The Puzzle of the Unflinching Civilians: Resilience, Resistance, or Resignation? Understanding Pakistan's National Psyche Amid Protracted Conflict

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a battle-hardened nation, surviving decades of armed conflict, wars, terrorism, Martial laws, and internal political instability. The current paper explores the collective psychological and sociocultural responses of Pakistani civilians to prolonged exposure to conflict and violence. This study employed a thematic and comparative analysis of 46 peer-reviewed articles, media reports, and conflict studies from Pakistan and similarly affected regions, including Colombia, Afghanistan, Uganda, Syria, and Palestine. Through this lens, six themes emerged: normalization of violence, culturally embedded coping mechanisms, emotional disengagement, trauma silencing, state-media framing of conflict, and post-war identity. This study finds that Pakistan's public resilience is less a reflection of psychological well-being and more a result of adaptive desensitization and institutional narrative control, where trauma is often reframed through patriotic, religious, or heroic perspectives. Comparative insights suggest that this resilience model happens to be uniquely reinforced by media censorship and militarized identity construction, mirroring patterns within other conflict zones. It can be concluded that Pakistan represents a hybrid trauma-resilience model: outwardly stable but fragmented inwardly; publicly stoic, privately grieving, thereby concealing the deeper layers of trauma. The study contributes to global trauma literature by challenging linear post-conflict recovery models while emphasizing context-sensitive frameworks for identity and resilience under chronic insecurity.

INTRODUCTION

In the early hours of May 7, 2025, Pakistan came under a sudden and escalatory military action, as Indian forces reportedly launched multiple missiles on five cities of Pakistan, killing more than 41 civilians, including five children (Pakistan vows retaliation, 2025). The following morning, hundreds of drones entered the Pakistani space, almost hitting the cities across the country. While the defense forces intercepted much of the attack, what followed was more sociologically revealing than strategically significant: Pakistani civilians reacted not with panic, but with participation.

Many locals reportedly took to rooftops and streets with their weapons, attempting to shoot down drones; in others, civilians gathered in large numbers in the streets, chanting slogans and waving national flags in acts of collective defiance. This mass civilian mobilization in response to an international military strike raises profound questions about the psychological and cultural conditioning of Pakistani society.

For over four decades, Pakistan has lived under the shadow of conflict & war, shaped by external wars, internal insurgencies, and the enduring threat of terrorism. From the fallout of the Afghan-Soviet war to the domestic consequences of the War on Terror, Pakistani civilians have been repeatedly exposed to the sights, sounds, and consequences of violence. US Drone strikes, suicide bombings, and cross-border hostilities have become woven into the fabric of daily life, particularly in

the country's border and urban regions. Yet, what stands out in this prolonged exposure is not merely the scale of violence but the national attitude toward it: normal life goes on, drone flyovers barely evoke panic, and citizens respond with dark humor, making memes on social media about the situation.

How does a population that has endured over four decades of conflict, ranging from foreign wars and terrorism to internal militancy, come to treat acts of war not as crises, but as familiar events? This apparent indifference or perhaps resilience raises a key sociopolitical and psychological question: How does a nation learn to live with war without falling apart? More significantly, what does this response reveal about the relationship between national identity, emotional adaptation, and the normalization of violence? To examine these questions, this paper draws on an integrated theoretical framework consisting of three interrelated components: Collective Trauma Theory, Conflict Habituation and Resilience Theory, and Political Socialization and Emotional Conditioning to interpret the normalization of violence in Pakistan.

The concept of collective trauma was provided by Erikson (1991) and expanded by Alexander (2004), who described how a community as a whole deals with the psychological effects of the experience of conflict and violence. Erikson emphasized that trauma occurs on both individual and social levels, as well as at collective levels, and that these traumas irreversibly shape shared identity and disrupt historical continuity. Alexander introduces the idea of cultural trauma, where communities build narratives around suffering and address how to rebuild their community's sense of self. Traumatic events, embedded in shared memory and cultural institutions, can completely shatter a community's social fabric.

