertainties. They are reaping COVID-19 to generate emotional and monetary support for their violent narratives. From February 2020, various extremist outfits have launched public fundraising campaigns for COVID-19 recovery projects and ultimately influence public narratives (Burchill, 2020). In the past, humanitarian programs' cash payments to help vulnerable groups were largely non-trackable, making cash payments attractive for illicit transactions.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF) views that "detecting money trail helps investigators identify terrorists and prevent terrorist attacks." FATF has recognized the misuse of charity organizations to flow extremism finance, a crucial loophole in the global struggle to stop financing for violent extremism (Jacobson, 2009). Around 1400 bank accounts worldwide were identified to be operated by the extremist groups in which more than USD 140 million were frozen. It urged extremist groups to increasingly adept least or non-traceable methods of managing their financial operations. Cash-based economies are favorite for extremists to generate and flow extremism finance with the least fear of traceability. For example, the al-Qaeda in Iraq brought cash via couriers, and the London attacks in 2005 were financed through only cash (Kaplan, 2006). "In a cash-based economy, it is challenging to track money as people carry huge sums of money in cash and do whatever business they like without being tracked," said Nigeria's Secretary to Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Vanguard, 2012).

Global policies to curb extremism finance have affected nonprofit organizations' operations as donors feel threatened of being trapped into

illicit finance flow (Cortright, 2008). Cortright mentioned nine Special Recommendations of FATF, the eighth of which narrates "ensure that nonprofit organizations cannot be misused to finance terrorism." But the pandemics like COVID-19 creates the need for charitable organizations for the humanitarian response, which offer opportunities for extremist groups to shadow their illicit finance flow. For the flow of extremist finance, charitable organizations have been used to cover humanity's service. Since the Covid-19 pandemic's recovery involves huge financial transactions through various channels, it has significant risks of illicit financial flow for violent extremism under charitable giving.

### 1.2. Charities comparative assessment

Since charity is to help humanity in need, it has been politicized to influence people in 'other' communities or societies to spread certain religious, economic, or political ideologies that undermine charity's spirit. This trend allows certain factors to drive humanity-oriented concepts of charity as their interest-oriented such as violent extremism and radicalization against certain factors or actors in a certain society or state. Kant (1995) stated that peace is possible when independent states will not be dominated by other states, either by donations in certain communities with hidden goals. The comparative assessment of charities from the perspective of Muslims and non-Muslim specifies below.

### 1.3. Global south

Believing as a disaster from quicker whenever a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic appears. They organize various types of informal fundraising activities naming for those affected by pandemics or disasters. The key driving force for such fundraisers in Muslim majority countries is the principle of Zakat in Islam that requires 2.5% of a person's annual excess wealth to give those in need. Muslims must donate a certain portion of one's wealth for charitable purposes as Zakat. Zakat has significant potential to raise money for Muslim charities mainly based in the Middle Eastern countries (Kaplan, 2006). The concept of zakat has been widely misused to raise finance for violent extremism activities under the umbrella of charity for disaster or pandemic response. COVID-19 pandemic has been a lead deriver of charitable giving in Pakistan, a country that contributes more than one percent of its GDP to charity counting more than 2 billion USD annually (Amjad & Ali, 2018). Hundreds of charity organizations are responding the pandemic with food and cash packages in Pakistan which has extended the fundraising grounds for extremist and banned outfits in the country (Imtiaz, 2020). Further, Islamic Relief is wholly and partially banned in Israel (2014), UAE (2014), and Bangladesh (2017). Donations from charities and wealthy individuals have remained the largest financing source for the groups with violent narratives.

In the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran were and are often named to base such charities and individuals who remained a financial source of multiple organizations with violent narratives operating in different countries. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Task Force Report (2002), individuals and charities in Saudi Arabia were critical financial sources for al-Qaeda. However, the government of Saudi Arabia acted in 2003 to disrupt such networks in their country. In efforts to promote Wahhabism, an ultraconservative brand of Islam, Saudi Arabia continue financing networks of imams and mosques in countries like Pakistan, Kosovo, Indonesia, and even in Europe through a range of religious charities (Wintour, 2017). Hence Saudi Arabia's financing for extremism was shadowed in most sacred institutions for Muslims, mosques, or madrasa, whose operations were never questioned at any level. This strategy of extremist finance remained significantly successful.

