An Evidence-Based Framework for Counterterrorism Police Training in Pakistan: Diagnosing and Designing

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Abstract

Pakistan's internal security landscape increasingly relies on a police-led counterterrorism (CT) approach, yet the corresponding training ecosystem remains fragmented and inconsistently applied across different ranks. This article assesses the contemporary condition of CT training within Pakistan's police, proposing an evidence-based framework to systematize essential competencies. Methodologically, it conducts a structured document analysis of national and provincial policies, training syllabi, program materials, and incident datasets (2010–2024), complemented by a single-case study of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Punjab. A hybrid inductive-deductive coding scheme was applied to these sources, with triangulation used to pinpoint strengths, deficits, and potential design levers. The findings highlight islands of capability, such as specialist CTDs, forensic linkages, and targeted courses that coexist with systemic flaws: a limited reach beyond elite units, inconsistent curricula and assessment, insufficient emphasis on rights-based community engagement, and weak monitoring and evaluation. In response, the study proposes a practical framework featuring a three-tier national CT curriculum connected to promotion gates and refreshers; a trainer-of-trainers registry with recertification; mandated scenario-based drills and after-action reviews; and a national dashboard to track coverage, quality, and operational proxies. This transition from diagnosis to design outlines a scalable path for mainstreaming CT competence, while simultaneously strengthening legality, accountability, and public trust.

Keywords: counterterrorism, training, police, curriculum; Pakistan

Introduction

For over two decades, recurring cycles of terrorist and extremist violence have profoundly shaped Pakistan's internal security, placing sustained pressure on national institutions, disrupting public life, and challenging the rule of law. As the state's primary domestic line of defense, the police are tasked with generating intelligence, preventing and responding to attacks, and constructing judicial solid cases. However, this threat

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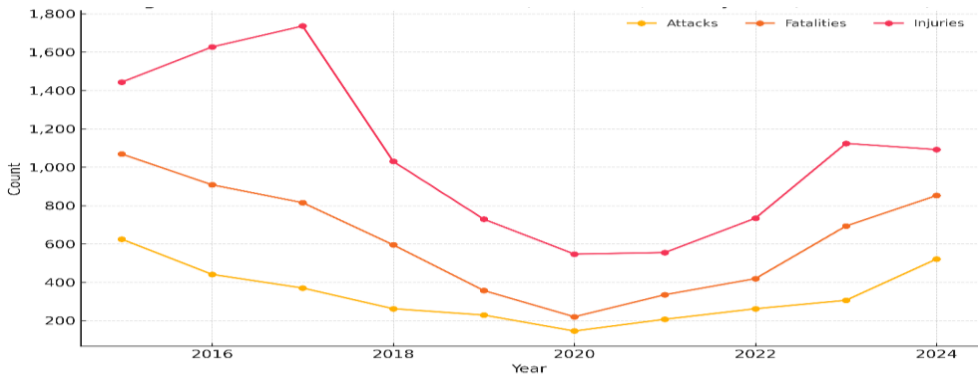Email: naeemullah@northern.edu.pk

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landscape is dynamic. Following a period of decline in the late 2010s, key national security indicators began to trend upward again by the mid-2020s, as incident rates, fatalities, and injuries rose concurrently. Figure 1, depicting national trends from 2015–2024, reflects this empirical reality and provides the foundational impetus for our study.

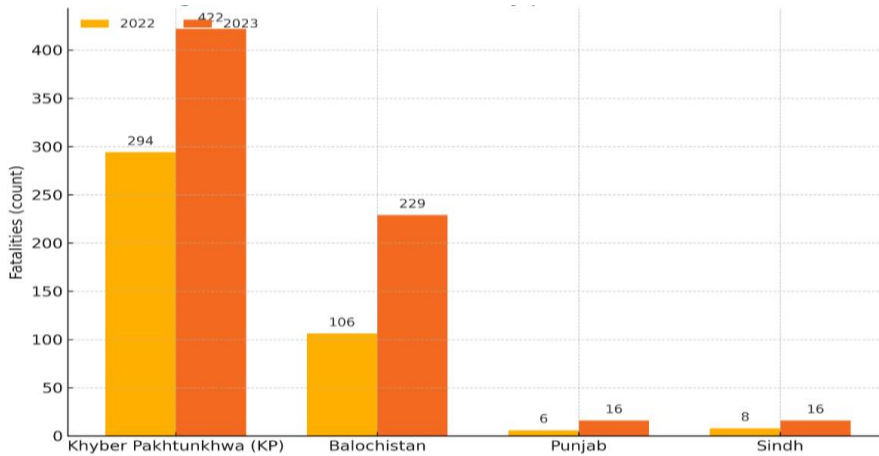**Figure 1:** *Pakistan: Terrorist Attacks, Fatalities, and Injuries (2015–2024)*

Source: Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, Pakistan Security Report 2015-2024

Beneath these national trends lie significant regional disparities. The distribution of violence is highly uneven, with provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan shouldering a disproportionately heavy share of high-impact events compared to Punjab and Sindh. Providing a provincial-level perspective, Figure 2 supplements the national data by combining a choropleth map illustrating fatality shares with a bar chart comparing counts from 2022 -2023. For police forces, this geographic imbalance creates a parallel inconsistency in training requirements: the essential skills for an officer in one district, such as IED response, mountain operations, or convoy security, can differ markedly from those needed in another, like urban crowd management or building forensic cases. Consequently, any approach dependent on sporadic workshops or donor-driven initiatives will likely perpetuate these geographic disparities instead of resolving them.