The perpetuation of consistent and repeated violence precipitates a collective trauma that coalesces into a shared identity narrative, thereby obscuring the dichotomy between wartime and peacetime experiences. In Pakistan, cross-border hostilities, bombing, US drone attacks, military operations, and political instability have ritualized the trauma into a national narrative. From a supercon or meta level perspective, Pakistan has assimilated traumatic events, such as the Bacha Khan University terrorist attack in 2016, the three Parachinar Bombings in 2013, 2015, 2017, and the APS school attack in 2014, into its national narrative, effectively rendering trauma an integral part of its collective identity.

In Pakistan, traumatic events are publicly commemorated through poetry, songs, and mourning, yet lack meaningful trauma discourse. These incidents become symbolic anchors of national resilience, reframed as expressions of strength rather than loss. Through this process, traumatic experiences are commemorated, but at the same time are also adopted to cultivate a sense of shared collectivity as a strength. However, unlike the trauma in the Western context often medicalized, trauma in Pakistan is largely reframed through narratives of patriotism, morality, and religion (Wazir, Badshah et al. 2023).

Johan Galtung's (1990) theory of structural violence & Ungar (2018) scholarship suggest that long-term exposure to conflict and violence does not always result in breakdown. Conflict habituation refers to the psychological and behavioral adaptation to long-term violence. Galtung (1990) emphasized that structural violence and chronic instability shape not just social institutions but emotional expectations. In tandem, Ungar (2018) proposed a cultural ecology of resilience, where individuals and communities adapt to risk environments through available social, spiritual, and symbolic resources. Empirical research supports this view: in Afghanistan, Ray (2017) found that civilians described bombings and shootings as routine, adjusting family schedules and work habits around conflict zones.

Instead, societies often develop adaptive mechanisms emotional numbing, fatalism, cultural pride, and humor, as strategies of survival. These mechanisms are visible in conflict zones like Uganda (Atim, Mazurana et al. 2018), where children normalize cyclical violence, and Colombia (Paul, 2012), where civilians operate within "continuous traumatic stress." In Pakistan, humor, memes, and fatalistic responses to missile attacks (such as the public reaction to the May 7, 2025, incident indicate a pattern of everyday coping through normalization, not collapse

This concept encapsulates how, through state narratives, media programming, school curricula, and religious fundamentals, war not only becomes commemorated it is also normalized and

legitimized. Bar-Tal (2011) and Berinsky (2007) demonstrate how states affected by protracted conflict often institutionalize ideological control via political socialization. Educational systems, media, religious narratives, and state-controlled symbols can convert survival ideologies into national identity. The result is a cohort of citizens for whom the language of martyrdom, nationalism, and militarized pride forms a core community identity and engenders emotional templates for how to react to conflict. In the case of Pakistan; this is evidenced in the exaltation of martyrdom, military sacrifice, and collective resilience. Azim and Usman Shakir (2023) Cite how school textbooks, national days, and television media all present conflict as a test of national integrity and discourage overt expressions of trauma or vulnerability (Alam, Ullah et al. 2023). State and media-backed nationalism and narratives of resilience portray every missile or bombing as a test of strength, unity, reinforcing stoic nationalism, and suppressing vulnerability. This suggests that normalization is not passive, but engineered through ideological repetition.

Despite an abundance of policy-oriented and clinical literature on conflict in Pakistan, there remains a significant gap in comparative, interdisciplinary studies that theorize the Pakistani experience alongside other conflict-affected societies. This paper addresses that gap by conducting a thematic, literature-based analysis of civilian normalization of violence in Pakistan, situating it within a broader global context. Moreover, Pakistan is rarely included in comparative studies of conflict psychology that integrate theoretical, cultural, and political dimensions. This study addresses that gap by offering a comparative thematic synthesis of civilian responses to conflict in Pakistan, Colombia, Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria, and Uganda.