On the other hand, Qatar has been accused of being the financial support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and Al-Nusra in Syria through individual philanthropists and charities, including the government itself. Iran is considered worse as its government supports organizations to promote Shi'ism in other countries. This mindset of pouring huge finance

to promote the ideology of Wahhabism or Shi'ism has created the junction of conflict and violence mainly in the Muslim world as countries supporting any of these ideologies give them space for violent expansions (Wilson, 2017). COVID-19 has strained the Yemen government's economic capacity and there are significant risks of humanitarian assistance being misused by those involved in the country's civil war (Warrick, 2020). In India, known as the world's largest democracy (Jaishankar, 2018), extremism has been on the rise, particularly during regimes of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which promotes Hindu nationalism by supporting extremist individuals and entities like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Their support includes political patronage to carry out violence against Christians and Muslims. They believe that India belongs to only Hindus, and it should be purified from non-Hindus. Such organizations not only receive financial support from like-minded high profiles, but public fundraising campaigns are also the primary source of their financial dependence (Marshall, 2004). Indian identity and Hindu nationalism have also been essential motivations for charity among Indian immigrants in the United States (Anand, 2004). Pawan Badhe, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of India to the UN said, "Amidst COVID-19 pandemic, extremist groups are making malevolent attempts to exploit the financial and emotional distress caused by lockdown" (Ani, 2020). Far right groups exploit the COVID-19 pandemic to capitalize on their monetary and non-monetary support (Carlo, 2020).

#### 1.4. Global West

Extremism is not limited to any specific religion; extremists misuse faith-based emotions to perpetuate their society grounds. Other than Islam, it has been practiced among Christians, too, with various similar approaches. For example, the Christian Institute in the UK believes extremism only belongs to Muslims by denying extremism definition on non-Muslims. UK's Commission for Countering Extremism (2020) fear that extremists are capitalizing on the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. British Far Right activists and Neo-Nazi groups are promoting violence against Jews and Muslims. Major Wong of the U.S. Army has outlined that "Christian extremism as a domestic terror threat" in the United States employs methods consistent with al-Qaeda and Hezbollah such as death threats. He claims that violent extremism is not limited to believers of the Islamic faith but a psychological phenomenon with no religious base. Donations, asset sales, new credit lines, injury lawsuits, and income tax returns were recorded as legal tactics to raise funds for violent extremism in the U.S. In contrast, the illegal tactics were financial aid fraud, illegal sale of a firearm, armed robbery, drug trafficking, bank fraud, embezzlement (Vidino et al., 2020). Amidst COVID-19, "cybercriminals most likely will deploy ransomware for financial gains" (Homeland Security, 2020). The U.S. law enforcement authorities has seized a website, FaceMaskCenter.com (Fig. 1), claimed to sell N95 masks, gloves, and protective gears. This website, along with four Facebook accounts promoting it, were linked to Islamic State (IS)

facilitators and its domain was purchased on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2020. Though it is an interesting case linked to COVID-19, it has urged the U.S. Department of Justice to disrupt three different terrorist financing schemes; cryptocurrency, online fundraising, and the use of bitcoins. (Daymon, 2020).

Webb (2018) explained how the charitable sector has been exploited by the Islamic extremists since the early days of jihadism in the 1980s (Crenshaw, 2017) and claimed that the UK registered charities and nonprofit organizations have been funding extremism in different countries. UK's Commission for Countering Extremism (2020) has identified monetary support activities by Islamists claiming COVID-19 as divine punishment for Western countries. ISIS celebrated the impact of COVID-19 on Western economies, which will divert countries' military resources to deal with this pandemic rather than fighting against ISIS operations. In the UK, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has framed the COVID-19 pandemic to negate democracy and the Caliphate's establishment. In the Global West, the charity organizations led by Muslims accused of financing extremism include Islamic Relief ([islamic-relief.org](http://islamic-relief.org)), KinderUSA ([kinderus.org](http://kinderus.org)), and Human Appeal ([humanappeal.org.uk](http://humanappeal.org.uk)) (Westrop, 2018). Financial Post of Canada and the UK Charities Aid Foundation have removed Islamic Relief from the online charities page, and the HSBC bank in the UK also closed its accounts in 2015 (Quiggin, 2018).