Policy evolution has occurred, yet it remains an incomplete journey toward full institutionalization. The 2015 National Action Plan (NAP) played a pivotal role by clarifying institutional mandates and spurring the development of provincial Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), alongside investments in forensic capabilities and an assortment of specialized courses. Figure 3 chronologically maps these policy and institutional milestones from 2015 to 2024. Notwithstanding these advances, CT training for the broader police force continues to be fragmented and reactive. High-quality instruction is predominantly confined to specialist units; foundational and in-service curricula vary significantly across training colleges; scenario-based assessments lack standardization; and cycles for refresher training are irregular. Furthermore, critical "soft" skills, which underpin public cooperation and include the lawful use of force, procedural

justice, victim and witness support, and crisis communication, have not been systematically integrated into training for all ranks. In essence, the central design challenge is not Pakistan's engagement in counterterrorism training, but rather its capacity to institutionalize CT competence as a universal, career-long standard.

Figure 2: *Terrorism Fatalities by Province 2022 vs 2023*

Source: PIPS's Pakistan Security Report 2022 vs *2023*

This study tackles this design challenge by pursuing three central questions: (1) What specific strengths and deficits define the current landscape of CT training within Pakistan's police, from recruitment through to senior command? (2) To what extent do these existing patterns correspond with international good practices concerning curriculum depth, trainer sustainability, scenario-based learning, and monitoring and evaluation? (3) Which specific policy and organizational mechanisms are necessary to embed CT competencies at scale, effectively linking accredited curricula to promotion criteria, regular refresher courses, and measurable outcomes? In exploring these questions, the research also engages with two key scholarly discussions: the balance between militarized tactical approaches and police legitimacy in a democracy, and the institutional conditions that enable training to cultivate durable organizational capability instead of transient, cohort-specific effects.

This study's approach is twofold, blending a rigorous review of key documents with a deep dive into a single telling case. We systematically interrogated national and provincial policies, police training syllabi, program records, and incident data from 2010–2024. Alongside this broad analysis, we focused intensively on the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Punjab, treating it as a heuristic model of what institutionalization can achieve. As a "most-likely" scenario, it helps uncover practical mechanisms, think promotion-linked certification, scenario drills, and police-prosecution coordination that might be adapted for other settings, even if Punjab's particular resources cannot be wholly

replicated. To sort and analyze the evidence, we applied a hybrid inductive-deductive coding scheme centered on core training components, from needs assessment to rights-based practice. We also cross-checked findings across different source types to guard against single-source bias. A full detailing of these methodological steps is provided in the section that follows.

Substantively, the contribution is fourfold. (i) Empirically, it consolidates dispersed evidence into a diagnostic map of where CT competence is strong (e.g., specialist CTDs, forensic interfaces) and where it is thin (frontline reach, refreshers, rights-centred practice). (ii) Analytically, it links that map to design principles from comparative experience, specifying how certification, incentives, and regular drills can convert training inputs into operational readiness. (iii) Practically, it advances a sequenced framework, a three-tier national CT curriculum; a trainer-of-trainers registry with recertification; mandated scenario-based exercises and after-action learning; and a national dashboard that tracks coverage, quality, readiness, and operational proxies. (iv) Normatively, it argues that legitimacy-enhancing practice is not a luxury but a CT multiplier that improves intelligence flow and case outcomes. To maintain conceptual clarity, a compact crosswalk of CT functions versus training coverage is presented in the Findings section, while Figures 1–3 remain here as minimal scene-setting.

The remainder proceeds as follows. The Literature Review first positions Pakistan's context within global counterterrorism (CT) training paradigms, framing the identified design gap around five critical themes: institutionalization and governance; curriculum depth and assessment; trainer sustainability; scenario-based learning; and rights/legitimacy. The Methodology section subsequently elaborates on the sources consulted, the inclusion criteria applied, the coding strategies employed, and the study's inherent limitations. The Findings section then synthesizes the identified strengths and systemic deficits, using CTD Punjab as an illustrative case to examine issues of sustainability, rights, and political-economy constraints. Building on this diagnosis, the Recommendations section puts forward an implementable national framework, complete with time-bound milestones and measurable indicators. The Conclusion draws implications for police effectiveness and public trust.

Review fo the Literature
1. Overview and Gap

Global and Pakistani sources converge on a central problem: counterterrorism competence in Pakistan's police is not yet institutionalized across the career ladder. Training is present, but fragmented, reactive, and uneven by province and rank. This review therefore organizes prior work around *design themes* that determine whether training translates into durable organizational capability: (i) institutionalization and governance; (ii) curriculum depth and assessment; (iii) trainer sustainability and incentives; (iv) scenario-based learning and after-action learning; (v) rights, legitimacy, and community engagement; and (vi) political-economy constraints and measurement. Framing the literature in this way brings the absence of a national, career-spanning CT

training framework to the foreground and sets up the article's contribution: a sequenced design for standards, accreditation, incentives, and monitoring.