This paper aims to critically analyze how Pakistani civilians have normalized violence and conflict and how this normalization intersects with state narratives, media framing, and cultural memory. Through comparative thematic analysis of global literature, the paper presents Pakistan as a hybrid model of apparent resilience and concealed trauma where stoicism is not a natural disposition, but a strategic, historical, and discursive adaptation. By analyzing thematic patterns across multiple conflict zones (e.g., Colombia, Afghanistan), it

positions Pakistan as a hybrid case, externally resilient, internally fractured, shaped by state narratives, cultural memory, and collective trauma.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, thematic, and literature-based approach to examine how civilians normalize violence in conflict-affected societies, with a primary focus on Pakistan.

Criteria for Inclusion of Data Source

The present study explored patterns of collective resilience, trauma, and adaptation among Pakistani civilians living under protracted conflict, drawing on 45 secondary sources. Inclusion comprised: (a) sources published between 2005 and 2024; (b) sources addressing the psychosocial or political responses of the civilian population in Pakistan or similar conflict-affected societies like Colombia, Palestine, Afghanistan, and Syria; and (c) texts originating from peer-reviewed journals. Sources that lacked a civilian perspective or exhibited overt political bias were excluded.

Justification for Thematic Analysis of Secondary Data

Thematic analysis is most commonly applied to the analysis of primary qualitative data, such as interviews or focus groups, but, as Braun & Clarke (2006) noted, it has been put to good use as well in secondary data research and document synthesis. Realistically, such constraints are ethical, logistical, or security-based, by which ability is influenced in collecting data in conflict zones. Thematic analysis of pre-existing, high-relevance public and scholarly materials provided a practical and conceptually robust alternative. This approach enabled cross-case comparisons and deeper conceptual development in the absence of primary ethnographic access.

Coding Process and Thematic Development

Thematic analysis followed Clarke and Braun's six-phase framework. First, all selected documents were read closely for familiarization and annotated for recurring patterns of meaning. Second, two independent reviewers conducted line-by-line coding using an inductive, data-driven approach. Codes such as 'grief suppression', 'emotional habituation', and 'normalization of violence' emerged organically. In the third stage, the extracted codes were clustered into possible themes and audited for coherence across documents and regions. Next, the themes were fine-tuned and

named on the basis of their analytic salience. The final themes included Normalization of Violence, Coping Mechanisms, Emotional Disengagement, State and Media Framing, Trauma Silencing, and Post-War Identity.

Table 1. The stages of thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework.

Phase	Description
Familiarization	Each source was read and annotated manually. Recurring discursive patterns were highlighted.
Initial Coding	Two independent reviewers generated initial codes (e.g., "grief silencing", "resistance reframing"). Codes were data-driven and inductive.
Searching for Themes	Similar codes were grouped into potential themes (e.g., "Emotional Disengagement", "Normalization of Violence").
Reviewing Themes	Themes were reviewed against the source context and refined. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus.
Defining and Naming Themes	Final themes were defined with operational descriptions. Overlaps were minimized through sub-theming.
Producing the Report	Themes were mapped to the core research question and structured across the Results section.

Visual Mapping of Themes across Sources

To further improve transparency, a matrix was constructed mapping thematic occurrences across select cases. It was then possible to visualize how these emergent themes were transnationally applicable and diverging. A sample matrix is below.

Table 2. Emergence of thematic patterns across sources. ✓= Theme present; — = Not observed.

Source	Country	NV	CM	ED	SMF	TS	PWI
This study 2025	Pakistan	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Nguyen‑Gillham, Giacaman et al. 2008	Palestine	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Ray 2017	Afghanist-an	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Charles 2022	Colombia	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Wedeen 2013	Syria	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Atim, Mazurana et al. 2018	Uganda	✓	✓	✓	✓		-

Table 2 provides a cross-case analysis of six key themes across six conflict-affected regions, including Pakistan. Normalization of Violence (NV) is the most consistent theme, found in all cases, highlighting how repeated exposure to violence leads to psychological adaptation. Coping Mechanisms (CM) appear in five cases, showing that prolonged conflict fosters culturally rooted survival strategies like humor, religion, and rituals. Emotional Disengagement (ED) is noted in four cases but is absent in Pakistan and Colombia, possibly reflecting cultural differences in processing trauma. State and Media Framing (SMF) is prominent in Pakistan, Palestine, and Colombia, suggesting varied narrative control across contexts. Trauma Silencing (TS), seen in four cases, points to how societal norms and governance may suppress expressions of grief. Post-War Identity (PWI) emerges in only three cases (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria), indicating that ongoing conflict may hinder the development of a collective post-conflict identity.