## 2. Methodology

Descriptive research was used to gather secondary sources about the misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism. It reviews policy reports from governments and international organizations by analyzing prior research studies and blogs articles related to extremism finance. The inclusion criteria to search for secondary data included non-political and non-religious content with a civil society perspective. This paper's data included content analysis of secondary resources like books, journals, and conference proceedings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the study topic. The Web of Science database was used for systematic review from 1970 to 2020 with four indexes, i.e., Social Sciences Citation Index, Science Citation Index Expanded, Arts and Humanities Citation Index, and Emerging Sources Citation Index. Since there is little academic work, only two studies found from the Web of Science database, May (2020) and Bhui et al. (2016), related to the misuse of charitable giving for extremism finance. This study excluded the governments' reports with partiality aspect in order to overcome the bias in content analysis. Further, a comparative analysis was performed to relate the Muslim and non-Muslim charities concerning extremism finance. The systematic content analysis was conducted around two significant themes as charity flow in religious covers to finance extremism and terrorism, and financial system loopholes allowing illicit financial flow in the cover of charity. A framework supported by literature synthesis was applied in focus to third world countries to identify various factors allowing the misuse of charity for violent extremism.

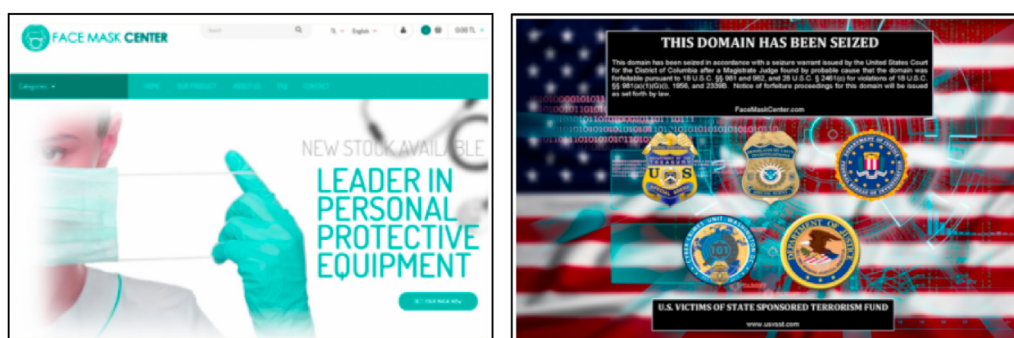


Fig. 1. FaceMask.com website, and seize notice by the U.S. law enforcement. Source: Daymon (2020).

Later, a summary is presented on the key governments' various steps to counter misuse of charity for violent extremism and terrorism.

### 3. Analysis and discussion

A systematic review of the literature identified four factors behind extremism finance in the charity lens: economic and capacity, socio-cultural, political and legal, and global networks (Fig. 2).

#### 3.1. Economic and capacity

Poverty, inequality, and unemployment significantly influence vulnerable people's actions to be trapped in extremist activities (Gold, 2004). After 9/11, poverty's argument as the sole reason to become terrorists lost acceptance because people involved in these attacks were far from poverty (Smith, 2002). Such facts set new realities that poverty can have an indirect facilitating role but not always directly associated with terrorism. Wealthy and middle-class individuals involved in terrorist activities can be understood through Gramsci's idea of how the ruling elite strives to maintain a political hegemony (Swenson, 2009). Undoubtedly, poor living conditions lead to dejection from political systems that justify extremist activities (Ehrlich & Liu, 2002). Poverty creates a social environment breeding insecurity and alienation, which helps extremists recruit people from such an environment (O'Neill, 2002, pp. 5–17). Poverty-ridden countries urge emergency projects to respond to emergencies like COVID-19 to support those in need, creating space for extremist groups to cover their finance in charity operations.

Fragile economies have weak financial institutions, cash-based economies, a lack of charity flow protocols, and traditional financial operations mechanisms. Fighting terrorism requires many resources, implying a direct economic cost on countries (Gold, 2004). COVID-19 has multiplied economic burden on governments creating opportunities for extremist networks to expand their emotional and monetary support. Economic deprivations and social isolations caused by COVID-19 will

push people to believe more in violent narratives with increased distrust on governments. (Bashar & Yaoren, 2020). Fragile economies cannot spend much money to build or upgrade their financial systems. Since charity operations share the economic burden of fragile economies to serve the marginalized communities, such organizations control the public narratives in beneficiary communities. However, there are a few exceptions where countries with stronger economies also fail to curb charity flows to terrorists (Ehrenfeld, 2011).