2. Institutionalization and governance: progress without a settled standard

The 2014–2015 policy window, National Internal Security Policy and the 20-point National Action Plan, accelerated the creation and upgrading of provincial Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs) and seeded specialized training tracks. Subsequent projects widened the menu of courses (e.g., forensic evidence, police–prosecution cooperation, electronic evidence), and some provincial academies added CT-relevant strands to basic and mid-career curricula. Yet governance remains decentralized and project-driven: there is no binding national CT training standard with common learning outcomes, accreditation of providers/instructors, or uniform assessment rubrics. As a result, the same rank can face very different expectations across provinces, and training often follows donor cycles or crises rather than a planned national cadence. In short, the system has centers of excellence but no nationwide floor.

Implication: A national authority (e.g., under NACTA/Interior) must set and steward minimum standards, while allowing provincial adaptation to threat profiles (urban vs. rural, coastal vs. border). This review treats such standard-setting as the prime mover for all other design elements.

4. Curriculum Depth and Assessment: Breadth vs Depth

Across institutions, CT content exists but lacks depth, tiering, and consistent assessment. Recruit courses may include "Counter Terrorism," "Security & Intelligence," and crime-scene basics; mid-career offerings include short workshops on investigations, digital evidence, and inter-agency coordination; senior courses include policy/legal strands. However, these elements are often non-credit, short-duration (3–5 days), and heterogeneous in content and evaluation. Without explicit learning outcomes, practical examinations, and refresh cycles, retention and transfer to the field are uncertain. International programs operating in Pakistan (e.g., UNODC/PFSA practicums; INTERPOL skills packages; ATA cohorts) demonstrate good practice at the course level, but the absence of a national, tiered curriculum means gains remain cohort-bound rather than systemic.

Implication: A three-tier national CT curriculum (basic–intermediate–advanced) with assessed competencies and credit hours should be linked to promotion gates and recertification windows, ensuring continuity from induction to leadership.

4. Trainer Sustainability and Incentives: Building without Foundation

While numerous projects have successfully created master trainers across provinces and police academies have initiated training cascades, these efforts rest on unstable ground. The system currently operates without a national trainer registry, lacks any routine process for recertification, and fails to track how master trainers propagate skills across the force over time. Frequent turnover and rotational postings further weaken this fragile structure by disrupting continuity. Compounding these issues, the career incentives for officers to obtain and maintain CT credentials, whether through promotion points, allowances, or formal specializations, remain fragmentary and inconsistent. This

predictable environment leads to the steady erosion of skills and fosters a recurrent dependence on new donor initiatives to replenish capabilities.

Implication: The solution requires establishing foundational structures: a national Trainer-of-Trainers registry organized by province and skill set, a mandatory three-year recertification cycle, and reporting on cascade effectiveness. Parallel, human resources policies must be calibrated so that career advancement and strategic postings formally recognize and reward certified CT competence and contributions in training roles.

5. Scenario-Based Practice and after-action Learning: Isolated Excellence

Training that incorporates practical application, whether forensic evidence handling at PFSA, joint police-prosecution exercises, or field drills, consistently produces officers who demonstrate superior decision-making under stress and commit fewer procedural errors. Despite these clear benefits, mandated drills and structured after-action reviews (AARs) have not become standardized practice across different districts or rank levels. Current promotion courses similarly show limited inclusion of complex investigative or command scenarios. This absence of regular, realistic practice creates a critical disconnect, preventing police organizations from effectively converting theoretical knowledge into reliable operational readiness.

Implication: Institutionalize quarterly tabletop exercises and annual multi-agency field drills, supported by standardized AAR protocols that directly link identified performance gaps to targeted remedial training.

6. Rights, Legitimacy, and Community Engagement: Operational Necessities

International evidence consistently demonstrates that police legitimacy and rights-respecting practices significantly enhance public cooperation, crucial foundation for intelligence gathering, witness participation, and maintaining public trust after critical incidents. While Pakistan's training system includes human rights components at senior levels, their integration into frontline training remains inconsistent and rarely assessed. Persistent accountability concerns, documented by scholars and civil society, further underscore the urgent need to embed lawful use of force, victim/witness support, and crisis communication as fundamental CT competencies rather than optional additions.

Implication: Mandate rights and legitimacy training across all ranks while implementing systematic tracking of complaint data and lawful force indicators alongside technical performance metrics, ensuring operational effectiveness does not compromise public trust.

7. Political-Economy and Geography: Designing for Risk and Capacity

Threat and capacity are unevenly distributed. Provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan face a denser mix of high-risk events; Punjab and Sindh have larger police systems and, in Punjab's case, stronger forensic linkages. Figure 4 in this article (Punjab's population share ≈53% vs. ≈2.8% share of 2022 terrorism fatalities) illustrates that outcomes can diverge markedly from population weight, but correlation is not causation: policing density, geography, targeting choices by armed groups, and socio-economic factors confound attribution. The literature suggests that standardization must therefore be combined with provincial tailoring, e.g., mountain/rural operations and

convoy security in high-risk border districts versus urban crowd management and digital-forensics case-building in metropolitan areas. Funding asymmetries, frequent postings, and donor dependence are recurring constraints that any national framework must anticipate.

Implication: Pair national standards with context-specific tracks and an equalization mechanism (earmarked grants, pooled trainers, cross-provincial exchanges) to close provincial readiness gaps.