Ethical Considerations

This study involves no human subjects and is based solely on publicly accessible data. However, care was taken to interpret trauma-related behaviors respectfully and to avoid reductive judgments about communities living in conflict zones. Cultural context and historical nuance were prioritized in all interpretive work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Normalization of Violence

Over the last few decades, Pakistani civilians have experienced repeated cycles of conflict, from the Indo-Pak wars (1965, 1971, 1998, 2019, and 2025) to the internal security to internal security interventions that ensued during the War on Terror, urban bombings, sectarian killings, cross-border firing, military operations, and US drone strikes. In this environment of continuous exposure to violence, a deep and palpable effect has taken root in the everyday consciousness of its people. A pervasive routine desensitization has marked the civilian psyche, and violence has been normalized through continuous exposure and state narratives of existential threat. Bombings, drone strikes, enforced disappearances, and targeted killings have moved from being extraordinary crises to banalities of daily life (Bilal 2024, Khoso and Shah 2025).

Moreover, public reactions to the missile strikes on May 7, 2025, for instance, were marked not by mass hysteria but by visible calm; moreover, some citizens reportedly attempted to shoot down drones and were chanting in the streets, all indicative behavior that is unclear, not panic but adaptive habituation. Such no-panic behavior has been codified in other conflict areas, and it is more pronounced in Pakistan because the civilians often resume work within a few hours of the post-attack. As Mueller-Hirth (2023) points out, this emotional flattening does not mean the absence of fear but rather a psychological mechanism for emotional protection that allows individuals to thrive in the face of chronic threat.
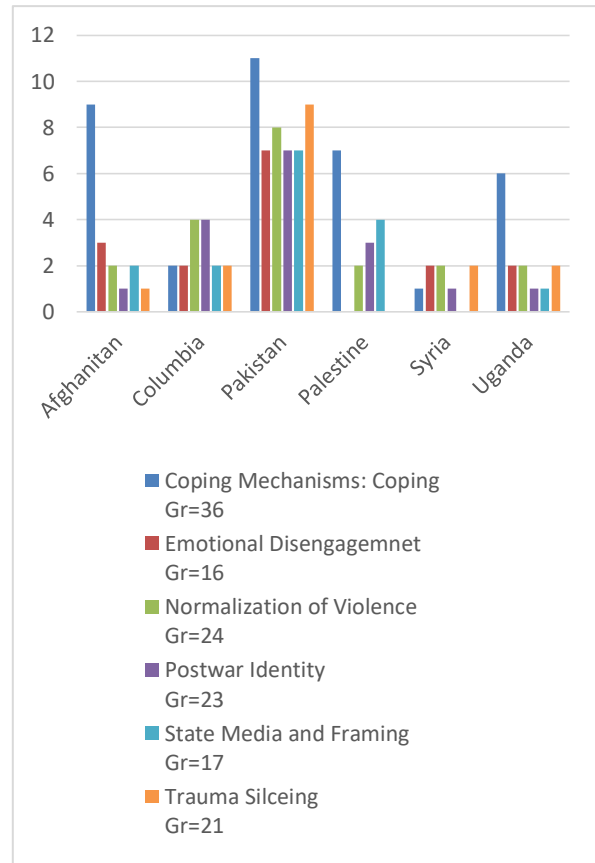

Figure 1. Comparative analysis of themes across conflict zones

Researchers, including Mueller-Hirth (2023) and Riaz (2021), mention how the normality of structural violence and direct violence in Pakistan, while remaining unspoken, is always present, entrenched in shared memory and daily life. Furthermore, while not indicative of healing, the normalization of trauma constitutes continual psychological conditioning resulting from political instability and a lack of collective institutional trauma healing. Civilian concerns are embedded via media, and education, particularly textbooks, amongst other things, that convolute militarized nationalism with enemy threat narrative (Jan, Xie et al. 2022).