Policymakers have suggested a borderless financial intelligence sharing to deal with borderless terror financing (Howell, 2007, pp. 1–46). Law enforcement agencies need sufficient financial intelligence to detect funds flow proactively for financing terrorism (Gilmour et al., 2017). National governments and international organizations still do not know much about innovative strategies used by terrorist groups to flow their finance (Keatinge & Danner, 2018). Global cooperation and coordination among countries can help monitor transnational terrorism, especially in pandemics like COVID-19 (Sandler, 2016). Thus, intelligence agencies should be trained to detect propensity during pandemics to involve in extremist activities at the individual, group, and community level (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2009).

#### 3.2. Political and legal

Historically, it is evident that extremist groups have exploited the pandemics to capitalize on political and legal spaces. COVID-19 pandemic has higher risks of such exploitation as people confined in their homes are spending more time online where extremist groups' reach is more comfortable (Wither, 2020). Considering the global political spectrum, influential governments like Qatar and Saudi Arabia receive less political pressure to curb violent extremism than underdeveloped and third world countries like Pakistan, Somalia, and South Sudan. Underdeveloped nations have inadequate infrastructure and lack of resources, which provide flourish opportunities to extremist groups. Thus, several underdeveloped countries cannot disrupt and control terror

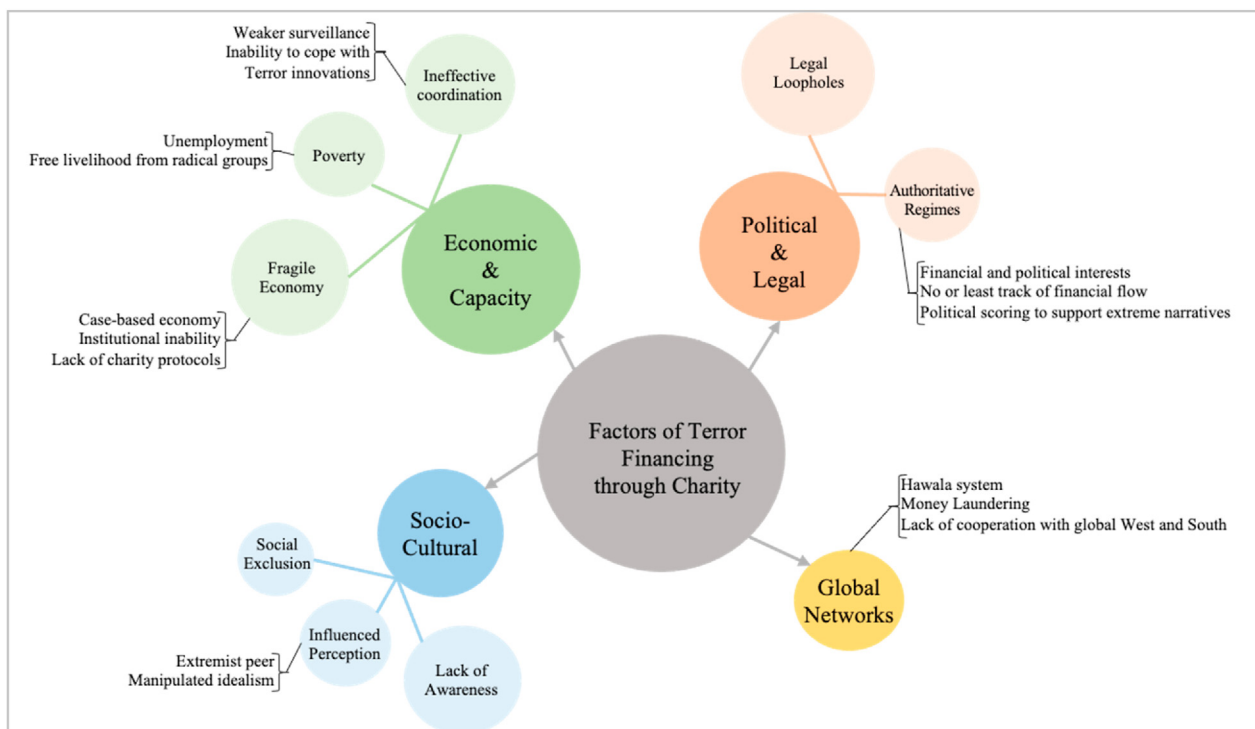


Fig. 2. Factors of financing violent extremism through charity amidst COVID-19.