8. Balancing the CTD Punjab Model: What Travels, What Needs Safeguard

CTD Punjab is frequently cited as a comparatively institutionalized case: integrated intelligence–investigation workflows, links to PFSA, specialist tactical training, and routine cooperation with prosecutors. Public trend data suggest Punjab's security environment stabilized earlier than other provinces, lending plausibility to capability effects. But the model is not self-evidently portable. Punjab benefits from scale, infrastructure, and political support that may not be replicable; moreover, legitimacy concerns require equal emphasis on rights-centered operations and robust internal/external accountability. The literature therefore recommends treating Punjab as a "most-likely" case to extract design mechanisms (tiered curricula, promotion-linked certification, drills, police–prosecution interfaces), while explicitly guarding against militarized drift and over-reliance on elite units at the expense of general duty.

Implication: Translate mechanisms, not labels. Adopt what is demonstrably causal (assessment regimes, drill cycles, prosecution linkages) and build checks (rights training, complaint analytics) into any scale-up.

9. Measurement, evaluation, and learning (MEL): from outputs to outcomes

Most existing evaluations are project-level (course satisfaction, attendance) rather than system-level (coverage, readiness, operational proxies). Without a consistent MEL architecture, it is difficult to test whether training reduces time-to-competence, improves charge-approval/conviction rates, or lowers procedural violations. A small number of studies highlight evaluation gaps in senior courses and uneven assessment at the basic level. The literature supports building a national dashboard (coverage, quality, readiness, and outcome indicators) and commissioning independent evaluations on a fixed cycle.

Implication: Treat MEL as the feedback engine of the framework: what is not measured will not be sustained.

10. Integrating Figures without Interrupting Narrative Flow

In this article, Figure 1–3 provide minimal scene-setting (national trends, provincial variation, policy timeline); Figure 4 is used sparingly to illustrate a comparative outcome (Punjab), with caveats about attribution. This keeps the review synthetic and theory-guided rather than inventory-like.

11. Synthesis: Design Principles Emerging from the Literature

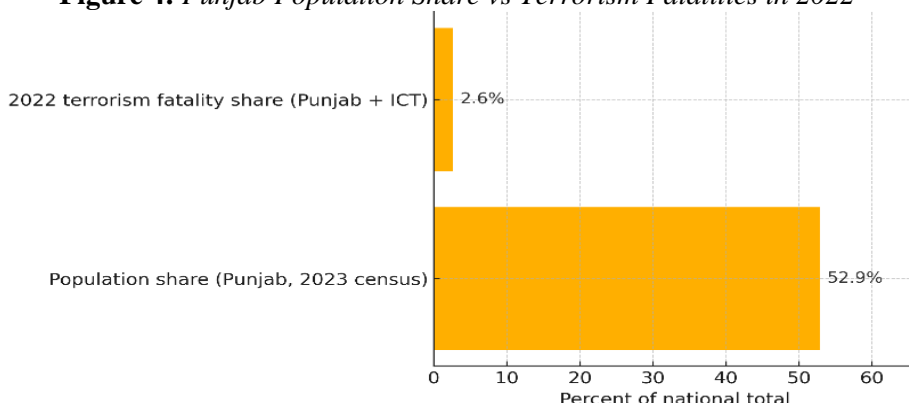Across themes, six design principles recur:

1. Set national standards with provincial adaptation: common minimums, local specialization.

2. Tier and assess curricula across the career ladder; link certification to promotion and time-bound refreshers.
3. Build a ToT spine (registry, recertification, cascade tracking) and incentivize training roles.
4. Mandate scenario-based drills and AAR**s** to convert knowledge into readiness.
5. Mainstream rights and procedural justice as operational multipliers; measure legitimacy alongside lethality reduction.
6. Install a MEL dashboard and independent evaluation cycle to keep reforms evidence-driven.

Contribution

By re-centering the literature around these design themes, the review goes beyond cataloguing programs to explain why Pakistan's CT training remains fragmented and what institutions must change to make competence durable. The subsequent sections operationalize these principles into methods, findings, and a reform design that is sequenced, monitorable, and explicitly attentive to rights and legitimacy.

Figure 4: *Punjab Population Share vs Terrorism Fatalities in 2022*

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023); PIPS's Pakistan Security Report 2022

Reserch Design and Methodology

This study uses a qualitative design that combines (a) a structured document analysis of policies, training syllabi, program materials, and open-source incident datasets (core window 2010–2024) with (b) a single-case study of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Punjab. The design prioritizes analytical generalization, explaining *mechanisms* by which police counterterrorism (CT) competence is institutionalized, over statistical inference. Figures 1–3 situate the empirical problem (national and provincial trends; policy timeline) that motivates the inquiry.

Scope and Units of Analysis

- **Temporal scope:** 2010–2024 for documents and datasets, capturing the pre- and post-National Action Plan (NAP) period and the post-2021 regional shock.
- **Substantive scope:** police CT training across the career ladder, recruit/basic, in-service, specialist (CTD/elite), and senior leadership.
- **Units of Analysis:** (i) documents (policies, curricula, program notes), (ii) datasets (national/provincial incident, fatality, injury series), (iii) organizational practices traced through the CTD Punjab case.