This thematic insight is also mirrored in other conflict zones. For instance, Colombia's border communities or Afghanistan's rural zones exhibit similar coping mechanisms and emotional numbing, reinforcing the idea of continuous traumatic stress as a framework rather than episodic PTSD (Ray, 2017, Charles 2022). However, what sets Pakistan apart is the absence of open trauma discourse and a national identity that glorifies resilience while suppressing vulnerability. This thematic insight is

also mirrored in other conflict zones, Colombia (Paul, 2012) has border communities, Afghanistan rural areas (Ray, 2017), Palestine (Nguyen-Gillham, Giacaman et al. 2008), and Lebanon during the civil war (Hermez, 2012), which carry a commonality for the normalization of violence as well.

Coping Mechanisms

The civilian populace in Pakistan, through chronic exposure to conflict, political instability, and terrorism, has developed culturally embedded coping mechanisms that incorporate humour, religious framing, digital forms of expression (i.e., memes), and collective practices. These coping mechanisms are not simply escapism, but represent culturally adaptive psychological mechanisms to help people deal with situations of ruinous uncertainty and violence.

Research studies call attention to the collective crises that are occurring, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with shifting geopolitical tensions, during which expressions of Pakistani humour on social media, types of meme cycles, jokes, and satire (Khan, 2019) emerged as mechanisms for working through feelings of fear, helplessness, and health-related threats. Recently, amid rising threats of an Indian military strike, the citizens didn't just sit back and panic. Instead, they took to social media, armed with wit and humour to create memes that turned fear into laughter (Kayyaz, 2025), emojis, memes, and gifs are significant found in between joke circles during crises in that they result in emotional self-regulation and social bonding, and often entail turning anxiety into irony and trauma into shared laughter (Alkaraki, Alias et al. 2024).

Social media gave rise to things like Facebook or WhatsApp group chats as digital 'majlis', where users found some kind of sliver of shared complexity as a communal space to engage in catharsis, as well as cultural commentary. Religion also offers a spiritual buffer. Fatalistic narratives like Jo Allah ki marzi (Whatever Allah wills) are not necessarily an insistence, but a culturally negotiated way for people to express control when they believe they may not have control. Kurze (2020) argues that phenomenological frameworks in countries like Pakistan help people reinterpret suffering as not simply troublesome, but sacred endurance instead, which aids in individual dignity, as well as collective solidarity.

Furthermore, community practices such as collective prayers, mourning and funeral visits, and neighborhood clean-ups after blasts all create spaces for bonding culminating in shared experiences outside of the term trauma as a disorder. This is where communities create functional resilience, or the ability to move on but without actually healing or collapsing. This pattern is repeated in other contexts of conflict. For instance, Silvestri (2018) describes how memes and humour were also ways of resisting and creating identity in Afghanistan and Nigeria. The transnational practice and use of humour thus becomes more than a means of coping and, instead, is symbolic resistance and soft defiance to helplessness.

Coping mechanisms in conflict-affected populations are deeply influenced by cultural values, communal structures, and belief systems. Across various cultural contexts ranging from civilians in Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan, Tibetan refugees, and Palestinian people utilized faith, family connectedness, a sense of agency, social support, and community practices to cope with ongoing trauma (Ebadi, Ahmadi et al. 2009, Eggerman and Panter-Brick 2010, Badri, Van den Borne et al. 2013). While religious coping approaches have been more frequently indicated as protective (Sousa, 2013; Zeb, Khattak et al., 2023), other strategies such as escape-avoidance or denial have shown mixed associations with mental health outcomes (Hussain & Bhushan, 2011). Coping is not merely an individual act of survival but often a shared, adaptive, and culturally situated response to violence and instability. However, Pakistan consists of an absence of open discourse surrounding trauma, not to mention a national identity that prides itself on resiliency in the face of vulnerability and hesitation (Jan, Xie et al. 2022).