Source: Compiled from (Ehrenfeld, 2011; Force, 2015; Gilmour et al., 2017; Gold, 2004; Groves, 2016; Keatinge & Danner, 2018; Knapton, 2014; Levi et al., 2018; Nawaz, 2016; Sandler, 2016; Smith, 2002; Swenson, 2009; Tsingou, 2020; Wright-Neville & Halafoff, 2010).



financing by coping with innovative ways by terrorist groups to funnel finance to fuel their operations (Keatinge & Danner, 2018). Governments divert their focus and resources to deal with pandemics like COVID-19. It creates an opportunity for extremist groups to utilize the fragile political and legal spaces to flow their illicit finances. Strengthening financial systems for situations like COVID-19 pandemics and people's sensitization on not donating to potentially extremist groups' charity operations can help prevent the spread of violent extremism.

### 3.3. Socio-cultural

COVID-19 has significantly influenced the sociocultural dynamics of countries around the world. The inability of critical social analysis traps people from being beneficiaries of terror financing. People in third-world countries live at the margins of being radicalized due to their limited worldviews. Their inability to differentiate between charities' volunteer work for the public good and potential extremist motives if they have (Force, 2015).

Socio-psychological factors determine acceptable levels of humanitarian assistance by extremist ideology charity organizations. Psychology, sociology, and other behavioral sciences help understand psychological and sociocultural factors pushing individuals to perpetuate and support extremist activities. Contemporary psychological theories suggest three significant factors behind terrorist involvement: injustice, identity, and belonging (Post, 1984). All terrorists do not have mental illness and psychopathological problems (Borum, 2007). Specific to COVID-19, the social isolation and more time spent online have projected the people's vulnerability of people being trapped into the extremists' networks of human and financial resource (Aryaeinejad & McGann, 2020). Individuals and groups facilitating terror financing is a different phenomenon where people do not directly get involved. Social exclusion is another factor causing identity crisis, leading to extremist activities' involvement and flourishes extremist thinking (Knapton, 2014; Wright-Neville & Halafoff, 2010). To influence the psycho-social spheres, extremists utilize blind spots in the communal spaces to root their existences, radicalize their targets, and influence perspectives with extremist narratives. For this purpose, extremist groups analyze the social psychology to offer monetary support covered in emergency response to the pandemics like COVID-19.

### 3.4. Global networks

Countries' political systems capacitate the money flow to extremist activities. For instance, Saudi Arabia has been found the source of money for several global extremist activities through individual philanthropists and charity organizations (Ehrenfeld, 2011). Pakistan is an example where lack of political consensus is a barrier for appropriate legislation against terror financing. The political elite often ignores extremist financing to gain political benefits from extreme right-vote banks such as Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) in Pakistan. Political exclusion can also cause political extremism, which may foster terrorist ideology (Rajae, 2002, pp. 35–39). Actions to curb the financial sources and fundraising of banned organizations are discouraged by politicians for their vested interests (Nawaz, 2016). "The massive amount of money that will be spent to address the economic, social and healthcare consequences of the virus risks being at the expense of security. We must prevent the one crisis ending up producing another", Counter-Terrorism Coordinator of EU has warned amidst COVID-19.

Since governments are in a dilemma of economic recovery from COVID-19, their focus and resources will be diverted from monitoring, preventing, and countering violent extremism. (Burchill, 2020). Since curbing extremism finance is a highly institutionalized global governance task, many transnational factors halt policies in this regard. Terrorist financing and money laundering can be controlled through global cooperation (Tsingou, 2020). Strengthening global cooperation can decrease financial flows to terrorist activities (Haigner et al., 2012).

Despite strict anti-money laundering laws, several loopholes are helping flow of money from developed to underdeveloped countries (Levi et al., 2018), and vice versa.