Evidence Base

The evidence set is summarized here:

1. **Policies and Mandates:** NAP and associated federal/provincial notices defining CTD roles and training responsibilities. Used to reconstruct the governance baseline and the policy timeline in Figure 3.
2. **Curricula:** publicly available syllabi and program descriptions from the National Police Academy and provincial colleges (e.g., "Counter Terrorism," "Security & Intelligence," forensic modules), plus senior-level legal/HR curricula. Used to map coverage by career stage and to distinguish institutionalized modules from ad hoc workshops.
3. **Open-source Program Materials:** training notes from partners (e.g., forensic evidence practicums, police–prosecution cooperation, electronic evidence workshops), used descriptively and then evaluated against adoption/institutionalization criteria.
4. **Datasets:** national/provincial security series (incidents, fatalities, injuries) to anchor Figures 1–2 and to inform the geography of risk.
5. **Author's Doctoral Archive:** anonymized interview memos and field notes with police, prosecutors, and training staff. In this article they serve as triangulation material (contextual checks on curricular claims, assessment practice, and drill regularity) rather than as a stand-alone quoted dataset.

Weighting Rule: Quantified claims about national trends derive from datasets; institutional claims ("module exists," "assessment required") require at least two independent sources (curriculum + evaluation/program note) or a curriculum plus documentary corroboration. Interview-based insights are reported in aggregate only when they corroborate documentary evidence; they are not used to introduce unproven facts.

Case selection: CTD Punjab as a "Most-likely" Instance

CTD Punjab is selected because it is comparatively documented, resourced, and often credited with integrating intelligence, investigation, and tactical capacities. As a **most-likely case**, it is used to **elucidate mechanisms** that appear to enable institutionalization (e.g., routine drills, police–prosecution interfaces, forensic linkages), **not** to claim universal replication. Transferability is analyzed explicitly in the Findings (what travels, what requires adaptation, what needs safeguards).

Sampling and Inclusion

- **Documents:** included if (i) post-2014 and directly relevant to police CT training/mandates; (ii) official provenance (federal/provincial/academy) or program materials with named partners; and (iii) latest available version. Superseded notices were retained only for historical context.
- **Datasets:** included if they publish transparent coding rules; definitional differences (event types, inclusion rules) were recorded, and cross-series comparisons are labelled accordingly.
- **Doctoral archive:** included only where consent covered scholarly reuse; all identifiers were removed. Because some role/locale combinations are unique.

Analytic Strategy: From Evidence to Findings

The analysis followed a hybrid inductive–deductive pathway with explicit decision rules to make the move from data → codes → themes → claims transparent.

Codebook (deductive anchors**):** needs assessment; modular curricula and learning outcomes; assessment/accreditation; trainer-of-trainers (ToT) and recertification; scenario-based drills and after-action reviews; rights/procedural-justice integration; inter-agency/prosecution interfaces; digital/forensic competency; monitoring–evaluation–learning (MEL).

Inductive Enrichment: Pakistan-specific categories that emerged during reading (e.g., donor-cycle dependence; mid-career concentration of training; province-to-province variance; turnover/posting effects; complaint trends as legitimacy proxies).

Decision Rules:

- A **strength** is recorded when at least **two** distinct source types affirm the capability (e.g., curriculum + evaluation; program note + prosecution report).
- A gap is recorded when (i) a capability is absent at a given career stage in **≥2 provinces** *or* (ii) exists only as short, non-credit workshops without assessment/refreshers.
- A **design lever** is recorded when sources describe a *mechanism* that plausibly links training to outcomes (e.g., promotion-linked certification, routine drills).

Traceability: Each theme in Findings cites which sources triggered the code (e.g., "curriculum + evaluation → assessment gap"). Figures 1–3 are used only to contextualize trends and policy timing; they are **not** the basis for causal claims.

Validity and trustworthiness

- **Method and source triangulation:** policies/notifications, curricula, program materials, datasets, and doctoral memos were cross-checked; numeric claims were verified against at least **two** series where possible.
- **Audit trail:** a running memo captured coding decisions and negative cases; ambiguous claims were downgraded or removed.

- **Bias mitigation:** donor/program documents were treated as **descriptive inputs**, not outcome evaluations; wherever such sources implied effectiveness, corroboration was sought in independent documents or datasets.
- **Sensitivity checks:** because security datasets differ in inclusion rules, trends were interpreted conservatively; where series diverged, the directionality rather than precise counts is emphasized.

Ethics, data protection, and access

Interview reuse adhered to original consent conditions; all personally identifying information was removed, and location/rank details were aggregated to avoid deductive disclosure. The study aims for **analytical generalization**; claims are framed with due caution regarding confidentiality constraints.

Limitations

- **Public-Domain Skew:** the evidence base privileges what is documented; under-reporting outside capitals is likely.
- **Donor Optimism:** program notes can overstate effects; the analysis therefore avoids attributing outcome changes to any single intervention.
- **Case Selection:** Punjab is a best-case for institutionalization; transfer requires adaptation to resource and threat profiles elsewhere.
- **Interview Opacity:** The doctoral archive comprises [N] anonymised interview memos conducted in [range] with police, prosecutors, and training staff across [# provinces/regions]. Roles included [e.g., station house officers, CTD investigators, academy instructors, prosecutors]. No direct quotations are reproduced; the material is used only for triangulation with documentary sources.