Emotional Disengagement

A dominant civilian survival strategy in Pakistan's protracted conflict environment is emotional disengagement. Rather than showing visible fear, grief, and pain, society exhibits stoicism, emotional flatness, and apathy in response to conflict, violent events, and behaviors that are neither accidental nor pathological. Such responses indicate a collective emotional numbing protective adaptation that finds its roots in chronic uncertainty and the state's implicit demand for psychological control. Another reason in the context of Pakistan is

that people feel that even if they say something, nothing is going to happen or change. Collective flattening wherein emotions are deliberately regulated to maintain societal coherence amidst conflict (Mueller-Hirth, 2023).

Under such situations, reactions such as silence in times of conflict have now gained currency. Responding to trauma by avoiding news shows the process of disengagement rather than mere indifference. In regions damaged by trauma and conflict, like Afghanistan and Colombia, particularly among youth, performative indifference and irony on social media have become clear and evident (Charles, 2022; Ray, 2017). People from Palestine have also displayed this behavior. Active coping mechanisms involve denial or distraction, such as listening to music, surfing the Web, or scrolling through social media apps like Instagram and YouTube in some ways, helps get the mind off things (Albala & Shapira, 2024)

State and Media Framing

In Pakistan, collective trauma has less to do with psychological healing and more to do with creating narratives, as it is tried to convey through state-led messaging and militarized language from the media. Rather than encouraging the therapeutic engagement, the state, facilitated by the military run Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), created narratives of heroism, sacrifice, and unity in the wake of the May 7, 2025, missile strikes. Within just three days of the attack, ISPR released four jingoistic songs containing messages about the divine mission to secure the nation's resolve and ideas of unity against perceived threats.

This was obviously in a bid to instill collective emotional cohesion, but also in a bid to restore national resolve to overcome the shock of the missile attacks. This example closely mirrors the state's behavior in mobilizing collective narratives of a united national response after the attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014, which involved a series of poetry readings, musical tributes, and government-mandated mourning ceremonies, to create national consensus toward a securitized, no-compromise approach to terrorism.

Moe and Müller (2015) call this phenomenon "militarized resilience framing," where trauma is not openly processed but repackaged into representations of national pride. Militarized

resilience framing suppresses mourning and dissent as it presents loyalty as performative rather than psychological. While newspapers in the mainstream media are frequently influenced by the oversight of military censorship and editorial filtering, newspapers present war and its impact on society in a highly curated and ideologically consumable format (Agha & Demeter, 2023).

Simultaneously, the rise of national security surveillance and censorship has limited open, public, critical discussions around extremism, governance, and human rights, even as they sporadically emerge in new digital forums and activist spaces. Our comparative cases were Afghan Hazara activists demonstrating their capacity to also curate media poetry in the form of slogans, video clips, etc., with the intent to visually protest and emotionally shape the collective trauma (Kerr Chiovenda, 2016).

Moreover, extensive global literature documents how state-controlled media in authoritarian regimes effectively mold public opinion and behavior by leveraging ideological bias, censorship, and ownership (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014; Adena, Enikolopov et al. 2015, Szostek, 2017). Media houses' prejudices and stereotypes play a vital role in shaping foreign countries' image in the U.S. media (Saleem, 2007). In this sense, Pakistan's media landscape functions not just as a channel for information but as a strategic tool of national emotional management, repurposing trauma into narratives of resilience, unity, and strength. Media affect attitudes of the citizens, reinforce feelings of threat, and political elites advocate a dominant set of policies; the public is apt to support those policies (Gadarian, 2010). The perceptions of threat lead people to support policies that they believe will neutralize the source of threat and protect them (Gordon & Arian, 2001).