## 4. A futuristic actions to charitable giving misuse amidst COVID-19 pandemic

### 4.1. At government level

Amidst COVID-19 pandemic, there have been efforts and initiatives by different governments to counter extremist narratives and operations at national and transnational levels. But redirection of governments' resources to respond the pandemic has created a space for extremist groups to influence narratives and raise their monetary support (CTED, 2020). COVID-19 urges for a strengthened partnership between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the United States to monitor extremism finance during this pandemic. Under this partnership, the four organizations, The Muslim Council of Elders, Hedayah, Sawab, and Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, need to incorporate COVID-19 scenarios in their protocols to monitor charity flow for emergency response projects. This partnership has added responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic to stop the flow of illicit funds in the Middle East, a region accused of being the base of generating finance for violent extremism through charity organizations and wealthy individuals (UAE/USA United, 2019).

Saudi Arabia partnered with the U.S. to establish a Terrorist Financing Targeting Center in 201 counter-terrorists and extremist financing in the Gulf region (Keatinge, 2017). The shift in Saudi Arabia's policy results from their support for extremism, turning back on them and their allies in Western countries (Khalilzad, 2016). The U.S.-Gulf counterterrorism partnership has noticed the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic being reaped by extremist groups to influence public narratives and divert their monetary support channels (Pelayo, 2020). The U.S. has further restricted the charities from providing money to any organization or group that can potentially be misused for extremism finance, explained by Wolosky, a former official of the U.S. National Security Council (Kaplan, 2006). French authorities recently have arrested 29 people around the country who were utilizing the COVID-19 pandemic by plotting a cryptocurrency scheme to finance jihadis (The Associated Press, 2020). Pakistan's NACTA (National Counter Terrorism Authority), established in 2013, needs proactiveness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It needs expanded financial intelligence of extremist groups in the country and COVID-19 response projects by charity organizations already on the extremism watchlist (Jorgic & Shahzad, 2019). Pakistan Center for Philanthropy can accelerate public awareness of charity organizations with extremist narratives (PCP, 2019).

The risk factors are high during the Covid-19 pandemic for misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism in developed and underdeveloped countries. Smarter investments for economic recovery will prevent the risks of extremism finance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Koser & O'Connell, 2020). The COVID-19 recovery response must adapt digital payment mechanisms, algorithms for transaction tracking, cash inflow, and charitable giving outflow monitoring.

### 4.2. At community level

Like the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters create space for extremist and terrorist groups to influence public narratives through their humanitarian response projects. Framed COVID-19 as divine punishment for 'infidels', Al-Qaida utilizes the pandemic for public relations campaign in Afghanistan by inviting international humanitarian organizations to resume work in Taliban-controlled areas. Taliban also distributed pamphlets for awareness of social distancing against COVID-19 to strengthen their position in political spheres. In view of community-level challenges, community engagement in the design and delivery of COVID-19 recovery response programs can minimize the risks of charity

money flowing into extremism. It will support governance and public accountability mechanisms for fairer disbursement of COVID-19 recovery projects for vulnerable populations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunities to extremist groups for disinformation to influence public narratives and raise funds, governments should engage communities to monitor the economic recovery programs (Della-Giacoma, 2020). Even in the post-COVID-19 world, more localized response approaches will be needed for economic recovery, restricting extremist groups' penetrations (Basit, 2020). To secure people from preying into violent narratives amidst COVID-19, preventing violent extremism (PVE) projects by humanitarian organizations must engage communities to make feel them protective and owned. It will retain the communities' trust upon local governments and their approved organizations in the pandemic of social isolation. (Rosand et al., 2020).

## 5. Conclusion

This study reviews risks associated with charitable giving misuse in response to the COVID-19 pandemic having the possibility that it could be used for extremist finance in diverse religiopolitical contexts. Hence, there is limited research on illicit financial flow through charities either by Muslims or non-Muslims worldwide. Since religions' manipulation is favorite to radicalize their followers and raise funds for violent extremism. Still, ultimately, religion can provide the most effective strategy to build peace among divided communities and divert charities' misuse towards human service. Thus, extremist groups could use religion as a tool to build a strong bond with the community for their ultimate purposes. To better understand charities' misuse to finance violent extremism and terrorism, countries need to focus on research studies to know more about it and develop advocacy programs that strengthen the financial system. Future research avenues would empirically examine factors associated with misuse of charitable giving, mainly focusing on developing countries. Quasi-experimental studies would be in greater support to investigate causes, reasons, and intentions towards misuse of charitable giving to finance violent extremism.

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All authors made equal contribution.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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