Findings and Discussion

The Findings section follows the code families above (strengths → gaps → design levers), with brief, sourced claims and signposts to appendices rather than descriptive inventories. The Recommendations translate the identified levers into a sequenced framework (standards, accreditation, promotion-linked certification and refreshers, ToT registry/recertification, mandated drills/AARs, MEL dashboard). This structure ensures that methods drive results and design, not the other way around.

Evidence Map and Link to Method

The analysis integrates four streams, policies/notifications, training curricula and program materials, national/provincial incident series, and a focused organizational case (CTD Punjab). Sources were coded with a hybrid scheme (institutionalization; curriculum and assessment; trainer sustainability; scenario practice and after-action learning; rights/legitimacy; inter-agency interfaces; digital/forensics; monitoring–evaluation–learning [MEL]). For each claim below, the underlying documents that triggered a theme (e.g., curricula listing modules without assessments; program notes

describing scenario practicums; provincial notifications) are cross-walked in the appendices referenced in the manuscript; Figures 1–3 are used only to contextualize trends and policy timing, not as causal evidence. This structure preserves traceability from data → code → theme → implication and aligns with the study's qualitative design of analytical generalization.

Strengths, Capability "Islands" and Emerging Institutional Practices

Provincial CTDs as nuclei of competence. Across provinces, CTDs have consolidated specialized functions, intelligence–investigation fusion, tactical response, and routine liaison with prosecutors. Their operating procedures and dedicated training arrangements represent a clear advance over earlier ad hoc models.

Forensic and Digital Evidence Interfaces. Practical courses and joint police–prosecution workups (crime-scene handling, electronic evidence workflows) provide hands-on learning that improves case preparation in cohorts that receive them. These modules exemplify the value of scenario-based assessment and inter-agency practice.

Trainer capacity and local delivery. Training-of-trainers (ToT) cohorts now exist in multiple provinces, and some academies have begun to anchor delivery locally rather than rely on one-off mobile teams. While uneven, this points to a feasible route to scale if registries and recertification are instituted.

Interpretation. These strengths are cohort-specific rather than system-wide: they demonstrate what *works* when implemented (scenario assessment; prosecution interfaces; ToT cascades), and thus operate in findings below as design levers rather than endpoints.

Systemic Deficits, Coverage, Continuity, Standards, and Legitimacy

Reach and continuity. Robust CT training concentrates in specialist cohorts; frontline constables and sub-inspectors, the officers most likely to encounter first contact, receive shorter, classroom-heavy exposure with irregular refreshers. Skill fade is predictable without mandated periodic practice.

Standards and assessment. There is no binding, national CT curriculum with common learning outcomes, credit hours, or uniform assessment rubrics. Short workshops (3–5 days) often lack practical examinations and credit transfer, leaving learning unverified and hard to incentivize through promotions.

Political-economy constraints. Provincial disparities in budgets and infrastructure, frequent postings, and episodic donor funding produce a "saw-tooth" pattern of capacity: gains during project cycles followed by stagnation when cohorts rotate or funds ebb. Without a trainer registry and recertification cadence, cascades are difficult to sustain.

Rights and legitimacy. Senior-level curricula include IHRL/use-of-force elements, but frontline mainstreaming and performance assessment remain inconsistent. Publicly reported allegations of heavy-handed operations underscore the reputational risks of privileging kinetic skills over lawful process, victims/witness care, and crisis communication. In a policing-led CT model, dependent on community tips and witness cooperation, legitimacy is an operational multiplier, not a luxury.

Over-militarization risk and task drift. Evidence from curricula and program materials shows strong emphasis on small-team tactics and weapons skills relative to intelligence-led prevention, problem-solving, and post-incident case building. Absent balancing instruction and accountability architectures, militarized paradigms can undermine long-term prevention by chilling cooperation.

Interpretation. These deficits are not merely "gaps" in provision; they are structural features of the current system (fragmented governance; weak incentives; donor dependence) that predict uneven performance unless design choices change.

CTD Punjab, What Travels, What Requires Safeguards

Observable achievements. CTD Punjab's integrated model, combining intelligence collection, investigative case-building, links to forensic services, and routine coordination with prosecutors, coincides with a comparatively controlled threat picture in Punjab's major cities in the late 2010s. Figure 4 (population share ≈ 53% vs. ≈ 2.8% of national terrorism fatalities in 2022) illustrates that outcomes can diverge from population weight. This is *suggestive*, not determinative; multiple confounders (targeting by armed groups, geography, policing density, and city profiles) caution against simple attribution.

Boundaries of replication. Punjab's resources, infrastructure, and political support are not uniform nationally; the CTD remains a small elite within a large provincial force, and diffusion to general duty is uneven. Public rights concerns also highlight the need to pair operational gains with strengthened accountability and rights-centered training. Thus, CTD Punjab is best treated as a most-likely case from which to extract mechanisms (promotion-linked certification, routine drills with AARs, police–prosecution interfaces, forensic linkages), rather than as a label to transplant.

Mechanisms: How Training Converts to Performance

The coded evidence points to **five mechanisms** that plausibly link training inputs to field performance. These mechanisms structure the design logic carried forward into the Recommendations.