Trauma Silencing

Despite years of violence, there is no widespread discourse on trauma in Pakistan. Media silence and cultural taboos, along with self-censorship, have created a situation wherein trauma is suffered in silence instead of being communally processed. These narratives of victims are either turned into tales of martyrdom or erased altogether. As the authors Jafree, Nadir et al. (2023) noted, symptoms of PTSD in very much affected

communities, like the Hazara, have been underreported and under-treated, due to both social stigmas and the framing of the state.

Due to a lack of emotional vocabulary in either state institutions or newsrooms, trauma becomes what Wedeen (2013) calls enforced forgetting, a political silencing of pain. Thus, violence is intimately known to an individual, but they learn not to speak of it. This silence is not absence or annihilation, but suppression, a consequence of decades of conflict without reconciliation. Particularly under militarized or censored governments, in conflict-affected societies, trauma is frequently met not with honest communication but with silencing, avoidance, and self-censorship, a phenomenon well-known in media, psychology, and sociopolitical investigations.

Shah, Cvetkovic et al. (2024) reveal that journalists in Pakistan endure great psychological stress yet avoid reporting traumatic events out of fear of institutional retribution and online harassment, therefore causing occupational disengagement and personal numbness. Similarly, Cypriot reporters in split areas restrict emotional expression and engage in cognitive disengagement to maintain mental stability (Yontucu & Ersoy, 2025).

Emotional disengagement and avoidance coping are also common in conflict areas such as Colombia and Mexico, where trauma exposure leads to a tactical retreat from truth-telling and public critique (Barrios & Miller, 2021). Nets-Zehngut & Elbaz (2017) build on this by presenting self-censorship in post-war countries like Turkey and Spain as a socio-psychological norm, culturally reinforced through silence around politically sensitive memories.

Trauma is frequently reframed using nationalistic or martyrism perspectives, even when it is recognized, as a way to manage public emotion and memory (Bhat, 2024; Park & Lee, 2024). Taken together, these studies show that trauma in conflict areas reflects a defensive but ultimately limiting psychosocial environment since it is actively suppressed, privatized, or transformed via cultural silencing and emotional withdrawal.

Post-War Identity

The culmination of disengagement, narrative control, and silencing is the creation of a post-war identity rooted in stoic nationalism. Rather than a therapeutic national memory, Pakistan promotes a mythology of unbreakable strength, framing its people as naturally resilient, divinely chosen, and constantly under siege. This narrative reinforces both external aggression and internal suppression. Pakistan's postwar identity is complicated, wrapped in many factors from psychological trauma to resilience to militarization of politics and different institutions, and extreme media censorship.

A core element of Pakistan's post-war identity is the military's deep integration into civilian life, from economic control to media influence. Military courts, checkpoints, and operations have become normalized (Javed, Shafiq et al. 2025), while the Supreme Court's endorsement of civilian trials in military courts (Iqbak, 2025) signals weakened judicial independence.

Anti-terror laws are frequently used to suppress dissent (Khan, 2019), reinforcing authoritarian governance over participatory politics. Legal tools are routinely used to silence opposition. Peaceful protests are curtailed, and dissent is equated with disloyalty or terrorism, contributing to a collective identity centered on obedience and national security rather than democratic engagement. State and military influence over media has grown, muting critical voices through censorship, bans, and regulatory pressure. PEMRA's labeling of dissent as "hate speech" led to blackouts on figures like Imran Khan (Mir, 2023), while journalists were taken off air for challenging narratives. Even platforms like Twitter (X) were banned during security crises. This reflects a militarized resilience framing where trauma is rebranded as patriotic strength.

This resilience-centric identity is not unique to Pakistan. Comparative studies reveal similar dynamics in conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Colombia. Ray (2017) highlights how in Afghanistan, identity is sustained through religious endurance, while Charles (2022) shows how Colombian civil society absorbed trauma into a discourse of resistance. In Pakistan, this takes a distinct militarized form. Instead of commemorating suffering through reconciliation, the public is taught to valorize trauma through patriotic songs, poetry, and martyrdom narratives, often disseminated by the military's media arm (ISPR). National holidays, textbooks, and state-controlled programming

celebrate conflict as a crucible of identity formation (Alam, Ullah et al. 2023).

CONCLUSION

This research explored the shared psychological and sociocultural reactions of Pakistani civilians to prolonged exposure to war, terrorism, and domestic strife, via an examination of five central themes: normalization of violence, coping, emotional disengagement, state and media framing, and post-war identity formation. The behavior of civilians in Pakistan is characterized by a cycle of habitual routine, where missile attacks, drone sightings, and frequent waves of terrorism infrequently trigger panic, but rather trigger cognate, emotionally dampened reactions.

This desensitization has not taken place in a vacuum; it has been nurtured over decades by state-coordinated histories of patriotism, martyrdom, and national resilience, transmitted through songs, media efforts, and regulated dissemination of information. Humor, religion, and shared rituals are culturally based coping strategies that enable psychological coherence in the face of ongoing insecurity. However, unlike post-conflict countries that practise reconciliation or memory work, Pakistan's stoic nationalism is characterized by adaptive silence, where healing becomes sublimated as survival, and grief is refigured as symbolic strength and sacrifice. As Vigh (2008) notes, violence that is recurring can become endemic and part of the fabric of everyday normality. For most Pakistanis, particularly in the areas regions repeatedly targeted by drones or terrorized by militancy, violence has not just molded memory but also shaped behavior, becoming integral to emotional expectation and civic identity.

The profound psychological transformation of Pakistani society cannot be explained solely through strategic or military analysis. Almost 70% of Pakistanis have been affected by some kind of violence and terrorism, and in certain communities, like in KPK and Baluchistan, the most affected regions, mourning is not recalled; it is lived. Trauma here is personal and architectural, transmitted over generations in the form of stories, silence, and normalization of fear.

The national identity of Pakistan has not been shaped merely by Partition and postcolonial formation, but also by its consistent geopolitical location as a security state. The long-standing perception of external threat, initially from India, then from the War on Terror, has created a siege nationalism, in which endurance is valorized, dissent is marginalized, and resilience is scripted into patriotic allegiance.

According to Bar-Tal (2011) and Berinsky (2007), war creates indoctrinated narratives that codify not just who suffers, but how suffering can be explained. Comparative understanding of Afghanistan (Ray, 2017), Colombia (Charles, 2022), Uganda (Atim, Mazurana et al. 2018), Palestine Nguyen‑Gillham, Giacaman et al. 2008), and Syria (Wedeen, 2013) confirms the insight that normalized violence is culturally particular but universally adaptable behavior. While Colombia constitutes trauma in terms of journalistic memory, and Afghanistan in terms of patriarchal endurance, in each society, there evolves the means to coexist with unhealed trauma and fear.

In Pakistan, during the Indian military strikes fiasco, civilians shooting down at drones or calmly mobilizing after airstrikes reflects not apathy but a collectively enforced emotional economy, a model of survival honed through historic suffering and state-crafted resilience. Therefore, this study concludes that Pakistan represents a hybrid trauma-resilience model: outwardly stable, inwardly fragmented; publicly stoic, privately grieving. It challenges linear models of post-conflict recovery and encourages scholars to see the coexistence of repressed trauma and performative resilience as a valid civic condition. In these settings, silence is not vacuity; it is a tactic. And survival is not merely endurance; it is a practiced national performance.

While this study offers a rich thematic and comparative framework, it is limited in several ways. The analysis relies solely on published literature and secondary data, without primary interviews or ethnographic observation from affected communities. The case of May 7, 2025, is used symbolically to highlight public reaction, but it may not represent the full breadth of psychological variation across time and regions.

To deepen the insights initiated by this study, future research could: Interviews, surveys, or fieldwork involving civilians, media practitioners, and trauma counselors can validate and expand the theoretical codes explored here. Future research may examine how trauma and resilience narratives

are passed on across generations, especially in collective rituals in the Pakistani context.

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