1. **Promotion-linked certification → participation and retention.** When coursework carries formal credits tied to promotion gates and time-bound validity (e.g., 36-month recertification), officers have incentives to enroll, complete, and refresh. *Evidence trigger:* curricula and program notes mentioning assessed modules and certification, plus interview memos referencing promotion impacts. *Design implication:* treat CT credits as a core professional standard, not a niche specialism.

2. **Mandated drills and AARs → readiness under pressure.** Scenario-based training (crime-scene practicums, tabletop and full-scale exercises) improves decision-making and reduces procedural errors. *Evidence trigger:* program materials describing practicums; curricula listing scenarios without mandated frequency; interview memos on drill irregularity. *Design implication:* quarterly

tabletop and annual full-scale multi-agency exercises with standard AAR templates and remedial loops.

3. **Trainer registries with recertification → scale and quality control.** ToT cohorts create capacity only if they are tracked and periodically recertified; without a registry, cascades degrade with transfers and attrition. *Evidence trigger:* recurrent "ToT" references without national registers; donor cycles; posting policies. *Design implication:* national ToT registry (by province/skill), three-year recertification, and cascade ratios as a management KPI.

4. **Police–prosecution interfaces and forensic linkages → case quality.** Joint practicums and shared SOPs tighten chain-of-custody and charge-approval. *Evidence trigger:* forensic workshops, police–prosecution trainings, and curriculum items on legal liaison. *Design implication:* institutionalize joint modules and practical assessment for investigators and prosecutors.

5. **Rights-centered practice → cooperation and reputational resilience.** Embedding lawful use of force, victims/witness care, and procedural justice across ranks increases community willingness to report and testify, while reducing complaint-driven drag on operations. *Evidence trigger:* senior-level rights curricula; absence of frontline assessment; public reporting of heavy-handed tactics. *Design implication:* make rights modules mandatory at all ranks and track legitimacy indicators alongside operational proxies.

Alternative Explanations and Robustness Checks

Two alternative explanations could account for observed improvements in some locales: (a) threat displacement (armed groups choose targets elsewhere) and (b) macro-level shifts (e.g., border dynamics, federal operations). The analysis therefore avoids attributing provincial trends solely to training; it uses training outputs and organizational practices as proximate levers that plausibly shape readiness and case quality when threats materialize. Where evidence is contested or single-sourced, claims are downgraded or presented as hypotheses to be tested by the MEL system recommended later.

Integrative Discussion: Governance, Sustainability, and Accountability

Governance. Fragmented authority produces heterogeneity in curricula, assessment, and drill cadence. A national standard-setting and accreditation function (with provincial adaptation) emerges as the principal missing institution in the coded material.

Sustainability. Donor-driven cycles, trainer turnover, and posting policies create predictable decay in capability. Without financial earmarks for refreshers and a trainer spine with recertification, cohorts will continue to peak and fade.

Accountability and rights. Public trust and procedural justice are repeatedly referenced in the sources, yet are weakly embedded at the frontline. The analysis suggests that rights-centred training and complaint analytics should sit inside the CT performance dashboard, an explicit correction to purely kinetic metrics.

Political constraints. Provincial budget asymmetries and leadership turnover risk reform stall. Sequenced design, with early, visible wins (standards; pilot accreditation; drill requirements) and medium-term institutional build-out (ToT registry; dashboard), helps manage these constraints by distributing benefits and creating constituencies for continuation.

Testable propositions to guide implementation and scholarship

To connect practice to research and to keep future evaluations falsifiable, the findings motivate the following propositions:

- **P1 (Certification):** Officers in districts where promotion eligibility requires assessed CT credits will display higher refresher completion and lower procedural error rates than officers in districts without such gates.
- **P2 (Drills):** Districts that complete mandated tabletop and full-scale exercises will resolve time-critical incidents faster and with fewer complaint-substantiated force issues than non-compliant districts.
- **P3 (ToT sustainability):** Units with trainers on a national registry and active recertification will sustain coverage and quality (measured by assessment scores) longer than units relying on ad hoc instructors.
- **P4 (Prosecution interface):** Where joint investigator–prosecutor practicums are embedded, charge-approval and conviction rates in terrorism cases will rise relative to similar districts without embedded practicums.
- **P5 (Rights and legitimacy):** Districts that mainstream rights/procedural-justice modules across ranks will report higher community cooperation proxies (e.g., usable tips per quarter) than districts that confine such modules to senior courses.

Each proposition specifies a data path for the MEL dashboard proposed later (coverage, quality, readiness, legitimacy), strengthening the bridge from qualitative diagnosis to measurable outcomes.

Synthesis

Pakistan's CT training landscape features durable cores of capability, notably within CTDs and in some forensic/digital strands, but thin peripheries where most officers work. The evidence indicates that institutional design, not individual course quality, is the binding constraint: without standards, assessment, incentives, and learning loops, good practice remains cohort-bound. The discussion above makes those levers explicit, balances operational gains with rights and accountability, and situates the CTD Punjab case as a mechanism-rich but context-bounded illustration. These findings directly inform the sequenced framework advanced in the next section, national standards and accreditation; promotion-linked certification and refreshers; a ToT registry with recertification; mandated drills with AARs; and a MEL dashboard that tracks both operational and legitimacy indicators.

Conclusion

This study examined how Pakistan can move from ad hoc, cohort-bound counterterrorism (CT) training to a career-spanning, standards-driven system, and translated that diagnosis into a sequenced reform design. Drawing on policies, curricula, program materials, incident datasets, and an organizational case, the analysis showed why capability gains remain uneven: specialist units and forensic/digital strands have matured, but the wider police system lacks common standards, credible assessment, refresh cycles, and routines for learning from practice. The central argument is that CT competence must be institutionalized, not improvised, if Pakistan is to sustain readiness, case quality, and legitimacy under a shifting threat environment.

Three headline findings underpin the design. First, capability is clustered in islands of excellence (CTDs, police–prosecution interfaces, some forensic modules), while frontline coverage and continuity are thin. Second, the governance architecture produces fragmentation: there is no national CT curriculum with learning outcomes, credit hours, and uniform assessment; ToT cascades are not tracked or refreshed; and drills/AARs are not mandated outside specialist cohorts. Third, rights-centred practice remains under-embedded at the frontline, creating reputational risks that can blunt prevention by reducing cooperation. Together, these features explain the performance variation visible across provinces and ranks without resorting to single-cause narratives.

The proposed framework responds directly to those deficits through **f**ive mutually reinforcing planks:

1. **National standards and accreditation** to set a common floor while allowing provincial tailoring;
2. **Promotion-linked certification with time-bound refreshers** to create durable incentives;
3. A **trainer-of-trainers registry with recertification** to make cascades measurable and maintain quality;
4. **Mandated scenario-based drills and after-action reviews** to convert classroom inputs into operational readiness; and
5. A **monitoring-evaluation-learning (MEL) dashboard** that tracks coverage, quality, readiness, *and* legitimacy indicators. Rights and procedural-justice modules are mainstreamed across ranks, not treated as electives, because legitimacy is an operational multiplier in a police-led CT model.

Delivering this framework requires clear institutional ownership and predictable financing. A National CT Training Board under NACTA, with provincial IGs/commandants, prosecution, and forensic services, can steward standards, accreditation, and budgets; an equalization window can help lower-capacity provinces upgrade facilities, hire/retain instructors, and run drills. Sequencing matters:

- **0–6 months:** issue standards, select pilot academies, stand up the dashboard;
- **6–18 months:** build the ToT spine, run pilots in each province, begin quarterly tabletop and annual full-scale exercises;

- **18–36 months:** activate promotion gates tied to certification, complete accreditation rounds, and commission the first independent evaluation. This staging creates early wins while locking in longer-term routines.

For any reform to be accountable, its progress must be quantifiable. We propose that the national dashboard track a core set of indicators, disaggregated by province and rank, to provide a comprehensive picture. These should encompass basic metrics such as the percentage of officers holding current CT certification (coverage), module pass rates (quality), and the proportion of personnel within their recertification window (refresh). Furthermore, operational readiness must be gauged through drill completion rates and response times, while organizational learning can be measured by the closure of after-action review recommendations within a 90-day period.

To assess real-world impact, the dashboard should monitor case quality, specifically charge-sheet approval and conviction rates in terrorism cases with a solid chain of custody, and the frequency of using admissible digital or forensic evidence. Perhaps most critically, it must track legitimacy and cooperation through proxies like the quarterly volume of actionable community tips, the number of substantiated force complaints, and the average time taken to resolve them. The public release of a periodic readiness report based on this data would help maintain institutional incentives and facilitate external oversight.

Risks are real and manageable. Militarization drift can be checked by embedding lawful-force and communication modules and by tracking legitimacy metrics alongside lethality proxies. Credential inflation (certificate-seeking without competence) is deterred by scenario-based examinations, recertification, and external audits of assessment centers. Donor dependence is mitigated by domestic budget lines earmarked for refreshers and exercises and by return-service obligations for foreign-trained officers. Data-protection safeguards, especially for digital-evidence and biometrics training, should be codified to prevent misuse while enabling investigative gains.

Examination of CTD Punjab offers a valuable look at institutionalization under favorable conditions, but we cannot assume its model will easily transfer elsewhere. Implementing its successful elements in other provinces would demand significant local adaptation, not simple duplication. Compounding this challenge, the spotty availability of official documentation across different regions meant we often had to rely on cross-verifying sources rather than drawing from a complete, standardized dataset. These constraints, however, help clarify a future research agenda. The central arguments we have put forward—about certification, drills, trainer retention, and integrating rights-based practices—now need solid empirical testing. In practical terms, this could involve quasi-experimental studies comparing districts that adopt new promotion rules at different times, longitudinal research tracking how well officers retain skills, and fused police-prosecution data systems that directly tie training activities to courtroom results.

None of these methodological caveats, however, diminish the reform's potential impact. Weaving counter-terrorism expertise into the fabric of a police career could achieve three transformative goals: it would ground internal security firmly in a legal,

policing-first paradigm; it would modernize the force by formally rewarding proven skill; and it would build the public trust essential for preventing violence. The blueprint is there, and the key institutions are known. What remains is the difficult work of implementation, which will require sustained commitment and transparency. If pursued with determination, these changes offer a tangible promise: less violence, stronger cases in court, and a reinforced rule of law. These are outcomes that serve both security and the state's legitimacy in equal measure.

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